"Righteousness Exalteth a Nation":
Providence, Empire, and the Forging of the
Early Canadian Presbyterian Identity[1]

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In *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich*, Stephen Leacock satirises the fictional Presbyterian Church of St. Osoph. Implicitly critiquing the denomination's reputation for fractiousness and austerity, he observes that the congregation of St. Osoph's is so thoroughly quarrelsome that it has severed its ties to virtually every other Presbyterian group. St. Osoph's, Leacock irreverently elaborates,

> seceded forty years ago from the original body to which it belonged, and later on, with three other churches, it seceded from the group of seceding congregations. Still later it fell into a difference with the three other churches on the question of eternal punishment, the word "eternal" not appearing to the elders of St. Osoph's to designate a sufficiently long period. The dispute ended in a secession which left the church of St. Osoph practically isolated in a world of sin whose approaching fate it neither denied nor deplored.[2]

Satirizing St. Osoph's – and, by extension, the larger Presbyterian community to which it belonged – was surely Leacock's chief objective. Yet it should not go unnoticed that his sketch also sheds considerable light on the Presbyterian ethos of the day.[3]

Perhaps the most revealing aspect of Leacock's account is his depiction of the divisive tendency that beset this ill-tempered congrega-

tion. The fragmented state of mid-nineteenth-century British North American Presbyterianism attests to the existence of such a predisposition. As a result of a litany of disputes – the most intractable of which pertained, predictably, to the immensely contentious church-state controversy – the denomination found itself divided into no fewer than eight autonomous sub-components, as well as several smaller groupings, which existed independent of the larger bodies.[4] The splintering of British North American Presbyterianism can thus be seen as evidence of the fractious tendency displayed to such a seemingly absurd degree in Leacock's St. Osoph's.[5]

It is hardly surprising, then, that accounts of the history of Presbyterianism in nineteenth-century Canada have tended to dwell on the deeply-ingrained pattern of intra-denominational conflict that preceded the establishment of the national Presbyterian Church in Canada in 1875. Investigations of the denomination's formative era have devoted substantial attention to the supposed "spirit of separation" that was thought to be responsible for the scattering of Presbyterianism into the various Synods and smaller groupings to which I have already alluded. Such discussions are typically followed by an explanation as to how this notoriously quarrelsome assortment of subgroups eventually became engaged in a progressive "movement towards union" in which, according to the conventional account, anxieties were allayed, gaps were bridged, and, at length, union was achieved.[6]

This pattern of reconciliation has traditionally been portrayed as the logical religious corollary to the political and economic maturation of the Canadian state. That is, discussions of the creation of a unified church that was coextensive with the confederated Canadian provinces are often intertwined with a misleading, teleological discourse on Canada's transition from subordinate colony to self-sufficient nation. In privileging the endemic divisiveness that preceded the establishment of a national union, such an emphasis obscures the unity of thought that pervaded the denominational community throughout the pre-1875 era (the period with which I am chiefly concerned). Counteracting early Canadian Presbyterianism's myriad schisms, this underlying conceptual cohesiveness bound together the denomination's various subgroups.

The conventional colony-to-nation approach to the history of early Canadian Presbyterianism hinges on the notion that residual "overseas influences" were responsible for denominational fragmentation in the years prior to 1875. Such influences, moreover, are thought to have waned

as Presbyterianism's constituent parts became more comfortably en-
sconced within the newly-minted dominion. Central to this process,
according to the traditional account, was the inspiring example of
Confederation. Mirroring the British North American provinces in their
decision to enter into a national union, Presbyterianism's subgroups have
been portrayed as casting off the divisiveness of the pre-Confederation era.
Instead, the argument runs, they enthusiastically embraced a nation-wide
institution as a more effective mechanism for bringing about the
Christianisation of Canadian society. The narrative typically unfolds as
follows: colonial subservience gave way to national assertiveness, "old
world" division gave way to "new world" unity, and the Presbyterian
Church in Canada was born.[7]

The preceding critique is not meant to suggest that the emphasis
placed by such scholars as Edmund H. Oliver, S.D. Clark, and H.H. Walsh
on the indigenisation of Canadian Presbyterianism is wholly inaccurate.
To deny the importance of this pattern would be both ungenerous and
misleading – after all, the eventual realisation of a nation-wide Presbyte-
rian church inarguably involved the overcoming of significant, longstand-
ing obstacles. It seems evident, though, that a tendency to concentrate
disproportionately on Presbyterianism's institutional history – and in
particular on the sloughing off of "old world" influences prior to the
advent of a nation-wide union – has led to the emergence of a reductive
conception of the denomination's formative era that at best is incomplete,
and that at worst neglects important aspects of its intellectual substance.

