

Covenanter Democracy: Scottish Popular Religion, Ethnicity, and the Varieties of Politico-religious Dissent in Upper Canada, 1815–1841

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The Anglican Church functioned as the primary institution for the transmission of Tory values in the British colonies, a fact recognized and stolidly defended by Upper Canadian elites, who used the church as their central weapon against any challenge to the Tory state from the American Republic or from internal dissent. One under-explored variable that affected the shape and diversity of the Protestant and Reformist critique of Anglican Toryism was ethnic identity, which often found its primary expression through religion. Nowhere was the fit between ethnicity, evangelical religion, and politics more overt than among Scottish Presbyterian Seceders who emigrated in large numbers to Upper Canada in the years after 1815. As an examination of the relationship between their faith and political radicalism illustrates, the critique of Tory-Anglican dominance did not emanate from a unified and homogeneous Reformist ideology, but rather from several divergent strands of political radicalism anchored in dissenting religious cultures and practices.

L'Église anglicane fut l'instrument primaire de transmission des valeurs tories dans les colonies britanniques, ce que reconnaissaient et défendaient avec flegme les élites du Haut-Canada, dont l'église était l'arme principale contre tout défi lancé à l'état tory par la république américaine ou des dissidents internes. L'identité ethnique, qui se trouvait souvent exprimée par la religion, est une variable sous-explorée qui a influé sur la forme et la diversité de la critique protestante et réformiste du torysme anglican. Nulle part l'adéquation entre l'ethnicité, la religion évangélique et la politique n'a-t-elle été plus manifeste que chez les sécessionnistes presbytériens écossais qui émigrèrent en grand nombre au Haut-Canada après 1815. Comme l'illustre un examen du lien entre leur foi et le radicalisme politique, la critique de la domination tory-anglicane n'est pas née d'une idéologie réformiste unifiée et homogène, mais plutôt de plusieurs factions divergentes de radicalisme politique ancrées dans des cultures et pratiques religieuses dissidentes.

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THE HISTORY of Upper Canada between the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the union of the colony with Lower Canada in 1841 has usually been read as the story of the triumph of pro-British, moderate conservative political values. Historians have argued that, although small sects of radical, pro-American republicans hovered on the margins of society, the events of the Rebellion of 1837 illustrated the predominance of more conservative types of political culture by offering compelling testimony to the monarchical allegiance and loyalist feeling of the vast majority of the colonial population. In attempting to construct an explanatory teleology for the 1854 high political coalition between moderate Reformers and moderate conservatives, a number of historians have insisted upon the commonality of political terminology and values cohering around the “British Constitution” and have thus accepted that there was a cultural convergence between “Reform” and “Tory” outlooks that underlay the political combination of 1854. Vying with one another to display their loyalty to the British constitution, each group accepted, with differences of degree, a commitment to popular sovereignty and to the deliberations of public opinion as essential to the working of the political system, and each evinced common values supplied by anti-Catholicism, respectable Protestant religion, and willingness to use the power of the state to discipline the dangerous, democratic tendencies of the common people.¹ However, the direc-

¹ For the major highlights of this historiography, see the “traditional” interpretations of S. F. Wise, “Upper Canada and the Conservative Tradition”, in Edith O. Firth, ed., *Profiles of a Province* (Toronto: Ontario Historical Society 1967), and “Liberal Consensus or Ideological Battleground: Some Reflections on the Hartz Thesis”, *Canadian Historical Association Historical Papers* (1974), pp. 1–14, which, while making a case for ideological pluralism, presents a thesis of conservative dominance; and J. M. S. Careless, “Mid-Victorian Liberalism in Central Canadian Newspapers, 1850–67”, *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 31, no. 3 (September 1950), pp. 221–236, and *Brown of the Globe, vol. 1: The Voice of Upper Canada, 1818–1850* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1959), which first broached the notion of “consensus” to describe the history of Upper Canada after the Rebellion. Modern “liberal” interpreters have unhesitatingly accepted the major emphasis of this traditional outlook, while attempting to correct certain details. See, for political ideology, Jane Errington, *The Lion, the Eagle, and Upper Canada: A Developing Colonial Ideology* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1987); David Mills, *The Idea of Loyalty in Upper Canada, 1784–1850* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1988). A seminal recent treatment of the workings of the British Constitution in Upper Canada, Jeffrey McNairn’s *The Capacity to Judge: Public Opinion and Deliberative Democracy in Upper Canada, 1791–1854* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), has sought to harness analysis of the “public sphere” to political ideology and posits a growing acceptance on all sides of the political spectrum of the notion that a popular sovereignty based on a “deliberative democracy” of public opinion and discussion displaced more static notions of the British Constitution. However, McNairn concludes that by 1854 only the most conservative forms of democracy remained central to the working of the political system. For developments within Protestant religion, see William Westfall, *Two Worlds: The Protestant Culture of Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989); John Webster Grant, *A Profusion of Spires: Religion in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988); Michael Gauvreau, “Personal Piety and the Evangelical Social Vision, 1815–1867”, in G. A. Rawlyk, ed., *The Canadian Protestant Experience, 1760–1990* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990). Despite the dislike of “radical” historians for much of the “metaphysics” of the liberal view of Upper Canadian history, the concern for questions of class, gender, and ethnicity has not challenged, but has simply been grafted onto, this half-century-old interpretation. For influential

tion of this historiography has tended to obscure the often more subtle diversities within that rapidly changing immigrant society. In particular, these attempts to define a set of conservative values based on loyalty to the British constitution have paid scant attention to the political and religious differences within British society, with its distinct ethnic subcultures in Scotland, Ireland, and England, and especially how the specific Irish and Scottish connections between ethnicity and religion affected both the content and form of political debate in Upper Canada. Not only did Scotland and Ireland possess a view of the British constitution and polity which was radically different from that held by the English, but, more importantly, their divergent political traditions were mediated primarily through the dissenting culture of evangelical religion.²

Nowhere was this fit between ethnicity, evangelical religion, and politics more overt than through Presbyterian Seceders who emigrated in large numbers to Upper Canada in the years after 1815. As their peculiar interpretation of the relationship between their faith and political radicalism illustrates, the critique of Tory-Anglican dominance did not emanate from a unified and homogeneous Reformist ideology calibrated either on American republicanism or on the creation of an overarching, free-floating category of public opinion as the basis of democratic popular sovereignty. Rather, there existed many strands of dissenting political ideologies, of which Scottish Seceder and later Free Church Presbyterianism was a part. Indeed, given the conclusion advanced by Carol Wilton's recent study of popular politics in Upper Canada, that political opposition was complicated by the lack of a party system and of electoral organizations,³ it is necessary for historians to pay closer attention to the social ideologies and cultural practices that informed the ways in which ordinary Upper Canadians appropriated the larger categories of Reform and Tory. As this study suggests, historians need to analyse

statements, see Alison Prentice, *The School Promoters* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976); Allan Greer and Ian Radforth, eds., *Colonial Leviathan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992); Bruce Curtis, *True Government by Choice Men?* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992); Allan Greer, "1837–38: Rebellion Reconsidered", *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 76, no. 1 (March 1995). What is most telling is that the "new social history" has been most devoted to a minute examination of the lives of the Upper Canadian elite, rather than to the "common people". See Katherine M. J. McKenna, *A Life of Propriety* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993); Elizabeth Jane Errington, *Wives, Schoolmistresses, and Scullery-maids: Women in Upper Canada, 1791–1840* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995); Cecilia Morgan, " 'In Pursuit of the Phantom Misnamed Honour': Duelling in Upper Canada", *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 76, no. 4 (December 1995), pp. 529–562.

2 For an examination of the close links between republican political ideology and evangelical religion in Upper Canada before 1815, see Nancy J. Christie, " 'In These Times of Democratic Rage and Delusion': Popular Religion and the Challenge to the Established Order, 1760–1812", in Rawlyk, ed., *The Canadian Protestant Experience*. It should be emphasized, however, that Christie's analysis emphasizes those settlers of "American" ethnic origin who formed the largest group in the population of Upper Canada before 1815.

3 Carol Wilton, *Popular Politics and Political Culture in Upper Canada, 1800–1850* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), p. 10.

other sources of division within Upper Canada than those constituted by class fissures or opposing monarchical and republican views of loyalty. One of these under-explored variables is ethnic identity, which often found its primary expression through religion, and this factor frequently accounted for the peculiar shape and diversity of the Protestant and Reformist critique of Anglican Toryism.

Religion was one of the primary ways in which political dissent in Upper Canada was expressed. The reason why religious language became the language of political controversy grew directly out of the dynamic between Anglicanism and the English aristocracy, which encompassed both Whig and Tory sensibilities in the years following the settlement of 1688. The Church of England was the central pillar of the English state and was seen to be the foundation of traditional social relations because it provided the rationale for a divine-right monarchy, which assimilated spiritual and political realms in a unitary sovereignty.⁴ Moreover, these Anglican doctrines of unitary sovereignty also underwrote the legal, social, and political consolidation of the United Kingdom between 1707 and 1801 through the destruction of the independent parliaments of Scotland and Ireland.⁵ They were similarly deployed in the early nineteenth century to justify the assimilation of Britain's North American colonies to the parent state. That the Anglican Church functioned as the primary institution for the transmission of Tory values in the British colonies was recognized and stolidly defended by Upper Canadian elites who themselves used the Church as their central weapon against any challenge to the Tory state from the American Republic or from internal dissent. Indeed, in the wake of the American Revolution, which many in Britain attributed to the lack of royal control over the colonial assemblies, the *Constitutional Act* of 1791 was deliberately designed by British authorities formally to enunciate a theory of imperial sovereignty.⁶ The new colonial constitutions explicitly subordinated the North American colonies through the financial independence of the executive from the assembly, a power of reservation and veto in the hands of the governor, who was responsible to London, and the appointment of legislative and executive councillors by the home government. The Church of England was accorded a prominent place in this new imperial design by its formal recognition as the established church of Upper

4 On the notion of English society in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a "confessional state", see J. C. D. Clark, *English Society 1688–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

5 J. C. D. Clark, *The Language of Liberty, 1660–1832: Political Discourse and Social Dynamics in the Anglo-American World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 62–75.

