

THE SOCIAL GOSPEL IN BRITISH COLUMBIA:
SOCIAL REFORM AS A DIMENSION OF RELIGION
1900 - 1920

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department

of

History

ACCEPTED
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

DATE *9 May 1974* DEAN

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

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ABSTRACT

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The social gospel which attracted much church interest during the first two decades of the twentieth century was the Protestant expression of widespread reform sentiment. [Much of the content of the social gospel was derived from other reform movements, but unlike them, its essential conception was religious,] rather than social or political.]

Social gospellers in British Columbia were a minority group although in the Presbyterian and Methodist churches they achieved great influence. Before the First World War their efforts were largely ignored by the Anglicans, the largest denomination in the province, as well as by the non-church-going segment of the population. During the war they attracted a much greater degree of public attention, particularly through the prohibition campaign and their attacks on government corruption. The end of the war brought greatest official church support for social gospel ideas. The failure, at this time, to find effective means to transform ideas into actions resulted in a diminishing interest in social reform as a task for the church.

Social gospel ideas arrived in British Columbia with immigrant ministers from Britain and eastern Canada and were reinforced by contacts with American churches. Although not an indigenous movement, the expression of social gospel ideas was shaped by the experience of life in the developing province and reflected not only British Columbians'

hopes of a bright future but also the tensions of existing discords. Much church interest in the social gospel was motivated by anxieties over the nature of contemporary society and the changing role of the church within it.

The existence in the province of radical labour and militant Marxist groups emphasized for social gossellers the necessity of a Christian reform of society, both to bring nearer the ideal Kingdom of God and to prevent a violent, destructive, and anti-Christian revolution by the discontented and oppressed. Fearful that extremist elements, such as the Marxists, would seize the leadership of the reform movement, unless the church acted, social gossellers insisted that reform must be spiritual as well as material, that only a religiously inspired reform of society could be successful.

Although social gossellers preached the need for fundamental social reconstruction, it is misleading to interpret the social gospel in British Columbia as a radical socialist movement. Changes in the goals and motivations of men rather than changes in law and social structures were their primary concern. Even the denunciation of profits was a condemnation of profits as the motive of all business life rather than a condemnation of private enterprise as a system. Individual redemption through evangelism was the favoured approach to social reform. While some social gossellers did advocate a form of socialism, the majority remained moralists, not socialists. Their use of a radical rhetoric masked an essential conservatism.

This thesis looks at the social gospel in British Columbia during the early years of its development and the critical years of the First

World War and attempts to determine the nature of its ideas, motivations, goals, and achievements. Inspired by faith in the coming of God's Kingdom, social gospellers believed that the church must provide leadership in the Christianization of society. Despite disagreements over choice of means and the definition of goals, they were united in their vision of social reform as a dimension of religion. Unable to solve the problem of means, the social gospel in British Columbia remained largely rhetoric without result.

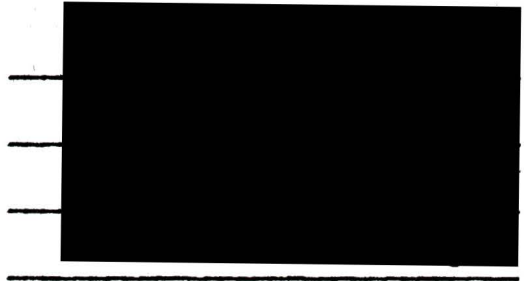


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CHAPTER I

THE SOCIAL GOSPEL IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

What was the social gospel? It was essentially a group of related ideas about the nature of God, man, society, religion and history. While these ideas were not precisely detailed nor expressed as a coherent whole, social gospellers in British Columbia agreed upon certain basic concepts.

The key concept was the belief in God as a loving father--good, merciful, and solicitous of the earthly happiness of his children. Believing that such a God must have created all things well, many social gospellers concluded that "the evils of to-day are not a part of the nature of things but are the effects of departing from the intention of the Creator."¹ Since human misery could not be attributed to God's plan for the world, it was not inevitable.

The emphasis placed in the social gospel upon the fatherhood of God led naturally to an emphasis upon a second Christian concept--the brotherhood of man. The essence of Christianity, according to the social gospel, was brotherly love. Christ's second commandment ought to become the basis of all human relationships, the motive of all social activity. William Lashly Hall, a prominent member of the British Columbia Methodist Conference, gave the common social gospel argument: "The cause of man is everywhere coming to be seen, as it really is, to be the cause of God. He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"²

Religion defined in terms of brotherhood led also to a re-examination of the nature of sin. It was no longer enough to chastise personal vice while ignoring public or social sins, the social gossellers warned. The private charity of a Rockefeller could not atone for the injustice and immorality of his business methods.³ Exploitation of the public by large corporations using monopolistic powers to inflate prices, deserved the condemnation of the church as much as did the thefts of an individual. The Rev. F. W. Kerr of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in New Westminster summed up the social gospel attitude on the subject: "The time has come when the church must define sin not so much in relation to private and personal morals, as in relation to social responsibility, political honor and business integrity."⁴

Believing that a loving God so created the world that human happiness and social justice were possible, social gossellers developed a new interpretation of the Kingdom of God. God's Kingdom--no longer an ultimate goal in the life to come but the perfect human society incorporating love, justice, and righteousness--would be created upon the earth in the course of historical time. Belief in the Kingdom was based upon the social gossellers' faith in an immanent God working through history towards this predestined goal. Thus, reform would be the result not of man's unaided efforts but of men performing the will of God. A. E. Cooke, a Congregationalist minister in Vancouver, explained:

we find the ultimate goal of the whole long process of social Evolution clearly set forth in Christ's great Ideal of the Kingdom of God. A world-wide society embodying the principles of the Divine Life, with Love as its atmosphere, and service as its standard, in which all nations shall be bound together in the bonds of brotherhood.⁵

Enthusiasm for the coming of the Kingdom coloured social gospel discussion throughout the pre-war period. A very strong element of millennial thinking was evident. For example, in 1910, the Western Methodist Recorder commented: "There never was a day in the history of the Church since Pentecost when such signs of victory were ours in the glory of His coming Kingdom. . . . The age is upon us."⁶ Even the outbreak of war in 1914 did not destroy this hope, for patriotism, mingled with the idealism of the reform movement, interpreted the war as the last great battle against the forces of evil.⁷

In the Protestant churches of British Columbia, as elsewhere in the Western world, the social gospel was a major topic of discussion during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Little that was included under the term, the social gospel, was really new as its main ideas were derived from traditional Christian beliefs. The emphasis given to certain ideas and attitudes and contrasts with some recent church positions constituted the novelty of the social gospel approach to Christianity. Much of this changed emphasis resulted from the work of European liberal theologians such as Albert Ritschl and the new critical approach to scripture.⁸

Social gospel theology with its organic views of society, its concepts of evolution towards the Kingdom, and the immanence of God, obviously owed much to nineteenth century European philosophy and Darwinian science as well as to developments in religious thought. Moreover, social gospel fascination with sociological facts as the means of understanding and solving human problems reflected Comte's positivism while, in North America, populism and the progressive movement contributed to

the social gospel analysis of political and economic power.

Most important of all, was the influence upon Protestantism of the rise of socialism.⁹ Whether viewing socialism as a rival for the loyalties of the working class or as a potential ally in reforming the world, Protestantism felt compelled to come to terms with the new philosophy. Whether reacting from fear and dislike or responding with praise and approval, Protestantism could not ignore a movement which in many of its more radical forms, challenged the very existence of organized religion both by its critique of Christian belief and by its promise to provide a heaven on earth without divine aid.

Not a unitary philosophy but rather a cluster of ideas, attitudes, and assumptions, the social gospel had supporters in every major Protestant denomination. Indeed, one of the marks of the social gospel-er was an indifference to denominational distinctions. How a man lived, not what he believed, was the chief interest of the social gospel advocate.¹⁰ Wide variations of opinion existed within the movement but, before the crisis of the First World War, these potential conflicts were generally not appreciated. Men sharing a common rhetoric assumed a basic agreement on important issues. The intensity of the debate over social gospel goals which quickened during the War gradually revealed that this assumption was not justified.

A central theme in this debate over goals was the mission of the church in the modern world. Social gospellers agreed with Rev. A. E. Cooke that God's Kingdom was the goal of all history and the chief duty of the modern church was "to bring men and women to God and then send

them out to establish His Kingdom here in this city--to make Vancouver a city of God."¹¹

Traditionally, the Protestant churches had concentrated upon the moral reform of the individual. Partly through evangelistic efforts, the churches gradually became aware of the significance of the social environment upon individual development. Many ministers recognized the impossibility of isolating "the work of saving individual men . . . without an understanding of the conditions, intellectual, moral, physical and social which have formed or deformed him."¹² An important early exponent of the social gospel in British Columbia, Rev. E. S. Rowe of Metropolitan Church, Victoria, declared:

The machinery of society, which inevitably, under the imperious demands of commercialism, crushes and degrades men, will perform its deadly work more rapidly than the preacher can possibly do his. He must then address himself to the changing of the conditions--the work of social reform, which must include economic reform.¹³

While most ministers would not grant such pervasive and compelling influence to the environment as did Rowe, they agreed with his conclusions.¹⁴

Social gospellers conceded that human problems were the product of character defects such as laziness and greed but they placed most of the blame upon the social system, especially as it had developed since the industrial revolution. Society corrupted men and encouraged them to behave in abnormal ways. The reform of society was essential to allow human development to proceed according to God's plan. The question of the essential nature of man and the influence of environment upon human development was a central area of debate among social

gospellers. They tended, on the whole, to stress an optimistic view of man's ability to achieve perfection. This view was grounded in the religious belief that an individual, imbued with the divine grace of the Holy Spirit, could achieve sanctity.¹⁵ With divine aid, society could also be made perfect. *

Although conversion of the individual remained the central interest of most ministers, many were drawn to social gospel views on social reform. In their experience, a Christian environment made more effective the appeal of evangelism and supported the efforts of the converted.¹⁶ George C. Pidgeon, in 1911 a teacher at Westminster Hall, the Presbyterian college in Vancouver, and later a well-known moderator of the United Church, argued:

The war against evil is simply the negative side of the church's effort to save men. In home missions we seek to build up the Kingdom of God; in moral reform we try to tear down the Kingdom of Satan. By establishing the church we win men to God and enlist them in His service; by fighting against wrong we seek to destroy those influences that ruin men. The one is largely vain without the other. Our efforts toward social reform aim to secure proper conditions for the church's activities, and to apply Christian principles to our corporate life.¹⁷ *

Prohibition also contributed to the increasing interest in social reform as a task for the church.¹⁸ The advocacy of legal prohibition rather than voluntary temperance as a solution to the liquor problem was a tacit recognition of environmental influences upon behaviour. By restructuring the environment, specifically, by closing the saloons, the prohibitionists anticipated a great reduction in the temptation and opportunity to sin. Social reform could make the moral reform of the individual more possible. *

The linking of the moral and the social reform movements in the churches led to a closer study of the causes of the abhorred evils. Gradually, the social gospellers came to view moral and social ills as related fragments of a larger picture. An example of this may be seen in the issue of Sabbath desecration which excited considerable attention before the War. The consensus of opinion early in the century, was that legislation to protect the Sabbath from human wickedness was the solution, but a few men of more advanced social gospel ideas interpreted the situation differently. F. W. Davey, a Methodist layman and frequent contributor to the Recorder, charged that:

The church by ignoring the social and economic causes of the disregard for a day of rest and worship, by treating this disregard as a flagrant exhibition of innate depravity fit for the repressive use of legislation and the policeman's club has assisted in raising in the mind of the worker feelings of hostility to the church as an institution. . . . Lighten the pressure incident to getting a living and the Sabbath question would largely settle itself.¹⁹

If the cause of moral reform had forced the churches to regard the individual within his social context, the cause of social reform forced the churches to consider the relationship of social problems to the functioning of the economic system. Social gospellers soon concluded that these problems were basically economic in origin. ✕

Social gospellers agreed that a fundamental reform of society and its economic basis was necessary to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. Believing that Christ's teachings offered "the only perfect sociology,"²⁰ they expected the Church to play a leading role in the salvation of society, as well as of men's souls. For too long men had neglected the social implications of the gospels but, by greater study,

acceptance, and dedicated application of these teachings, they could eventually solve all their problems. Social gospellers believed that social reform needed church leadership.²¹ They defined social reform not as a secular activity but as a dimension of religion. True religion, social gospellers declared, involved service to others out of love for God and a right appreciation of Christ's teachings. Rejecting the Protestant view of salvation by faith alone, social gospellers agreed with the Rev. A. M. Sanford, then principal of Columbian College, a Methodist institution in New Westminster, that "no matter how much a man may believe that Jesus died for him, he will never see Heaven unless he has worked for Christ, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, seeking the lost, lifting up the fallen."²² But social gospellers believed that this service must not be merely to individuals as had once been the practice. Society itself must be redeemed through the church's commitment to the cause of social reform.

In forming their position that social reform should be a dimension of religious life, the ministers frequently cited the Salvation Army as a model for emulation, representing "a type of religious activity which is in accord with the enlarged religious view of the times."²³ The editor of the Recorder, convinced that the task of Christianity was "to remedy social conditions," declared:

We feel that all the churches may learn much of the imperative duty and possibility of social Christianity from the work of the Salvation Army. There is no danger of losing the fervour for 'saving souls' by seeking also to save society. The danger rather is that we shall lose that fervour if we do not seek to save society.²⁴

With the definition of religion as service, social gospellers had little sympathy for any tendencies towards pietism. The essence of Christian life, they insisted, was not to be found in any personal feelings of devotion and holiness but in "self forgetful activity for our sin-cursed and socially cursed fellow-man."²⁵

Many ministers, however, feared that this activist approach to religion might lead to a misinterpretation of religion as little more than an ethical system. A Presbyterian minister noted with disapproval that "The Gospel which some now-a-days want is a Gospel without Christ or atonement, a gospel of morality only."²⁶ Although concerned about social problems, such ministers believed that "Faith in Christ . . . as the Divine Son of God is the world's need." They warned against the "mental idolatry" of "modern humanism" which magnified "the virtues of benevolence and generosity" but ignored "the fact of sin."²⁷

Some social gospellers had tended to minimize the supernatural aspects of religion in their eagerness to modernize the church. Anxious to appeal to men "whose minds are filled with the great questions of how to wrest daily bread from such a landscape, of industrial improvement, and social development, of nation building," they dismissed as useless all other-worldly appeals. The Rev. George W. Dean who represented this trend, urged his brethren to "get rid of 16th Century theology and traditions" and preach a message relevant to the needs of the day. Warning that a "growing mass of men do not look to the church for any practical help in solving the problems of today," he affirmed:

this Province appeals to a vigorous man, . . . its vast possibilities lure him, and brace him to meet his difficulties. The pearly gates and golden streets of a heaven beyond will attract no more than a hell of fire will frighten him. . . . Humanity will be helped by those who have faith in humanity. The race is moving up into the light and we ought to be able to stand beside the publican and the harlot with the clearest vision and brightest hope of any age in the world, to say to them that the Kingdom of God is not far away.