In a 1993 address to members of the Canadian Historical Associa-
tion, Phillip Buckner urged his audience to jettison the increasingly
outmoded notion that the formulation of a coherent Canadian identity was
a "natural development" that entailed the total eradication of "all other
loyalties."[8] Rather than conceiving of Canadian nationalism as a "natural"
phenomenon that permanently eclipsed British imperial fervour in the late
nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, he advocated an alternative
epistemological tack. In keeping with the pioneering works of J.G.A.
Pocock, he recommended the adoption of a spatially vast, conceptually
fluid approach that concerns itself with the elaborate, inter-connected web
of commercial, ideological, and emotional circuits that constituted the
amorphous, trans-oceanic British imperial world.[9] The implementation of
such an interpretive model, Buckner reasoned, would neutralise the
potentially distorting excesses of nationalist triumphalism, and would
reassert the centrality of the "imperial experience" within English-

Canadian history and culture.[10]

Consistent with Buckner's recommendation, it seems that situating Canadian Presbyterianism's foundational era within the context of a wider "British world" offers a refreshing alternative to the traditional depiction. In stressing the permeability of borders and the enduring, multi-sided significance of the British connection, such an approach represents a departure from the comparatively parochial institutional and national emphases that have hitherto dominated accounts of Canadian Presbyterianism's formative epoch.

By applying such a framework to the denomination's intellectual dimension it becomes apparent that, contrary to the indigenisation narrative, "old world" influences in fact played a seminal role in the formulation of a coherent, integrated Presbyterian self-conception. Indeed, I shall argue that for all of their apparent fractiousness the various subgroups that comprised the wider denominational community were, at bottom, tied together.

Conceiving of themselves as a "national" community analogous to the ancient Israelites, the Presbyterians succeeded in coalescing around a cluster of widely held beliefs. They saw themselves as endowed with a divinely sanctioned responsibility for the advancement of God's providential design, through which the wicked would be punished and the righteous would be rewarded. This conviction dovetailed with their fierce attachment to the principles, institutions, and mystique of the British Empire. The Presbyterians also felt that they were bound together by the denomination's distinctive form of church polity, which promoted a sense of communal inter-connectedness throughout the various subgroups. Flowing from this constellation of beliefs was a millennial sense of mission that reverberated throughout the denominational consciousness, and that extended well beyond the borders of British North America and the early Canadian dominion.

This paper takes as its central theme the synthesis of providentialism and British imperial enthusiasm that invigorated nineteenth-century Canadian Presbyterianism. It argues that this combination played an indispensable role in the shaping of a coherent denominational identity.

A consideration of providentialism as an overarching motif within the mental world of nineteenth-century Canadian Presbyterianism must begin with an exploration of its most salient traits. The Christian doctrine of providence maintains that the "sovereign God who creates is also the God who guides."[11] More precisely, providence – the notion of the

unfolding of a divinely authored, foreordained design—is thought to consist of three irreducible elements: first, that God is the fount of creation; second, that God sustains, accompanies, and exercises authority over all that is in existence, and is thus intimately involved in the rhythms and phenomena that actuate and characterise both physical and historical change; and finally, that the fruits of both creation and change are infused with an unwavering, albeit frequently inscrutable, purpose that for all of its mystery will nevertheless assuredly be realised, culminating gloriously in the Christian millennium. The cosmos, the totality of history, the natural world in all its verdant complexity, and the inner-workings of human society – *everything* is accounted for. In short, then, the doctrine of providence amounts to nothing less than the awe-inspiring assertion that no aspect of God's handiwork is exempt from divine guidance and oversight.[12]

Orthodox nineteenth-century Presbyterians placed a particularly heavy emphasis on God's providential sovereignty. This tendency was born out in an abiding belief in the creator's infinite authority. It was also evident in a corresponding conviction regarding humankind's abject inability to merit salvation. Unlike contemporaneous Arminian theology, which reputedly held that saving faith in God stems from human free will, doctrinaire Presbyterians, steeped as they were in the stern tenets of Calvinism (of which more will be said), were unshakably insistent on God's total omnipotence. They were equally convinced of the insufficiency of individual agency when it came to humanity's deep-seated yearning for sanctification. Redemption, the Presbyterians reckoned, is entirely contingent on God's graciousness, and not at all on the capricious whims of human beings who, left to their own devices, were thought to be both intrinsically and irredeemably corrupt in consequence of original sin's indelible stigma.[13]

"The one theory," observed the Reverend Michael Willis, principal of Knox College, Toronto, in a barbed reference to Arminianism, conceitedly and presumptuously conceives of God's graciousness as contingent on the will of "the sinner." By contrast, churches rooted in the Calvinistic tradition were thought to afford "all the glory" to God. In Willis' view, adherents of Calvinism attributed the extension of saving faith to "[the] wonderful love of Him" who "in His infinite wisdom and mercy chose us not because we were holy or foreseen to be holy, but that we should be [made] holy and without blame before Him in love."[14]

Thus, when it came to the question of sanctification, zealous Presby-

terians such as Willis placed tremendous stress upon the indispensable importance of the creator's benevolent graciousness and none whatsoever on human initiative. While they were by no means unique among Christian denominations in focusing on the providential theme, the early Canadian Presbyterian conception of God's absolute sovereignty nonetheless occupied a clearly-defined, unmistakably important position within the denominational imagination.