6 See the discussion in J. G. A. Pocock, "Empire, State and Confederation: The War of American Independence as a Crisis in Multiple Monarchy", in John Robertson, ed., *A Union for Empire: Political Thought and the British Union of 1707* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 318–348, which argues that, prior to the American Revolution, the British "Empire" lacked any precise definition of the legal relationship of the colonies to the mother country and was thus unable to accommodate or resolve colonial demands for greater autonomy. Nor could the American colonists themselves advance any arguments for reform other than separation.

Canada, the appointment of colonial bishops, and a steady revenue through a system of land grants known as the “Clergy Reserves”. These measures recognized the political role of the Anglican Church in promoting loyalty to the imperial connection. Between 1791 and 1853, the bond between church establishment and the colonial state was regarded by the home authorities as integral to the task of empire-building in North America, and British policy-makers, both Whig and Tory, fought stoutly to limit the rights of colonial assemblies to legislate a local solution to the question of church establishment.⁷ This style of governance created a political climate such that Upper Canadian critics of Tory elites were in turn compelled to utilize religion as the fundamental axiom of political disputation, in which arcane disputes about church polity were understood to be explicitly about the form of government and the relationship of the colony to the mother country.

Although dissenting Protestantism became the vehicle for expressing a democratic critique of Toryism, within each Protestant group there existed a slightly different matrix in which democratic values and popular religion intersected, and this in turn was largely determined by ethnic difference. Thus, while the New Light Baptists and Methodists conceived the idea of democratic rights in terms of the individual freedom and independence conferred upon them by the emotional experience of the New Birth, as George Rawlyk and Nathan O. Hatch have argued,⁸ the popular Calvinism of Scottish Presbyterian Seceders underscored constitutional traditions and conceived of independence not in terms of individual spirituality or the ecstatic piety of mass revivalism, but in terms of a communal identity of Presbyterian purity which evoked the closely knit early modern Scottish village life, dominated by family prayer, the religious practices of the local church congregation, and the celebration of the sacramental communion.⁹ Scottish popular piety rested on a “whig-presbyterian” civic humanism which emphasized from ancient times the unbroken maintenance of a democratic church constitution in the face of English and royalist attempts to impose an episcopal hierarchy. In opposition to Anglican doctrines of a unitary, impe-

7 Judith Fingard, *The Anglican Design in Loyalist Nova Scotia, 1783–1816* (London: SPCK, 1972), pp. vii, 1–3; Curtis Fahey, *In His Name: The Anglican Experience in Upper Canada, 1791–1854* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1991); John S. Moir, *Church and State in Canada West: Three Studies in the Relation of Denominationalism and Nationalism, 1841–1867* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959).

8 G. A. Rawlyk, *The Canada Fire: Radical Evangelicalism in British North America, 1775–1812* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994); Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 4–10.

9 For the emphasis of this “people’s Calvinism” on historical and theological tradition, see Mark A. Noll, “Revival, Enlightenment, Civic Humanism and the Evolution of Calvinism in Scotland and America, 1735–1843”, in George A. Rawlyk and Mark Noll, eds., *Amazing Grace: Evangelicalism in Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994), pp. 75, 95, 101. For the place of the sacramental communion in Scottish popular religion, see Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scottish Communion and American Revivals in the Early Modern Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

rial sovereignty based upon hierarchies of king and bishop, Seceder Presbyterianism counterposed a democratic concept of local sovereignty, based upon the right of the congregation, frequently led by small landowners and prosperous tenants, to elect ministers. That this popular political theology united Scottish communities on both sides of the Atlantic was forcefully expressed by Robert Wallace, a young Upper Canadian clergyman of Irish Seceder origin. "It is evident", he declared, "from history, from the admission of some of the most evident divines ... and from the word of God, that ministers were chosen by the suffrages of the people, and that they were called by a congregation."¹⁰ For many ordinary Scottish believers, therefore, the church was perceived as the most important institutional force in the Presbyterian religious struggle against episcopacy. For Scottish common folk, Seceder Presbyterianism's defence of democratic local religious rights thus epitomized the dogged attempt to maintain the national independence of Scotland against English encroachment.

The growth of popular Presbyterianism as the crucible of Scottish nationalism was the product of changes that occurred in the years between 1730 and the French Revolution. In the latter decades of the eighteenth century, the landed classes of Scotland and a leading section of the Established Church, the "Moderates", abandoned their traditional role as the guardians of distinct Scottish institutions and religious practices. Haunted by the seventeenth-century failure of their nation to achieve a stable and prosperous civil or religious polity, they preferred to see their destiny as bound up with a larger "British" nation which had conferred upon the barbarous society of Scotland the benefits and social values of wealth, politeness, and humane learning.¹¹ The combined strength of these elites and the increasing economic and social integration of English and Scottish societies ensured that Scotland would not experience a political revolution. However, many sections of Scottish society,

10 United Church Archives [hereafter UCA], Rev. Robert Wallace Papers, 86.178C, File 2, "Quotidiana or Common Place Book, 1841-1844", "Presbyterianism - Extracts from defence of it by Irish ministers of the Synod of Ulster", July 11, 1842. See also UCA, Rev. William Fraser Papers, 86.109C/TR, File 1, "Diary, 1834-35", enclosures of copies of "Charles I and II. Parl. 2 Sess. 2, Act 39, Act Abolishing the patronage of Kirks" and "Assembly at Edinburgh 4 Aug. 1649, Sess. 40, Directing for Election of Ministers". For the "democratic" Seceder congregational practices in the early eighteenth century, see Ned C. Landsman, *Scotland and its First American Colony, 1683-1765* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 39, 44, 57-61.

11 For the increasing integration of Scottish and English elites in the eighteenth century, and the forging of a common "British" identity at these upper levels of society, see Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (London: Pimlico, 1992), pp. 117-145. The identification of the "Moderate" party in the Church of Scotland with "Britishness" has been treated in the fine study by Richard Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985). For the attempt of "Moderate" intellectuals like Principal William Robertson and David Hume to dispense with much of the Scottish past in the name of prosperity and politeness, see Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity, 1689-c.1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 97-98, 193.

particularly small-town and rural clergy, tenants, small farmers, artisans, and rising professionals, resisted this programme of anglicization. In the absence of an independent Scottish parliament, the focal point of their struggle against the aristocracy was the church, and the theological language and symbols drawn from Scotland's seventeenth-century religious past were frequently drawn upon to arouse individual emotion and group cohesion. Of all these symbols, the most potent was the National Covenant of 1638. This document, drawn up by Scottish nobles and radical Presbyterian clergy, took the form of a pledge to resist royal attempts to impose episcopal government and ritualistic innovation upon the independent Church of Scotland. Though not democratic in the modern sense, the Covenant yoked Calvinist "federal theology", with its idea of a contract between humans and God, to enthusiastic millenarian notions aimed at enlisting the entire Scottish people under the rubric of an all-embracing, perpetual dedication to God. These Covenanters built upon an older Scottish tradition of "radical constitutionalism" first propounded by the sixteenth-century humanist George Buchanan. This emphasized elective kingship and thus articulated a formidable critique of Anglican conceptions of divine-right monarchy and non-resistance. In the hands of radical Presbyterians, Buchanan's doctrine of a constitutional contract between rulers and subjects, by conferring upon the people the right to remove a monarch who had broken the "contract", asserted a doctrine of popular sovereignty. The Covenanters attacked the Anglican doctrines of royal absolutism and the identification of church and state by closely circumscribing the king's headship of the church. In attempting to halt the efforts of the crown to impose English values and institutions on their society, the Covenanters redefined a peculiarly Scottish relationship between church and state that virtually equated a separate national existence with the independence and presbyterian structure of the Scottish Church.¹² In short, they asserted a dualism between "spiritual" and "temporal" kingdoms.¹³

12 For the "federal" ideas of the Covenanters, see David Stevenson, "The Early Covenanters and the Federal Union of Britain", in Roger A. Mason, ed., *Scotland and England, 1286–1815* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1987), pp. 163–181.

13 For the "popular" nature of the Covenanter movement, see Margaret Steele, "The Politick Christian: The Theological Background to the National Covenant", in J. Morrill, ed., *The Scottish National Covenant in its British Context* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), pp. 31–67. The "radical" views of the early Covenanters have been explored in Ian Michael Smart, "The Political Ideas of the Scottish Covenanters, 1638–1688", *History of Political Thought*, vol. 1, no. 2 (June 1980), pp. 167–193. For the republican constitutional theories of George Buchanan and their usefulness to radical Presbyterians, see Arthur H. Williamson, *Scottish National Consciousness in the Age of James VI: The Apocalypse, the Union and the Shaping of Scotland's Public Culture* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1979), pp. 109–110; Roger A. Mason, "George Buchanan, James VI, and the Presbyterians", in Roger A. Mason, ed., *Scots and Britons: Scottish Political Thought and the Union of 1603* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 112–137. The very different "English" notions of monarchy and church establishment, which rejected contractarianism and popular sovereignty, have been superbly explored by Clark, *English Society 1688–1832*.

By the turn of the nineteenth century, Scotland already had a long history of expressing political dissent through theology and ecclesiastical institutions. Despite the defeat of the Covenanters by the royalists and the absorption of many clergymen back into the Church of Scotland, the tradition and memories of the National Covenant survived into the eighteenth century, forming the ideological anchor of a plebeian presbyterian culture among a substantial section of Scottish peasants and skilled tradesmen in the south-western Lowlands. Among the common people, classics of the Covenanter movement such as Samuel Henderson's *Lex Rex* of 1644, the regicidal tract *A Hind Let Loose*, and Thomas Boston's warmly evangelical *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, a popular text of Calvinist divinity that downplayed the harshness of predestination in favour of the gospel's free offer of salvation, continued to circulate despite official prohibition.¹⁴ This Calvinist democratic traditionalism was founded not upon mass displays of emotion, but upon a whig-presbyterian historical consciousness, a reading of Scotland's past that asserted the nation's independence from England, emphasized popular sovereignty and resistance to monarchical pretensions, and proclaimed the ancient roots, purity, and superiority of Scotland's more democratic church polity over that of England, which was founded upon episcopal hierarchy and subordination to divine-right monarchy.¹⁵ This brand of civic humanism differed from both its English and American counterparts because it emphasized not the preservation of an ancient "mixed government" from corruption, but the unbroken purity of an ecclesiastical polity.