If Dean was more unorthodox than many of the ministers in his religious views, nevertheless, his view that, "Truth may be inspired, but no definition of truth is so necessarily, only as it may apply to its own day and generation,"²⁸ was shared by many B.C. social gospelers. Like Dean, they were prepared to discard much of traditional Christian belief as musty medieval relics. *Brotherhood was the gospel message and social reform was the task of religion.*

*Social gospel emphasis upon practical activity, linked with the new theological liberalism of European scholars, resulted in a definite reaction against strong credal positions. The distaste of many reforming ministers for more esoteric theological discussion and their revulsion against many traditional elements of the Christian faith were very marked in the writings of this period. Rev. Albert M. Sanford described brotherhood as the focal point of Christian theology. While other points of theology might be debatable, he said, one central fact was clear. All that man needed to know and accept was "one great principle, the love of one's neighbour emanating from a right appreciation of Jesus Christ. Here the modern Christian may stand."²⁹ Both in his criticism of the churches' preoccupation with the more esoteric points of theology, and in his faith that a greater awareness

of Christ's message of brotherhood would reform the world, Sanford was a true spokesman for the social gospel.

For a few ministers, the crisis of confidence in the church's relevance to the modern age was also a crisis of faith in religious belief. These men sought in social service and reform a substitute for religion rather than an extension of religious concern and expression.³⁰ For the vast majority of social gossellers in British Columbia, however, belief in an immanent God working through history formed the basis of their hopes for mankind.

The social gospel as proclaimed by most British Columbian ministers was most definitely inspired and formed by religious faith. Believing that through his own powers, man was incapable of sustaining his efforts to reach perfection, they conceived of social reform as primarily a religious undertaking. Their belief that to live "that life of love and service and sacrifice which leads to the ultimate triumph . . . man needs the spiritual presence and close companionship of the Christ who redeems him" assured them that secular reform efforts alone could not succeed.³¹ Only as social reform was recognized as a dimension of religion could success result. Although social gossellers had high hopes that science, especially sociology, would help in finding solutions to human problems, they agreed that:

History had proved the futility of basing social reform upon the unaided efforts of man. Social reform can only result from a combination of the prophetic spirit and the scientific mind. There must be a vision of social relations in the light of ultimate realities, combined with some effective technique of social action.³²

Church commitment to the cause of reform was necessary but this commitment did not imply a less religious orientation on the part of the church. Social gospeller Ernest Thomas emphasized that:

The essential fact in Christian life is fellowship with the Father . . . Social betterment and moral advancement are not the first concern of the Christian Church . . . the work of the Church is to foster and mediate the life of fellowship with the Father. This fellowship when informed by the spirit of the Good Father will become a channel of His creative energy making for a good world; but the primary fact must be the recognition that one's own life has no worth save as it expresses the thoughts and will of the Father.³³

Certainly the ministers agreed that the prime duty of the church would be in the future as it had always been, "the obligation to bring home to the world the conviction that will lead to repentance and deliver it from darkness and misery."³⁴ Evangelism remained the basic approach to social reform. The Recorder produced the detailed exposition of this view:

The Church's business above all things . . . is the creation and development of a consciousness of human relation to God and duty to our fellows; in other words the preparation of human character in unselfishness and spiritual, rather than material, aspiration, so that human society may become solicitous and mutually helpful and fraternal.³⁵

The Rev. R. J. McIntyre summed up his view of the duty of the church more succinctly: "Teach and preach and organize for the establishment of the Kingdom on Earth."³⁶

Social gospel ideas arrived in British Columbia full-blown in the many ministers coming from Eastern Canada (mainly Ontario) or from Great Britain. While Ontario ministers were vehicles for American social gospel influences, notably the ideas of William Gladden,

George Herron, and Walter Rauschenbusch, the British ministers brought the ideas of Christian socialism as developed by such men as Hugh Price Hughes. These ideas were continually reinforced by the visits of guest speakers and lecturers as well as by means of published material.³⁷

Church educational institutions within the province were influential in the dissemination of social gospel ideology. Westminster Hall, the Presbyterian college in Vancouver, was especially important through the presence on its staff of prestigious visiting teachers. Among these were Shailer Matthews of the University of Chicago and many leading ministers from the British free churches.

In British Columbia, the arguments of the social gossellers received much attention within church circles. Sermons, lectures, debates, records of church meetings and assemblies, and articles published in church and secular newspapers recorded the lively discussion. Social gossellers were found in all the Protestant churches although support was not distributed equally among the denominations, nor was there ever a lack of opposition.

While the Anglicans possessed the largest membership in the province, the official policies of that church remained least affected by the social gospel during the pre-war years. Unlike the mother church in England, which encompassed many varieties of opinion including a radical form of Christian socialism, the Anglican church in British Columbia (and in Canada as a whole) was very conservative.³⁸ Nevertheless, the Anglican clergy were not altogether unaffected by the currents of social gospel enthusiasm. Despite the cautious tone of official pronouncements on social issues, the Anglican Church in B.C.

did join the local interdenominational Social Service Councils and some individual ministers showed sympathy for the movement. Most social gospellers were found in the Methodist and Presbyterian churches, and to a lesser extent, in the Congregational and Baptist churches.³⁹

Social gospel ministers in British Columbia formed no distinct, organized group. They were divided by many differences of opinion and by depth of involvement in the movement but they did share sympathies and certain broad goals. They worked together in interdenominational organizations such as the Ministerial Associations; they attended the same lectures and seminars; and they participated in an exchange of ideas by means of letters, articles, and books.

While it is true that most ministers were raised and educated elsewhere, and that some moved away after only a few years' residence, many spent the greater part of their ministry in the province. Among this body of men who worked within the scope of provincial church organizations, were several prolific writers and noted speakers who commanded considerable local attention. British Columbia social gospel ministers also achieved prominence in the organizations of their churches. In the Methodist Church, particularly, they dominated provincial delegations to national conferences and committees.

Although the development of social gospel themes in the Protestant churches of British Columbia was not an indigenous movement, the interest and enthusiasm shown by the ministers proved that these themes were compatible with their experience in the province. [use 1] The social gospel arrived in Canada at a period when the nation was changing from a rural to an urban, industrial form of society. By the dawn of the new century,

British Columbians were conscious that the period of beginnings had ended. The railroads had breached the barriers to settlement. Exploitation of the rich natural resources of the province promised general prosperity. The worst crudities of the pioneer era of settlement were beginning to disappear as family life in permanent settlements began to supplant the communities of itinerant loggers and miners.]

Even so, conditions were less than satisfactory by church standards. Although the Anglican Church was established early in the province, with considerable support from the parent church in Britain, other Protestant denominations faced a tremendous task of church extension. In this task they were hampered by limited resources and denominational competition, as well as by special difficulties particular to the character of the province. J. H. White, Local Superintendent of Missions for the British Columbia Methodist Conference described in his official reports "the vicissitudes of mission work in a mining country."⁴⁰ [As mines closed, the people left and church investments in property and organization were lost.]

[Other problems also hampered the work of the churches.] On a visit to British Columbia in 1904, Dr. S. D. Chown, general secretary of the Department of Temperance and Moral Reform for the Methodist Church, concluded; [The whole Province calls loudly for a great revival of public interest in all questions which relate to the moral and religious safeguarding of the people."⁴¹] Several years later, in 1913, at the Pre-Assembly Congress of the Presbyterian Church, a British Columbia minister complained of "a stone wall of indifference . . . with regard to things eternal," "aggressive unbelief," and "flagrant forms of vice,

iniquity and sin."⁴² The ministers' conviction that vice was more prevalent and open in British Columbia than elsewhere in Canada was supported by the results of a survey undertaken by the Presbyterian Church in 1911.⁴³

Nevertheless, most ministers were optimistic about the future development of the province. J. H. White noted in his report the possibilities for growth demonstrated in the fruit-growing districts, railway building, and the port cities, and he concluded that "the era of expansion is upon us."⁴⁴ [Support for moral reform, although slow to develop, increased with each year. Moreover, social gospel theology encouraged hopes that all problems could be overcome.]

Social gossellers in British Columbia faced the future with hope and faith. Inspired by both patriotism and missionary zeal, they saw a special Protestant destiny for Canada. British Columbia, as part of the Dominion, would provide leadership to the world in the organization of a prosperous society and a Christian civilization. The Rev. R. G. MacBeth, a Presbyterian minister living in Vancouver, expressed this sense of religious mission--this blending of social gospel visions with patriotism when he declared: "This Dominion if we are faithful, seems destined to become in the hands of God a chosen instrument for turning the rest of the world unto Him and if we fail in our duty we shall lose the peerless opportunity of the world's history."⁴⁶ British Columbia provided the challenge to the church. The social gospel promised success in meeting that challenge. [British Columbia social gossellers interpreted their duty to be the establishment of the Kingdom

of God on earth by making social reform an integral expression of
religious life.

Footnotes to Chapter I

¹"Present Discord and the Remedy," The Western Methodist Recorder, (hereafter referred to as W.M.R.) February 1900, p. 12.

²"The Pastoral Address," W.M.R., June 1907, p. 13.

³H. H. Stevens, "Public Morals," W.M.R., August 1910, p. 6.

⁴"The up-to-date Sinner," Lux Columbiana, May 1915, p. 17.

⁵"The Place of Christ in Evolution," handwritten essay, n.d., Papers of A. E. Cooke, p. 26.

⁶W.M.R., February 1910, p. 10.

⁷W.M.R., August 1914, p. 12.

⁸For the background of social gospel development, see the following: C. H. Hopkins, The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865-1915 (New Haven, 1940); Richard Allen, The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada 1914-28 (Toronto, 1971).

⁹C. H. Hopkins, Rise of Social Gospel, p. 244.

¹⁰In Canada, social gospellers were usually strong advocates of the church union movement. They had little patience with denominational rivalry, believing with the Rev. E. E. Scott, "We shall never be asked in the heavenly country which boat we came over in." "Domestic Missions," W.M.R., April 1902, p. 4. See also John Webster Grant, "Blending Traditions: The United Church of Canada," The Churches and the Canadian Experience, ed. J. W. Grant (Toronto, n.d.), pp. 131-144.

¹¹"Our Church and Our City," The Congregational Monthly (First Congregational Church, Vancouver), June 1920, p. 2.

¹²J. Scott Lidgett, "The Spiritual Task of Methodism," W.M.R., February 1904, p. 6.

¹³"Preacher and Social Problem," W.M.R., October 1917, p. 3.

¹⁴C. T. Scott was among those who argued that sin is the responsibility of the individual, stating that "environment exerts a persuasive influence upon the will of the individual but it never has a compelling power." "Message of Methodism, Part II," W.M.R., August 1915, p. 3.

¹⁵See A. M. Sanford, "The Development of Paul's Theology," The Ryerson Essays no. 9 (Toronto, 1922), p. 32.

¹⁶Rev. R. G. MacBeth declared, "we must reach their hearts with the Gospel, and give them an environment which will not choke the seed sown and render it unfruitful." Our Task in Canada (Toronto, 1912), p. 126.

¹⁷"Notes of the General Assembly of 1911," Westminster Hall Magazine, I (July, 1911), p. 20.

¹⁸For a history of the prohibition movement in British Columbia, see Albert John Hiebert, "Prohibition in British Columbia," Burnaby, Simon Fraser University, M.A. Thesis, 1969. The importance of the prohibition movement to the development of the social gospel in Canada has been described by E. R. Forbes, "Prohibition and the Social Gospel in Nova Scotia," Acadiensis, I (Autumn, 1971), pp. 11-36; John Webster Grant, George Pidgeon: a biography (Toronto, 1962), pp. 47-48; Marion Royce, "The Contribution of the Methodist Church to Social Welfare in Canada," Toronto, University of Toronto, M.A. Thesis, 1940, pp. 165-166.

¹⁹"Sabbath Observance," W.M.R., August 1900, p. 14.

²⁰E. S. Rowe, "Preacher and Social Problem," W.M.R., July 1902, p. 4.

²¹In accounting for the belief of many Protestants that leading the movement for the reform of society was a duty of the church, Douglas J. Wilson suggests that missionary activity in the North-West had developed "a deep sense of responsibility for national welfare." "A Canadian Christian Tradition," The Churches and the Canadian Experience, p. 155. Other writers stress that the church had always considered itself as an essential culture building force in society. See Donald B. Meyer, The Protestant Search for Political Realism 1919-1941 (Los Angeles and Berkeley, 1960), pp. 26-27; Richard Allen, "Salem Bland and the Social Gospel in Canada," Saskatoon, University of Saskatchewan, M.A. Thesis, 1961, pp. 60-63.

²²"Sanctification," W.M.R., January 1903, p. 1.

²³W.M.R., April 1907, p. 8.

²⁴W.M.R., December 1906, p. 14.

²⁵W.M.R., March 1906, p. 3.

²⁶"Presbyterian Letter," W.M.R., January 1910, p. 7.

²⁷"The Words of Life," W.M.R., March 1910, p. 7.

²⁸All the above quotations are from Dean's article, "The Attitude of the Pulpit to Present Day Issues," W.M.R., November 1908, p. 1.

²⁹"The Development of Paul's Theology," The Ryerson Essays no. 9 (Toronto, 1922), p. 21.

³⁰This appears to be the case of J. S. Woodsworth and A. E. Smith, two Methodist preachers eventually left the ministry. Both men served briefly in British Columbia. The basic reason for their departure from the church was not their reform views but their loss of faith. The church, while allowing great latitude of opinion, was no place for men who had no religious beliefs. See A. E. Smith, All My Life: an autobiography (Toronto, 1949), and Kenneth McNaught, A Prophet in Politics: A Biography of J. S. Woodsworth (Toronto, 1959).

³¹A. E. Cooke, "The Place of Christ in Evolution," p. 28.

³²A. E. Heatherington, "Our Theological Curriculum," W.M.R., October 1914, p. 5.

³³"Christian Experience and Evangelism," W.M.R., October 1917, p. 4.

³⁵W.M.R., October 1914, p. 8.

³⁶"Letter to Editor," W.M.R., December 1918, p. 4.

³⁷One such speaker was Guy Mark Pearse of British Methodism who spoke in Victoria on Christian socialism. According to accounts in the W.M.R. and Victoria Daily Times, his lecture tour of west coast cities received enthusiastic response. W.M.R., January 1904, p. 3.

³⁸W. W. Judd, "The Vision and the Dream," Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society, VII (December, 1965), p. 79.