In surveying the principal features of the early Canadian Presbyterian identity, the centrality of the determinative, superintending, all-encompassing providential schema can scarcely be overstated. It furnished the denominational community with an invigorating sense of destiny that went a considerable distance in knitting together an otherwise unwieldy variety of Presbyterian subgroups. A belief in God's universal authority, too, was fundamental to the denominational world-view. As a result, articulations of the Presbyterians' sense of distinctiveness and duty were couched throughout the pre-1875 era in expressly providentialist terms.

The all-powerful hand of God was thought by the Presbyterians to be everywhere apparent and ceaselessly at work. It followed that the unfurling of the divine plan encompassed both painful, distressing phenomena as well as that which was positive and gratifying. Indeed, tumult and suffering were widely held to be punitive manifestations of divine displeasure.

Punishment for sinfulness was meted out, in the Presbyterians' view, not only on an individual basis in which wayward sinners would suffer as a result of their trespasses, but on a communal or "national" basis as well. A critical mass of wrongdoing, in other words, could bring about the chastisement of an entire community, and could be visited upon the virtuous as well as the depraved. God's vengeance could thus be applied both individually and corporately – as punishment for the indiscretions and offences of individual sinners as well as the communities in which they lived.[15]

The pronounced extent to which nineteenth-century Presbyterians viewed earthly misfortune as punishment meted out by God is evident in the reaction of the congregation of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in York, Upper Canada to a cholera epidemic that afflicted that community in the summer of 1832. Reacting to the crisis the church's minister, the Reverend William Rintoul, convened weekly meetings of the congregational session and broader church community in an effort to assuage York's suffering.

The meetings were designed to encourage prayer as well as "supplication to God" as a result of the severity of the "pestilential Disease," which was thought by members of the congregation to have been brought on by widespread immorality. Church records indicate that they explicitly acknowledged the workings of God "in a judgement so marked as the present malady." Accordingly, members of St. Andrew's humbly appealed to God to bring the plague to an end, and pled for mercy for the community as well as the world at large for the entirety of its duration.[16]

The notion that intense and/or pervasive sinfulness could elicit the wrath of God was by no means unorthodox. On the contrary, the anxieties evinced by the congregation of St. Andrew's, York were entirely consonant with the Calvinistic ethos that underlay Presbyterian doctrine. For John Calvin, the uncompromising sixteenth-century theologian for whom the system is named, a preponderance of iniquity in a given community represented a pernicious moral miasma that, when left unchecked, led inevitably to the flouting of God's laws. For Calvin, an inability to curb pernicious behaviours could spark a degenerative downward spiral in which the proliferation of vice and disorder would bring about potentially cataclysmic expressions of divine displeasure.

Within the context of sixteenth-century Geneva, which witnessed the vigorous, systematic implementation of Calvin's various institutions and teachings, sin and crime were viewed as indistinguishable from one another. In a situation in which scriptural precepts and ordinances pervaded virtually every aspect of the socio-political order, any and all transgressions were invariably violations of the edicts of God. Secular and sacred laws in Calvin's conception were eminently complementary and, indeed, inextricably interwoven. Civil legislation and the authority of earthly magistrates were therefore doubly important since, in addition to promoting stability in the secular sphere, they also served as a bulwark against impiety by enforcing godliness.[17]

But where sinfulness could bring about expressions of God's disappointment, divine approval could, in contrast, manifest itself in a nurturing paternalism that sought to reward righteousness and encourage further obedience. While God could punish sinful individuals and communities he could also exalt those who were righteous. In keeping with this notion, nineteenth-century Canadian Presbyterians conceived of themselves as enjoying a "special" providential status that was indicative of divine favour.[18]

The Presbyterians' sense of uniqueness was predicated upon the belief that they were an exceptional denomination tasked with an equally exceptional mission: namely, to facilitate civilization's progress and to propagate as extensively as possible Christianity's glad tidings. They saw themselves as a divinely favoured community analogous to the Old Testament Israelites – as a people, in other words, united to God by way of an unbreakable covenantal bond and imbued with a divinely ordained destiny that linked them indissolubly to the unfolding of the providential design.[19] The Presbyterian "Zion," they maintained, was endowed by God with an unmatched combination of piety, prudence, and fidelity, and was responsible for the advancement of the grand providential design.[20]

Notwithstanding their numerous politico-religious differences, the early Canadian Presbyterians conceived of themselves as fitting neatly within a larger, trans-oceanic British "nation."[21] This national community transcended the arbitrary borders of political geography and united devout members of the denomination throughout the Empire in a spatially amorphous, conceptually coherent body. Under-girding the Presbyterian nation was an abiding sense of "loyalty to our Queen" and an equally ardent "attachment to our constitution."[22]

