

# The "Erastianism" of John Strachan

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IN HIS RATHER WHIMSICAL BIOGRAPHY of William Lyon Mackenzie, Professor William Kilbourn referred to certain newspaper articles by Egerton Ryerson as "the most effective attack ever made upon the Erastian intentions of Archdeacon Strachan."<sup>1</sup> It was the word "Erastian" which struck an odd note, because in all the opposition to Strachan the gravamen of complaint seemed to be that if the Archdeacon's policies prevailed, the Church of England would control the State in Upper Canada, and not that, as in the case of Erastianism, the State would control the Church. That Strachan believed the State to have a certain responsibility towards the Church, and therefore some measure of control in religious affairs, it would be foolish to deny, but that he had "Erastian intentions"—that he wished the Church to be subordinate to the government or run as a sort of department of State—would, in our estimation, be a complete misreading of the evidence we have of his principles and activities.

Nearly twenty years ago, the late Professor George Brown wrote that "few important Canadians have more need of a competent and discerning biographer than Bishop Strachan who is generally regarded as the principal exponent of reactionary Anglican opinion,"<sup>2</sup> and obviously the need still exists. His long life and the position of importance which Strachan held in the political, educational, and religious life of Upper Canada would present his biographer with a formidable task, in which discernment of the character and principles of the subject, rather than literary competence, might prove to be the criterion of success. The stereotype of Strachan as a sort of Family Compact ogre, hindering the development of the country, dealing in corrupt government, and hostile to the activities of other religious bodies, will not stand up to the test of evidence, and it is heartening to note that modern scholars are taking a more rational and less emotional line in their assessment of this great Canadian.

Whether Strachan's aims be approved or rejected, they can be understood only in the light of the principles which he was attempting to enunciate. That he stood against the general current of opinion in his day is easy enough to demonstrate; it is less easy to show that the ideas of his opponents were the necessary corrective for the ills of society which were frequently laid to Strachan's charge. Here we are interested only in certain aspects of his religious activities—more particularly, in his idea of the proper relationship between Church and State, and in the question of whether he was an

<sup>1</sup>William Kilbourn, *The Firebrand* (Toronto: Clark Irwin, 1964), p. 91.

<sup>2</sup>George W. Brown, "The Formative Period of the Canadian Protestant Churches," in R. Flenley (ed.), *Essays in Canadian History* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1939), p. 368.

Erastian pure and simple, and if not, to what kind of Erastianism he felt able to commit himself.

It was to an undeveloped society that Strachan came at the end of 1799. The Constitutional Act of 1791 had set Upper Canada apart from Lower Canada with a basis of government which the first Lieutenant-Governor, John Graves Simcoe, called an "image and transcript" of the British constitution, but it was still not clear in 1799 what particular form the society would take, although some general lines were already discernible. The question whether it was wise in the Imperial Government to attempt to reproduce a little England in Upper Canada need not detain us, but the constitution of the colony contained a provision for the Church of England which Anglicans in Upper Canada believed to be an establishment of their church, so that when Strachan decided to take Orders in the Church of England, he became a clergyman of the Established Church, and his career followed almost as the night the day, given his character and ideas.

Strachan lived just long enough to see Canadian Confederation achieved, and while he might have doubted the propriety of some of the terms of that interprovincial pact, we can be sure that he would have been as resourceful and active as any of the Fathers in making confederation work. But confederation marked the end of the period in which Strachan had been a dominant figure, and perhaps the centennial year of our national history, which marks also the centenary of his death, is a good time to begin some reassessment of his life and work.

What we are interested in is Strachan's ideas on the need and propriety of a church establishment, and his attempts to make his ideas effective. Since the British Government intended the Church of England to be the official church of the colony, Strachan saw it as his duty to make that intention actual, and if in the course of his duty he should meet with opposition, he would use every constitutional means to strengthen and secure the position of the Church. The Anglicans could hardly have expected their claims to remain unchallenged for, as Ryerson was to point out later, an established church is only possible if the majority of the people belong to that church, and it is doubtful whether Anglicans were ever in a majority, although they were for a while the largest non-Roman group. In a frontier society with representative institutions, the singling out of a particular Christian body as the sole recipient of government bounty was bound to be questioned, but, although he was aware of this danger, Strachan pursued his course, determined to achieve for the Church of England what he believed the constitution provided.

