

The Canadian Protestant Experience, 1760-1990. Ed. George A. Rawlyk. Welch Academic Library. Burlington: Welch Publishing Company Inc., 1990. ISBN 1-55011-142-6. Pp. 252.

Although the title is somewhat misleading, editor George Rawlyk makes it clear in the Preface that the unique purpose of this collection of five essays is to highlight the place of evangelicalism within the broader picture of Protestantism in Canada, and to examine its role in the social and cultural development of Canada as a nation.

In the first chapter, Nancy Christie examines a period in which two different, often opposing, expressions of Protestantism developed in the Maritimes and Upper Canada (1760-1815). She argues that the New Light Baptists and the Methodists were "two facets of a common popular religious impulse which sought to redefine British North American society in contrast to the established authority." The emphasis that each individual must take responsibility for their own spiritual welfare unwittingly generated a social revolution by fostering notions of equality, liberty and freedom. Propagated by an army of itinerant evangelists, this message functioned as a "fulcrum of dissent" against the traditional views of elite control and ecclesiastical homogeneity, and in so doing left an indelible impression on Canadian culture.

The second essay, written by Michael Gauvreau, examines the period between the War of 1812 and Confederation. He extends Christie's argument by suggesting that the evangelical impulse, "a passion, a living force, a pulsating energy infusing the individual soul and human communities," transformed the culture of nineteenth-century British North America by presenting "a rival vision of social order," which advocated the "rejection of an inherited model of religious, social and political organization, founded upon traditional notions of rank, status, and social subordination." Gauvreau also explores how this impulse deeply influenced the intellectual climate in Canada by modifying various Enlightenment emphases.

In the third chapter, Phyllis Airhart surveys the period between Confederation and the Great War (1867-1914). The initial apathy towards confederation changed when the challenge of creating a Canada as "His Dominion" fired the imagination of Protestant leaders. This vision provided the "symbolic coherence for a broadly based consensus" and found practical expression through missionary activity, reform movements and the

formation of voluntary societies. She traces the way this consensus slowly began to fragment, dividing denominations within as much as against each other, as churches sought to face a bewildering array of new social problems in the twentieth century.

In the fourth chapter, Robert A. Wright identifies some of the events and movements that radically changed the look of Canadian Protestantism during the interwar years (1914-1945). Wright claims that while fundamentalism affected all major denominations, it particularly "breathed life into sectarian movements that had grown up on the nation's geographic and socio-economic periphery." Fundamentalist and conservative evangelical groups developed a new ecumenism that was particularly evident in the field of education. A host of Bible institutes and colleges were founded which eventually became the "bedrock for evangelical Protestantism in Canada."

In the final chapter, John G. Stackhouse examines the Protestant experience in Canada since 1945. He confirms what many have suspected for some time, namely that the burgeoning numbers of evangelicals now make the categories of "mainline" and "sectarian" obsolete. Stackhouse traces the public emergence of a transdenominational fellowship of like-minded evangelical Christians that has become an "interlocking set of institutions." While many of these institutions are concerned chiefly with the traditional evangelical emphases, some have broader interests that include a variety of social, economic, educational and political matters.

Despite the dramatic increase in "morale, efficiency, visibility, technique, group identity and expressiveness" among evangelical Protestants, Stackhouse also highlights some ambiguities. Sociologists have found that most of their growth can be attributed to immigration, a higher-than-average birth rate, a better-than-average ability to retain children and geographically mobile members, and the ability to attract members from other churches—what one sociologist refers to as the "circulation of the saints." Only a small percentage of their growth can be attributed to the evangelization of non-evangelicals. Stackhouse wonders also whether the numerical growth of evangelicals, as members of the middle class who have gained a measure of prominence, wealth and respectability in modern Canadian society, really indicates that they are now influencing society more, or that they have in fact been co-opted?

The volume rides a wave of renewed interest in Canadian religious history, and in so doing, makes a unique, and a long overdue, contribution to the field. By isolating and tracing the movement of one strand within

Canadian Christianity the book transcends the narrow limitations of a denominational study, and at the same time provides a more substantial treatment of Canadian evangelicalism than is possible in a general survey.

The serious reader will, however, be frustrated by the absence of reference notes. Although the bibliographic essays concluding each chapter are excellent (despite a certain amount of repetition), and do compensate in part for the absence of references, the fact that the publisher has designated the book a part of the "Welch Academic Library" series suggests that employing a critical apparatus would not have been too much to expect. (The volume also contains an unfortunate number of typographical errors.)

The volume's most significant contribution is the way in which it summarizes and makes accessible pertinent material that would otherwise have remained buried within academic tomes. By surveying what has been done, and by pointing to areas that need additional exploration, it establishes an agenda for future studies of Canadian evangelicalism. Its readable style and its manageable size will undoubtedly make it a popular resource for classroom use.

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The Distancing of God: The Ambiguity of Symbol in History and Theology.

By Bernard Cooke. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990. ISBN 0-8006-2415-7. Pp. viii+368.

This work in sacramental theology by the Professor of Theology at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts is divided into two parts. The first is an historical survey of what the author calls the "distancing" of God, i.e., the way in which God is made to appear far away from the common Christian. The second part is a consideration of developments in the understanding of symbols and symbolism in the human sciences. In the last section of this second part Cooke considers experience (general human experience, the historical experience of Jesus and the church, and Christian ritual experience) as a symbol that bears the presence of God, and addresses the theological questions suggested by this analysis.

The first section of the book is the most successful. The thesis is that God was especially present in the experience of Jesus, and thereby in the