³⁹For an examination of social gospel influences within the different denominations, see the following: Methodists--Royce, "The Contribution of Methodism"; Presbyterians--E. A. Christie, "The Presbyterian Church in Canada and Its Official Attitude Towards Public Affairs and Social Problems, 1875-1925," Toronto, University of Toronto, M.A. Thesis, 1955; Baptists--John Byron Richards, "Baptists in British Columbia: A Struggle to Maintain 'Sectarianism'," Vancouver, University of British Columbia, M.A. Thesis, 1964.

⁴⁰Methodist Church of Canada, General Conference, Journal of Proceedings (Toronto, 1906), p. 383.

⁴¹"Moral Reform Notes," W.M.R., November 1904, p. 3.

⁴²C. M. Wright, "The Church's Task in Canada," Presbyterian Church of Canada, Pre-Assembly Congress (Toronto, 1913), pp. 95-96.

⁴³Christie, "Official Attitudes and Opinions of Presbyterian Church," p. 50. See also Hiebert, "Prohibition," pp. 5, 10, 13.

⁴⁴Methodist Church of Canada, General Conference, Journal of Proceedings (Toronto, 1906), p. 383.

⁴⁵Hiebert, "Prohibition," p. 22.

⁴⁶Our Task in Canada, p. 22.

CHAPTER II

THE SOCIAL GOSPEL - PRODUCT OF ANXIETY

The experience of the Protestant churches in British Columbia tends to support the theory that the social gospel was a reaction to the changing position of the Christian Church in the modern industrial order.¹ In this time of growth and change, the church was failing to keep pace. Church membership was not increasing in proportion to the increase in population.² Just as disturbing was evidence that despite Protestant assumptions regarding the church's position of leadership in the nation, many sections of society were becoming increasingly remote from church influence.

In the slums of the downtown areas created by the rapid urbanization of the nation, the city poor and the working classes were largely outside the membership of the organized churches. These "unchurched masses" constituted a challenge to the Protestant concept of society which the churches could not ignore.³

The churches were also concerned over the indifference to Christian morality displayed by the world of big business. Social gossellers severely criticized "the willingness of men of wealth and powerful corporations to deceive, corrupt or intimidate electors and legislators" and "the growth of the evil features of trusts and combines; such as limiting production and monopolizing natural resources."⁴ The results of such practices--the manipulation of government to serve

special interests, industrial strife, and high prices--threatened the whole community. Any suggestion that traditional Christian morality was impossible in business life provoked either vehement denials by the reformers or demands for a radical reorganization of economic life. Business ought to be subject to religious considerations and not left to the working of vague, abstract economic laws.

Social gospel anxieties about economic life centred on the effects of competitive capitalism--from gross inequalities of wealth with consequent hardships for the poor, to moral deformities in a system which placed no value upon the Christian virtues of trust, generosity, compassion, humility, and selflessness. British Columbia ministers had first-hand evidence of the lack of Christian influences in contemporary forms of capitalism.⁵ From the early years of the century to 1912, the province enjoyed prosperity based on the exploitation of its rich natural resources. Accompanying this solid development was a speculative boom, especially in real estate, in which many fortunes were quickly made and many others as quickly lost. While British Columbia clergymen openly rejoiced as they witnessed this prosperity and growth, they were troubled by the unnecessary anachronism of poverty in a land of plenty. The Rev. Elliot S. Rowe described the problem in 1902 before a meeting of the Victoria Ministerial Association:

Here, then, we have the factors in the problem: A wise and beneficent Creator, a fruitful earth, a race advancing in power over nature, and increasing in wealth--and a majority of that race shut out from equitable participation in the blessings of God, the produce of the earth and the fruits of human progress . . . these human ills come of human ignorance and wrong. . . . The social problem, therefore, is the product of a system which denies to the workman a fair price for his labour.⁶

That poverty existed was an injustice, social gossellers were convinced. They were also painfully aware that current methods of dealing with the poor and the weak, the victims and misfits of society were hopelessly inadequate. Since such people had long been a concern of the Christian church, social gossellers demanded that more equitable and dependable means than chance charity be found for providing for social welfare.

The onset of serious and prolonged depression in 1913 precipitated a vigorous and searching debate on the economic system. Before the boom collapsed ministers warned that a preoccupation with riches endangered the development of spiritual values. They urged that the unsuccessful in society not be forgotten, that men of wealth should remember the Golden Rule. With the end of prosperity, social gossellers directed their criticism less to specific abuses and more to the underlying principles of the economic system which produced them. War-time idealism increased the vehemence of the attack. In its report of 1917-1918, the British Columbia Methodist Conference stated plainly social gospel fears and criticisms of the economic system:

The conditions confronting Canada in 1914, at the outbreak of the war, had awakened Canadians to the imperative and immediate necessity for a social reconstruction. In the years preceding, we had sown to the winds with our speculation, competition and selfish haste to get rich, and were at that time reaping the harvest of debt, disaster, hunger, suffering and poverty. The insolvency of companies, the bankruptcy of individuals, the collapse of boom cities, townsites and sub-divisions, carrying with them the financial ruin of many people, with their consequent personal and family suffering, were indisputable evidence of the unsatisfactory and unstable character of our commercial and industrial life.⁷

Whereas earlier in the century social gospellers had attacked human greed and selfishness as the anti-Christian elements most obvious in economic life, by the War years their analysis of capitalism resulted in a new emphasis upon the evils of competition. This change indicated a shift away from criticism of abuses to an attack upon the system itself. A reform of capitalism was no longer enough for some social gospellers who demanded a fundamental reconstruction of society. Believing that the competitive spirit of modern life was the antithesis of Christian concepts of love and brotherhood, they preached the substitution of cooperation for competition in social and economic life.

By 1917, the issue of food costs, which were rising rapidly in the wartime inflation, increased social gospel dissatisfaction with the profit system. Rev. A. E. Cooke, while more extreme in his opinions than most British Columbia ministers, expressed a popular social gospel theme in his opinion that

If the society of the future is still based on the present system of profits for those who can squeeze them out of their fellows instead of on service for the good of all, then we have no business to call ourselves a Christian people. . . . Not profits and gain, but service and sacrifice must rule men's lives in the Kingdom of Christ.⁸

The British Columbia Methodist Conference in 1917 also officially condemned the "prevailing system of competitive individual initiative and exploitation."⁹ In 1919, the same body congratulated the national convention of the church for its "clear-cut message on production and distribution for service, and upon the displacement of the profits system by a system of co-operation."¹⁰ While this position reflected the idealism, excitement, and urgency of the war's end, rather than the more

typical expression of British Columbia social gospel opinion, social gossellers agreed that the desire to give service rather than the desire to make profits should be the prime motivation of the businessman.

The ministers found other reasons to be critical of modern economic development. Attacking the soullessness of the impersonal corporation, the inhumanity of the factory system, and the political and economic power wielded by the business elite, social gossellers revealed their concern over the erosion of individual freedom, security, and dignity in an economic world of increasing organization.¹¹ The helplessness of the individual in this situation could only be remedied, they were sure, by a revolution in social ethics leading to an increased recognition of human brotherhood.

Disturbed by the inequities of the economic system, social gossellers were convinced that justice for the labourer must be achieved before lasting industrial peace could be expected. The labour movements' own attempts to solve its problems, however, caused great anxiety among reforming ministers. They feared conflict between capital and organized labour would break into savage class warfare in which the certain loser would be the general public. Outbursts of violence during strikes heightened such fears. Social gossellers were disturbed by the independence of the labour movement from church control and influence. Despite their sympathies for the workers' cause, ministers resented the anti-religious bias of some labour leaders.¹² They were frightened, also, by the methods labour chose to use.

In political life social gossellers also found much cause for anxiety. Political corruption shocked and repelled them. As avowed

democrats, they saw in such abuses a denial and negation of democratic rule. As social reformers, they saw political corruption as a major stumbling block in the way of remedial legislation and the impartial enforcement of the law. As ministers of the social gospel, they believed that politics, like all other areas of life, must be subjected to religious considerations.

The conduct of election campaigns and voting irregularities provoked much ministerial criticism over the years. In 1900, for example, the Recorder complained that the "practice of bribery and corruption at elections is becoming so common that the public sense is being outraged and the church can be no longer indifferent to the matter."¹³ Of equal concern was the behaviour of the elected representatives and other government officials in the discharge of their duty. Social gossellers charged that men in government positions were unduly influenced by pressure groups representing special interests. They made these charges in a general and vague fashion, without examples or details, and they were influenced, no doubt, by contemporary American muck-raking accounts as much as by any actual knowledge. The exception was the attack made upon the liquor interests whose influence in both provincial political parties was cited as the chief cause of corruption and the main obstacle to stricter government control over the liquor trade.¹⁴

Social gospel anxiety about the moral level of government activity reached a peak during the early war years. In 1915, a few ministers began making serious charges about the nature of the government's involvement with the economic forces developing the province. While much of this attack may have been due to the partisan position

of some of the critics, dissatisfaction with the moral tone of the provincial government was widespread. Some of this dissatisfaction resulted in the publication by the Ministerial Association of the Lower Mainland, of a pamphlet, The Crisis in B.C. It charged the government with neglect of the public interest, falsification of information, evasion of the laws, corruption and fraud. It even blamed the economic depression upon the government's failure to control the exploitation of the province by big business. The pamphlet deplored the:

gross exploitations of the people by which thousands of our most worthy and hard-working citizens have been reduced to poverty, and from which they have received absolutely no protection by the legislators and administrators of law in this province. The real cause of the Financial Stringency, Business Depression and Unemployment in British Columbia today is not the war, but the artful operations by which the money of honest investors has been diverted from real development of provincial resources into the crooked channels of speculation, company promotion and exploitation. . . . Much of this has been done under what practically amounted to Government patronage.¹⁵

While not all B.C. social gospellers supported the Ministerial Union in these charges, concern over the lack of purity in politics had reached a peak, resulting in unprecedented political comment and involvement by the ministers. The Field Secretary of the Methodist Church optimistically reported:

The moral revolt, the sense of injustices prevalent in industrial relations, the keen disgust against political corruption and the increasing irritation under the dominating power of the party machine along with a rising flood of sentiment, which promises soon to be over-whelming against the liquor traffic, indicates the change in public opinion and the aspiration for righteousness and justice in that great Western Province.¹⁶

A. E. Cooke, who led the attack upon government corruption, called for fundamental changes in the economic system to remedy the situation. Until such changes were made, he declared, government would not express the will of the people, for:

The government itself is in the grip of the handful of men who control the whole trade and commerce of Canada. The wheat speculators, the packing houses, the railroads and banks of this Dominion are so bound together by interlocking directorates and are so powerful in the realm of politics that they hold the government in the heart of their fist.¹⁷

For the failure to express and reflect faithfully the will of the people, social gospellers chiefly blamed the party system. As early as August 1899, the Recorder, in a discussion of federal politics, called for a change in "the composition of the parties so that they will voice the demand of the people and represent the people, instead of representing party machines."¹⁸ But even reformed parties had serious defects. The most common objection to the party system, apart from corruption, was that party interests tended to overrule both personal convictions and considerations of the national interest. Social gospellers condemned loyalty to the party when carried to such extremes. They urged their people to vote for men of high moral principles rather than for party connections. That expediency rather than principle should determine the course of political activity was unthinkable to men who believed that placing "party connection before the support of righteous government" in any matter "affecting the moral welfare of the community" was a betrayal of the "religion and the ideals that have made the British Empire great."¹⁹ By 1916, an election year in British Columbia, disenchantment with party politics was so widespread that the

Recorder asked, "Is the Party System Played Out?"²⁰ Most B.C. ministers would have agreed, however, that imperfect as the system was, "the discovery of some better system has not yet apparently been made, certainly we do not find it in the personal system which long obtained in the Province."²¹

Declining church influence was apparent in areas of life other than politics and the business world. Many of the traditional standards, values, and customs of Protestantism were no longer dominant in the society. Ministers watched with growing dismay the neglect of Sabbath observance, the popularity of professional sports and entertainments, public tolerance of gambling and prostitution, and the acceptance by many people of liquor consumption as part of social life.²² Some blamed this weakening of old values upon the rapid social changes then occurring but a more obvious cause was the tremendous influx of foreign non-Protestant, non-English speaking immigrants during the first decades of the century.

In the social gospel vision of society, there was little room for minority groups with differing values. Having no conception of the possibility or desirability of a plural society, social gospellers thought in terms of a homogenous national culture in which all minority groups must become assimilated. For this reason, British Columbia ministers justified their rejection of Asiatics as undesirable immigrants, their racial characteristics in addition to the cultural differences, making assimilation very difficult, if not impossible.²³ Immigrants from Europe also aroused fears. To many ministers, these immigrants with their different mores threatened destruction of the

national character and a degeneration of the level of civilization in Canada. With their hopes for a special Protestant destiny for Canada and their belief that the church had an essential role in nation-building, social gossellers regarded assimilation of the immigrants as an urgent responsibility. Their point of view was stated plainly by R. G. MacBeth who warned, "for the most part those who have been coming in recent years are of inferior races and lower civilizations. And our task is to make them Christian citizens of Canada."²⁴

British Columbia ministers certainly shared the national concern over the Canadianization of the immigrants but they seldom accorded this problem the same attention it received elsewhere in Canada.²⁵ Since relatively few non-British European settlers reached the Pacific province, British Columbia social gossellers focussed upon the problem of most concern in that region--industrial relations with its dangers of labour strife and violence.

The search for explanations and solutions to the problem of waning church influence in the life of the nation led many ministers to criticize the church severely for her shortcomings. Despite warnings about the dangers to spiritual development of a preoccupation with material concerns, the church, as part of the larger culture, had not escaped the contemporary fascination with growth, prosperity, and technological advance. Social gossellers deplored the view that the work of the church was to build

a large and beautiful Church, filled with a wealthy congregation, fine organ, well-trained choir, and a popular pastor, whose business, apart from visiting

the sick and burying the dead is to see that the services of the Church on the Sunday are conducted after the fashion of a pleasant entertainment.²⁶

Many social gospellers regarded much church activity as superficial and meaningless formalities. They criticized ritual and dogma as distractions hindering the church in the fulfillment of her functions. The editor of the Recorder admitted impatience and frustration with the church, declaring,

religion may be a very different thing to theological dogma or modern Churchianity. Although I am not ridiculing the Church, . . . it may be admitted that [it] is a very inadequate exponent of religion and sometimes gives a perverted view. It continues to be hampered with pagan phylacteries and medieval mysticism in the midst of modern enlargement of thought. . . . It has 'run to seed' in many instances in sentiment and ceremony until many of its devotees identify religion with regular church attendance, sanctimonious airs and facility in the use of what may be called prayer meeting intonation and phraseology.