## I

The major reason for separating Upper from Lower Canada in 1791 was the demand of the English-speaking colonists for the normal institutions of government and justice to which they were accustomed. There had been a considerable influx of United Empire Loyalists after the American colonies

obtained their independence, and their desire for local self-government was strong. The previous constitution of Canada, the Quebec Act of 1774, with its special provisions for the protection of the French, especially in civil law, was not acceptable to the Loyalists, but the British Government, while favourably disposed towards those who had suffered for their loyalty, wished also to strengthen those institutions of government which, it was thought, had contributed by their absence in the older colonies to the breakdown of Imperial control. One of those institutions which were given added support and prestige in the remaining British North American empire was the Church.

It is possible that the Constitutional Act would have contained certain sections dealing with the Church of England, regardless of the situation in America, because it was normal procedure at that time to include such matters in the charters of Crown colonies, but the more specific nature of the terms in the Canadian constitution owed something to the representations of Loyalist churchmen, who were convinced that, had the Imperial Government been more concerned to support the Church of England in America, the revolutionary war could have been avoided. One American writer states flatly: "It is indeed high time that we repossess the important historical truth that religion was a fundamental cause of the American Revolution."<sup>3</sup> No doubt opinions will differ on the importance of religion among the causes of that conflict, but there is evidence that Anglicans among the Loyalists pressed the government not to make the same mistake of neglecting the Church of England in the remaining colonies to the north. The Reverend Thomas Bradbury Chandler, recommended by the Loyalists for appointment as Bishop of Nova Scotia, remarked that, had Britain given the Church the support she needed in the colonies, by 1766 "a general submission in the Colonies to the Mother Country . . . might have been expected."<sup>4</sup> Charles Inglis, who became Bishop of Nova Scotia when Chandler declined, also argued the case for a colonial episcopate for many years before the Revolution, but without success. He hoped that the government would not have cause to regret their failure to appoint bishops, who would have been "so great a means of securing the Affections & Dependence of the Colonies, & firmly uniting them to the Mother Country."<sup>5</sup> This weighty political burden seems almost too heavy for a few bishops, but the sentiments expressed are indicative of the attitude of Loyalist clergymen on the place of the Church in matters of State. On the termination of the war, other Loyalists added their influence in London and played their part in securing the appointment of Inglis to Nova Scotia.

Three years later, when the new constitution of Canada was enacted, the Church of England received its own particular attention. William Pitt,

<sup>3</sup>Carl Bridenbaugh, *Mitre And Sceptre* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. xiv.

<sup>4</sup>John Wolfe Lydekker, *The Life and Letters of Charles Inglis* (London: S.P.C.K., 1936), p. 52.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 54.

Prime Minister of Britain at that time, declared that he wanted the Canadian constitution to be "as nearly analogous to the British Constitution as the case would permit,"<sup>6</sup> so that provision for the Church of England was to be expected. But the intention of the government was made clear during the debate on the Constitutional Act, when Pitt announced that he hoped to send a bishop to Canada, who would be a member of the Legislative Council "and by his rank and weight strengthen the established Church."<sup>7</sup> Not all his ministers were as sanguine as Pitt of the continued attachment of the colony to Britain. The Colonial Secretary, William Grenville, felt that the probable result of granting the colony a legislature would be its separation from the Mother Country,<sup>8</sup> but Pitt may have been more influenced by the opinions of such men as Simcoe, who advised the Archbishop of Canterbury that an episcopal establishment subject to the primacy of Great Britain was "absolutely necessary" in Upper Canada, "which is peculiarly situated in the midst of a variety of republics," so that "every establishment of Church and State which upholds distinctions of ranks and lessens the undue weight of democratic influence ought to be introduced."<sup>9</sup> Since Simcoe was willing to contribute £500 of his own salary towards the support of the bishop, his representations may have had some force. At any rate, when the Act was passed in 1791, sections 36-42 provided the land grant later known as the Clergy Reserves, and gave the governor power to create parishes and endow them with land and to appoint to the parishes clergymen of the Church of England.