Indeed, a widespread sense of British imperial enthusiasm went a considerable distance in counteracting the ethnic differences, vast territorial distances, and institutional cleavages that separated early Canadian Presbyterianism's various constituent parts. A celebratory mythology that centred on the superiority of British institutions and on the magnificence of the British Empire fostered an atmosphere of concord that ultimately overshadowed intra-denominational differences. A pervasive imperial zeal, in short, served to bind together an ethnically heterogeneous, geographically scattered, institutionally fragmented denomination.[23]

Bolstering Presbyterian cohesiveness throughout this expansive community was the denomination's distinctive form of church polity. This consisted of individual church courts, local presbyteries, regional synods and, at the national level, general assemblies. The denomination's intricate governmental structure systematically promoted both social solidarity and liturgical uniformity throughout a multitude of Presbyterian subgroups. While rows concerning matters such as the church's relationship to the state were undeniably frequent, the importance of principles such as communal cohesion, order, and doctrinal integrity were nevertheless, as a result of the denomination's characteristic system of church polity, fervently upheld throughout the amorphous British Presbyterian commu-

nity.[24]

In addition to providing an otherwise disparate, geographically diffuse assortment of Presbyterian subgroups with a nucleus of ideas around which to coalesce, this invigorating combination of providential favour, British imperial enthusiasm, and pan-Presbyterian inter-connected-ness also infused the denomination with a dynamic sense of mission. By equipping the wider Presbyterian nation with a compelling conceptual synthesis of pride, prestige, cohesiveness, and virtue, it strengthened their belief in a unique communal responsibility for the advancement of God's redemptive design.

It is important to recognise that convictions regarding the denomina-tion's providentially sanctioned destiny were propagated and amplified by way of a Presbyterian public sphere. Emanating from podiums and circulating through a plethora of religious newspapers as well as published lectures and addresses, the ideas and anxieties proffered by devout Presbyterians throughout nineteenth-century Canada constituted, in the aggregate, a vibrant discursive community. By weighing in on pressing issues and controversies, articulate Presbyterians made public their views, engaged in often vigorous debates, and contributed to the shaping of a fundamentally coherent Presbyterian sentiment that, in the event, cross-cut the denomination's numerous institutional, regional, and politico-religious divisions.[25]

The views of the elites in the pulpit, then, were not simply foisted onto the congregants in the pew. To be sure, educated, well-connected individuals invariably exerted disproportionate influence. This was especially true if they were in the position of delivering a sermon to a congregation rendered docile by a sense of reverence, intimidation, or some combination of the two. Despite this fact, the prevailing attitudes that percolated within the denominational community can best be understood not as the result of an arbitrary, "top-down" imposition, but as the product of a sustained, organic process of discussion, thought, and analysis.

This integrative public sphere brought together members of a politically fragmented, geographically dispersed denomination in a variety of discussion-oriented communities in which words and ideas intermingled and jostled for supremacy. Cumulatively, such communities acted as a deliberative forum through which concerns and convictions regarding a wide range of issues could be debated, negotiated, and eventually conveyed to a broader Presbyterian public.

Although disagreements over the degree to which the state should

involve itself in the affairs of the church continued to rankle, such discursive communities nevertheless played an important part in identifying and articulating the priorities of substantial swathes of the denominational membership. The sustained emphasis placed by Presbyterians on the denomination's special providential status and on the glorious destiny of the British Empire was therefore not confined to the writings of an isolated, unrepresentative few. Rather, it was indicative of a broadly held belief – expressed by way of the denominational public sphere – that pervaded early Canadian Presbyterianism's mental world.

As a result of the Presbyterians' belief in the denomination's divinely favoured status, conflicts such as Great Britain's protracted struggle with revolutionary and Napoleonic France in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were viewed through a providential lens. In an 1814 sermon entitled "The Prosperity of the Church in Troublous Times," the Nova Scotia Presbyterian minister and educator Thomas McCulloch enunciated an epic, millennial conception of history in which events such as the chaotic French revolution and Britain's victory at the battle of Trafalgar were invested with cosmic significance. In McCulloch's conception they served to definitively demonstrate that the British Empire was indeed the beneficiary of divine favour.[26]

McCulloch asserted that the French Revolution, despite purporting to advocate such ennobling principles as liberty, equality, and fraternity, had in fact been predicated on "principles of infidelity." More pointedly, he noted that beneath a veneer of enlightenment lurked an insidious radicalism that strove to undermine social stability. Owing to a seemingly unquenchable atheism, the proponents of such corrosive tenets sought, in particular, to do irreparable harm to Christianity, the vital bedrock of any virtuous, well-regulated polity. Britain, he asserted, was in contrast the sturdy, virtuous "bulwark" of western civilisation. Specifically, it was a beacon of virtue and piety, a defender of order and constitutional governance, and a steadfast opponent of the godless radicalism espoused by the French revolutionaries and their equally iniquitous sympathizers elsewhere in the world.