But we need not dwell upon that--a larger view is growing; men are beginning to realize that religion concerns life and are not troubling about the definition of creeds; they are digging deeper for the great laws of equitable existence.²⁷

Criticism of the church for the gap between religious ideals and practice and the tendency to observe outer forms while neglecting the inner spirit of the commandments, was not confined to traditional themes. The social gospellers' main complaints centred upon the failure of the church to develop broader concepts of Christian duty and responsibility. They warned that "the laboring and poorer classes of the people" were turning away from organized religion "because they have not found in the Church that recognition and sympathy in their struggles for life that they had looked for."²⁸ William Lashly Hall declared, "there is a chasm between men and what they conceive to be

the message of Christianity. It seems to belong to another world, to be an affair of priests and churches and people who are comfortable and well off."²⁹ Hall and other social gossellers attacked the church for her timidity and hesitation to speak out against injustice, to accept the challenges of the changing order, and to assume her responsibilities in the work of social reform.

While not neglecting the essential faith of their fathers, social gossellers anticipated major changes in the organization and expression of religious life. Near the end of the war, when expectations of imminent fundamental changes in social relations were at a peak, the Recorder warned that in the new order:

no organization will find its problems of re-adjustment in the new age more difficult than the Church, for, not only is the Church lacking in credit with the toiling masses, but any effort on the part of those of her leaders who first glimpse the direction such readjustments should take will be opposed and denounced . . . by large numbers of the devout people of the Church itself who look with suspicion upon all change in either the Church's message or method as a departure from "the old Gospel," though in reality it might as often be a return to the old Gospel.³⁰

At one point the Recorder even raised the question, "Is there a possibility that Christianity will go on without the present organization called the Church, finding more simple and practical channels for vital expression in human life?"³¹

Church anxieties over the direction of modern social development and the relationship of the church to the social order promoted interest in social gospel ideas of reform. Social gossellers' attempts to subsume all areas of life under the umbrella of Christian morality raised the question: could modern, urban, industrial civilization be

Christian? A few decided with A. E. Cooke that the "present system is fundamentally opposed to the teaching and principles of Jesus Christ."³² By the end of the First World War, many had become convinced that only a radical reform of society could create conditions in which men could lead truly Christian lives.

As a stimulus to church interest in social reform, the socialist movement was of extreme importance. Moreover, the existence in British Columbia of a doctrinaire Marxist form definitely affected the expression of social gospel ideas. Eager to disprove the Marxist contention that religion was indifferent to social problems and man's condition in this world, social gospellers appealed to the established powers in society to repent and to reform the system to eliminate all forms of oppression and injustice.

One Methodist minister, Ernest Thomas of Vancouver, urgently called for a purge of "those vices of arrogance and ignorance and class complacency which threaten to bring upon us the disintegration seen in Russia." Speaking to men in positions of power he described the danger posed by "the long toleration of grievances which should have been removed."³³ Only by such repentance and reform could society be made safe from the threat of violent revolution. Social gospellers also made a plea for restraint to the oppressed classes, urging them to seek reform only by constitutional methods. The Committee for Social Service and Evangelism of the B.C. Methodist Conference in its 1917 report, while noting that "many existing evils are the direct outcome of past failure on the part of our community to organize its life on the basis of mutual service," stressed that it was not a time for recrimination

and warned "against any disposition to seek by any other method than renewal of the hearts of the people, escape from the evil spirit and usage of the past."³⁴ Caught in the middle between both groups, neither of which appeared ready to heed its warnings, men of the church were increasingly frustrated by the impotence of their position.

Before 1919, social gospel attitudes towards the Marxists were ambivalent. Condemnation of the materialist doctrines of the socialists alternated with recognition that the socialists' ultimate goals were essentially compatible with social gospel aims. Several ministers shared the opinion of the Recorder that "Socialism is a misguided attempt to return to the ideals of Jesus Christ. Our attitude towards it must not be contempt or hostile criticism but leadership."³⁵ This view changed as the chances of conversion grew dimmer and as events, notably the Bolshevik revolution in Russia and the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919, seemed to indicate that socialism could be an immediate danger to the peace of society and the constitution of the state.

Christian socialists in the ministry were seldom explicit in detailing their beliefs and the differences between their views and those of other social gospellers were not always clear. They were careful, however, to make distinctions between their beliefs and the materialist Marxism found in the province. Christian socialism derived from British models, stressed gradual reforms and parliamentary procedure. Moreover, it was not merely an economic system or a materialist philosophy but the application of the ethics of Jesus to all of life. The dynamic of reform would be the spirit of brotherhood not class conflict. British Columbia social gospellers rejected wholly any

suggestion of violent revolution arguing that true progress depended upon "the spread of moral truths and principles"³⁶ derived from spiritual sources.

Social gossellers were disturbed by the socialist analysis of class divisions and the necessity for class conflict. The churches disliked the whole concept of class as it conflicted with their basic belief in human brotherhood. Yet class conflict as exemplified in labour strife was a real fear and recognized problem, and the churches became increasingly uneasy over the possibility that as institutions, they themselves were class structures motivated by class prejudices.³⁷

J. P. Hicks, editor of the Recorder, and a chief exponent of Christian socialist views in the province for over twenty years, exemplified many of the confusions and contradictions of this more radical social gospel position. Impatient with the churches and the established powers in society for their failure to correct injustices, he also distrusted the radical socialists and labour leaders who attempted to force reforms. Although preaching the cause of Christian socialism he remained a strong supporter of Richard McBride's Conservative government.³⁸ In fact, Hicks was interested in social justice, the goal, rather than public ownership, the means. He was essentially a moralist rather than a socialist, interested in promoting the spirit of cooperation and brotherhood more than discovering social institutions which would incorporate these ideals. Moreover, the religious nature of his views on reform determined all his ideas. Hicks declared:

To vast numbers of good people, not privileged or selfish people, Socialism is somehow a term of alarm; it has something relentless in it, from which they recoil, and

yet it aims at simple justice. Why is this? Because it is largely a demand instead of a benevolence. Socialism must be a prayer as well as a protest; it must feel it more blessed to give than to receive; it must spring from sympathy and love more than from the sense of injury and oppression. . . .

If it is purely a materialist or economic movement it will not prove a panacea for all human ills, but if it be inspired by a great moral and sympathetic impulse it will bring measurably near the millenium. . . .

I am convinced a great reconstruction of social-economic conditions is assuredly coming. . . . A reconstruction which will express more clearly the principle of justice in terms of production, distribution, and remuneration for labour.³⁹

Reform, to be successful, must be religious, but religion, to conform truly to God's will, must include social reform. Hicks argued:

It is only partially true that the Church has tried to make good men without endeavoring to make good society, but Socialism had vainly undertaken a more difficult thing. She is attempting to make good society without making good men. Unaided by the Church Socialism will fail; but without a more sympathetic study of socialistic aspirations the Church will not realize her full effectiveness as an agency for righteousness.⁴⁰

Although much in advance of public opinion generally with respect to reform ideas, British Columbia social gospellers, confronted with militant radical forces hostile to religion, frequently found themselves on the defensive not for the radical nature of their views but for a conservatism born of fear of force and violence. Their encounter with extremist positions emphasized for most social gospellers the importance of the religious basis of their own position. For British Columbia ministers, evangelism remained the favoured approach to social reform.

The modern world presented a tremendous challenge to the church. The problems of the city, the poor, the new immigrants; of Marxism and

labour radicalism; the immorality of business life; the erosion of religious beliefs, standards and influence made the ministry deeply anxious over the nature of the emerging society and the place of the church within it. The diminished role of the church in the life of society was a matter of deep concern to men who assumed that religion was the very basis of their civilization. In seeking the role of social reformer for the church, therefore, social gospellers acted as much from fear of loss as from hope of gain.⁴¹ Social gospel optimism and faith in future progress did not overcome entirely the very deep sense of anxiety with which they regarded the present.

Footnotes to Chapter II

¹This theory is discussed in the following works: Meyer, The Protestant Search for Political Realism; Hopkins, The Rise of the Social Gospel; Stewart Crysdale, The Industrial Struggle and Protestant Ethics in Canada (Toronto, 1961). See also John Webster Grant who states, "change was beginning to pose questions to which the churches had no immediate answers, and that the church's position in Canadian society was to be radically altered." Pidgeon, p. 27.

²As early as 1902 the editor of the Recorder was asking, "What's wrong with Methodism?" as, according to census figures, membership was not keeping pace with the increase in population. In 1904 the Rev. J. Scott Lidgett spoke of the "painful and humiliating facts . . . revealed in a religious census." W.M.R., February 1904, pp. 6-7. Albert John Hiebert discusses the census of 1911 and its effects upon church opinion. "Prohibition in British Columbia," p. 23.

³The problem was discussed frequently in social gospel writing. See W.M.R., May 1905, p. 6; W.M.R., May 1906, p. 8; Rev. George W. Dean, "The Attitude of the Pulpit to Present Day Issues," W.M.R., November 1908, p. 1; W.M.R., December 1911, p. 6.

⁴F. W. Davey, "The Church and the Social Problems," W.M.R., November 1903, p. 1.

⁵The background of British Columbia history in the following paragraphs is derived chiefly from Margaret Ormsby, British Columbia: a History (Toronto, 1958); Paul Phillips, No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in B.C. (Vancouver, 1967).

⁶"Preacher and Social Problem," W.M.R., July 1902, p. 1.

⁷Methodist Church of Canada, Department of Evangelism and Social Service (hereafter referred to as Methodist Department of E.S.S.), Annual Report, 1917-1918 (Toronto 1918), p. 105.

⁸The High Cost of Living (Vancouver, n.d. [1917]), p. 12.

⁹Methodist Department of E.S.S., Annual Report, 1916-1917, p. 79.

¹⁰Methodist Department of E.S.S., Annual Report, 1918-1919, p. 80.

¹¹W. L. Hall, "Moral Reform," W.M.R., July 1912, p. 3.

¹²W.M.R., September 1901, p. 9.

¹³July 1912, p. 3.

¹⁴Hugh Dobson, "Field Secretary's Report to the General Board," Methodist Department of E.S.S., Annual Report, 1915-1916, p. 111.

¹⁵The Crisis in B.C., Ministerial Union of the Lower Mainland (Vancouver, 1915), p. 1.

¹⁶Dobson, "Report," Methodist Department of E.S.S., Annual Report, 1914-1915, p. 63.

¹⁷The High Cost of Living, p. 9.

¹⁸August 1899, p. 6.

¹⁹D. A. Chalmers, "For Righteous Government," Westminster Hall Magazine and Farthest West Review, III (March, 1913), p. 22.

²⁰May 1916, p. 9.

²¹November 1904, p. 4. See also the "British Columbia Conference Report," Methodist Department of E.S.S., Annual Report, 1916-1917, p. 80.

²²For evidence of the ministers' concern see MacBeth, Our Task, pp. 86-87, 130-137; Methodist Church of Canada, Department of Temperance and Moral Reform, Annual Report, 1911-1912 (Toronto, 1912), p. 43; J. S. Henderson, "Report of the Field Secretary of the Board of Social Service and Evangelism," Presbyterian Church of Canada, Acts and Proceedings of the Fortieth General Assembly (Toronto, 1914), p. 308.

²³E. D. McLaren and George C. Pidgeon, "East Indian Immigration," Westminster Hall Magazine, I (January, 1912), p. 28.

²⁴Our Task, p. 21.

²⁵The problem of assimilating the new immigrants has been described as "the major catalyst that precipitated radical Christianity." Grant, Pidgeon, p. 29. I do not believe that this was true of British Columbia. See also Crysdale, Protestant Ethics, p. 19; George Emery, "The Methodist Church on the Prairies: The Outreach of Ontario," Vancouver, University of British Columbia, Ph.D. Dissertation, 1970, pp. 225 and 345; Neil G. Smith and others, A Short History of the Presbyterian Church in Canada (Toronto, n.d.), p. 59.

²⁶"Hindrances to Revivals," W.M.R., September 1900, p. 4.

²⁷J. P. H. "Nellie Mason's Revenge: a story," W.M.R., April 1908, p. 5.

²⁸"Hindrances to Revivals," W.M.R., September 1900, p. 4.

²⁹"The Answer of Christianity to the Existing Situation," W.M.R., September 1911, p. 3.

³⁰July 1918, p. 8.

³¹May 1917, p. 9.

³²The High Cost of Living, p. 12.

³³"The Signs of the Times," W.M.R., January 1918, p. 6.

³⁴Methodist Department of E.S.S., Annual Report, 1916-1917, p. 81.

³⁵May 1905, p. 6.

³⁶F. W. Davey, "Is Victoria District Derelict?" W.M.R., March 1919, p. 4.

³⁷See the remarks of W. L. Hall, "The Answer of Christianity," W.M.R., September 1911, p. 4 and E. Farrington, "The Modern Aspect of Religion," W.M.R., August 1909, p. 3.

³⁸The Recorder gave a very nice tribute to McBride upon his retirement as premier. January 1916, p. 9. The Recorder continued to support the Conservative government in a quiet way, despite occasional criticism of its policies, up to its defeat in the 1916 election.

³⁹"Nellie Mason's Revenge: a story," W.M.R., April 1908, pp. 5-6.

⁴⁰W.M.R., May 1905, p. 6.

⁴¹This is the view of Donald Meyer with regard to the social gospel in the United States. The Protestant Search for Political Realism, p. 25.

CHAPTER III

THE SOCIAL GOSPEL: RHETORIC WITHOUT RESULT

In the social gospel, many ministers found a role for the church in the modern world. As traditional church functions no longer seemed adequate to ensure the church its rightful position of leadership and influence in society, the church needed to seek more relevant forms of service. Although uncertain of the exact relationship of the church to the evolving social order, social gospellers expected that once committed to the great task of reform, the church would greatly enlarge the scope and importance of its activity.

Despite increasing support for their views within the churches, social gospellers failed to transform the rhetoric of reform into concrete results. In 1906, the Recorder complained: "As a Conference we are evidently not indifferent to our soical [sic] responsibilities but have so far not distinguished ourselves in practical achievement."¹ This complaint continued throughout the years. Social gospellers agreed that one obstacle to effective church action was inadequate knowledge and understanding of social problems. To remedy this, they urged that the study of sociology be made an integral part of ministerial training. The British Columbia Methodist Conference also established a social problems committee to investigate actual conditions, the findings of which would be used in the decision-making processes of the church. Nevertheless, church success in the practical work of reform was

limited. Pressure by church groups upon municipal councils resulted in more vigorous enforcement of morality laws in a few cases. Compared with the extensive aims social gossellers espoused, such results were extremely disappointing.

The frustration of the activist ministers at their continuing inability to affect significantly the course of events, was heightened during periods of social crisis. During the Vancouver Island coal miners' disputes of 1912-1914, Rev. William Lashly Hall pleaded that "the church in her collective capacity, should take some attitude other than impotent silence,"² and the Recorder declared:

One often stands appalled at the obvious impotence of the Church when confronted in a concrete way, with some of the problems of present day unrest and the Church's difficulty is not lack of sympathy but lack of understanding, but the result is that the Church is losing ground in the work-day world, in the practical affairs of men.³

During the First World War, many social gossellers believed the time had at last arrived when the call for reform would bring a more positive response. The success of Prohibition, a church-supported movement, in the 1916 referendum, was proof to many that church action in social causes could be effective. The idealism stimulated by the war caused the Methodist Conference to hope that "this should not be dissipated in a mere sentimentalism, but that it should find concrete expression in definite constructive action."⁴ Just what action the church should or could take was the problem social gossellers could not resolve.