It is against this background of Loyalist ideas and government action that Strachan's life and work have to be seen. It is not necessary here to prove that the Church of England was established; it is sufficient to state that the Anglicans believed their Church to be established, and that both the British and the colonial governments asserted unequivocally that it was established. In the Loyalist circles of the Kingston area, Strachan would have heard nothing else, and no doubt he received instruction in Loyalist notions of Church and State from the Reverend John Stuart while he read for Holy Orders under that clergyman. We should not be surprised, therefore, to find that Strachan's ideas of the place of the Church in the colony were not unlike those expressed by Charles Inglis and other former Americans.

Strachan believed that it was the duty of every state to provide for the religious instruction of its people and that therefore a church establishment was necessary to the state.<sup>10</sup> In the case of Upper Canada, a British colony, the Established Church could only be the Church of England, for the

<sup>6</sup>George Tomline, *Memoirs of William Pitt* (London: John Murray, 1821), Vol. II, p. 216.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 226.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Hilda Neatby, *Quebec: The Revolutionary Age, 1760-1791* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966), p. 259.

<sup>9</sup>Quebec Diocesan Archives (Q.D.A.), Series D, Vol. 3, Simcoe to Moore, December 30, 1790.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. Public Archives of Ontario (P.A.O.), Strachan Letter Book 1812-1834, Essay on The Clergy Reserves, 1829.

colony was an extension of Britain where only the Church of England was cognizable by the State. As an essential part of the constitution, the Church would assure to the inhabitants of Upper Canada the "preservation of their religious as well as their civil liberties by which the most affectionate link of attachment would be formed" between the colony and Britain.<sup>11</sup> The reciprocity of support between Church and State which was characteristic of Loyalist argument is clear. It was to be reiterated frequently by Strachan in his own correspondence and in addresses and petitions bearing his signature as leader of the Church in Upper Canada. Monarchy and Church were the twin pillars of a true British political structure, and since the absence of a strong Church had resulted in the loss of the American colonies, every means should be used to strengthen the position of the Church in Upper Canada. It was a thoroughly Loyalist point of view, but it was out of date shortly after Strachan appeared on the public stage, for by that time the Loyalist population had been thinned by the immigration of new people who had not suffered the disintegration of their society by political division, and who had no strong feelings for the Church of England even when they were nominally members of that church.

When Strachan became Incumbent of York in 1812, the constitutional position of the Church was still unchallenged, but its actual situation had changed very little since the colony was formed, and the outbreak of war with the United States hindered further advance for a few years. His own exertions earned for Strachan a seat on the Executive Council after the war was over, but by that time opposition to the claims of the Church was being voiced in the legislature. An attack on the Clergy Reserves in the Legislative Council and the defeat of a bill providing support for the training of candidates for Holy Orders led Strachan to believe that the Anglican membership of that House should be strengthened, and he offered himself for appointment even though he would have preferred to stay out of the legislature.<sup>12</sup> His hope, as he informed the Lieutenant-Governor, was that he could influence the Legislative Council in the Church's favour through his friendship with the non-Anglican members.<sup>13</sup> There was, of course, good British precedent for Church representation in the Upper House, but Strachan was even more encouraged by the presence in the Legislative Assembly of many of his former students at Kingston and Cornwall, now rising to positions of importance in the colony and taking their places as elected representatives in the Lower House.<sup>14</sup> Once again, the pre-Revolutionary aim of the Loyalists of influencing, if not controlling, the local legislature in favour of the Church was being implemented in Upper Canada.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, Strachan Papers, Address from the Clergy Corporation to Sir Peregrine Maitland, 1824.

<sup>12</sup>*Cf. ibid.*, Strachan Letter Book 1812-1834, Strachan to Jacob Mountain, May 12, 1817.