Although the common people were barred from the more obvious forms of political participation, throughout the eighteenth century this popular presbyterianism provided the language and institutional means by which the social tensions inflamed by the "improvement" of the eighteenth century were given overt expression. The "democratic" and "national" aspirations of tradesmen, small landowners, and tenant farmers focused on contesting control of the parish church and specifically on the right of the people to select a minister independently of the wishes of royal and aristocratic patrons.¹⁶ This

14 For the continued popular affection for these classics, see John Brims, "The Covenanting Tradition and Scottish Radicalism in the 1790s", in Terry Brotherstone, ed., *Covenant, Charter and Party: Traditions of Revolt and Protest in Modern Scottish History* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1989), pp. 50–51; Arthur Fawcett, *The Cambuslang Revival: The Scottish Evangelical Revival of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1971), pp. 18–19; Andrew L. Drummond and James Bulloch, *The Scottish Church 1688–1843* (Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press, 1973), pp. 30, 35–40, which notes significantly that Ebenezer Erskine, the founder of the Secession Church, was one of the prominent defenders of *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*. For the softening of predestination and election among radical Presbyterians, see Callum G. Brown, "Protest in the Pews: Interpreting Presbyterianism and Society in Fracture During the Scottish Economic Revolution", in Thomas Devine, ed., *Conflict and Stability in Scottish Society, 1700–1850* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1990), pp. 85–87.

15 For the "whig-presbyterian" view of Scottish history and its opposition to the "sociological whiggism" of the Moderates, see Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past*, pp. 18–19, 22–23, 193, 197–198.

16 For the "political" character of these struggles over the polity of the local parish church, see Brown, "Protest in the Pews", pp. 83–104; R. A. Houston, " 'Bustling Artisans': Church Patronage at South Leith in the 1740s & 1750s", *Albion*, vol. 26, no. 1 (Spring 1994), pp. 55–57.

popular aspect of the Covenanter heritage found its institutional expression in the Secession Church founded in 1734 out of the opposition of a number of congregations to the attempt by the aristocracy and its clerical allies to assert control of the nomination of parish ministers.¹⁷ By the early nineteenth century, this church comprised a substantial and vocal minority of the population of the Lowlands.¹⁸ This democratic religious movement flourished among the very social groups experiencing the impact of the agricultural and industrial changes associated with the commercial expansion of Scotland. For the handloom weavers, who formed the backbone of Seceder congregations in many towns and villages, the daily experience of economic uncertainty in this violently fluctuating trade reinforced the warm piety of popular Calvinism as well as enjoining a rigid ethic of personal conduct and self-control as a way of expressing their discontent with the deleterious effects of prosperity on the morals of the individual and the community. In this crucial period of industrialization the modern values of the new political economy, self-discipline, self-improvement, and moral rectitude, were increasingly linked with evangelicalism and ironically were promoted by those evangelical groups that retained the strongest allegiance to the traditions of seventeenth-century popular theology.¹⁹

Between 1730 and 1830, Covenanter Calvinism was deployed by the emergent middle classes and skilled tradesmen as a critique of the manners and morals of the aristocracy and their intellectual henchmen, the Moderate clergy. Thus, in the hands of radical clergymen like Archibald Bruce and George Lawson, who openly sympathized with movements of parliamentary reform during the era of the French Revolution, it became more than the assertion of national independence, but was radicalized. Bruce was a ruthless satirist of the hypocrisy of the established church, and he continued to preach a modernized Covenanter doctrine of popular sovereignty. He insisted that loyalty to the monarchy extended only to the temporal sphere. He particularly excoriated the efforts of the nobility and Moderate clergy to assimilate Scottish culture and institutions in a wider “British” identity, accusing them of

17 For the social strength, persistence, and links between the Covenanter ethos and the Secession Church, see V. G. Kiernan, “A Banner with a Strange Device: The Later Covenanters”, in Brothstone, ed., *Covenant, Charter, and Party*, pp. 25–49; Callum G. Brown, *The Social History of Religion in Scotland since 1730* (London and New York: Methuen, 1987), pp. 26–27.

18 For the social strength, persistence, and transformation of the Covenanter ethos in the period 1660–1730, see Kiernan, “A Banner with a Strange Device”; Brown, *The Social History of Religion in Scotland*, pp. 26–27; Smart, “The Political Ideas of the Scottish Covenanters”, pp. 184–193.

19 This irony has been observed by Mark Noll in “Revival, Enlightenment, Civic Humanism, and the Evolution of Calvinism”, p. 101. For the “modernity” in outlook of the “Popular” or “Evangelical” party in the Church of Scotland, see Ned C. Landsman, “Witherspoon and the Problem of Provincial Identity in Scottish evangelical Culture”, in Richard B. Sher and Jeffrey R. Smitten, eds., *Scotland and America in the Age of the Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), pp. 30, 40–41, and “Presbyterians and Provincial Society: The Evangelical Enlightenment in the West of Scotland, 1740–1775”, in John Dwyer and Richard B. Sher, eds., *Sociability and Society in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: The Mercat Press, 1993), pp. 194–209.

abandoning the Scottish cause. For Bruce, then, the struggle for national independence, liberty, and reform rested with the new middle and lower classes.²⁰ Despite government efforts to tarnish the Seceders by linking them with French revolutionary republicanism, Seceder churches grew rapidly in the early nineteenth century, and by the mid-1820s 32 per cent of the population of the Lowlands belonged either to the Secession or to the Independent Scottish Congregational or Baptist churches. In 1829 the growing strength and confidence of this popular religious movement was manifested when the Seceders overtly demanded religious voluntarism through the disestablishment of the national church.²¹

While in Scotland the Covenanter ideology remained on the fringes of the established church, in Upper Canada its influence was predominant in Scottish settlements largely because the evangelical activism of the Seceders gave them an early lead in the field of foreign missions. Until 1829 Seceder clergy were the mainstay of Presbyterian congregations in Upper and Lower Canada, supplying 12 of the 18 active ministers. Even when the Church of Scotland threw its resources behind Canadian missions, the mission committees were led by evangelicals who sent out clergymen drawn exclusively from the ranks of the Evangelical party and who were sympathetic to the doctrines of civil and religious liberty advanced by the Secession Church.²² More tellingly, the bulk of the immigration from Scotland came from those very geographical areas and social groups where the tenets of radical presbyterianism had struck their deepest roots. As Rev. William Proudfoot, the Seceder missionary at London, Upper Canada, observed, "The majority of people here are from the working classes of the old country, the ploughmen or weavers or blacksmiths or tailors they were in the old country before they became Canadian lairds, and they still retain the morality of the class of society they belonged to."²³

The career of Rev. William Bell, who ministered to the Scottish congregation at Perth, in the Ottawa Valley, illustrated the tenacious hold of the Seceder brand of popular presbyterianism. Born near Glasgow, Bell was the

20 Brims, "The Covenanting Tradition", pp. 53–55; Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past*, pp. 200–201.

21 Brown, *The Social History of Religion in Scotland*, pp. 31–36. For an analysis of the role of Seceders and other dissenting Protestants in the voluntarist campaign of the 1830s in Scotland, see Stewart J. Brown, "Religion and the Rise of Liberalism: The First Disestablishment Campaign in Scotland, 1829–1843", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 48, no. 4 (October 1997), pp. 682–704.

22 John S. Moir, *Enduring Witness: A History of the Presbyterian Church in Canada* (Toronto: Presbyterian Publications, 1976), pp. 80–84. For the growing affinities between the Seceders and the "Evangelical" party within the Church of Scotland, see Emma Vincent, "The Responses of Scottish Churchmen to the French Revolution, 1789–1802", *Scottish Historical Review*, vol. 73, no. 2 (October 1994), pp. 202–203; T. C. Smout, *A Century of the Scottish People, 1830–1950* (London: Collins, 1986), pp. 184–185. It is a serious gap in the historiography of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Scotland that there exists no modern published monograph on either the "Popular" party or the Seceders, comparable to the veritable industry that surrounds the Moderates.

23 University of Western Ontario [hereafter UWO], "Diary of Rev. William Proudfoot", November 9, 1833.

son of a respectable joiner and house carpenter who, despite membership in the established church, was a close friend of local Seceder clergymen. William was baptized by Rev. William Carr, a minister of the Relief Church, a small offshoot of the Seceder movement which was strongly evangelical in doctrine, critical of the association between church and state, and more open in terms of membership.²⁴ As a boy, Bell imbibed the values of piety, education, and self-improvement typical of late eighteenth-century Scottish skilled tradesmen, which centred on regular attendance at the parish church and a weekly grilling by his father on the subject of the minister's sermon. He read extensively from the Bible and the contents of his father's small library, which included such religious and patriotic classics as *Satan's Invisible World Discovered*, *The Exploits of Sir William Wallace*, and the *History of Scotland*. This latter classic was written by the radical humanist George Buchanan, the tutor of James VI (later James I of England), and was the first to articulate a notion of dual sovereignty shared between monarchy and people.²⁵ The impress of Covenanter Calvinism on Bell's own personal spirituality was evident in his recollection that at age eleven he "experienced strong desire after a happiness which no earthly business or amusement could afford". After two years of unavailing struggle, he happened to hear a sermon preached by Rev. Mr. Hislop, which demonstrated to the adolescent Bell "the inefficacy of our own attempts to repent, without a reliance upon the repentance and grace of God". This revelation drove him "out of my refuge of lies, one after another, until I took refuge in Christ, as the only shelter from the storm, and covered [*sic*] from the rain of God's wrath". From that moment forth, Bell entered "into a personal covenant with God, devoting myself to him".²⁶ This spiritual bond was a powerful factor in his decision to become a minister. After fervent prayer to God for direction, he recalled that "from this time I banished all doubt from my mind. I received *my covenant* with God, and *devoted* myself to his service, in the gospel of his son."²⁷ What made Bell's conversion experience different from that of other evangelical groups such as the Methodists and New Lights was that, in a culture where presbyterianism was an expression of community political aspirations, the Covenanter tradition carried implications beyond the realm of personal piety. Although Bell's father was a member of the Church of Scotland, the young carpenter had always harboured reservations concerning aristocratic control of patronage, and, upon his marriage in 1802, he joined his fiancée, Mary Black, in the Seceder Church. Bell's objection to the Church of Scotland was not theological in origin; rather, his decision to become a

24 National Archives of Canada [hereafter NAC], MG 29 B15, Robert Bell Papers, vol. 49, file 20, "William Bell, Reminiscences, 1780–1817". For the Relief Church, see Drummond and Bulloch, *The Scottish Church*, p. 62.