Converting the church into an instrument of social reform posed many difficulties, some of which were not fully appreciated by the

reformers. That the church must become active in the cause of social reform, social gospellers agreed. What precise goals the church should espouse, what means it should employ, what degree of involvement in practical reform measures it should attempt remained matters of controversy.

The definition of social gospel goals was a crucial issue for the success of the movement. Many ministers were confused and contradictory in the presentation of their goals and very real differences of opinion existed among them. That the ambiguities and problems within social gospel thought were not fully recognized during this period was largely due to lack of definition in the terminology used and the abstract level and generalized nature of the debate. As concrete applications of social gospel ideas to specific local conditions were attempted these unresolved difficulties became more apparent.

Social gospel definitions of the perfect society were extremely vague, outlining the basic principles and expected results rather than giving descriptions of the social organization which would produce these results. The Kingdom of God would be a society based on "the divine principles of human brotherhood."⁵ In describing this society some ministers emphasized love as the essence of brotherhood, while others emphasized justice as the basis of social relationships. Most social gospellers did not carefully distinguish between love and justice in referring to the future society but used the terms as if they were interchangeable or inseparable. They did not consider whether, in fact, love and justice were completely compatible. Although their assertion that social justice was unattainable without a pervasive

spirit of Christian love may well have been correct, their assumption that love defines justice was an error. While love might prompt men to seek justice for all, it does not provide knowledge of what justice is. Christian love might conceivably be so unselfish as to ignore questions of right and justice in the solution of human problems.

What social gossellers meant by justice was unclear, confused as the idea was with the concept of Christian love. Moreover, the common usage of a radical vocabulary tended to mask differences in opinion which existed. In most cases, their positions on questions of justice were only partially stated. What was Christian justice in economic life? Was it a matter of to each according to his need? Or to each as he deserved? Was equality of income an expression of justice or injustice? Was private capital justified or should all the means of production and distribution be publicly owned?

Most British Columbia social gossellers seemed to interpret economic justice as a more equitable distribution of income in which the worker would receive a larger proportion of the wealth produced. While they expected the elimination of grosser inequalities of wealth, they did not anticipate or desire absolute equality. The Rev. C. T. Scott of Metropolitan Church, Victoria, gave a full exposition of this point of view in a series of articles published in the Recorder. To begin with, argued Scott:

Diversity of genius stands for the diversity of gifts with which individuals are originally endowed, and necessitates differing capacities to produce wealth. Inequality in this as in other things, is the law of nature and of God. In Christianity the law of love steps in here and prevents--or should prevent--those

grave inequalities which give some excessive riches and deny others the common comforts of life.⁶

Thus, he concluded; "If we do justice in the recognition of poverty rights, we must naturally expect a state of society in which inequalities of wealth prevail."⁷ W. L. Hall seemed to support Scott's views asking only that those "who produce the results, the productive and constructive workers, should share proportionately in the product."⁸

Certainly most of the reformers in British Columbia did not advocate an end to private property and the capitalistic system. Capitalism needed reform, to be sure, and a reconstruction of its basic motives and purposes, but private wealth in itself was not unjust.

C. T. Scott, continuing his arguments for inequality of income, noted:

All our modern effort to secure justice for the labouring classes is based in the right of property. It is the effort to secure to every man his just share in the wealth he helps to produce. The policy which aims to destroy private property if successful would defeat the very justice it aims to secure.⁹

Interestingly, although most of Scott's writings show a pre-occupation with defining justice in economic life, at one point he declared it the duty of the church "to find some clear application of the law of love to the production and distribution of wealth."¹⁰ Like most social gospellers, he talked of the need to establish justice but was really more interested in promoting the spirit of love which would render all questions of justice meaningless.

Social gospellers in British Columbia were essentially moralists interested in the moral principles rather than the social structures which would embody them. They discussed the ideal--a society "organized for the practice of mutual service"¹¹ but gave little attention to the

form such a society could have. Social gospel discussions of property rights under the concept of "stewardship" reveal this moralist tendency.

The concept of stewardship was based on the belief that all property belonged to God and was held in trust by men to be used for the good of all. A popular idea among B.C. ministers, stewardship implied no necessary condemnation of personal riches. Providing that no one in society was permitted to suffer actual need, men of talent and industry deserved the greater share of the world's goods that they would accumulate through their efforts. Most ministers agreed that "wealth in the hands of good men whose spiritual life is robust and who understand the privileges and responsibilities of Christian stewardship" could be a positive good in society.¹² What was essential, in their opinion, was that a clear distinction be made between honest and dishonest money. Wealth itself was not wicked nor unjust. What determined the morality of wealth was the manner in which it was made and the purposes for which it was used.

The social gospel concept of stewardship did imply severe restrictions upon the rights of property in the public interest. Firstly, the making of money was to be limited to ways considered legitimate by the church. Certainly money which resulted from most forms of speculation would not be approved by many ministers. Yet little effort was made to define legitimate means clearly. Secondly, the uses of wealth were restricted. As God's stewards, men of wealth must use their property for the good of all men. Ostentation, waste, and luxury were abuses of God's gifts. Rich men ought to seek to benefit the less fortunate members of the community by engaging in charitable works.

Thirdly, the kinds of property which could justly be possessed by a private individual were also limited. Many social gospel ministers called for increased public ownership of essential services and utilities. Some, arguing for the nationalization of natural resources and an end to the private ownership of land, contended that "that which is limited in extent and necessary to the life of all men, cannot in righteousness be held by the few."¹³

The concepts of property rights involved in the theory of Christian stewardship left several problems unresolved. For wealth to be justified, its acquisition ought to depend chiefly upon the exercise of talent and industry. Wealth then would be the just reward of labour. Quirks of fortune could never be eliminated, of course, but inequalities of opportunity to develop and use one's abilities ought to be. Yet the problem of inheritance and gifts was not discussed. The question of providing for the unfortunate in society was also left disturbingly vague. Presumably men of wealth would take care of those in need but whether this would be done as a matter of individual charity or on a more systematic and dependable basis was not clear. The most important of the questions left uncertain in discussions of Christian stewardship, was the extent to which restraints upon property should be imposed by law or could be left to the pressures of private conscience and public opinion.¹⁴

The emphasis upon cooperation and service in the social gospelers' description of their goals did not mean that they undervalued the importance of the individual. Indeed, they continually affirmed the primacy of the individual in their evangelistic appeals for

conversion. They wanted a form of society in which the individual would be free to develop his highest nature and, at the same time, a society in which all men submitted to the requirements of the public good. On this point, as on some others, social gospellers failed to discern all the possible difficulties inherent in their views. The assumed compatibility of individual self-realization and the common good ignored many problems, including the possibility of legitimate conflicts of interest between men in society. As most of the reformers had as a model of society one in which all parts naturally functioned in harmony, they regarded any sort of conflict as an abnormality. In the ideal society, they believed, there would be no clash of interests, no tensions, rivalries, or conflicts. An article in the Recorder stated the view explicitly that:

From the standpoint of the Christian it was clear that it was possible to so organize men as to have them in relations in which they can harmoniously do the world's work and at the same time accomplish their individual development and general good.¹⁵

The assumption was that men acting in a spirit of brotherly love, when working for the good of all, would also be working in their own best interests. Who would define the common good was never questioned.

This view of the relationship of the individual and the common good of the society stemmed directly from the religious basis of all social gospel ideas. For social gospellers, the question of self-interest and its fulfillment did not loom so large in the development of the individual as his spiritual growth which implied a spirit of selflessness and the willingness to make sacrifices for the sake of others. Thus, working for the good of society did not imply the

frustration of individual growth but evidence that spiritual growth was proceeding. Social gospeller Ernest Thomas described the goal, saying "the flower of Christian life was . . . seen . . . in the inspiration of personal life by love and in the organization of society for the practice of a life which found expression in service of one another."¹⁶

Being largely unrecognized, the conflicts and ambiguities involved in social gospel goals did not really have a divisive effect until the latter years of the war. While the vagueness of their aims impeded social gospellers in their preparation of a programme for action, their main disagreements were over questions of methods, not goals.

The whole problem of finding the means by which the church might assume its role of leader in social reform was complicated by the failure of many social gospellers to recognize that the problem existed. Their faith in Christian love as the panacea for all social problems led them to suppose that love would find the means. Thus, the Rev. E. S. Rowe in speaking of the reform of society confidently declared: "Motives and purposes must be harmonized with those of God. Methods will then soon be discovered. Love, as the motor power of social action, will soon clothe itself with appropriate forms through which to operate."¹⁷ Recognition of the need, by men motivated by love, he seemed to assume, would guarantee accomplishment of the task. Other ministers, while sharing the belief in love as the answer, wanted a more explicit examination of the practical measures available to the reformers. In 1913 Professor Salem Bland gave a series of talks at

the B.C. Methodist Annual Conference on the need for social reconstruction and the duty of the church. C. T. Scott, criticising Bland's addresses, raised the central question:

Some of us would have liked a more positive constructive policy to remedy the ills we all must denounce. No doubt the spirit of Jesus in the hearts of men will bring the sure solution of this problem, but how far law and authority are to be used to remedy the social conditions is the practical question that faces those of us who are in the active work.¹⁸

Two main fields of activity appeared to invite church participation. Firstly, the symptoms of social maladjustment could be treated with relief work of many kinds. The church as a social welfare agency undertook to ameliorate the situation of victims of poor socio-economic conditions. Efforts along this line included the establishment of church-supported rescue homes, hostels, down-town missions, child care centres, and the hiring of a social worker by the Methodist Conference for the city of Vancouver. Always hampered by totally inadequate funds and resources, the churches were unable to develop a comprehensive scheme of welfare measures. In time, of course, society came to assign prime responsibility for work of this sort to government, leaving only a few residual areas for private agencies.

Church efforts in the area of social welfare, if innovative to some extent in methods, had at least been within the traditional pattern of Christian charity. The second possible course of action--the reconstruction of society to eliminate conditions causing social problems--was a very different matter. Changes of this fundamental nature involved the question of power, bringing the church into the realm of politics.

Most social gossellers in British Columbia expected the church to use only its moral authority rather than any direct political power in promoting reform legislation. They shared a conception of the church that was very much in the traditional pattern of teacher, guide and inspiration. Although the aim now included social as well as moral reform, the means proposed--education and moral suasion--were certainly no departure from previous church experience.¹⁹ Unaware of how political processes functioned, most social gossellers neglected the area of power relationships in society. As a result, they tended to be unrealistic in their estimation of the powers available to the church. Goals were frequently selected without consideration of the resources and the ability of the church to undertake their achievement.

While social gossellers could express ringing resolutions and recommendations for action, they lacked the means of implementation. Only government had the power to carry out large scale reforms. Although the moral authority of the church was not negligible in the realm of politics, it could not easily be translated into political success. Social gossellers were slow to realize this, however. Like the Rev. A. E. Roberts, a long-time member of the British Columbia Methodist Conference, they expressed confidence that "the quiet, persistent influence of the church [was] sufficient to bring about a mighty reform in the domain of politics"²⁰ and in social and economic life as well.

Social gossellers placed great emphasis upon the role of legislation in reform. Other methods of producing social change, such as use of the strike or boycott, favoured by the labour movement, they regarded with suspicion. The use of violence they utterly rejected.

The reconstruction of society in terms of mutual service could only be accomplished by regenerated members of society using democratic political processes.²¹ Social gospel hopes for reform depended, thus, upon government response to the reform sentiment expressed by the church.

Though hampered by lack of real political power, disunity of purpose, and disagreement over means, social gospellers agreed that it was imperative to do all in their power to "hasten the coming of remedial legislation."²² Such legislation would establish standards of public morality as well as correct social injustices. While legislation could not make men good, it could at least restrict evil. Until all members of society had been inspired with the spirit of Christian brotherhood, social gospellers argued, private sins as well as public crimes should be subjected to the coercion and authority of the law. As early as 1903 the Recorder urged the need for legislation on moral questions:

Our legislative bodies have been so engrossed with the material development of the country that legislation affecting the moral conditions has been very much neglected. . . .

The duty of all good citizens is clear: whatever else may be necessary to moral advancement the obvious first step is to reduce to a minimum the inducements to evil, by a rigorous enforcement of existing law and the adoption of additional restraints to the prevalence of vice.²³

The prohibition movement was, of course, the most outstanding example of the social gospellers' attempts in this direction. By expecting to use the powers of the state to enforce the moral standards of the church, the ministers revealed their identification of those standards with the national culture. To protect the values and ideals of the national culture, according to their belief, the state was justified in

the use of its powers. Good must be promoted and evil prevented, good and evil being defined by the spokesman and interpreter of the culture, the church.

The reforming ministers wanted government to undertake reforms and promote social welfare and justice. How this could best be accomplished, most were unsure. Many of them, indeed, argued that "the Church's duty is not to provide the programme, but to provide the moral foundation for it."²⁴ Even as they preached leadership in social reform as the role of the church, social gospellers looked to the powers of the state for the practical measures. If the church was not to provide the programme, however, in what sense was it to give leadership to the reform movement? This question became one of the most divisive issues which emerged during the war.

By the end of the war, many social gospellers were convinced, as was the Recorder, that the time was "ripe for a great increase in the function of the State . . . not socialism in the old crude Marxian sense, but . . . a very greatly increased social control in the public welfare."²⁵ Wartime experience of government control, transfer of ideas regarding stewardship to the state, and realization that other sources were inadequate prompted men in the church to assign to government more responsibilities than, at that time, it was willing to accept. Just what relation the church would have to the state and how it would exercise its authority were unknown. Most ministers saw the church in the role of the national conscience, failing to realize that in the emerging mosaic of Canadian society, Protestant values were no longer dominant.

If government were to be the agent of reform, the need to make church leadership effective in political life seemed imperative. While most social gospellers preferred to rely upon the use of the moral authority of the church rather than direct political power to influence government, others advocated some form of direct involvement in politics. But who was to be involved?--the church as a collective body? or the members as individual citizens? And what should be the nature of this involvement?--the church acting as a political party? church support to whichever existing party advocated reforms? church support of a non-partisan league? Typical of the views is that of a Vancouver Presbyterian minister: "There is a grand opportunity before the Church. Not to become political partisans but a holy brotherhood, working through the intricate mass of our social problems to the grand climax of the establishment of the Kingdom of God."²⁶ As in much social gospel rhetoric, no hint was given as to how this could be accomplished.