<sup>13</sup>*Cf. ibid.*, Strachan to Gore, May 22, 1817.

<sup>14</sup>*Cf. ibid.*

One of the aspects of British society which Strachan and his friends thought would give stability to the state was that "distinction of ranks" which Simcoe had mentioned in his letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Legislative Council, as an appointed house, was intended to give men of influence and substance a share in the legislative process—to provide a sort of colonial aristocracy to match the House of Lords. By controlling education, Strachan hoped, not only to train prospective members of such an aristocracy, but also to produce a laity loyal to the Church and therefore to the British idea of society. For this purpose he proposed that the elementary education of the rising generation should be placed "under the direction and control of the regular clergy,"<sup>15</sup> and also that a university should be established so that the more able young men need not leave the province to obtain higher education. The great danger was that they might go to the United States and there develop republican sentiments, a danger which gravely disturbed the Lieutenant-Governor in 1825, Sir Peregrine Maitland. His request to the Executive Council to consider the matter resulted in a report which urged the opening of King's College in Toronto, whose teachers should be "not merely eminent for their learning, but for their attachment to the British Monarchy, and to the Established Church." In this way, "the evil to which Your Excellency has alluded . . . would be most effectively checked."<sup>16</sup> In the event, opposition to Church control of education was so strong that nearly twenty years were to pass before the university was opened for instruction.

The United States were the *bête noire* of the Loyalists and their spiritual descendants, the Tories of Upper Canada, who tried in every way to combat the growth of democratic equality, which they felt was the enemy of a true British society and the peculiar evil which had infected the American colonies. To Strachan, liberalism was a system "made energetic by malignity, falsehood, deception, calumny and slander,"<sup>17</sup> committed to the destruction of the British connexion and the Church of England, and therefore to be opposed by all loyal subjects of the Crown. It was obvious that democratic ideas were spreading in Upper Canada; indeed, they invaded even the British homeland, where Strachan was afraid they would produce "sad convulsions and many years of darkness." It seemed to him ridiculous for the Legislative Assembly to talk about attachment to British institutions while at the same time it attacked the Church and passed an Alien Bill opening the franchise to American settlers after seven years' residence in the province, but it was still his duty "to persevere to the last in resisting what we believe evil."<sup>18</sup> It was the American connexion of the Canadian Methodists that raised doubts in his mind about that denomination, although the general democratic nature of their organization would

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, Strachan to Mountain, November 30, 1820.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, Strachan Papers, Report of the Executive Council Relative to the Founding of a University in Upper Canada, February 3, 1826.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, Strachan Letter Book 1812-1834, Strachan to Mountain, November 30, 1820.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, Macaulay Papers, Strachan to John Macaulay, February 16, 1832.

also render them suspect. Strachan felt that, as long as the Canadian Methodists remained under the authority of the American Conference, the colonial government could not control them or "prevent them from gradually rendering a large portion of our population . . . hostile to our institutions, both civil and religious."<sup>19</sup> The proper remedy for this situation was an increase in the number of the established clergy.

One is struck by the rather naive simplicity of the idea that Anglican clergy would automatically support the political ideas of the Tory group. Strachan was to be rudely undeceived in this respect in the later stages of his fight for the Establishment, but already he detected among churchmen signs of flirting with the enemy. In 1827 he objected to a suggestion by the Archdeacon of Quebec that petitions in support of the Church should be circulated to the congregations for general signature by the people. Apart from the fact that petitions in favour of maintaining the *status quo* were likely to be held in contempt because they were not liberal, Strachan held "all such references to the people dangerous in principle because hostile to Established Order."<sup>20</sup> The claim of the Church of England to establishment and therefore to the Clergy Reserves "is a legal right and must be defended on legal grounds," and the bishop ought to approach the Imperial Government himself in the name of the Church "and not descend to a measure which would induce every man to think that our retaining the Reserves depended upon his signature—references to the people at large smells too much of Democracy for me."<sup>21</sup>

These were the general principles upon which Strachan and his friends based their actions in politics and religion during the first half of the nineteenth century, but a glance at the political history of Upper Canada at that time will show that they were swimming against the tide of opinion in the province. When loyalty was at stake, the Tories were to find that public opinion was on their side, as for example in the rebellions of 1836–1837 in both provinces. But for the Reform Party in general, political loyalty was not an issue. What was in question was the necessity of a Church Establishment as a *sine qua non* of a British colony. Many Anglicans were to find their political home in the Reform Party, and were thus to find themselves ranged against their bishop on the matter of establishment until all connexion between Church and State was swept away.