25 NAC, Robert Bell Papers, "William Bell, Reminiscences, 1780–1817".

26 *Ibid.*

27 *Ibid.*, entry for 1806.

Seceder rested upon his opposition to the social and cultural values of the aristocracy. Individual piety was for him a sign of Scottish nationalism and more democratic social values.

Upon his return to Scotland from London in 1812, William Bell enrolled in the Seceder Divinity Hall at Selkirk where, under the principalship of the redoubtable George Lawson, students not only learned theology, but also kept alive ideals of civil and religious liberty which were imperilled during the Napoleonic Wars.²⁸ In Bell's case, the Seceder advocacy of popular liberty was given an anti-aristocratic, anti-establishment edge from his own experience as a schoolmaster on the island of Bute in 1811. Angry at Bell's success in luring pupils away from the parish school, the Church of Scotland minister and the local notables of Bute "began to persecute me by every means in their power, in order to drive me out of the place". "Future ages", Bell complained, "will scarcely credit the arbitrary rule at this time exercised by the clergy of the established church."²⁹ Bell's conviction that the maintenance of a pure presbyterian church polity was the guardian of the national liberty of Scotland against the anglicizing ambitions of the aristocracy was evident in his unfinished manuscript, "History of the Church of Scotland". With a ringing endorsement of the doctrines of popular sovereignty and nationalism expressed in the humanist histories of George Buchanan, Bell declared that a study of the Scottish struggle for the Reformed faith "may have the effect of stimulating us to the same sturdy independence by which our fathers withstood the power of Rome till long after all Europe besides had sunk under it & in a later age completely foiled the domineering attempts of English episcopacy to lord it over".³⁰ However, a pure faith and national independence were inseparable from the piety and virtue of the common people. "The gospel", he stated, "does not in general lay hold in the first instance, on the great or the mighty or the noble of this world. It most frequently works its way upwards from the humble classes of society."³¹

For Seceder clergymen like William Bell, emigration to Upper Canada was inspired by an evangelical sense of mission and was interpreted within a Covenanter lexicon that placed to the fore the aspirations of Scottish small farmers and tradesmen for personal independence from the burdens imposed by the aristocracy. Viewed in this way, Upper Canada was a "land of freedom from tithes and tax-gatherers" where, through hard work and perseverance, "the prospect of independence, and a provision for their families, will sweeten all their toils". However, for radical Presbyterians, the assertion of personal independence was inseparable from a wider commitment to a democratic vision that bound together resistance to aristocracy, the defence of national religious traditions, and popular sovereignty in the political realm.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, entry for 1812.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, entry for 1811.

³⁰ NAC, Robert Bell Papers, vol. 49, file 26, William Bell "History of the Church of Scotland", n.d.

³¹ *Ibid.*

In contrast to Scotland, where the common people were barred from the political franchise, Upper Canada offered emigrants the additional “felicity of voting for a representative in the provincial parliament”.³² But, even in the backwoods settlements of Upper Canada, these personal and civic values were increasingly challenged in the 1820s by the attempts of social, political, and religious elites to establish an ascendancy. As in Scotland, this clash of values between the Seceder culture of the skilled tradesman and small farmer and the manners and morals of the gentry centred around the issue of who would control the polity and practices of the local church. These tensions, however, involved far more than disconnected local issues or personal squabbles, for they ultimately centred on the Seceders’ opposition to episcopacy and their firm commitment to religious pluralism and disestablishment. It was precisely through opposition to the connection between church and state that the democratic culture of Upper Canada’s dissenting religious groups was focused and channelled into the political sphere and came to unify various political and religious groups around the overarching constitutional question of the Anglican establishment.

When in 1825 Andrew Bell, William Bell’s eldest son, was employed as a schoolmaster at Ancaster, Upper Canada, he attended a Church of England service at Barton Church and was forcibly struck by the stark contrast between his democratic presbyterian piety and the formality and hierarchy prevalent in episcopal churches. In a letter to his father, he described how the Anglican priest, Mr. Salmon, “a poor, silly, self-conceited, blundering, stammering thing”, could scarcely even read the service. The following week, the younger Bell again attended the Anglican service and heard Mr. Howe, “another good-for-nothing dandy” who

had a most affected look and irreverend manner. He preached from Psalm 3 and the sum and substance of his poor little discourse was that most unscriptural doctrine, that we should put our souls into God’s keeping from the fear of punishment. I very much fear that both he and the poor souls whom he pretends to lead will tumble into the ditch together. The performance of the whole *farce*, the reading of paternosters, liturgies, litanies, collects and the little sermon, including about five minutes he spent in looking for the place one time when he lost it by looking off his paper, scarcely took up three-quarters of an hour.³³

Seceders like Andrew Bell, accustomed to religious devotions centring on the familial affectionate sermon preached extemporaneously by the minister, were repelled by the practice prevalent in established churches of reading a prepared sermon, a practice that only reinforced the sense of social distinction between ministers and people. Reading from a text was a mark of prelacy, a vestige of

³² Rev. William Bell, *Hints to Emigrants* (Edinburgh, 1824), pp. 163–165.

³³ Archives of Ontario [hereafter AO], Bell Family Papers, letter from Rev. Andrew Bell (1803–1856) to Rev. William Bell, September 26, 1825.

“the Popish practices” swept away during the Reformation.³⁴ For those born into the culture of popular presbyterianism, aristocratic behaviour and an episcopal church polity were but the obverse and reverse of the same coin.

By the 1830s, a long popular tradition that viewed church establishment, aristocracy, and an episcopal polity as a single menace had turned many of the backwoods settlements of Upper Canada into querulous religious cockpits. Until the 1830s, Rev. William Bell’s diary was studded with his attempts to induce the military gentry, whom he blamed for administering the Perth settlement in “an arbitrary and tyrannical manner”, to enforce respect for the Sabbath and restrict horseracing and the sale and consumption of liquor.³⁵ This cannot be dismissed as simple middle-class prudery or social control. Bell’s views expressed the social convictions of the farmers and tradesmen of Scotland that their religion and morality were superior to those of the aristocracy. Thus Bell charged that gentry leaders like Hon. William Morris, a well-connected local Tory and member of the Assembly, lacked inner spiritual devotion. Morris “wished to enjoy the privileges of the church, though they neither submitted to its discipline, nor attended to the duties of religion”. What made Bell’s position more difficult was that these magistrates and officers consistently sought to undermine him with the government by alleging that the Secession churches “*were not sound in their political sentiments*”.³⁶ As the dispute between Bell and Morris illustrates, one’s position regarding church discipline was regarded as synonymous with one’s civic allegiance. Although Morris professed personal friendship to Bell, this powerful local magnate sought to exercise the privileges of a Scottish aristocrat by nominating a minister of the Church of Scotland and driving Bell from his church.³⁷ In addition to the allegations of political disloyalty, Morris and his associates employed the Orange Order to intimidate Bell’s congregation and, with the backing of the colony’s highest legal authorities, launched periodic lawsuits against him. In 1829 Bell’s attempt to reprove Sabbath-breaking found him the target of a lawsuit for libel launched by Mr. Stewart, a member of the Orange Order and publisher of the Perth newspaper. Backed by William Morris and two of the local magistrates, Stewart was assisted by a sympathetic jury, drawn almost entirely from his Orange brethren, and was

34 NAC, Robert Bell Papers, “Reminiscences of Rev. William Bell”, entry for 1835; AO, Bell Family Papers, Andrew Bell to William Bell, September 26, 1825. For other amusing incidents of the foibles of the Anglican and Kirk preachers who relied upon prepared texts, see NAC, Robert Bell Papers, “Reminiscences of Rev. William Bell”, entry for 1827; UWO, “Dairy of Rev. William Proudfoot”, entry for November 27, 1832. For the Covenanter belief that the extemporaneous sermon was a mark of presbyterian commitment and a symbol of resistance to anglicisation, see Steele, “‘The Politick Christian’”, p. 33. The religious innovations of Charles I had required Presbyterian preachers to abandon the practice of extemporaneous preaching and prayer.

35 NAC, Robert Bell Papers, “Reminiscences of Rev. William Bell”, entries for 1818, 1819, 1825, 1829; Bell, *Hints to Emigrants*, p. 80.

36 NAC, Robert Bell Papers, “Reminiscences of Rev. William Bell”, entry for 1821.

37 *Ibid.*, entry for 1829.

represented by no less a figure than Hon. Christopher Hagerman, the Solicitor-General of Upper Canada. Though a victory for Stewart, the trial did not succeed in silencing or financially embarrassing Bell, and in fact earned him much sympathy throughout the settlement.³⁸

The attempt by local aristocrats like Morris to curb Seceder ministers like William Bell was symptomatic of the growing polarization of Upper Canadian society over the constitutional relationship between church and state. In 1825 the Upper Canadian Assembly explicitly raised the problem of the status of the Anglican Church by resolving that the Clergy Reserves be secularized and appropriated for educational purposes. Sensing the rise of a new political self-consciousness among non-Anglican denominations in the 1820s, the powerful Anglican Archdeacon of Toronto, Rev. John Strachan, embarked on a crusade to defend the policy of establishment, pressing his claim for exclusive Church of England control of the Clergy Reserve lands and the recently chartered provincial university. Strachan believed, as did the British governing elite, that the British nation and constitution were founded upon the principle of social and political subordination. In also conceiving of the colony as an integral part of the British nation,³⁹ however, Strachan sought to replicate exactly the constitution of the mother country. The very cornerstone of recreating the British constitution overseas was the formal establishment of the Anglican Church, from which would naturally flow the correct deferential social and political values.

Historical discussion of the controversy between Anglican exclusivism and those religious groups favouring liberal voluntarism has usually focused on the celebrated 1827 debate between Archdeacon John Strachan and the young Methodist leader, Egerton Ryerson, and the political and social conflict has usually been interpreted as a by-product of the gulf between the rival cultures of Anglicanism and Methodism.⁴⁰ However, by the early 1830s, immigration had fractured Methodism between an American element reputed

38 *Ibid.* For other encounters with militant Orangeism, see entries for 1831; July 12 and December 4, 1827.