Accompanying this exalted status, McCulloch thundered, was a responsibility for spreading the light of civilization and Christianity to the wretched and benighted the world over. "[Our] native country," he propounded, in reference to the widely dispersed British diaspora, is endowed with a special "duty" that transcends worldly considerations. For McCulloch, this sense of moral obligation found expression in a fervent

desire to see the gospels promulgated as widely and as energetically as possible. Convinced of the British Empire's divinely authored destiny, he went as far as to posit that it was the indispensable instrument through which the regeneration of the world would achieved. Elaborating on this sentiment, he argued that the efforts of Britain's Protestant evangelists – with the doctrinally unassailable Presbyterians inevitably in their vanguard – would precipitate the coming of the Christian millennium and, eventually, the establishment of a New Jerusalem.[27]

McCulloch expanded upon the Empire's grand destiny by portraying British Protestantism as the universal locus of Christian righteousness and zeal. He stated that the intensification of evangelical fervour within the ranks of this uniquely righteous community foreshadowed the worldwide proliferation of the gospels as well as the Christian millennium itself. It was foreordained, he explained, that the revival of religious enthusiasm within the "commonwealth of Israel" would presage the dramatic expansion of the boundaries of the Christian "Zion." Britain's Protestant evangelists, under the auspices of an awesome superintending providence, were responsible in McCulloch's view for nothing less than the redemption of the world, which in turn would precipitate the second coming of Christ.[28]

McCulloch's concluding remarks aptly encapsulate both the essence of his vision and, more broadly, the sense of ardent providentialism that galvanised early Canadian Presbyterianism. "Labours in the name of the gospel," he averred, elaborating on what for him was the symbiotic relationship between British imperialism and Protestant evangelism, will most assuredly "harmonize the affections of men," draw together the various "nations" in a single "family of love," and usher in the thousand-year reign of "universal goodness."[29]

Nor were Presbyterian conceptions of the Empire's special providential status limited solely to conflicts that bore immediately upon Britain and its array of imperial possessions. The revolutionary tumult that enveloped much of continental Europe in 1848, for example, was viewed as notably portentous despite the fact that it did not lead to formal, large-scale British involvement.

The surge in radicalism that issued in the toppling of monarchies in that year was seen as important for two principal reasons. First, the fact that the British Isles themselves were for the most part spared the upheaval that characterized the conflicts on the continent was construed as evidence of divine favour and protection (curiously, the "Young Ireland" rising and

mobilisation of the Chartists, both of which took place in 1848 were, either as a result of oversight or calculated omission, largely excluded from such discussions). Second, the turbulence of the era, consistent with the soaring declarations of McCulloch, was thought to signify the imminence of the Christian millennium.

Both themes were trumpeted in an essay published in the May 1848 edition of the *Ecclesiastical & Missionary Record*, a Canadian Presbyterian publication. An unnamed author employed the metaphor of an earthquake as an evocative means of emphasising the singular import of what was thought to be transpiring. No natural phenomenon is more "terrific" than the earthquake, the author stated. Those who are not devastated by it cannot help but acknowledge the comparative "impotency of man" and the "terribleness" of God's punishments.[30]

The tremors and rifts wrought by earthquakes were linked in the author's conception to God's absolute sovereignty over the universe. They were portrayed as indicative of his capacity for punishing sinful individuals as well as the communities in which they lived. Similarly, revolutions, as the earthquake's political equivalent, were cast as punitive manifestations of divine disapproval as a result of the pervasiveness of worldly tyranny and corruption.

After portraying the era's upheaval as an expression of divine judgement, the author moved on to a discussion of the significance of the era's tumult in relation to the unfolding of the providential design. Integral to this conception was God's benevolent preservation of Britain as a veritable oasis of peace and stability despite its close physical proximity to the revolutionary maelstrom. For the author, there could be no doubt as to whether an omnipotent superintending providence had prevented the transmission of the revolutionary contagion from continental Europe to Great Britain. "God has so ordered it," the author confidently declared, that the chaotic spasms that were responsible for the overthrow of haughty "imperial thrones" on the continent failed to wreak comparable havoc among his favoured peoples in Britain.[31]

Pivotally, in addition to hobbling the monarchical "despotism" of such figures as France's Louis-Philippe, the era's instability was thought by the author to be symptomatic of the imminence of the glorious millennium and second coming of Christ. The "time of the end" was plainly drawing nigh. This was evident in the harsh judgements meted out by God on a series of "usurping and tyrannical potentates and states," which in turn were seen as foreshadowing the glorious realisation of the

"Kingdom of the Prince of Peace" on earth.[32]

In bold, broad strokes, the author proceeded to sketch out the crucial sequence of events that would culminate in the triumphant thousand-year reign of the Son of God. The "despotisms and privileged castes" which had traditionally held sway over continental Europe must all be overturned so as to allow for the proliferation of gospel "truth," the author asserted. "[Yea] and though 'that worst of tyrants, an usurping crowd'" will for a time wield great power God's chosen peoples should neither lose focus nor shrink from their responsibilities. For, "when darkness is deepest the morning light is approaching." Thus, the article concluded, even "coming troubles" could be construed as anticipating the arrival of the "long wished-for millennial day."[33] Taken together, the author's sentiments capture the fusion of providentialism and British imperial enthusiasm that invigorated Canadian Presbyterianism in the pre-1875 period.