## II

There was another aspect to Strachan's thinking which never fitted completely into a true Erastianism. It may have been his Scottish background and the nature of the Church Establishment in that country which modified the Loyalist ideas he had acquired in Upper Canada, but in the

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, Strachan Papers, Strachan to Wilmot Horton, May 22, 1827.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, Strachan Letter Book 1827–1839, Strachan to G. J. Mountain, December 31, 1827.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, Strachan to Archdeacon of Kingston, February 13, 1828.

methods he used to protect the Establishment and make it effective, he used the government as a tool of the Church. The same law which had established the Church, had also created the institutions of government; therefore both stood or fell by the same law, neither having control over the other. There is some difficulty in separating Strachan's political activity as a citizen from his political activity for religious purposes, but that is a difficulty which must always exist in assessing the life and work of a churchman who is a politician or *vice versa*. It was necessary for Strachan to use the instruments of government to effect the constitutional provisions for religion, so it is not surprising to find in a new country with all still to do that religion takes up a disproportionate amount of the time of government and legislature. Equivocation from the British Government and active hostility from the Legislative Assembly in Upper Canada dictated the methods he had to use to attain his ends. What has to be kept in mind, however, is that Strachan did not accept the local government as a competent authority in Church matters. The Constitutional Act was an Imperial enactment: it was for that government to act upon its own legislation.

When Strachan moved to York in 1812 very little had been accomplished by the Church. Britain had been completely engrossed by the war against Napoleon and very little time or resources were left over for the Church in Canada. Very great exertions were necessary if the Establishment were to operate at all. Strachan lost no time in laying the needs of the Church before the local government. As soon as the war with the United States was over he addressed the Chief Justice on the need for more clergymen, and in effect demanded government assistance for the building of churches because "the people are in general too indifferent to give much, and in many places they are too poor."<sup>22</sup> At this time, the salaries of the clergy were carried by the territorial revenue of the province, but the representations of the Bishop of Quebec on the same subject led the British Government in 1816 to make a block grant to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (S.P.G.) for the support of the Church of England in all the North American colonies, so that requests for clergymen had to be addressed to that Society. Of course, the provision of one-seventh of all the land granted in Upper Canada seemed like a very generous support, but not until the new influx of settlers after the end of the Napoleonic wars did the demand for land make an income from the Reserves possible. Even then, the government was the Church's chief competitor, because its income also was derived from the sale of land, and since people preferred to own land, and the price charged by the government was very low, renting the Reserves was difficult and income practically non-existent.

It was the vacillating British Government that provoked Strachan to wrath, but it had granted an establishment and he had no intention of allowing it to opt out of its responsibilities. If anything were to be achieved,

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, Strachan Letter Book 1812-1834, Strachan to Elmsley, March 1, 1815.



it was upon that government that every effort of cajolery or compulsion must be exercised. Since the local government was too involved in raising its own revenue from land, Strachan agreed with the bishop that the clergy should be incorporated to handle the leasing of the Reserves. This was done in 1819 when the Clergy Corporation was formed, but there was very little improvement in the number of leases granted. Strachan therefore came to the conclusion that, in order to obtain a reasonable income as soon as possible, it would be better to sell some of the Reserves. The Bishop of Quebec, while not opposed to the plan of sale, nevertheless thought that the time was not favourable for such a suggestion to come from the Church.<sup>23</sup> But Strachan had not waited for episcopal approval; he was already on his way to London with the assurance of support from the Lieutenant-Governor.<sup>24</sup>