While differences of opinion over church involvement in politics existed, most British Columbia social gospellers seemed to expect that political gains should be the result, not of collective action by the church but of church members acting as individual citizens. The prohibition movement was a prime example of the type of church participation in politics of which they approved. While giving direct moral support, the churches were not active in the practical aspects of the political campaign, although many individual ministers were. The creation of a non-sectarian, non-partisan league, in which ministers and other interested persons were organized as citizens rather than as members of a class or church pressing for a special privilege, was

lauded as the correct method of approaching the task.²⁷

A few ministers, frustrated by the limitations of the church, left the ministry to seek other, more fitting instruments for the work of social reform. In fact, the church was not well suited for political action. Its power was not political but moral. Save in rare instances, such as the prohibition movement, where a consensus of opinion existed within the church, political activity had a divisive effect on church membership.

Many ministers were anxious that the emphasis upon reform legislation should not detract from the fundamental work of the church--the conversion of the individual. In British Columbia, most social gospelers agreed that reform legislation was not a substitute for the work of conversion but merely an adjunct to the task. They were careful to stress that "Men must have the right spirit and motive if laws and institutions are to contribute to social regeneration."²⁸ Laws had a deterrent value but the real redemption of society depended upon the redemption of its individual members. The system must be changed, but changes in the system alone would never bring about the Kingdom of God. The essential reform was not alteration of the system but conversion of the motivations, aspirations, and ethics of the men operating within the system. The 1919 Conference reports of the British Columbia Methodists stated the duty of the church: "to redeem men personally and make them saviours to create conditions that will facilitate the people's uplift."²⁹

The difficulties facing the church were obviously tremendous. Reform of society through the regeneration of its individual members

implied a reform of human nature itself. How could this be done? And why were so many ministers optimistic of their chances for success when the experience of past and present failures surrounded them?

To begin with, the ministers were sure that history was on their side. Without their faith in providence moving through history towards the appointed goal of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, their outlook, as they well knew, would be most bleak. But they had faith that the spirit of brotherhood was increasing, according to God's plan, so that the ministers' pleas and exhortations would find increasing response.³⁰ As men were touched by the Holy Spirit, their eyes could be opened by the ministers' teachings and their hearts moved by their prayers. Thus, a new outlook would prevail and a society based on love become a reality. In addition to their religious beliefs, social gossellers were further encouraged by their faith that science would produce knowledge of means to tackle social problems. Scientific knowledge inspired by religious zeal and faith would ensure success. But only as social reform was recognized as a dimension of religion would success result.

Social gossellers could not entirely reconcile their conviction that the final solution to social problems depended upon the spread of Christian love and their desire to carry out immediate reforms of existing social and economic structures, which depended upon the use of power. How could coercion by the law be an intermediate step towards a society based on love? Most British Columbia ministers supported the view that "compulsion will not bring in the Kingdom of God. Compulsion may check a grasping selfishness, but it cannot give us the fraternal

spirit."³¹ At the same time, however, they also agreed that "We must enforce righteousness as well as proclaim love if we would bring in the Kingdom of God."³² As an answer to this perplexing problem, they concluded that moral and social reform were complementary to each other and that the promotion of brotherhood and the enactment of legal reforms were both necessary. No precise definition of the relationship between the use of the law and the out-reach of evangelism in the work of reform was attempted.

Social gospellers in British Columbia did not succeed during these years in settling all conflicts in belief and purposes nor did they succeed in finding wholly appropriate means to accomplish their aims. Social welfare, while remaining an area of church activity, was necessarily limited to a very small scale by the church's lack of funds and trained personnel. Promotion of reform legislation proved difficult. Lacking political power itself, the church was incapable of carrying through institutional changes in society. Nor were the ministers prepared to see the church assume the functions of a political party or pressure group. While the church was prepared to give moral support and general guidance on main principles, it declined to become involved in specific details of reform. The work of individual conversion, a continuing activity, fluctuated in its degree of success. Ministers were acutely aware of the increasing pressures of a secular society and the erosion of old values.

The expectation of many social gospellers that the church would find the means to assume a greater position of national leadership influencing all aspects of social, political, and economic life, was not

realized. Lacking the resources, abilities, and powers to fulfill the role the reformers envisioned for the modern church, the churches gradually returned to a greater emphasis upon traditional tasks and functions. The element of social awareness was by no means eliminated from the churches after the First World War; indeed, modified social gospel ideas are still influential.

Footnotes to Chapter III

- ¹W.M.R., March 1906, p. 1.
- ²"Bourgeois Morals and Other Things," W.M.R., February 1914,
p. 5.
- ³W.M.R., February 1914, p. 12.
- ⁴Methodist Department of E.S.S., Annual Report, 1915-1916,
p. 54.
- ⁵Methodist Department of E.S.S., Annual Report, 1917-1918,
p. 106.
- ⁶"Honest Money," W.M.R., October 1912, p. 5.
- ⁷"Christianity and the Industrial Order," W.M.R., May 1913, p. 13.
- ⁸"Moral Reform," W.M.R., July 1912, p. 3.
- ⁹"The Bible and Social Problems," W.M.R., January 1914, p. 8.
- ¹⁰"The Bible and Social Problems," W.M.R., November 1913, p. 5.
- ¹¹Methodist Department of E.S.S., Annual Report, 1916-1917, p. 79.
- ¹²T. E. Holling, "A Prosperous Year," W.M.R., January 1910, p. 8.
- ¹³C. T. Scott, "The Bible and Social Problems," W.M.R., January
1914, p. 8.
- ¹⁴At first stewardship was viewed as an individual responsibility.
Later, some ministers came to regard government as fulfilling the func-
tions of stewardship.
- ¹⁵E. S. Rowe, "My Brother and I," cited in W.M.R., October 1900,
p. 16.

- 16 "Cleaning Out the Old Wells," December 17, W.M.R., p. 4 .
- 17 "Rev. Elliot S. Rowe's Conference Sermon on the Church and the Social Problem," W.M.R., July 1901, p. 2.
- 18 "Impressions of the Conference," W.M.R., June 1913, p. 16.
- 19 Note the resolution for debate on this point introduced at the British Columbia Methodist Conference of 1907 by Rev. R. Newton Powell: "it is the solemn duty of the Church of God to constitute herself as an active force, seeking by means of education and moral suasion to bring about the enactment . . . of such laws as shall make for the betterment of social conditions." "Conference Debates," W.M.R., June 1907, p. 10.
- 20 "Politics in Zion," W.M.R., February 1907, p. 5.
- 21 The British Columbia Methodist Conference, whole-hearted in support of social gospel goals, never ceased to emphasize "the transformation of the individual as the key to the whole social and national service programme." Methodist Department of E.S.S., Annual Report, 1918-1919, p. 79.
- 22 F. W. Davey, "The Church and the Social Problems," W.M.R., November 1903, p. 1.
- 23 W.M.R., February 1903, p. 10.
- 24 W.M.R., December 1916, p. 8.
- 25 W.M.R., October 1917, p. 6. George Emery states that the church did not regard social welfare as a government responsibility. "The Methodist Church on the Prairies," p. 116. Social gospel ministers in British Columbia most definitely did expect greater government responsibility for social welfare.
- 26 Rev. H. W. Fraser, "The Church of the Future," W.M.R., August 1910, p. 9.
- 27 W.M.R., Nov. 1908, p. 8. Walter Ellis discusses this view of the relationship of the church to political activity. "Some Aspects of Religion in British Columbia Politics," Vancouver, University of British Columbia, M.A. Thesis, 1959, pp. 4, 6, 104.

²⁸C. T. Scott, "Social Regeneration," W.M.R., August 1913, p. 6.

²⁹"Conference Reports," W.M.R., July 1919, p. 5.

³⁰These views were expressed by A. M. Sanford in the articles he wrote for the Ryerson Essay series. He wrote of "the great progressive sweep of the Kingdom throughout the centuries" and declared that the "possibilities of Jesus as a regenerating power in the life of humanity are becoming more and more evident." The Development of Paul's Theology, p. 32, and The Person and Work of Jesus, Part II, no. 27 of The Ryerson Essays, p. 49.

³¹C. T. Scott, "Social Regeneration," W.M.R., August 1913, p. 6.

³²C. T. Scott, "The Bible and Social Problems," W.M.R., January 1914, p. 9.

CHAPTER IV

THE HEART OF THE MATTER: CAPITAL-LABOUR RELATIONS

One way of examining social gospel experience in British Columbia is to look at the area of its chief concern: capital-labour relations. In the rest of Canada, social gospel attention might be diverted from this issue by the pressing problems of the new immigration and the movement for prohibition; in British Columbia the fear of industrial strife and violence was so pervasive among the ministry, all other problems were of secondary importance.¹

In October of 1904, Rev. Dr. S. D. Chown, the general secretary of the Committee for Temperance and Moral Reform of the Methodist Church in Canada, visited several cities in British Columbia. After this visit, D. Chown told readers of the Western Methodist Recorder:

When the moral reformer passes over the Rocky mountains [sic] from the East, he finds himself confronted with a new set of moral and social problems. The most insistent question of the common people is not, what have you to say about temperance or prohibition, but, what is your message in respect to capital and labor; what is your scheme for bettering the material conditions of the people, and producing peace and good will between the employer of labor and his employees.²

Social gossellers in British Columbia were convinced that most social problems were directly related to the issue of capital-labour relations. Solution of labour problems was, therefore, essential for the future peace and progress of society. Church involvement in the search for solutions was also imperative. In attempting to impress upon his

fellow delegates to the Methodist General Conference of 1918, the importance of this issue, Rev. A. M. Sanford asserted, "the very existence of Christianity depends on us not hiding our heads in the dust. If some of you people lived in the West, you would realize the importance, the need of Christian people joining hands with labour interests."³

The climate of industrial relations justified some of these fears.⁴ In extractive industries such as mining and logging, divisions between management and workers were more distinct than in many other areas of economic life. Moreover, as these industries tended to exist in areas somewhat isolated from the rest of society, the workers developed a strong sense of solidarity which promoted militant forms of unionism. In an era characterized by ruthless business tactics, exploitation of the worker in British Columbia may not have been any worse than elsewhere in Canada, but many of them faced unusual hardships and dangers and, by the nature of their occupations, were extremely vulnerable to unemployment caused by seasonal layoffs and business slumps. Workers' attitudes towards these conditions were influenced by the radical theories of the Marxist groups and by the militant labour movement in the western United States. Thus, despite general prosperity in the province prior to 1912, the British Columbia labour scene was frequently marred by unrest.

Ministers observed the tension and discontent, the periodic strikes and occasional outbursts of violence with foreboding. When the Recorder of August 1901 commented, "No thinking person can contemplate the present relations of Capital and Labor without experiencing the

gravest anxiety as to the outcome," it reflected the view of many within the church.⁵ Labour troubles were injurious to the economy of the province, social gossellers believed, since everyone--employers, strikers, their families, and the general public--suffered from strike action. More than this, they feared the current climate of industrial relations might deteriorate even further into actual class warfare. An anonymous article in the Recorder of February 1900 described "unions of labor and organizations of capital" as watching each other "like two hostile armies."⁶

Viewing capital-labour relations as the crux of the social problem, social gospel ministers devoted much of their attention to analyzing the economic system. Most concluded that much in the organization and conduct of economic life was inimical to Christian ethics. The motivations and the goals of business life were sadly out of harmony with God's commandments. Love, not desire for power and prestige, should be the mainspring of human action; human good, not profits, the goal of all enterprise. Under the existing system, man concentrated upon producing wealth but failed to ensure a just distribution of that wealth. The resulting injustice to the worker, who did not receive adequate compensation for his labour, was the source of all labour troubles.

Social gossellers wanted the worker to receive his righteous share of the wealth produced. They were convinced that it was the task of the church "to find a means to avert the threatened disturbances and at the same time secure and protect the rights of all men."⁷ Social gospel interest in capital-labour relations was, thus, often motivated

as much by fear of what might happen if the current situation continued as by the desire to see justice done.⁸ Justice for the labourer was a major aim of social gospellers largely because achievement of economic justice seemed the only way to ensure industrial peace. Unfortunately, many social gospellers spoke of justice without explaining fully what they understood by that term. Many reformers seemed to mean little more than that the workman should receive a greater proportion of the wealth produced. Others obviously expected innovations to ensure more democratic organization of industry, schemes of profit-sharing, and other basic changes in the relationship of the worker to his job. As in the case of social reform generally, the problem of means proved the major weakness and a prime disintegrating factor in the social gospel movement. As early as August 1901, the Recorder faced the problem and stated the social gospel position:

What is to be done? Everyone would desire justice to employer and employee alike: the question at present is, how to secure it? Whether by compulsory arbitration, or some system of compulsory profit sharing, or Government ownership of all large concerns, or by some other means yet to be suggested? Certainly the only complete remedy is the eradication of selfishness, which will come about only by the transforming power of God's love.⁹

British Columbia social gospellers accepted the need for the formation of labour unions, believing that "while Capital organizes for abnormal profits, no reasonable person can object to Labor organizing for normal protection."¹⁰ Many ministers worked hard to overcome anti-union prejudice in their churches. A. M. Sanford, a Methodist who had served in the mining towns of Sandon and Rossland early in his career, had first-hand experience with the problems of the workers.

While he was at Rossland, a strike by the miners saw some violence. At the height of the strike Sanford gave a sermon denouncing the violence but supporting the strike and declaring that, "the annihilation of unionism could not but be a dreadful disaster to all the legitimate interests of our country."¹¹

The ministers had their own conceptions of just what a labour union should be. They were unwilling to regard unionism as a purely bread and butter movement but wanted it to assume spiritual as well as economic aspects. The motivation for action must not only be self-interest. Nor could the ministers accept the socialist contention that justice for the worker could only be achieved through an increase in class consciousness and eventual class conflict. The ultimate answer to the workers' plight, they argued, was not the stimulation of class differences but a new awareness of human brotherhood.

Most ministers were unwilling to let the settlement of industrial disputes be a contest of power between capital and labour. Although the obvious weapon of the labour movement was economic power, they were most reluctant to sanction strikes. They regarded the strike as a necessary evil under current circumstances, but they hoped other means would soon be found. As an alternative to direct confrontation between capital and labour, the social gospellers suggested government intervention, most probably in the form of compulsory arbitration. Social gospel ministers generally tended to look to the powers of government for both the protection of the rights of labour and for the preservation of peace in society. They anticipated an extension of government responsibility in the field of labour relations as well as

an increase in public ownership. Agitation for labour legislation was the means most acceptable to the ministers' point of view. Yet most ministers regarded political action only within terms of the individual citizen operating through the present party system. Most British Columbia social gospellers were not advocates of the formation of labour parties.

On the whole, proposals for specific reforms were vague in detail and moderate in tone. In outlining goals, the social gospellers appeared to expect radical changes, but in describing practical measures for action, moderation was the keynote. This was typical of social gospel experience in British Columbia. The rhetoric was radical; the substance much more moderate.