Early Canadian Presbyterianism was by no means a monolithic entity. For the better part of the nineteenth century a seemingly irrepressible penchant for intra-denominational squabbling militated against the establishment of a single body. For evidence of this quarrelsome tendency one need look no further than the dizzying profusion of largely autonomous subgroups that existed prior to the establishment, in 1875, of the nation-wide Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Yet an investigation of the prevailing anxieties and aspirations that circulated within the denominational consciousness reveals that, divided as they may have been over issues such as the endlessly vexatious church-state question, Presbyterianism's myriad constituent parts also shared considerable common ground. While the lack of institutional uniformity prior to 1875 is undeniable, when it came to the life of the mind the various subgroups succeeded in coalescing around a cluster of compelling, broadly held impulses and convictions.

Conceiving of themselves as part of an amorphous, trans-oceanic British nation, the early Canadian Presbyterians were, in the final analysis, tied together by a widespread belief in the incomparable greatness of the British Empire. Suffusing the denominational community, too, was a belief in Presbyterianism's providentially ordained destiny, which manifested itself in a millennial sense of mission that transcended the boundaries of British North America and the early Canadian state. For Presbyterians, it seems that righteousness, in tandem with divine providence, was indeed the mainspring of national exaltation. Resounding throughout the denomination, this conviction played a vital role in the

forging of a coherent Presbyterian identity in nineteenth-century Canada.[34]

Endnotes

1. The first part of this paper's title is drawn from Proverbs 14:34 (King James Version).

2. Stephen Leacock, *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich* (New York: John Lane, 1914), 203.

3. A note on terminology: in making general references to the pre-Confederation era the term "British North America" will be used. An exception to this pattern will be phenomena that are strictly confined to Upper and Lower Canada, or to their successor colonies of Canada West and Canada East, respectively. In such instances the terms "Canada" and "Canadians" will be freely employed. When referring to the pre-1875 period on the whole, however, I will use the terms "early Canada" and "nineteenth-century Canada"; while, admittedly, somewhat imprecise (among other things, such terminology prematurely anticipates the absorption of the various British North American colonies into a national union prior to Confederation) these nevertheless seem preferable to "British North America" which, in addition to being comparatively uneconomical, fails to account for the national entity that would come into existence in July 1867.

4. A succinct overview of the church-state controversy as it relates to Presbyterianism appears in John S. Moir, "'Who Pays the Piper . . .': Canadian Presbyterianism and Church-State Relations," in *Presbyterianism in Canada: Essays by John S. Moir*, ed. Paul Laverdure(Gravelbourg, SK: Gravelbooks, 2003). See also John Webster Grant, *Divided Heritage: The Presbyterian Contribution to the United Church of Canada* (Gravelbourg, SK: Gravelbooks, 2007), especially 28-57; and John S. Moir, *Church and State in Canada West: Three Studies in the Relation of Denominationalism, 1841-1867* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959). For a complete listing of the various Presbyterian subgroups see John S. Moir, *Enduring Witness: A History of the Presbyterian Church in Canada* (Burlington, ON: Eagle Press Printers, n.d.), "Major Presbyterian Unions in Canada," chart opposite page 130; and Neil G. Smith, Allan L. Farris, and H. Keith Markell, *A Short History of the Presbyterian Church in Canada* (Toronto: Presbyterian Publications, n.d.), 50.

5. In addition to the issue of fractiousness, Leacock's sketch gestures in the direction of a second theme that figured prominently within the "real life" history of nineteenth-century Canadian Presbyterianism. As Joseph C. McLelland has noted, the dour, intransigent attitude evinced by the congrega-

tion of St. Osoph's regarding the duration of the reprobate's ultimate punishment was evident during the scandalous heresy trial of D.J. Macdonnell, which began in 1875. Essentially, Macdonnell, who served as Minister of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Toronto, expressed misgivings concerning the position of the Westminster Confession of Faith – the fundamental articulation of Presbyterian doctrine – on the question of eternal damnation. He admitted to being wracked by "moral confusion" as a result of the apparent tension between the unsettling notion of endless punishment and the idea of a benevolent, merciful God. For doctrinal conservatives, Macdonnell's comments appeared to call into question the conceptual bedrock of orthodox Presbyterianism, and were therefore tantamount to heretical theological laxity. As a result of Macdonnell's agreement in 1877 to adhere to a declaration of piety deemed acceptable by the prosecuting party, the controversy was defused. That the charges against him, which likely would have ended his career, were ultimately dismissed suggests that at least a modicum of "liberality of thought" was permissible within the wider Presbyterian community. Yet at the same time, the emotional intensity and protracted length of the episode also bespoke the degree to which influential elements within late-nineteenth-century Canadian Presbyterianism were guided by a doctrinaire rigidity that was very much in keeping with the strident ethos exhibited in Leacock's fictional Presbyterian congregation (see McLelland, "Ralph and Stephen and Hugh and Margaret: Canlit's View of Presbyterians," in *The Burning Bush and a Few Acres of Snow: The Presbyterian Contribution to Canadian Life and Culture*, ed. William Klempa [Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1994], 115; McLelland, "The Macdonnell Heresy Trial," *Canadian Journal of Theology* 4, no. 4 [October 1958]; David B. Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith: Canadian Protestant Clergy and the Crisis of Belief, 1850-1940* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992], 42-5; and Moir, *Enduring Witness*, 172-4).

