

Book Reviews

Two Worlds: The Protestant Culture of Nineteenth-Century Ontario. WILLIAM WESTFALL. Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989. 273 p. ISBN 0-7735-0669-1.

William Westfall has long been arguing that religion cannot be kept on the periphery of Canadian historiography. In *Two Worlds*, he examines the central role Protestantism has played in the cultural norms of nineteenth-century Ontario. It is a complex and bold synthesis based on the assumption that "religion leads directly to culture."

This book is based on a broad range of sources, including material from the United Church Archives, the Archives of Ontario, and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) Archives. But even more impressive than the research is Westfall's careful reading of the documents and innovative use of sources, many well known to historians of nineteenth-century Ontario. Westfall makes use of the most traditional sources, such as those passages from the Bible or psalms or hymns which seemed to be most significant for the Victorians, and he analyzes how these passages were understood and applied in nineteenth-century Ontario. Rarely do religious historians pay such close attention to these crucial sources.

Westfall begins his study by outlining the character of Protestantism in the early nineteenth century. He appears to approach this task in a conventional way, drawing upon such sources as sermons, addresses, diaries, forms of worship, and the denominational press. As well, his analysis focuses on John Strachan and Egerton Ryerson, but adds much new insight into these "old chestnuts." According to Westfall, Anglicans and Methodists understood the character of God and creation and the nature of salvation differently. Anglicanism was a religion of order; the path to redemption was gradual and dependent on education and the proper forms of church worship. Methodism was a religion of experience; redemption was sudden or spontaneous and usually occasioned by the dramatic experience of an emotional conversion.

Westfall is interested in the way in which the religions of order and experience, at loggerheads in the 1830s, had developed into an "omnibus Protestant culture" by mid-century. The economic, demographic, social, and political change of the period provides the background for this investigation. He demonstrates that the emerging urban environment forced Methodism to temper its emphasis on revivalism and conversion. Westfall concludes, in a passage typical of his elegant prose, that "God was brought

indoors and institutionalized in a church." Increasingly, the emphasis was on gradual growth in grace within the confines of the respectable church. Methodism became more rational, worldly, and active in the world. He draws a compelling sketch, but it is too dependent on the changes within the Wesleyan Methodists. Westfall's analysis does not consider the evidence of other Methodist bodies, such as the Primitive Methodists, which indicates that the religion of experience remained an important aspect of the Methodist experience.

While Methodism was abandoning some of its past, the religion of order was also being transformed. Using Durham's famous report as primary evidence, Westfall suggests that the Canadian state was interested in material progress and decided that it no longer needed the established church. Disestablishment forced the Anglican church to become a different kind of institution. Westfall sees this transformation in the change in John Strachan's sermons, which stressed the idea that the church was a "sacred institution in a secular world." In confronting the secular world, both Methodism and Anglicanism became part of "a broad Protestant alliance which tried to confront the sins of the new age."

In the most innovative section of the book, Westfall argues that this Protestant culture is reflected in the church architecture which dominated the skylines of Ontario cities and towns. In this chapter, Westfall draws on a number of new sources, most notably the plans and designs of church buildings, the numerous histories of individual churches, and the papers and published works of church architects. The aesthetic principles which informed church architecture, he argues, reflects where the sacred belonged in the scheme of cultural life. The revival of the Gothic and Romanesque style "confirmed visually the growing unity of Ontario Protestantism itself." This revival of "Christian architecture" was not merely a change in fashion, but rather a part of a social and religious movement. In a visually dramatic way, the church buildings gave "the sacred a distinctive place in the secular world." Westfall ties this architectural style to other cultural phenomena of the Victorian age, and argues that it was part of a romantic revival seeking to recreate a heroic and spiritual world which stood in marked contrast to the secular urban world which was coming to dominate the Victorian age. Church architecture sought to move people by portraying the grandeur, power, and nobility of the sacred. The church buildings were "like sermons in stone."

Ontario churches had abandoned many of the beliefs and forms of worship which many still sought to guide them through the uncertainty and sense of crisis that characterized society. A variety of premillennial groups emerged in the 1840s to fill the spiritual void. Although there are some important primary sources on the Millerites, Irvingites, Russellites, and Campbellites, Westfall is forced to rely on the reaction to these movements by the mainstream churches for his assessment. These sources, however, allow Westfall to delineate what happened to the religious spectrum. He points out that the Methodists attacked the millennial movements with arguments similar to those used by Strachan against the disruptive influence of pioneer Methodism: "New heresies were, in effect, old orthodoxies." A duality within Protestant culture in Ontario remained. By interpreting events as signs of impending doom and confidently predicting the world's end, the premillennial movement challenged the mainstream church's faith in sacred and secular progress. Whereas mainstream Protestantism thought that religion would play a central role in the transformation of Ontario secular culture into the Kingdom of God, the premillennialists were convinced that there was little which could

be done except to await the end of time which would be determined by God. In outlining the emergence of this debate concerning sense of time and possibility of social change, Westfall has laid a firm foundation for exploration of the sources of the fundamentalist versus modernist controversy, which divided Protestantism beginning in the very late nineteenth century.

Two Worlds concludes in a manner which is strikingly similar to what may be emerging as a new orthodoxy in Canadian historiography: the ironic outcome of the sacred world's quest to redeem and transform the secular world was that it somehow succumbed to the forces of secularization. Westfall, however, sees the irony differently from Brian McKillop in *A Disciplined Intelligence*, and Ramsay Cook in *The Regenerators*. In working out a sacred vision and world which was quite distinct from the secular world, religionists managed to push religion and the churches to a peripheral position which was remote from the concerns and values of the secular world.

William Westfall's *Two Worlds* is a superb study of religious values and beliefs, especially among Methodists and Anglicans, in nineteenth-century Ontario. He draws a pattern or structure of the religious past similar to the one drawn by S.D. Clark in his classic *Church and Sect in Canada*. But it is a better model, for Westfall is sensitive to the power of religious ideas and beliefs in history, and does not interpret religious history as the mere result of social and economic change.

David Marshall
University of Calgary

A Profusion of Spires: Religion in Nineteenth-Century Ontario. JOHN WEBSTER GRANT. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988. x, 291 p. ISBN 0-8020-5798-5 \$30.00 (cloth).

It has been several years since conscientious Canadian religious historians have felt obliged to apologize for the lack of relevant secondary literature. Despite being relatively ignored by general Canadian historians, and with some notable exceptions, the bibliography of church-related history is now large, varied, and expanding. This is especially true in the case of Ontario, which has long exercised national religious hegemony, at least for English-speaking Canadians. Nevertheless, the focus of Canadian religious history has usually been a rather narrow one. This problem is partially a result of the disparate archival institutions scattered across the country. Most are small and lack the financial support to collect and process religious records. Moreover, most churches have a surprisingly poor historical sense and see little value in maintaining their papers.

The most common studies in religious history have focused on the rise and success of individual congregations and groups. These works serve a localized clientele; they do not consider the broad social fabric of the community or country. They are based heavily on the local church record, which is the most common church record collected. Generally such studies have lauded institutional expansion and denominational competition. The broader studies of the various denominations represent the bulk of the scholarly work in the field, but they too are designed to justify the churches involved and represent a search for a respectable place among the profusion of spires dominating the landscape. Unfortunately, they are rarely related to the critical political, social, and intellectual