The social gospel conviction that it was a task of the church to solve the problems of labour was not shared by the labour movement. Social gospellers blamed the churches for the fact that most workers looked for help and guidance in economic affairs, not to the church but to their own labour organizations. In the past, the churches had failed to "appreciate the point of view of the wage-earner" by appealing for charity rather than justice for the poor. This failure had "led the masses to look elsewhere for leadership in matters of reform."¹² Moreover, the church in its self-contented and restricted view of religious duty had failed to speak out authoritatively in condemnation of many existing evils. It was understandable, though regrettable, declared the social gospellers, that many workers, finding little in the church which seemed applicable to their own problems and experience, had drifted away from institutionalized religion and had sought to work

out their own salvation in unionism or socialism. But in the future, the ministers hoped, a renewed church imbued with social gospel principles would convince the workers that the final solution of their problems must be a religious one. A motion for discussion at the B.C. Methodist Conference of 1903 detailed the social gospel position:

there is at present throughout the whole civilized world a discontent with the social and economic conditions under which men live and labour, a discontent which disturbs the harmony of human relations, develops a spirit of class differences and results in disputes between sections of society . . . within the Province of British Columbia . . . these disturbances have seriously affected the relations between employer and employee . . . the final solution of these problems is and must be a distinctively religious and Christian solution . . . the present economic conditions especially in the Province of British Columbia--demand a fuller study of the relations of the second commandment to the first, and of methods . . . to be adopted to bring about perfect harmony of the two in the practical affairs of everyday life . . . our conception of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is comprehensive and includes all the relations of man to God and man to man, therefore necessarily including an interest in man's material as well as his moral, intellectual and spiritual welfare.¹³

That the labour movement needed the guidance and inspiration of the church, social gospellers were agreed. The solution of social and economic problems required more than changes in the system. The essential reform must be that of the individual's motivations and desires. Again and again the ministers warned that a regenerated society depended upon regenerated men, that the solution was "not economic science, but a flame kindled in the human heart."¹⁴

Social gospellers, while sympathetic to labour, made no pretence of identifying with the working class. They were aware of the separation between themselves and the worker, although they deplored the

fact and hoped to remedy it. This sense of separation was largely the result, no doubt, of the middle class background of so many in the ministry. Social gospellers realized that their efforts to bridge the gap between the church and the labour movement were hindered by a lack of understanding on both sides. Ministers urged the study of economic questions in order to gain greater knowledge and comprehension of workers' problems. Gradually, social gospel discussions succeeded in creating within the churches an atmosphere of sympathetic concern for labour's struggles to improve its position. Despite the sincerity of the ministers' attempt to achieve better communication with the working class, essential differences of opinion remained. These differences appeared most critical during times of crisis in the industrial relations of the province.

How far most social gospel ministers were from the achievement of real empathy with the labour movement was revealed in many incidents. Even such a staunch supporter of labour's rights as the editor of the Western Methodist Recorder was capable of a remarkable insensitivity to labour's views. Certainly his article about Lieutenant-Governor James Dunsmuir as "a good and considerate master" despite his refusal to recognize labour unions, was not appreciative of labour's feelings. Nor could his opinion that Dunsmuir's "men have not suffered in wages nor in the conditions of their labour because of their inability to organize," have reassured workers that the Recorder had the best interests of labour at heart.¹⁵

The case of the Reverend Elliot S. Rowe is a prime example of the ambiguities in the social gospel's position towards the worker and

the labour movement. Rowe came to Metropolitan Methodist Church in Victoria from Ontario in 1900. He soon established a reputation as a man of advanced social views and was much in demand as a guest speaker and lecturer. The Recorder expressed its admiration in 1904, saying of Dr. Rowe:

[He] has wielded a wide and powerful influence during his pastorate in Victoria, affecting not only the welfare of his own congregation but matters of general public interest. No pastor of Metropolitan (or perhaps any other church in Victoria) has ever gained an equal place in public prominence and recognition. He is a man of liberal views . . . a man who feels his citizenship as well as his churchmanship and his counsels have naturally been sought on many matters of general moral and social interest.¹⁶

Several of Rowe's speeches on what he called "the social problem" were printed in the Recorder. His speeches were full-blown expressions of social gospel ideas and attitudes as they had developed to that time. The social problem, declared Rowe, was "the product of a system which denies to the workman a fair price for his labor."¹⁷ He concluded that the preacher must work for reform of the system even though his chief efforts would be reform of the human heart.

In 1903, radicalism within the labour movement reached a peak of influence. A strike by the United Brotherhood of Railway Employees, an industrial union affiliated to the American Labor Union, began in February. This was followed by the first large sympathy strike in the province. Soon after, coal miners on Vancouver Island went on strike. The fact that these miners were newly organized members of the Western Miners' Federation, also an American industrial union, raised fears in some minds over the growing extent of foreign, radical influences.

Writing in May of that year, the Recorder lamented that "Strikes seem to be just now really epidemic, and the results are felt in all lines of business".¹⁸ The editor hailed the appointment of a federal Royal Commission to investigate the disputes. Heading the Commission was British Columbia Chief Justice Gordon Hunter and assisting him was Rev. E. S. Rowe. Rowe, described as "an authority on social questions and . . . a true friend to the laborer and the oppressed,"¹⁹ now had an opportunity to make a gesture of support in labour's cause.

The results of the Royal Commission were not encouraging for the British Columbia labour movement.²⁰ The Commissioners condemned Canadian membership in American unions, seeing in the strikes a socialist conspiracy under alien control. No awareness of the workers' complaints and problems which had led them to affiliate with these unions was demonstrated. The Commissioners accepted the theory that the strikes were largely the work of foreign agitators despite evidence that ample cause for strike action existed in local conditions. While urging employers to cease discrimination against union members, the Commission made no specific recommendations to bring about methods of collective bargaining. In fact, the general result of the recommendations, had they been put into effect, would have severely limited labour's weapons in the struggle to achieve collective bargaining. In his study of the report of this commission, Allan Donald Orr concluded, "The Commissioners did not seem to understand the economic and political functions of unions in British Columbia and throughout the western world."²¹ It appears that Rowe, the friend of labour, had very limited views on the legitimate aims and functions of labour organization,

views which prevented him from gaining real insight into the British Columbia labour situation.

Social gospel insight into the labour situation was little improved by the time of the Vancouver Island coal miners' strike of 1912-1914. Strikes, lockouts, and violence culminated in riots in Nanaimo during August 1913.²² At this point, the provincial government ordered the militia to restore order and several union members were arrested. The seriousness of the disturbances attracted much attention within the churches.

Some of the reforming ministers expressed sympathy for the workers as did the editor of Lux Columbiana, the Methodist college publication, who declared:

That there are certain grievances no one will deny, and anyone who has had experience of the conditions as they exist for the employees, particularly in the mining districts, will thoroughly appreciate the attitude taken up by the miners, even while they may deplore the methods that have to be employed.²³

The sympathy for the workers' plight did not extend to the actions they took to improve their position. Many ministers lacked even a general knowledge of existing grievances and found the causes of the strike totally incomprehensible. Once again, the Recorder illustrated this failure of communication between so many of the social gospel ministers and the labour movement they wished to guide. In its comments on the strike, the Recorder stated:

Whatever may have been the causes of the strike, which has been in progress since May--and these causes nobody seems clearly to understand, and certainly we do not--there could be no possible justification for such a resort to violence as had been witnessed and the public

authorities are to be commended for their prompt action in sending the militia to the scene to restore order.²⁴

Finding no cause for discontent among the workers, the Recorder was forced to view the whole dispute as the work of "outside agitators."

The Presbyterians also had difficulties in interpreting the strike. The B.C. report to the General Assembly stated:

The attitude of a large number of wage-earners and members of labour unions towards the church has not become more friendly. The influence spreading eastward and inward from the deplorable events of the prolonged labour disturbances on Vancouver Island, which brought representatives of labour into sharp conflict with government, has proved embittering and mischievous.²⁵

Moreover, the church's pronouncements made in an effort to conciliate labour feelings were belated and suffered from "imperfect knowledge of certain phases of the dispute." The Presbytery of Westminster, like the Vancouver Ministerial Association asked Ottawa for a commission of investigation into the strike.

C. T. Scott, writing in Lux Columbianana, suggested government intercession in the coal miners' strike, to force the company owners to come to an agreement with the workers.²⁶ In the case of a serious or prolonged strike, he declared, the duty of government to protect the public interest superceded the rights of property, but the government, reluctant to intervene, limited its actions to maintaining law and order and protecting property. Despite government refusal to accept responsibility in the area of industrial relations, social gossellers continued to view legislation as the answer to labour's problems. The creation of machinery to end disputes and protect labour's rights would

obviate the use of the strike. In the light of past experience and prevailing government attitudes, labour more realistically concluded that government was unlikely to fight for the workers' interests more effectively than they themselves would do.

Perhaps the basic source of misunderstanding in the interpretation of capital-labour relations by men in the church stemmed from their strong inclination to regard all labour disputes as the result of moral depravity or ignorance. Thus, they tended to interpret wage disputes as the result of greed by one party or another rather than the result of a disagreement over what constituted a fair wage. W. L. Hall, one of the most perceptive of British Columbia social gospellers, called on his fellow ministers to "at least strive to assess the situation," and to realize that the basic cause is "not a case of human depravity and premeditated devilry on either side, but of conflicting interests."²⁷ He warned that by regarding labour conflict in these terms, the ministers ignored the real issues which motivated most of the conflicts. Social gospellers tended to assume that rightminded people informed of the facts would have little difficulty in coming to an agreement satisfactory to everyone. Viewing employer-employee relations strictly in moral terms, social gospellers frequently failed to realize that real differences in opinion and legitimate conflicts of interest existed.

Such an interpretation also affected the social gospellers' views on methods of ending labour disputes. If ignorance was a cause of conflict, education was the key to lasting industrial peace. Education alone was not sufficient, of course, for men informed of their duties

and responsibilities must still be motivated to perform them. Conversion of the hearts of men in the business world to the ethics of Jesus would also be necessary. Social gossellers regarded both tasks as obvious functions of the church.

Fears that the labour movement, acting on its own behalf in its struggles to achieve justice, would ignore the rights of other sections of society, prompted social gossellers to assert the need for church leadership. The truth was that most social gospel ministers distrusted the labour movement. They hoped to bring it within the sphere of church influence as a means of controlling its aims and methods.

To the social gosseller, the labour union was yet another semi-autonomous power structure (like the corporation) independent of church authority. Moral suasion, the churches found, was usually more effective upon individuals than upon institutions. Furthermore, the potential economic power of unions seemed to threaten the position of the unorganized middle classes in society.

Distrust of the labour movement was especially noticeable at any sign of radicalism within the movement. The Industrial Workers of the World for instance, were emphatically condemned as a dangerous, alien influence.²⁸ Rev. Ernest Thomas noting this tendency in the church, cautioned that such an attitude hindered understanding and solution of the problem. Writing in 1918 with the memory of the Russian Revolution fresh in his mind, Thomas linked the Bolsheviks and I.W.W. and asked:

How many are there in our congregations who have ever taken an hour to understand what gives rise to the

passionate cry of the I.W.W.'s? We dispose of them as dangerous but have we ever asked what makes them dangerous?²⁹

Another target of social gospel criticism was Marxist influence among the workers. While many social gospellers endorsed forms of socialism, they unanimously rejected the atheistic materialism of the British Columbia Marxists. Fear that the Marxist belief in revolution would encourage social discord dominated social gospel attitudes towards the labour movement. They stressed that reform must be the product of unselfish impulses, not force. Labour experience indicated, however, that enlightened self-interest rather than unselfish impulses dominated capital-labour decisions.

In discussing the problem of capital-labour relations, social gospel ministers passed easily from demanding justice for the labourer, to demanding that the whole range of business activities be reconstructed on the basis of Christian morality. Most social gospellers hoped this could be accomplished without severe social dislocation or conflict. What they sought essentially was a reform of the business world carried out by the businessmen themselves.³⁰ To this end they directed their preaching, calling for a new awareness of Christian responsibility and brotherhood, although the role of reform legislation was not neglected.

While social gospellers were critical of many facets of business life, their chief targets were large-scale organizations of capital. The large corporation was described as the chief villain in the piece, operating outside the dictates of morality, oblivious to the needs and rights of individuals, and arrogant with power. The presence in a

democratic society of these semi-autonomous organizations upon which the individual citizen was dependent, and over which he had no control, frightened the reforming ministers. Moreover, revelations of cases in which these organizations interfered in the law-making processes as well as regulated economic conditions seemed to confirm their fears.

New concepts of property rights and considerations of the public good must be adopted by the business community, social gospellers insisted. If they were rather unrealistic in expecting businessmen to operate from a desire to serve society rather than from a desire to make profits, they at least recognized that society could not tolerate for long a system in which profits were the only consideration. Though exulting in material progress like the rest of society, men in the church did not forget the importance of human values in their description of the better life. Unfortunately, the ministers seldom achieved any greater understanding of, or influence upon, the world of big business than they did in the world of organized labour.

Although social gospellers asserted that the labour movement needed the church, in fact, they were unable to offer any concrete assistance, proving ineffective both in their efforts to influence big business and to convince government of its responsibilities to the worker. Because of lack of understanding of the labour situation and misconceptions of the role and powers of the church in an industrial, secular society, social gospel efforts to impose their ideals upon capital-labour relations were largely in vain.

Footnotes to Chapter IV

¹Canadian church interest in the social gospel has been interpreted as the response, in large part, to the large-scale immigration of non-Protestant, non-English speaking people during the years before the First World War. See Crysdale, Protestant Ethics, p. 19; Grant, Pidgeon, p. 29; Emery, "Methodist Church", pp. 225 and 345; Smith, Short History, p. 59.

²"Moral Reform Notes," W.M.R., November 1904, p. 3.

³Cited by Carroll H. Lee in "Dr. Albert Morris Sanford," Vancouver, Union College, essay, 1956, p. 7.

⁴For a brief history of industrial relations in British Columbia during this period see Phillips, No Power Greater, pp. 27-84.

⁵P. 9.

⁶"Present Discord and the Remedy," p. 12.

⁷"Rev. Elliot S. Rowe's Conference Sermon on the Church and the Social Problems," W.M.R., July 1901, p. 2.

⁸George Emery noted that "the Church's sympathy for the labourer was exceeded by its concern for the average citizen." "The Methodist Church on the Prairies," p. 116.

⁹P. 9.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Cited by Lee, "Sanford," p. 7.

¹²W.M.R., May 1905, p. 6.

¹³"The Annual Conference," W.M.R., June 1903, p. 11.

¹⁴Rev. George Fallis, "Golden Age of the Workingman," W.M.R., November 1914, p. 3.