6.   H.H. Walsh, *The Christian Church in Canada* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1956), 212-214; see also S.D. Clark, *Church and Sect in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1948); Smith, Farris, and Markell, *Short History of the Presbyterian Church*; and Stuart C. Parker, *Yet Not Consumed; A Short Account of the History and Antecedents of the Presbyterian Church in Canada* (Toronto: Thorn Press, 1942); Edmund H. Oliver, *The Winning of the Frontier* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1930); and John Thomas McNeil, *The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1875-1925* (Toronto: Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1925), especially 1-32.

7.   Walsh, *The Christian Church in Canada*, 214; Clark, *Church and Sect in Canada*, 329-330; and Oliver, *The Winning of the Frontier*, 196-202.

8.   Phillip Buckner, "Whatever Happened to the British Empire?" *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 4 (1993): 12.

9.   The principle features of such a framework were initially propounded by Pocock who, in the 1970s, called for the fashioning of a "new British history" that would situate the global British diaspora in "a context of inherent diversity" in which the notion of "a monolithic 'parent society'" would be supplanted by what he termed "an expanding zone of cultural conflict and creation" (Pocock, "British History: A Plea for a New Subject," *Journal of Modern History*, 47, no. 4 [1975]: 602). For more recent assessments of this conceptual approach, see Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich, "Mapping the British World," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 31, no. 2 (May 2003); and Nancy Christie, "Introduction: Theorizing a Colonial Past: Canada as a Society of British Settlement," in *Transatlantic Subjects: Ideas, Institutions, and Social Experience in Post-Revolutionary British North America*, ed. Nancy Christie (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), 3-44. For examples of works relating to Canadian Christianity that have built upon Pocock's appeal, see Richard Vaudry, *Anglicans and the Atlantic World: High Churchmen, Evangelicals, and the Quebec Connection* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003); Michael Gauvreau, "The Dividends of Empire: Church Establishments and Contested British Identities in the Canadas and the Maritimes, 1780-1850," in *Transatlantic Subjects*, 199-250, as well as the following contributions by Todd Webb: "Making Neo-Britons: The Transatlantic Relationship between Wesleyan Methodists in Britain and the Canadas, 1815-1828," *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, 16, no. 1 (2005); and "How the Canadian Methodists Became British: Unity, Schism, and Transatlantic Identity, 1827-54," in *Transatlantic Subjects*, 159-198.

10. Buckner, "Whatever Happened to the British Empire?" 30.

11. Donald K. McKim, *Presbyterian Beliefs: An Introduction,* 27. McKim is no relation to the author of this paper. See also Paul Helm, *The Providence of God* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994); and Horton Davies, *The Vigilant God: Providence in the Thought of Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin and Barth* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992).

12. Helm, *The Providence of God*, 22-3; and McKim, *Presbyterian Beliefs*, 27.

13. Davies, *The Vigilant God*.

14. Michael Willis, *The Gospel of Grace Vindicated; Being Sermons Preached on Several Sabbath Evenings in 1869 . . .* (Toronto: A. Lovell, c. 1870), 12.

15. The impact of evangelicalism's emphasis on sin, suffering, and redemption on British intellectual culture from the late-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries is illuminated in Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

16. 1 July 1832, Session Records, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Toronto, Presbyterian Church in Canada Archives (PCCA), Toronto.

17. H.M. Höpfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); and William James Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

18. For an analysis of the providential motif in late eighteenth-century Nova Scotia, see Gordon Stewart and George Rawlyk, *A People Highly Favoured of God: The Nova Scotia Yankees and the American Revolution* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1972).

19. For Anthony D. Smith, the "moral life" of a people purportedly wedded to God by way of a permanent covenantal bond is characterised by neither naive optimism nor passive fatalism. Rather, it is typified by a pervasive apprehensiveness regarding the community's susceptibility to sinfulness and the corresponding spectre of divinely-administered punishment (Smith, *Chosen Peoples* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003], 64-65). See also Donald Harmon Akenson, *God's Peoples: Covenant and Land in South Africa, Israel, and Ulster* (Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991).

20. *The Presbyterian, a Missionary and Religious Record of the Presbyterian Church of Canada in Connection with the Church of Scotland* (June 1848): 79.