The Colonial Secretary, Lord Bathurst, without consulting the authorities in Upper Canada, had already opened negotiations with the Canada Land Company to sell the Crown Reserves and part of the Clergy Reserves in the province, so that all Strachan had to do for the moment was to place his knowledge of Upper Canada at the disposal of government and company.<sup>25</sup> But when the prices which the Company was going to pay were announced, he immediately protested what he considered little better than theft of the Church's patrimony. As a result, the Clergy Reserves were withdrawn from the agreement with the Company. But the need to sell remained, and in 1827 Strachan was back in England pressing for the necessary legislation. There was some delay while a grievance committee of the House of Commons investigated complaints from Lower Canada and the claims of the Presbyterians to share in the Clergy Reserves, but finally, late in 1827, the Clergy Reserves Bill was enacted, allowing the sale of 100,000 acres of land each year, the investment of the proceeds in British Consols, and the payment of the income to Anglican clergy. For a time it had looked as if the position of the Church and its right to the Reserves would be altered in favour of the Presbyterians, but a letter from Strachan to the Under-Secretary for the Colonies had turned the tide,<sup>26</sup> and he was able to return to Upper Canada satisfied with his efforts.

Although the Church now had an income which increased year by year—it was £6,000 by 1834—her financial position was by no means secure. We should note the importance of financial security in Strachan's thinking. At no time did Strachan wish the Church to be at the mercy of the government. While Establishment meant that the government had a right to some say in Church affairs—as in the appointment of bishops, for example—the

<sup>23</sup>Cf. Q.D.A., Series G, Vol. 4, Mountain to Maitland, February 21, 1824.

<sup>24</sup>Cf. Public Archives of Canada (P.A.C.), Series G, Vol. 60, Maitland to Bathurst, January 3, 1824.

<sup>25</sup>Cf. Toronto Public Library, Scadding Collection, Strachan to Mountain, November [n. d.], 1824.

<sup>26</sup>Cf. P.A.O., Strachan Papers, Strachan to Wilmot Horton, May 22, 1827.

Church had to be free to do its work its own way, and its ministers required security of tenure in their incumbencies. The only way this could be ensured was by removing control of the payment of the clergy from the government. While payment through S.P.G. was some improvement, nevertheless the Society was also removed from the scene of operations and frequently interfered in Church activities in Canada without due consultation. Besides, the grant to the Society was static and did not allow for expansion beyond a certain point. Hence the urgency to provide money raised in the colony itself—but even so the income from sales was controlled by the government, a state of affairs which did not satisfy Strachan.

Another method of freeing the Church from State control was provided in the constitution. Section 38 gave the governor power to erect parishes and to endow them with land from the Clergy Reserves, and if this were done, Strachan could breathe more easily, for parishes with clear title to their own endowment would provide the material security for their rectors which payment from government-controlled investments could not do.

It would be tedious to recount the story of all the efforts to obtain the implementation of this part of the Establishment, but two instructions from the Colonial Office should be mentioned. In 1818, when Bishop Jacob Mountain was in Britain, he refused to return to Canada until he had received a definite assurance that instructions would be sent to the Governors of Upper and Lower Canada ordering the creation and endowment of parishes. Lord Bathurst perforce complied with this request,<sup>27</sup> and some rectories were established in Lower Canada, but difficulties remained in Upper Canada. On the arrival of Sir Peregrine Maitland in 1818, Strachan drew his attention to Bathurst's instruction, but because of a disagreement between the Law Officers over the form of the legal instrument, no action was taken. Once again, in 1825, Bathurst sent a direct order on the subject. Maitland was instructed "to constitute and erect within every township or parish which now is, or hereafter may be formed" one or more rectories "by an instrument under the Great Seal of the Province," and to endow them with land from the Clergy Reserves.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, Maitland could not obtain from his Law Officers an agreed legal form; so once again Strachan was frustrated.