- ¹⁵W.M.R., December 1906, pp. 3-4.
- ¹⁶W.M.R., June 1904, p. 4.
- ¹⁷"Preacher and Social Problem," W.M.R., July 1902, p. 1.
- ¹⁸P. 8.
- ¹⁹W.M.R., June 1902, p. 16.
- ²⁰See Phillips, No Power Greater, p. 41; and Allan Donald Orr, "The Western Federation of Miners and the Royal Commission of Industrial Disputes, in 1903 with Special Reference to the Vancouver Island Coal Miners' Strike," Vancouver, University of British Columbia, M.A. Thesis, 1968, p. 186.
- ²¹"Western Federation of Miners and the Royal Commission," p. 150.
- ²²For accounts of these events see Phillips, No Power Greater, pp. 55-61; and Alan John Wargo, "The Great Coal Strike: The Vancouver Island Coal Miners' Strike, 1912-1914," Vancouver, University of British Columbia, B.A. Graduating Essay, 1962.
- ²³W.M.R., March 1912, p. 9.
- ²⁴W.M.R., August 1913, p. 12.
- ²⁵Presbyterian Church of Canada, Acts and Proceedings of the Fortieth General Assembly (Toronto, 1914), p. 44.
- ²⁶"The Third Party in Labour Disputes," April 1913, pp. 11-13.
- ²⁷"Bourgeois Morals and Other Things," W.M.R., February 1914, p. 5.
- ²⁸The Recorder described the I.W.W. as "a most dangerous associate to labour." April 1912, p. 12.
- ²⁹"The Signs of the Times," W.M.R., January 1918, p. 5.
- ³⁰By the time of the war, socialist social gossellers assumed most reform in this area would be the result of government activity but they also continued to emphasize evangelism believing that without a new spirit and attitude, laws would be ineffective.

CONCLUSIONS

[Social gossellers hailed the year 1919 as the beginning of a new era in the world's history.] Only the expectation that society must emerge from the war purified and regenerated had reconciled them to the dreadful sacrifices of the war effort. With the end of the war, they shared a sense of crisis, urging that social reconstruction proceed immediately. The first year of peace proved disillusioning as material rather than spiritual interests continued to dominate men's attention. Not only were the old problems unsolved but new tensions threatened to [destroy the social order.] The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and the Winnipeg General Strike heightened social gospel fears that, without substantial reform, [Canadian society was in peril of violent revolution by radical elements impatient of slow progress.] Since much of the motivation for social gospel preaching originated in the desire to maintain the peace of society, the spectre of violence now associated with the socialist movement, caused many social gossellers to recoil from radical positions and statements.] It became important, as it had not been before, to define clearly the terms used and the goals they sought.

Although disappointed that wartime idealism could be so quickly dissipated, the social gossellers were not entirely disheartened. Forced to a more realistic evaluation of the obstacles they faced, they prepared to continue the work while relinquishing their premature hopes for imminent success. Nevertheless, the momentum of the movement was

definitely declining. The Recorder maintained a positive note warning that people had expected too much, too quickly, but was forced to admit that the "'New World' we saw visions of, which was to come as the compensation for such suffering and sacrifice as the Great War involved, has not yet, to the ordinary eager watcher, made its appearance."¹

From the early years of the twentieth century to just after the First World War, the social gospel had won increasing attention and support within the Protestant churches in British Columbia. The core idea of the movement was the conception of social reform as a dimension of religious life. Possessed of an organic view of society in which none were safe till all were saved, social gossellers believed that Christ preached the salvation of society as well as of individual souls. Furthermore, they believed that history, under the guidance of an immanent God, was progressing inevitably towards the establishment of a perfect society on earth. In this Kingdom of God, mankind would consist of regenerated, perfect individuals, the end result of a spiritual evolution.

To work for the establishment of this Kingdom of God on earth was the first duty of the church. But the social gossellers in British Columbia were motivated as much by fear of the developments within modern society as they were by enthusiasm and faith in the coming Kingdom. Impressed by the achievements of the new industrial, technological order, social gossellers were aware that the position and influence of the church within that order was declining. Other changes in society, especially the growing power of large organizations of capital and labour, also alarmed them. The churches, with their large representation

of the unorganized members of society, the middle classes, feared the possible effects on economic and political life of these new aggregations of power. Frightened by the threat of serious conflict between these antagonistic groups, social gossellers sought to be peacemakers, promoting reform as a preventative measure and safeguard against class war and revolution.

Reform ideas were in the air during this period. Socialism, American progressivism, and the social gospel were varying expressions of the same hope that man could learn to structure his social life with some of the efficiency, skill, and order he appeared to demonstrate in his manipulation of the physical environment. Social gossellers believed that their version of social reform based on religious concepts of the nature of man, society and God, was the real hope for the future. Only as reform became a spiritual and religious undertaking would men achieve success.

In the years before the war, the main efforts of social gossellers in British Columbia were directed to convincing those within their churches that the church had responsibilities in the area of social reform. They regarded this effort--the preaching of the need for action--as the main task. They assumed that once men recognized the need for reform, reform itself would be easy. Successful in arousing considerable support for their views, social gossellers were then faced with producing practical results, with translating words into actions and finding the means of applying their views to actual conditions. In this, they were less successful.

In part, the failure of social gospellers to find practical means of implementing their ideas was due to the nebulous nature of many of these ideas and consequent confusion over aims and goals. The ultimate goal of social gospellers, the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth, was necessarily vague and ill-defined. Unfortunately, they were little more precise in detailing their immediate objectives. What in essence the ministers were demanding was an attempt to institutionalize Christian love. Without a clear understanding of specific aims, effective action was difficult.

Another factor inhibiting successful action was the lack of unity within the movement. Disguised at first by the looseness of the terminology, differences among social gospel viewpoints became increasingly evident by the war years. Social gospellers agreed that injustices existed and that they had a religious duty to try to correct them. They disagreed on nearly everything else. In the delineation of the essential problems, they concurred--the existence of poverty amid wealth, the inadequate reward of labour, competition and strife among men forgetful of their common brotherhood--but they differed in accounting for these problems and in the remedies proposed.

An essential area of disagreement was the interpretation of sin. Was sin innate, the result of the imperfection of man's nature, or the perversion of man's natural goodness by a corrupt social environment? Would reform result from awakening men's consciences to their social responsibilities or from a restructuring of the system? On a different level, social gospellers also differed over the extent to which property rights needed alteration. Was poverty a correctible abuse within the

system of private property or an inevitable defect of the system?

Related to this question was the issue of the role of government in modern society. To what extent should government be responsible for social welfare?

Lack of agreement on these issues made agreement on methods impossible. Was the essential reform the conversion of human motives and aspirations or the alteration of social institutions? If both must be attempted concurrently, what relationship would exist between them? To what extent could the coercion of the law be used to promote a society based on brotherly love?

Social gossellers agreed that the government must accept more responsibility for social welfare, even as the rich must accept their responsibilities to the poor, and the employer, his to deal justly with his employees. The church must declare these duties plainly in its preaching. Most social gossellers did not urge compulsion in the assumption of these responsibilities, arguing that these duties would be performed effectively only by men who accepted the task willingly. Other social gossellers, impatient with the reluctance of men in power to reform themselves, wanted a fuller use of the law to force changes. They believed that institutional changes, by releasing men from the pressures of a perverted system, would permit a greater development of brotherly feeling.

The search for means by social gossellers, eager to find in social reform a role for the church, was frustrated most of all by ignorance and misunderstanding concerning power relationships and social organization. Their misconceptions regarding the power and resources

of the institutional churches in modern society resulted in confusion over the church's role in political life. ^{*1} At first, social gospellers appeared to expect that the church would play an active role in producing the structural changes in society, as well as providing various programmes of social relief. Gradually, it became apparent that although the church might provide moral leadership, practical reforms could only be carried out by the political power of the state. Social gospellers were forced, therefore, to look more and more to government to solve the problems of society. But due to the vagueness of their goals and the disunity of the movement, social gospellers, acting through their churches, encountered great difficulty in presenting specific proposals for action. As a result, they tended to be ineffectual petitioners of government. On the whole, the social gospel in British Columbia remained rhetoric without result, little more than a vague hope of human progress which lost cohesion as it attempted to become a programme for action.

The interpretation of social reform as a dimension of religion was proving, by 1920, to be frustrating, both from the point of view of reform and of religion. Social gospellers neither initiated social reconstruction nor enhanced the position of the church. [While social gospel ideas remained influential, the lack of results and obvious disunity among social gospel supporters, caused many church people to reconsider its basic assumptions.]

Reform obviously was not going to be as easy as many had anticipated. The Rev. Principal W. H. Smith of Westminster Hall in his inaugural lecture of May 1920, noted:

The popular idea that the work of the church in overcoming iniquity is comparatively easy fails to grasp the fact that sin is the deepest, most persistent and deadly fact in the world . . .

The criticisms of the Church on account of failure to bring in the golden age of industrial and economic harmony show a pathetic ignorance of the actual changes to be effected in human hearts before social conditions are changed.²

Other difficulties also existed. Since converted men would still need knowledge and skills to build a better society, social gospellers had sought scientific methods of dealing with social problems. Unfortunately, the social sciences proved disappointingly incapable of answering the basic questions. How men living in an industrial urban society could achieve justice for all remained unknown.

Social gospel experience in British Columbia also indicated that the church was not in a position to perform the task of social reform. Lacking skills, resources, and power to carry out a comprehensive programme of reform, the church had only its moral authority and influence over public opinion. Within a secular society of many heterogeneous beliefs, church authority was necessarily limited. This being the case, government rather than the church must be the agency of reform. If the work of reform was primarily within the sphere of politics and under the direction of the state, just how religious an activity was it? Religious convictions could motivate the work of reform without defining the work itself as essentially religious. While the church could influence the choice of goals, it need not take responsibility for deciding which of several possible courses of action might be the most effective means.

If social gospel views had not been especially useful in the promotion of social reform, some ministers were even more concerned that

they had tended to weaken religion. Emphasis upon social problems, while increasing social awareness and broadening religious concepts of morality, had led, in some instances, to a neglect of the spiritual as opposed to the ethical aspects of religion. Rev. Smith in the address previously quoted, expressed fears that:

there has been some drifting away from the faith once delivered to the saints. The spirit of the age with its rationalizing tendency, its literary criticism and its worship of scientific evolution, has misled many within and without the Church. The result is that much preaching has degenerated into lecturing on scientific, literary and social subjects, without any vision of the eternal verities which alone can redeem the soul.

If, after 1920, the social gospel was not regarded with quite the same enthusiasm and naive expectation as previously, it by no means disappeared. The churches still found in social issues, vital interests and concerns. Ministers continued to seek social justice as well as individual salvation. But this period was the beginning of a gradual adjustment of social gospel assumptions and expectations in the light of social and political realities. Under existing circumstances of life in Canada, the primary responsibility for social reform did not belong to the church.

Footnotes to Conclusions

¹December 1919, p. 8.

²W. H. Smith, The Ministry and Spiritual Leadership (Vancouver, 1920), p. 6.

³Ibid., p. 17.

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APPENDIX

Biographical Information on Some British ColumbiaSocial Gospel Ministers

Complete information was not available in the case of all ministers. Dates of residence show earliest known date through date of departure or up to 1920.

	<u>Resident in B.C.</u>	<u>General Information</u>
I. <u>Methodists</u>		
1. R. Wilkinson	1889-1920	Born in England. President of Conference 1917.
2. J. P. Hicks	1880-1920	Born in England. Editor of <u>The Western Methodist Recorder</u> . Secretary of Conference 1902.
3. William Lashly Hall	1893-1920	Born in England. Was secretary to Booth of Salvation Army. President of Conference 1913. B.C. delegate to General Conference and to Social Service Council. Member of B.C. Committee of Dept. of E.S.S.
4. W. J. Sipprell	1898-1913	Born in Ontario. Principal of Columbian College. B.C. delegate to General Conference.
5. Elliot S. Rowe	1900-1904 Metropolitan Church, Victoria	Born in Ontario Retired to Vancouver Died 1914
6. S. S. Osterhout	1900-1920	Born in Ontario. On faculty of Ryerson College. B.C. delegate to General Conference and Dept. of Temperance and Moral Reform.

7. R. F. Stillman — 1900-1919 Born in Ontario. President of Conference 1915. B.C. delegate to Social Service Council. Member of B.C. committee of Dept. of E.S.S.
8. A. E. Roberts 1899-1920 Born in England. Secretary of Conference 1905-1911; B.C. correspondent for Christian Guardian 1910-1938.
9. W. H. Barraclough 1895-1909 Born in Ontario. Associate editor of W.M.R., B.C. delegate to General Conference.
10. S. J. Thompson 1889-1917 Born in Ontario. B.C. delegate to General Conference. Member B.C. committee of Dept. of E.S.S.
11. R. J. McIntyre 1901-1919 President of Conference 1918. B.C. delegate to Social Service Council. Delegate to General Conference.
12. A. M. Sanford 1897-1920 Born in Nova Scotia. On faculty of Columbian College, Principal from 1913. Delegate to General Conference.
13. Robert Hughes 1900-1920 B.C. member of Dept. of E.S.S
14. George W. Dean 1908-1919
15. C. T. Scott 1912-1916 (Victoria) from Ontario. B.C. member of Dept. of E.S.S.
16. A. E. Smith 1910-1914 (Nelson) from Ontario; later sent to B.C. to work for Prohibition during 1916.
17. Ernest Thomas 1916-1920 (Vancouver) Born in England. Delegate to General Conference. Member of B.C. committee of Dept. of E.S.S.

II. Presbyterians

- | | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|--|
| 1. R. J. Wilson | 1903-1918 | |
| 2. H. W. Fraser | 1904-1917
(Vancouver) | |
| 3. G. A. Wilson | 1907-1937 | Superintendent of Home Missions. |
| 4. George Pidgeon | 1909-1913 | On faculty of Westminster Hall.
Delegate to Social Service
Council. |
| 5. R. G. MacBeth | 1912-1920 | |
| 6. Dr. John MacKay | 1908-1920 | Born in Ontario; studied in
Scotland. Principal of West-
minster Hall. |

III. Congregationalist

- | | | |
|-------------|--------------------------|--|
| A. E. Cooke | 1913-1920
(Vancouver) | |
|-------------|--------------------------|--|

VITA

Surname: MOSHER Given Names: Sheila Patricia

Place of Birth: Victoria, B.C. Date of Birth: March 2, 1940

Educational Institutions Attended, with Dates of Entering and Leaving:

University of Victoria, Victoria, B.C. 1958 to 1969
_____ _____ to _____

Degrees, Diplomas, Etc., Awarded, with Dates and Names of Institutions:

B.A. 1969 University of Victoria

Honors and Awards:

Publications:

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as a Dimension of Religion 1900 1920"

Author


Signature

Mrs. Sheila Patricia Mosher
Name

April 30, 1974
Date