39 For this definition of Upper Canadian conservatism, see Gerald M. Craig, *Upper Canada: The Formative Years* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1963), pp. 109–110. For the “politicization” of the Clergy Reserves, see Grant, *A Profusion of Spires*. For the motives behind Strachan’s defence of Anglican privileges, see Fahey, *In His Name*, p. 123. Other historians of Upper Canada have similarly noted the pivotal nature of the 1820s in fostering political division. According to Jane Errington, by 1825 there existed a “court party” and a “people’s party”, differing over how the British constitution was to be applied to Upper Canada. See Errington, *The Lion, the Eagle, and Upper Canada*, pp. 114–118. In a study of the concept of “loyalty”, David Mills traced the elaboration of two rival concepts of loyalty, one stressing unquestioning adherence to the imperial connection, and the other being a broader, more accommodating concept which, while stressing loyalty to the British Crown, permitted individual dissent. See Mills, *The Idea of Loyalty in Upper Canada*, pp. 5–6. Both these studies of political ideology are marred by an essentially “modern” understanding of the term “British constitution”, which excludes consideration of religion and the position of the Church of England as the integral basis of loyalty, subordination, and the imperial-colonial relationship.

40 For an analysis of this debate, see Westfall, *Two Worlds*, chap. 2.

to be “disloyal” to the Crown and an English element quite prepared, in the interests of preserving the colonial tie, to accept the constitutional primacy and privileges of the Anglican establishment. Although Ryerson himself was personally hostile to church establishments, his views on politics and government were derived from the establishment tradition and owed a heavy debt to the Anglican apologetics of William Paley and William Blackstone, as well as to the writings of the Church of Scotland Moderate, Hugh Blair. Like Strachan and John Wesley, another High Tory, Ryerson accepted the divine origins of government and therefore maintained a high view of the monarchy and the royal prerogative in cementing the imperial connection. Consequently, Ryerson’s concept of a voluntarist society was not sustained by an oppositional tradition of civic humanism, and he was easily drawn towards the counter-revolutionary, “loyalist” implications of Anglican thought. Anxious to unite the two Methodist factions, and equally devoted to his own political advancement, Ryerson had converted to “Liberal-Toryism” by 1834, even downplaying his critique of church establishments to gain government assistance for Methodist missionary and educational projects.⁴¹

After 1830, when sections of Methodism had clearly broken with their radical republican origins, the mantle of religious and political dissent fell to Seceder Presbyterianism. In contrast to Methodism, which emphasized individual spiritual liberty, the Seceder critique of the establishment tradition was more hard-edged and directly political in its implications because of its insistence that an independent church polity was identical with popular liberty and national independence. Seceder clergy were consequently not pulled in a more conservative direction through a debt to English constitutional thinking. Through long historical experience of simultaneously defending a non-episcopal church polity and their nation’s independence from English encroachment, Upper Canadian Seceders were able to place political events in the colony within a framework of popular resistance to royal encroachment, articulating what was the most formidable critique of Toryism. It was a compelling democratic vision of a society founded upon religious liberty, rather than subordination, which entailed a radical revision of the relationship between monarchy and people, and consequently of the relationship of the colonial society to the mother country. Of equal significance, Seceders were able to repel Tory charges that they were disloyal republicans because their constitutional lan-

41 For Ryerson’s “moderate conservative” political stance, see Michael Gauvreau, “The Empire of Evangelicalism: Varieties of Common Sense in Scotland, Canada, and the United States”, in Mark Noll, David Bebbington, and G. A. Rawlyk, eds., *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700–1990* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 227–232. For the Methodist vacillations on the church-state question, see Grant, *A Profusion of Spires*, pp. 87–89. According to Goldwin French, Ryerson failed to develop the “radical implications” of his beliefs in civil and religious liberty. See Goldwin French, “Egerton Ryerson and the Methodist Model for Upper Canada”, in N. McDonald and A. Chaiton, eds., *Egerton Ryerson and his Times: Essays on the History of Education* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1978), p. 57.

guage was couched in a “British” radical idiom that stressed the reciprocal rights of Crown and People.⁴²

From the perspective of Covenanter Presbyterianism, John Strachan’s defence of exclusive Anglican privilege was a deliberate outrage to cherished ethnic religious and political memories. The equation between Toryism and attacks on Scottish ethnic nationalism which formed the core of Seceder ideology was made all the more pointed because of Strachan’s Scottish origins. Here was a blatant symbol of British and Anglican privilege once again infecting Scottish culture. In the minds of Seceder clergy, Scottish Episcopalianism was not only the church of the aristocracy, but was politically suspect because of its loyalty throughout the eighteenth century to the Stuart cause.⁴³ Thus, to these Scottish radicals, Strachan’s political manoeuvres were nothing more than a front aimed at furthering royal absolutism and restoring Roman Catholicism. Reading the politics of Upper Canada through the lens of Scottish history, Seceders were convinced that their Anglican opponent was simply a version of those traitorous anglophile clergymen who aimed at destroying the civil and religious liberty of Scotland through the imposition of an episcopal hierarchy, which was nothing more than the entering wedge of absolute monarchy. In this spirit in 1832 Rev. William Proudfoot, a recent Seceder immigrant, declared of Strachan’s political tracts, “I never witnessed so pure a specimen of bigotry. I must give the fellow a dressing. I will make him rue the day that he ever put pen to paper. His object is unquestionably to get Episcopacy established in Canada, and endowed too, and which if he do, he will be one of the greatest curses ever seen in the country.”⁴⁴

The opposition of Seceder clergymen to John Strachan’s programme to establish a confessional state in Upper Canada became the principal expression of their participation in the transatlantic cause of democratic reform. While still in England, William Bell recorded the day in 1810 that Sir Francis Burdett, the prominent constitutional reformer, “was committed to the Tower”, and in 1832 he enthusiastically welcomed the news of the passage

42 Scottish radicals thus resembled their English counterparts and differed from American and French republicans in seeking to anchor their democratic claims on historical precedent. See James A. Epstein, “The Constitutional Idiom: Radical Reasoning, Rhetoric, and Action in Early Nineteenth-Century England”, *Journal of Social History*, vol. 23, no. 2 (1990), pp. 553–569. For the use of the patriotic language and symbols of monarchy among British radicals, see Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation*, pp. 337–343.

43 For the pro-Catholicism and aristocratic social composition of the Scottish Episcopal Church, see Brown, *The Social History of Religion in Scotland*, pp. 49–50. Brown estimates that 86% of the high nobility and 66% of the landowning classes were Episcopalians.

44 UWO, “Diary of Rev. William Proudfoot”, entry for December 16, 1832. Like Bell’s, Proudfoot’s own social origins were humble, and he had thoroughly imbibed the connection between religious and political liberty from the theological class of George Lawson. See Stewart D. Gill, *The Reverend William Proudfoot and the United Secession Mission in Canada* (Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991), pp. 25–26. Proudfoot had previously attended the Lanark Grammar School and the University of Edinburgh before beginning his theological training in 1807.

of the Reform Bill.⁴⁵ William Proudfoot subscribed to the radical Reform newspaper, *The Colonial Advocate*, edited by a fellow radical Presbyterian, William Lyon Mackenzie, and warmly approved Mackenzie's advocacy of popular interests "in opposition to the selfish measures of the aristocracy", even though he expressed reservations over Mackenzie's propensity to make personal enemies through scurrilous attacks on his opponents.⁴⁶ Indeed, the Seceders' disparagement of episcopacy and church establishments was but the logical corollary to their conviction that maintaining the presbyterian polity of their church was fundamental to the cause of political democracy. On his first visit to the American Republic in May 1833, Proudfoot was forcefully struck by the contrast between the "life and spirit" prevailing under republicanism and the "habit of obedience" characteristic of European despotisms. Significantly, he directly traced these contrasting values to the rival systems of episcopacy and presbyterianism. As Proudfoot argued, in the United States, where episcopacy was weak and all churches were on an equal footing, "the common sense of the people goes before the government", and widespread education ensured that there was little need of "ruling", by which he meant the habit of deference and subordination. In contrast, he singled out the hierarchical church traditions of Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism as the main social and political support of despotic monarchy. "In all churches, where there is ruling", Proudfoot declared,

the people have little spirit in religious matters, the priesthood rule men for themselves. Hence Priestcraft and a most profitable craft it is. The ground on which Priestcraft rests is the same as that on which despotisms rest — Ignorance. The ends which governing churches and despotisms have, are the same, the lust of power and the lust of emolument. The way in which Priests and Despots aim to gain their ends viz: by reducing all to a uniform level. Despotism levels men's actions, Priests men's minds. In both minds grow shrivelled, in both everything great and good is repressed, the one destroys Patriotism, the other destroys Knowledge and Religion; the one counterfeits a love of country which he does not feel, the other degrades religion into a multitude of idle ceremonies....⁴⁷

Proudfoot's linking of episcopacy and monarchical absolutism demonstrated how, in Upper Canada, the Covenanter tradition fused the causes of presbyterianism, religious voluntarism, national independence, and popular sovereignty into a Seceder civic humanism.

The increasingly sharp political conflict between 1828 and 1837 in Upper Canada has generally been interpreted as a struggle pitting a monolith of

45 NAC, Robert Bell Papers, "Reminiscences of Rev. William Bell", entries for 1810; July 25, 1832.

46 UWO, "Diary of Rev. William Proudfoot", April 24, 1834; November 26, 1832.

47 *Ibid.*, entry for May 3, 1833.

loyal British elements and a small faction of disloyal “Republicans”. The latter have been identified almost exclusively with pro-American elements clustered around figures like William Lyon Mackenzie, while those ideologies that did not adopt a republican idiom have been generally subsumed in a moderate consensus of allegiance to the British Crown and Constitution.⁴⁸ The presence in British North America of strands of radical thought grounded in the popular Presbyterian religious culture of Scottish and Irish immigrants challenges and complicates any attempt to posit an Upper Canadian ideological polarization around the issue of “loyalty”. The continued vitality of ethnic religio-political allegiances, which equated a democratic church polity with resistance to the centralizing imperatives of the English monarchy, ensured that Seceder clergy would be vocal exponents of a cohesive “British” radical tradition in politics and religion. These memories of Presbyterian opposition to Anglican imperialism, in turn, would play a prominent part in shaping the constitutional reform movement in Upper Canada and the drift to rebellion in the 1830s.