21. Incisive discussions of the advent of the modern, geographically and politically self-contained "nation-state" can be found in E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780; Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism,* 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006 [1983]). Gellner defines nationalism as "primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent" (Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 1). Such an interpretation differs sharply from the amorphous "national" community envisaged by the Presbyterians of the British world. The fulsome expressions of pro-British loyalty put forth by many Canadian Presbyterians in the nineteenth century stand in contrast to the reputation for revolutionary fervour garnered by their American co-religionists in the late eighteenth. As a result of an array of factors – principal among them the Calvinistic tradition of resisting impious (and thus illegitimate)

authorities, Scots Presbyterian opposition to the reputedly despotic overtures of the Stuart monarchs in the mid- and late-seventeenth century, and the denomination's diffuse, democratic system of church polity – Scottish and Scots-Irish Presbyterians in America, especially in such "middle colonies" as Pennsylvania, have frequently been portrayed as among the keenest revolutionary participants; so much so that certain loyalists are alleged to have dismissed the insurgency as little more than "a Presbyterian war" (Martin Marty, "The American Revolution and Religion, 1765-1815," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. VII, *Enlightenment, Reawakening and Revolution, 1660-1815*, ed. Stewart J. Brown and Timothy Tackett [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006], 502-3). See also Patricia Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Mark Noll, *Princeton and the Republic, 1768-1822: The Search for a Christian Enlightenment in the Era of Samuel Stanhope Smith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); and Joseph S. Tiedemann, "Presbyterianism and the American Revolution in the Middle Colonies," *Church History* 74, no. 2 (June 2005): 306-344.

22. Reverend William Gregg, Sermon at Cooke's Church (n.d.),Toronto. Gregg Papers, Reel 2, PCCA.

23. For a discussion on the degree to which eighteenth and nineteenth-century Scots Presbyterians (particularly those of Lowland extraction) viewed themselves as essentially British, see Colin Kidd, "Race, Empire, and the Limits of Nineteenth-Century Scottish Nationhood," *The Historical Journal*, 46, no. 4 (2003); and Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World 1600-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), especially 15-16. On the Highland contribution to the Empire see Andrew MacKillop, *More Fruitful than the Soil: Army, Empire and the Scottish Highlands, 1715-18* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000); and Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005 [1992]), especially 119-120. The pervasiveness and political potency of loyalty as a rhetorical and symbolic construct in Upper Canadian society is skilfully elucidated in David Mills, *The Idea of Loyalty in Upper Canada, 1784-1850* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988); and Jane Errington, *The Lion, the Eagle, and Upper Canada: A Developing Colonial Ideology* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987).

24. Kerby A. Miller, in assessing the experiences of Ulsterite Presbyterian emigrants, has made this point in a notably persuasive manner (Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1985], especially 157-58). Additional aspects of the transatlantic Ulsterite Presbyterian world are explored in David A.

Wilson and Mark G. Spencer, eds., *Ulster Presbyterians in the Atlantic World: Religion, Politics and Identity* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2006).

25. For a more exhaustive discussion of this theme as it relates to early English-Canadian political culture see Jeffrey L. McNairn, *The Capacity to Judge: Public Opinion and Deliberative Democracy in Upper Canada, 1791-1854* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000). A useful overview appears in J.A.W. Gunn, "Public Opinion," in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, eds. Terrence Ball, James Farr, and Russell L. Hanson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

26. Thomas McCulloch, *The Prosperity of the Church in Troublous Times. A Sermon, Preached at Pictou, Friday, February 25th, 1814, (The Year Before Waterloo) By Thomas McCulloch with Introductory Remarks by Rev. Robert Grant, East River, Pictou Nova Scotia* (New Glasgow, NS: S.M. Mackenzie, 1882), 7-10. See also Stanley E. McMullin, "In Search of the Liberal Mind: Thomas McCulloch and the Impulse to Action," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 23, nos. 1-2 (1988).

27. According to John Wolffe, the notion that the British Empire was imbued with a divinely ordained responsibility for the diffusion of Christian piety and the advancement of western civilization continued to circulate widely amongst mid- and late-nineteenth-century Britons. The attitudes evinced by the early Canadian Presbyterians in this period are highly consonant with such an interpretation (Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain: Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland 1843-1945* [New York: Routledge, 1994], 222). For an assessment of the part played by millenarianism in stoking the fires of political radicalism in late-eighteenth-century New England see Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

28. McCulloch, *The Prosperity of the Church in Troublous Times . . .*, 14-15.

29. McCulloch, *The Prosperity of the Church in Troublous Times . . .*, 17.

30. *Ecclesiastical & Missionary Record of the Free Church of Scotland* (May 1848): 106.

31. *Ecclesiastical & Missionary Record of the Free Church of Scotland* (May 1848): 106.

32. *Ecclesiastical & Missionary Record of the Free Church of Scotland* (May 1848): 106.

33. *Ecclesiastical & Missionary Record of the Free Church of Scotland* (May 1848): 106.

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