

5-1-1990

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Recommended Citation

Cole-Arnal, Oscar (1990) "The Social Uplifters: Presbyterian Progressives and the Social Gospel in Canada, 1875-1915," *Consensus*: Vol. 16 : Iss. 1 , Article 13.

Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol16/iss1/13>

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The Social Uplifters: Presbyterian Progressives and the Social Gospel in Canada, 1875-1915

Brian J. Fraser

Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1988

xv + 212 pp.

Like most specialized studies Brian Fraser's *The Social Uplifters* will not reach a broad reading public. This is to be expected, the usual fate of books designed to describe one microscopic portion of a much larger history. Nonetheless, it would be tragic indeed if this work did not achieve a wider recognition beyond its more narrow and conscious focus. It is an absolute must for anyone who has significant interest in the Canadian social gospel era at the turn of our century. It is a unique and valuable contribution to this period in a number of respects.

First of all, it profiles, in a sensitive way, six major figures of the Presbyterian social gospel. These men, including George Pidgeon and J.G. Shearer, are described throughout the book in terms of their background, their ideological evolution, their experience in the church and society and the similarities and differences they shared with each other. One comes to know them, not chiefly as herculean personalities, but rather as paradigms of the training, church and society they embodied. Fraser's blend of biographical, intellectual, ecclesiastical and social history is masterful. Not only is he able to bring persons and eras to life; also he manages to guide his readers along the path he forges with consummate narrative skill.

Secondly, he integrates theology and life. The Scottish evangelical liberalism, which so shaped these six leaders and their church, is never disembodied by Fraser. He links it to the mentors of these men as well as to the institutions which trained them for their influential roles. He shows how they applied it to their ecclesiastical institutions as well.

Third, the reader becomes deeply aware of church, social and political life, especially in Toronto. In such a way, one is treated to the milieus which shaped and were shaped by the reformism of these "progressive" social gossellers.

Finally, although the author has profound sympathies for these men, he does not hesitate to subject them to trenchant criticism. By such judgments as calling their programme "a sincere but naive attempt to Christianize Canadian civilization" via integration of all people and movements "into their Anglo-Saxon Protestantism", Fraser sets the agenda whereby he analyzes their shortcomings. These emerge with crystal clarity in his portrayal of their abortive alliance with labour, in their designs for the immigrant ghettos of the cities, and in his [Fraser's] comparison of them with the American Charles Stelzle.

This or that minor imperfection in the book might be cited, but they pale in contrast to the book's excellence. The insights found therein,

backed by solid primary research and much literary talent, should stimulate a fundamental re-assessment of conventional social gospel wisdom. Richard Allen's monumental work *The Social Passion* highlighted "the progressives", as he called them, both Methodist and Presbyterian. Using extensive quoted material he praised effusively such men as S.D. Chown, T.A. Moore and J.G. Shearer, and he did so at the expense of such radicals as J.S. Woodsworth and William Ivens. For his part, Fraser goes beyond the public rhetoric to underlying values (with their limitations) and social analysis. Fraser recognizes and acknowledges that words have their incarnation in programmatic and social reality, and he demonstrates quite clearly the middle-class tunnel vision of his protagonists. In this respect, his book is superior to and more nuanced than the earlier work of Allen's. Fraser has pushed the social gospel debate forward in a most significant way, and for that, both the ecclesiastical and academic world owe him a debt of gratitude.

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Confirmation: Origins and Reform

Aidan Kavanagh

New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1988

xi + 137 pp. \$18.75

When the king heard the book being read, he tore his clothes in dismay... (2 Chronicles 34:17, TEV).

This is an important book. Although Lutherans who read it will not likely tear their clothes in dismay, those from traditions where confirmation is considered a sacrament, if they accept Kavanagh's thesis, may be so inclined.

Kavanagh claims to have made a radical and far-reaching discovery. What we now call "confirmation", he proposes, originated simply as a dismissal blessing which concluded the early Christian baptismal liturgy. This blessing adds nothing to baptism, but only completes this part of the initiation rite. The episcopal "confirmation prayer" which we know most commonly from the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus, paragraph 21, is not an epiclesis but only a dismissal. This, Kavanagh claims, shifts the emphasis on the imparting of the Holy Spirit in baptism away from the acts of consignation and imposition of hands, keeping it in the liturgies of baptism and eucharist where it belongs.

The fact at issue, he says, is whether there can be, or is, such a dismissal as a "liturgical unity in the evolution of Christian worship" (4). Kavanagh