Given the prevalence of arguments drawn from Scottish ecclesiastical history which explicitly linked resistance to episcopacy with independence from England, it was small wonder that many Scottish immigrants read their traditions of Presbyterian resistance to arbitrary power into the constitutional struggles of the 1830s. “[T]he grievances of the Canadian people in 1838”, declared the Irish Presbyterian Francis Hincks, “were very similar to those which induced the people of Great Britain to revolt in 1688.”⁴⁹ In 1836 the new governor, Sir Francis Bond Head, launched a virulently anti-Reform campaign, based on the sole issue of “loyalty” to the Crown and the British Constitution. While the use of the “loyalty” cry enabled Bond Head to break the grip of the Reform majority in the Assembly by building an alliance of High Tories, moderate conservatives, and Wesleyan Methodists like Egerton Ryerson, the traditions of radical constitutionalism prevalent among Scottish Seceders had effectively inoculated them against such appeals. Bell and Proudfoot were active anti-government spokesmen during the election, with the former playing a leading part in drumming up support among Scottish settlers for Malcolm Cameron, the Reform candidate. Despite the opposition of William Morris, Cameron was chaired in triumph, with “a very large specimen of the Scotch thistle”, recently picked from Bell’s garden, as his emblem.⁵⁰ At the western end of the province, John Talbot, the editor of the *St. Thomas Liberal*, beseeched William Proudfoot to contribute editorials

48 Errington, *The Lion, the Eagle, and Upper Canada*, pp. 97–99, argues that by the 1820s Tories sought to apply the “principles” of the British Constitution, while Reformers contended for the “image” of the British Constitution. See also Mills, *The Idea of Loyalty in Upper Canada*, pp. 5–7.

49 Sir Francis Hincks, KCMG, OB, *Reminiscences of his Public Life* (Montreal: William Drysdale, 1884), p. 37.

50 NAC, Robert Bell Papers, “Reminiscences of Rev. William Bell”, entry for June 1836.

and use his influence against the Anglican parson Benjamin Cronyn, who was stumping the London District on Bond Head's behalf.⁵¹

Read in light of the Covenanter tradition, however, the Tory victory signalled the renewal of the Anglican offensive to secure total control of the Clergy Reserves and the desire to become the dominant church. Seceders like Proudfoot viewed the passage of a bill waiving the requirement of new elections on the death of King William IV⁵² as little more than an abrogation of the colony's constitution and a conspiracy against popular liberty. For these Scots, Upper Canada had come to resemble Scotland in 1638, a situation which required a covenant to bind those who were prepared to resist episcopal encroachments and monarchical usurpation. In a letter to William Proudfoot written in April 1837, Rev. Thomas Christie, the Seceder minister of West Flamborough, Upper Canada, bemoaned what he saw as the growing strength of those elements that supported church establishment. "I am of opinion", Christie stated, "that we as a Church must soon let our way of thinking and acting be known through the breadth and length of the Canadas. We should have a form of petition drawn up ... and have petitions from all our Congregations and all those who choose to join with us to both houses on the voluntary principle or as it ... should be called the Bible principle. We must now speak as a body or in my opinion we will not act faithfully."⁵³ What Christie was recommending was a practice drawn from the Scottish past, a declaration, modelled on the Scottish National Covenant of 1638, that would enlist all those loyal to the cause of disestablishment behind a common statement of principles. Such a moral badge of identity was deemed necessary to resist the Tory ascendancy.

Grounded in theology and ethnic historical tradition, "British" constitutional doctrines of resistance to the Tory-Anglican confessional state enjoyed wide popular currency in the 1830s. The existence of these powerful ethnic traditions of political dissent compels a reassessment of the Rebellion of 1837, an event that has puzzled both "moderate conservative" and neo-Marxist historians. To the conservative school, committed to the monolithic "loyalty" of Upper Canadians, the Rebellions must be dismissed as the work of extreme elements or of "outside pressures" and characterized as an abject failure with no lasting influence on the society and culture of the colony.⁵⁴

51 AO, William Proudfoot Papers, MS 54, reel 2, John Talbot to Proudfoot, June 15, 1836; UWO, "Diary of Rev. William Proudfoot", entry for June 23, 1836.

52 AO, William Proudfoot Papers, MS 54, reel 1, Thomas Parkes, House of Assembly, to Proudfoot, January 14, 1837. For the Tory elections bill, see Greer, "1837-38: Rebellion Reconsidered", p. 11, which unfortunately does not examine how this measure would have been interpreted by the different religious communities of Upper Canada.

53 AO, William Proudfoot Papers, MS 54, reel 2, Thomas Christie to Proudfoot, April 12, 1837.

54 Craig, *Upper Canada*, p. 241. A recent summary of this "conservative" tendency can be found in Colin Read and Ronald J. Stagg, eds., *The Rebellion of 1837 in Upper Canada: A Collection of Documents* (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1985). The editors argue that the revolts were abject failures, and what role they did have in hastening responsible government lay solely in the fact that the violence discredited political extremists (pp. xcvi-xcix).

Likewise, those historians preoccupied with the economic roots of social tensions have been unable to link low social or income status firmly to participation in the Rebellion. Indeed, one recent study simply abandons the attempt at historical explanation by pleading “rapidly changing circumstances” and the seismic shockwaves of the larger rebellion in Lower Canada as sufficient to account for the Upper Canadian phenomenon.⁵⁵

However, the one feature that divided rebel and “loyalist” in 1837 was ideological, and centred around the tendency of rebels to belong to dissenting religious groups, particularly those like the Baptists and Seceder Presbyterians who had a long tradition of theological and constitutional opposition to Anglo-Toryism.⁵⁶ Viewed in this light, the Rebellion was not simply an American-style republican movement external to the “conservative” character of Upper Canada, nor can it be summed up as the political expression of immediate socio-economic grievances. The presence of many religious dissenters in the ranks of the rebels formed an element of ideological continuity between the Rebellions and the broader “constitutional reform” movement, which based its claim to greater colonial sovereignty on the principle of religious voluntarism. By tying rebellion ideology almost wholly to W. L. Mackenzie and his immediate followers, historians have concluded that all radical political viewpoints were eradicated from the political arena of Upper Canada. This undue emphasis upon the discontinuity between pre-rebellion radicalism and post-rebellion reformers has enabled those defenders of moderate conservatism to portray later movements for responsible government as cleansed of radical impurities.⁵⁷ Because hostility to the Anglican Church establishment was one of the most frequently cited grievances among political and social reformers in Upper Canada in the 1830s,⁵⁸ there was thus no

55 Greer, “1837–38: Rebellion Reconsidered”, pp. 6, 17–18. For the absence of linkage between lower socio-economic status and the propensity to rebel, see Colin Read, *The Rising in Western Upper Canada 1837–8: The Duncombe Revolt and After* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982); Douglas McCalla, *Planting the Province: The Economic History of Ontario, 1784–1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993).

56 Read and Stagg, eds., *The Rebellion of 1837*, pp. lvi–lvii. Read, *The Rising in Western Upper Canada*, pp. 178–189, argues that few Scots were among Charles Duncombe’s rebels, most of whom were either of American origin or native-born Upper Canadians. However, Read observes that the government was not confident of Scottish loyalty, as some Scots in other areas of the province, particularly in Halton, assisted William Lyon Mackenzie’s assault on Toronto. Indeed, the Scottish propensity for radicalism made them rebels and accomplices in the eyes of loyalists, with Mackenzie’s uprising labelled a “Scotch Rebellion”. The Scots’ non-participation cannot be taken as an index of conservatism, as historians like Read insist upon the haphazard and disorganized nature of the rebel attempts and also that the imputation of rebellion damaged Seceder congregations outside the areas of the immediate uprising (Read, *The Rising in Western Upper Canada*, p. 195).

57 See Mills, *The Idea of Loyalty in Upper Canada*, p. 128, for the eradication of both “High Tory” and radical alternatives during the aftermath of the Rebellion. A similar excision of radicalism lies at the basis of J. M. S. Careless’s influential *Brown of the Globe, vol. 1: The Voice of Upper Canada*.

58 It was hardly coincidental that the rebel leader, William Lyon Mackenzie, drafted a proposed constitution for the “Republic of Upper Canada” of which the first article disestablished the Church of England and based the state on religious freedom and equality of all denominations. See Read and Stagg, eds., *The Rebellion of 1837 in Upper Canada*.

sharp cleavage between the rebels and those reformers who claimed impeccably “loyal” credentials. Greater attention to the religious underpinnings of political radicalism would thus direct historians to place the Upper Canadian Rebellion not in the context of contemporary uprisings like the Indian Mutiny or the Polish Revolution,⁵⁹ but within an older framework supplied by a long tradition of popular resistance within the British Isles to the royal prerogative and the established church, a struggle sanctified by theology and ecclesiastical history.⁶⁰

That religious dissent provided a bridge between “constitutional” and “radical” reform was demonstrated by the activities of Seceder clergymen during the Rebellion. Rev. William Smart of Brockville was quick to dissociate the Rebellion from any imputation of rebel conspiracy, and he offered an alternative interpretation which exonerated the radical reformers and placed responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the Tory regime. Smart blamed the violence on religious grievances centred on exclusive Anglican claims to church establishment and on “the foolish tenacity of the Government not to yield, & stubbornly refusing, & resisting the reforms demanded by the state of the country & the spirit of the age”.⁶¹ At Perth, William Bell regarded the loyalist military preparations as a meaningless distraction, especially at the height of his congregation’s communion season, even though his son was appointed ensign of the local volunteers raised to defend the settlement from rebel attacks. Of the subsequent Tory witch-hunt for traitors, Bell scathingly wrote that it “proceed[ed] from nothing but malice”.⁶²

The defeat of the rebels certainly did nothing to move these clergymen in the direction of greater “loyalism”. Government reprisals in 1837–1838 often targeted Seceder congregations, which had long been viewed by local Tory elites as politically unreliable. In Brockville, all Seceders were lumped in with rebels, as British troops simply took possession of William Smart’s church and used it as a barracks. For the next year, much of Smart’s energy was devoted to persuading the authorities that they had been given exaggerated accounts of public disaffection. He was frequently called upon to testify to the firm allegiance of individual members of his congregation who found themselves victimized by an Orange-Tory vigilante campaign orchestrated

59 The lack of attention to the religious basis of political dissent has recently led Allan Greer to a rather tortuous exercise in this type of comparative history. See Greer, “1837–38: Rebellion Reconsidered”.

60 This would include the Scottish national religio-political struggles of the Reformation, the Covenants of 1638 and the period 1678–1679, the English Civil War, the Protestant resistance to James II in 1685–1688, the American Revolution, and the Irish Rebellion of 1798. See the recent argument advanced by J. C. D. Clark in *The Language of Liberty*, which similarly places the American Revolution in an older pattern of dissenting Protestant religious struggle against ecclesiastical tyranny.

61 UCA, Rev. William Smart Papers, 86.205C, box 1, file 1, “Biography 1811–1849”.

62 NAC, Robert Bell Papers, “Reminiscences of Rev. William Bell”, entry for December 7, 1837; AO, Bell Family Papers, file A1, “Family Correspondence, 1827–1979”, Rev. Andrew Bell to William Bell, January 16, 1838.

by Hon. William Morris and his cronies.⁶³ Although he received a government salary, William Bell continued to oppose the activities of local Tories, those “despotic gentlemen” Hon. William Morris and Rev. Harris, the Anglican clergyman, branding their exclusion of him from the local Board of Education as “evidence of their arbitrary and tyrannical disposition”.⁶⁴ However, the Covenanter linking of church polity to political radicalism was even more powerfully displayed by the preaching and activities of William Proudfoot during the Rebellion. His church was reportedly the gathering point for rebels in the London area, and he was personally implicated by the fact that many members of his congregation fought on the rebel side and by his own unwillingness to advocate passive obedience to an arbitrary government. Proudfoot’s political sympathies were made clear in 1841, when he led a campaign to lobby Lord Sydenham, the new governor, for a general amnesty for the rebels.⁶⁵

The prominence of Seceder Presbyterians in the reform movement of the 1830s not only necessitates a rethinking of the relationship between radical religious traditions and the events of the Rebellion of 1837, but also dictates a rethinking of reformist ideologies such as “Responsible Government”, which so divided Upper Canada in the 1830s. Because of their preoccupation with uncovering a “Canadian” political tradition as distinctive as possible from that of the United States, many historians have been wont to emphasize above all the power of moderate conservatism as the *via media* between republicanism and Toryism. The politics of consensus has reduced Responsible Government to an impeccably “British” doctrine which, in its essential conservatism, amounted to little more than a criticism of petty administrative abuses or, more cynically, a political tactic designed to secure government posts.⁶⁶ Because Responsible Government became the established constitutional practice after 1848, its supposed “moderate” and “consensual” character has been extrapolated back in time. This procedure ignores the extent to which Responsible Government⁶⁷ was both a critique of the Tory establishment and the product of a radical strand of British political thought, in which religion was the key to explaining ideological dissent. What is generally forgotten is that the advocates of Responsible Government sought a radical goal through procedural reform: the sovereignty of the colonial legislature over matters of

63 UCA, Rev. William Smart Papers, “Biography 1811–1849”.

64 NAC, Robert Bell Papers, “Reminiscences of Rev. William Bell”, entry for July 1838.

65 AO, William Proudfoot Papers, MS 54, reel 2, Thomas Parkes, Kingston, to Proudfoot, July 17, 1841; Gill, *The Reverend William Proudfoot*, pp. 91–94, 177.

66 This is the burden of the argument advanced in the standard account of Upper Canadian society and politics. See Craig, *Upper Canada*, pp. 189–190, 194. According to Graeme Patterson, the conflict between Tories and Reformers in Upper Canada can be summed up as a struggle between rival conservative traditions. See Graeme Patterson, “Whiggery, Nationality, and the Upper Canadian Reform Tradition”, *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 56, no. 1 (March 1975), p. 44.

67 In this context, “Responsible Government” is understood to mean that the executive council, or “cabinet”, is drawn from and possesses the confidence of the majority of the assembly.

local concern, and a claim to independence and equality vis-à-vis the imperial parliament. By focusing on the narrow issue of “loyalty”, contemporary scholarship has obscured the fact that the origins of Responsible Government lay outside the canons of English constitutional thinking⁶⁸ and posed a far-reaching challenge to both “Whig” and “Tory” definitions of authority.

The origins of “Responsible Government” lay in the constitutional thought of Irish Whigs who recognized that English law did not account for their own independent parliament or for the peculiar status of the Crown in relation to Ireland. In attempting to affirm their independence, by 1800 these Irish politicians had evolved a theory of cabinet government and ministerial responsibility far in advance of what was currently practised at Westminster. Using notions of dual sovereignty, which balanced power between “Crown” and “People”, they argued that the colonial servants of the Crown were accountable not to the imperial parliament, but to the local assembly.⁶⁹ While scholars have long recognized that ideas of responsible government entered Upper Canada through Irish sources, principally through the agency of William Warren Baldwin and his son Robert, what remains obscure is why this issue moved out of elite legal circles and became the rallying-cry of a broader movement for democracy and political reform in the 1830s. Religious dissenting groups were the primary vehicle for the popularization of political ideas which originated among a relatively small faction of Reformers such as Robert Baldwin and John Rolph.

While the leaders of Upper Canadian Reform certainly spoke with an idiom derived from British parliamentary practice and the common law, the issue of local ministerial responsibility involved far more than changes in parliamentary procedure. If the colonial assembly was sovereign in all affairs pertaining to the colony, would not the majority be free to choose a more “democratic” type of polity based on separation of church and state, rather than the “confessional state” that Britain had sought to promote since 1791? Indeed, the links between responsible government, church disestablishment, and the democratization of Upper Canadian society were evident during this period. Reform spokesmen always coupled “Responsible Government” and “the Voluntary Principle” in speeches, tracts, and newspaper mastheads.⁷⁰

68 For the rejection of “Whig constitutionalism” by Upper Canadian Reformers like William Warren and Robert Baldwin, see Paul Romney, “From the Types Riot to the Rebellion: Elite Ideology, Anti-Legal Sentiment, and the Rule of Law in Upper Canada”, *Ontario History*, vol. 79, no. 2 (June 1987), pp. 113–114. Romney’s study is seminal in positing a conflict of legal, social, and political values between Tories and Reformers in Upper Canada, although it does not trace this disagreement to divergent notions of the relationship of church and state. For the Baldwins’ debt to the political thinking of the later Scottish Enlightenment, see Gauvreau, “The Empire of Evangelicalism”, p. 232.

69 For these eighteenth-century Irish notions of “responsible government”, see W. L. Morton, “The Local Executive in the British Empire, 1763–1828”, *English History Review*, vol. 78 (1963), pp. 436–457; Patterson, “Whiggery, Nationality, and the Upper Canadian Reform Tradition”, pp. 25–44.

70 For this link, see Hincks, *Reminiscences of his Public Life*, p. 22; “Opening Editorial”, *The Pilot* [Montreal], March 5, 1844. Francis Hincks, an Irish Presbyterian, was one of the leaders of the consti-

Here was a radical alternative to Tory ideas of imperial solidarity which not only rejected the principle of church establishment but in so doing sought to revise those doctrines of royal prerogative that subordinated both the individual to a divinely-ordained hierarchy and Upper Canada to the British state. However, what made this constitutional radicalism more appealing to many groups within Upper Canada was that it was couched in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century communal experience of Irish and Scottish Protestants. In their reverence for the past, and in their belief that church polity and theology were the guardians of personal and national liberty, these “British” ethnic historical-religious traditions employed a language markedly different from the individualism and rejection of historical precedent characteristic of early nineteenth-century American republicanism.⁷¹

There were clear affinities between the implications of the Irish Whig idea of ministerial responsibility and the theological politics of Seceder Presbyterianism. Men like Bell and Proudfoot recognized that the concept of Responsible Government grew not out of the conservative English culture of allegiance, but out of a contractarian theory of power-sharing between monarch and people, local assembly and imperial parliament, which could be incorporated into their own whig-presbyterian, radical and regicidal reading of Scottish history, in which sovereignty was divided between Crown and People and the king and an independent church polity. Significantly, this was the very theological basis of politics and government that had long been familiar in communities of Scottish and Irish Presbyterians, and frequently deployed to resist the religious and political encroachments of the Anglican church and the English monarchy.

That the essence of Responsible Government lay outside established English constitutional practices and traditions was best exemplified in Upper Canada by the Seceder clergy. As Rev. William Proudfoot explained in 1833, “there is no established religion in the country ... there is no act of Parliament for their doing so”.⁷² Seceder clergymen, well-versed in the arcane legal and historical controversies between presbyterianism and episcopacy, were quick

tutional Reform movement in the period between 1836 and 1854 and edited the Toronto *Examiner* and the Montreal *Pilot*. See also UCA, William Smart Papers, box 1, file 13, “Notes & Misc. Papers”, n.d., in which Smart cited “the improvement of Legislation & Government of the nations of the earth, especially in the adoption of the principle of self-government” as evidence of “an overruling hand” at work in modern history.

71 For the individualism and rejection of historical tradition prevalent among American “democratic” religious and political movements, see Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, pp. 4–10. By contrast, the British “radical” tradition sought to anchor its democratic claims on historical precedent. See Epstein, “The Constitutional Idiom”, pp. 553–569.

72 UWO, “Diary of Rev. William Proudfoot”, April 5, 1833. For a similar view, see NAC, Robert Bell Papers, “Reminiscences of Rev. William Bell”, Bell to Alexander Morton, June 8, 1819: “On the subject of religion, you have nothing to fear, liberty of conscience is enjoyed to its fullest extent. You will be called upon to support no religion but your own. In this province there is no religion established by law.”

to seize upon the fact that Anglican clergymen ordained in Upper Canada were not “recognized as Ministers of the English establishment & they would not be appointed to parishes, nor fill the pulpits of the English church establishment”.⁷³ Despite the provisions of the *Constitutional Act* of 1791, which seemed to create a church establishment, radical Presbyterians pointed to the fact that the Upper Canadian parliament, which they believed was fully sovereign in local matters, had never enacted any law in support of an established church. This reasoning articulated a rejection of one of the fundamental articles of the British Constitution, the notion of a consolidated empire founded upon a church establishment enjoying the same status and privileges in both England and the colonies. Central to the thought of both Whigs and Tories was the belief that the Anglican Church, both in England and in the colonies, legitimized the constitutional subordination of the colonies and the unitary sovereignty of Crown-in-Parliament, expressed through allegiance to the monarch as head of state and head of the established church.⁷⁴ However, the Seceder belief was based upon the understanding that Upper Canada had never possessed an established church. In asserting that the whole basis of social authority in the colony was different from that prevailing in England, men like Smart and Proudfoot were proclaiming a vision of Upper Canada in defence of ethnic pluralism, and especially the endurance and historicity of Scottish national culture. Upper Canada was a society founded not upon allegiance and subordination, but upon a moral contract between Crown and People guaranteeing liberty of conscience and religious freedom, as Scottish Presbyterians had long argued in the face of English political encroachments. This fact alone validated the claim of the Upper Canada legislature to sovereignty in matters of local concern, particularly the management of religious institutions. Seceder clergy drew upon the Scottish radical constitutional theory of the National Covenant to argue that this religious liberty and equality of all denominations underlay any claim to “responsibility in the government”. If Seceder congregations called their clergy through consent of the congregation, in practice a form of responsible government,⁷⁵ then by corollary the

73 UCA, William Smart Papers, “Diary 1811–1849”.

74 Clark, *The Language of Liberty*, pp. 63–67. According to Clark, Anglican notions of divine right posited a unitary conception of authority which not only buttressed the exclusivist claims of the Crown-in-Parliament over notions of fundamental law, but associated England’s imperial expansion with the destiny of the Anglican Church.

75 For the argument that the principle of localism in Canadian federalist ideas can be traced to the idea of congregational self-government in Presbyterian, Congregationalist, Baptist, and Methodist denominations, see Paul Romney, “From the Rule of Law to Responsible Government: Ontario Political Culture and the Origins of Canadian Statism”, *Canadian Historical Association Historical Papers* (1988), pp. 95–96. However, both establishment Presbyterians and Methodists were characterized by a far more centralized and authoritarian church polity than the Seceders. As well, the constitutional implications of Seceder political theology were more explicit than a principle of localism, but in fact offered a counter-argument to English constitutional thought, as well as a religious explanation and sanction for the idea of responsible government.

executive council in Upper Canada must be chosen by the legislative majority, which represented the consent of the citizenry. This parallel between church and civic polity explains why Seceders conceived of a responsible executive council as part of a “consuetudinary” or natural moral law, which overrode, in their estimation, any acts of the British Parliament.⁷⁶ Long the defender of a separate Scottish nation, in the Upper Canadian political environment, Seceder Presbyterianism was similarly deployed to fight against English exclusiveness, but, more importantly, this religion of dissent inextricably wedded concepts of colonial sovereignty and democratic control with Presbyterian church government. The Seceders thus offered a more legitimate, but no less radical, vision of government than American republicanism, because it was expressed within both a “British” and a religious idiom.

While Seceders believed in expressing a personal loyalty to the Crown as a symbol of the imperial tie, clergymen like William Bell were quick to condemn the immoral conduct of members of the royal family, and they rebuked as “arbitrary” those Crown-appointed local judges who attempted to lay down the principle that the king could not be sued by private citizens.⁷⁷ Therefore, men like Bell and Proudfoot advocated a system of “responsible government” which would preserve the imperial tie and loyalty to the Crown while formally recognizing the fact that colonial society was fundamentally distinct from England.⁷⁸ Indeed, Proudfoot went much further in asserting the “home rule” implications of Responsible Government, declaring that “the connexion of Canada with Britain is merely a question of time. The whole course of events ... has been towards a separation from the mother country.”⁷⁹ A monarchy shorn of many of its prerogatives and a federal, contractual division of powers between the colony and the mother country would entitle the Upper Canadian Assembly to independence in the management of her local affairs. This was derived not from any commitment to American-style republicanism or from any new definition of loyalty,⁸⁰ but from the application of the Covenanter argument that the political independence of Scotland flowed from the maintenance of a separate religious pol-

76 AO, William Proudfoot Papers, MS 54, reel 3, William Proudfoot, “Letter 3, for the Inquirer”, “article for the Inquirer which Parke would not insert because it was not enough laudatory of the Governor”, n.d.

77 NAC, Robert Bell Papers, entries for 1827, 1829, and 1831.

78 For the “dualism” of eighteenth-century Scottish attitudes, prevalent among both “Moderates” and radical Seceders, regarding membership in the British political community, see Smout, *A Century of the Scottish People*, pp. 237–238; Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past*, pp. 210–211; John D. Brims, “The Scottish ‘Jacobins’, Scottish Nationalism and the British Union”, in Mason, ed., *Scotland and England*, p. 255; John Robertson, “Andrew Fletcher’s Vision of Union”, in Mason, ed., *Scotland and England*, pp. 203–225.

79 AO, William Proudfoot Papers, MS 54, reel 2, Proudfoot to Rev. David Anderson, July 13, 1846; UWO, “Diary of Rev. William Proudfoot”, entry for January 1, 1844.

80 Mills, *The Idea of Loyalty in Upper Canada*, argues for the emergence of a less exclusive concept of loyalty in the 1830s, in which both Reformers and Tories had concurred by the late 1840s.

ity. In the same way, Seceders argued that Upper Canada was politically distinct from England because it possessed a separate religious constitution characterized by separation of church and state.⁸¹

The belief that the emergence of a moderate ideological socio-political consensus constitutes the key to Upper Canadian history rests ultimately on the interplay between Anglicanism and Methodism. These two forms of religious expression, it is averred, began as polar opposites, with the radicalism of Methodism becoming attenuated after 1830 as the two groups converged near the centre of the social and political spectrum.⁸² However, while Methodists were certainly suspicious of Anglican power, their view of the relationship between history and church polity contained no long-standing political critique that would distinguish them from the Anglicans, apart from a rather pragmatic question of resistance to exclusive church privilege. Presbyterianism, especially in the form articulated in Seceder congregations, possessed a tradition that immediately linked local religious control with constitutional opposition to English supremacy. Therefore, it was Seceder and later Free Church Presbyterianism, and not Methodism, that supplied the language and practices that enabled a new generation of Reformers like Peter and George Brown to make the question of religious voluntarism the key constitutional question between 1815 and 1854.⁸³ While the Methodists fought alongside radical Presbyterians to rid Upper Canada of Anglican Church establishment privileges, the Presbyterian conception of voluntarism also interwove religious and political democracy by affirming the right of the people directly to control church government and, by extension, the institutions of the state. In this way, the Presbyterian harnessing of church structure to Scottish ethnic nationalism was a much more radical expression of religious pluralism than was Methodism, whose emphasis on inner spiritual control did not imply local sovereignty in the way that the Covenanter traditions of opposition to English political domination did. Here, the element of Scottish nationalism that underwrote the radical Presbyterian ideology politicized religious dissent in Upper Canada.

The existence of several divergent strands of political radicalism anchored in dissenting religious cultures and practices serves further both to reinforce and to modify recent new directions in the socio-political history of Upper Canada. Like Carol Wilton's treatment of the petitioning movements and

81 In this respect, the problem for the Upper Canada Seceders echoed John Witherspoon's eighteenth-century struggle to reconcile loyalties both to Scotland and to America, which he resolved by harnessing the civic humanism and Covenanter notions of the Popular party to the cause of American independence. See Landsman, "Witherspoon and the Problem of Provincial Identity".

82 For the main statements of this interpretive trajectory, see Westfall, *Two Worlds*, especially chap. 2–4. Rawlyk, *The Canada Fire*, conclusion.

83 For the close connection between Covenanter theology and the political language and beliefs of Peter and George Brown, see Michael Gauvreau, "Reluctant Voluntaries: Peter and George Brown, the Scottish Disruption and the Politics of Church and State in Canada", *Journal of Religious History*, vol. 25, no. 2 (June 2001), pp. 134–157.

political unions that served as the way in which ordinary Upper Canadians participated in politics in an era before formal parties or more centralized electoral structures, this discussion urges greater attention to a terrain of social ideology and experience that lay outside the realm of what present-day historians would consider “political”, but which was viewed by contemporaries as seamlessly interwoven with politics. Following Jeffrey McNairn’s analysis of the evolving role of public opinion in defining colonial notions of what constituted the “British Constitution”, this analysis of Seceder religio-political ideologies also makes the case for the resumption of a serious dialogue between socio-religious ideas and social history. However, by asserting a close affinity between Scottish ethnic religious identity and reform-radical political ideology, it stands as a contrast to these two recent analyses, both of which largely discount religion as a serious factor conditioning both political practices and the substance of political argument.⁸⁴ Was religion, for Upper Canadians, as separable from identities of nationality, ethnicity, and ideology as Wilton asserts? If not, are there not grounds for reading the predisposition to petition and participate in political unions as elements derived from a series of dissenting religious allegiances and practices predating the nineteenth century? And if, as McNairn argues, Upper Canadians evolved a public sphere of rational discussion that became integral to constitutional ideology and practice, did this occur in this particular time and place according to a universal, modernist logic of the Enlightenment, and in spite of religion? For ordinary Upper Canadians, was public opinion experienced as a free-floating entity, or was it mediated through a series of more concrete, “pre-modern” personal religious beliefs and community associations that made both the British Constitution, and public opinion itself, highly contested notions in the early nineteenth century?

84 Wilton’s argument is somewhat contradictory on this point. While acknowledging that “religious factors loomed larger than previously suspected in the oppositionist politics of the 1820s and 1830s”, Wilton discounts the idea that religious dissent was the chief destabilizing force in Upper Canada, arguing instead that nationality, ethnicity, ideological convictions, and prudential calculations loomed larger (*Popular Politics and Political Culture*, pp. 228–229). While these strands can be clearly separated for present-day historians, early nineteenth-century Upper Canadians would have viewed nationality, ethnicity, and ideological convictions as inseparably interwoven with religion. McNairn argues that the key to the growth of a public sphere “was the waning of explicit and strictly denominational appeals in political debate in favour of secular or vaguely Judeo-Christian sentiments and idioms. ...Individuals’ participation in the public sphere may have been shaped by religion, but when talking to other Upper Canadians from competing traditions, they needed to translate their claims into other terms” (*The Capacity to Judge*, p. 15).