Strachan was not at first impressed by Sir John Colborne, who succeeded Maitland, but he proved to be the man capable of overcoming all difficulties. Soon after he arrived, Colborne addressed an enquiry to the Executive Council about the proper means of erecting and endowing parishes.<sup>29</sup> Strachan was a member of the Council and we can be sure that he lost no time in discussing methods with his fellow-members and with the Lieutenant-Governor. The necessity of endowment had become more urgent with the announcement in 1831 that the grant to S.P.G. was to

<sup>27</sup>Cf. P.A.C., Series G, Vol. 57, Bathurst to President Smith, April 2, 1818.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, Vol. 61, Bathurst to Maitland, July 22, 1825.

<sup>29</sup>Cf. *ibid.*, Upper Canada State Papers, Vol. 15, Minutes of the Executive Council, December 21, 1830.

be progressively reduced until 1834, when it would come to an end. Although this decision could not affect Upper Canada as gravely as Lower Canada, nevertheless it provided the strongest possible evidence of the insecurity of the Church's financial position until it was in complete control of its own resources. After a great deal of argument in the Executive Council over the legal designation and territorial limits of a parish, fifty-seven patents were drawn, of which forty-four were completed and signed by Colborne just before he was relieved by Sir Francis Bond Head.

As might be expected, the endowment of the rectories caused a furore among the opponents of Strachan and the Church of England, but the discussion of the matter can hardly have been a secret. It had taken five years for the patents to be drawn after Colborne's first reference to the Executive Council, and during that time many people must have been aware of what was happening. The accusation of haste and duplicity can be rejected. Had the signing of the patents been more than a matter of routine once all legal difficulties had been removed, we can hardly doubt that the most strenuous efforts would have been made to complete all fifty-seven. Colborne probably expected the remaining thirteen to be signed in the course of ordinary business by his successor.

We need not follow the course of the dispute concerning the legality of Colborne's action. The only interesting point is that Colborne thought he was following an instruction issued to him in 1832 by Lord Goderich, Bathurst's successor at the Colonial Office, while Strachan cited the positive orders of Bathurst to President Smith and Maitland. It is almost inconceivable that Colborne was unaware of those orders, but it was on the basis of those instructions that the legality of the rectories was upheld by the Law Officers of the Crown in Britain. Strachan had once again achieved a signal victory in his pursuit of Establishment, and had maintained his own principle that the British government was the real authority in Church affairs in Canada. But it was a pyrrhic victory, for the "infidel and democratic principles" against which Strachan had set his face were now more widely held than the constitutionalist ideas of his younger days, and were shortly to receive added sanction and encouragement from the findings of the Durham commission. The endowment of the rectories was therefore the *ne plus ultra* of Strachan's mission to achieve the Establishment of the Church; it was also the point beyond which his opponents were determined to prevent the success of that mission.

### III

It would take us too far from our subject to trace the course and development of the opposition to the Establishment of the Church of England, which would include also the rejection of Strachan's ideas of Church and State, but we might glance at some of the reasons why the old outlook had to go. Since Britain was for Strachan the final arbiter of all disputes, the

changing attitudes in that country were of great importance. The Industrial Revolution was changing the structure of British society, so that gradually political power shifted from a rural to an urban base. At the same time, democratic ideas, which found expression in the demand for a wider franchise, were undermining the old basis of aristocratic control of government. A new era of religious toleration was also beginning, in which the removal of civil disabilities for religious reasons became a matter of practical politics leading to the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1829. It was difficult for British ministers, therefore, to support in Canada a political and religious attitude which was in process of disappearing in Britain; thus after 1820 Strachan could not count on unquestioned support from Britain. But neither could the Imperial Government bring itself to maintain complete neutrality between the Church of England and other Christian bodies in Upper Canada, with the result that, while all petitioners were encouraged, all were equally disappointed by the ambivalence of British ministries, whether Whig or Tory.

A good example of British equivocation was provided by the claim of the Presbyterians to share in the Clergy Reserves. In 1816 the Presbyterians of Niagara requested government assistance to pay their minister, because of the destruction of their church during the war of 1812. This request posed no problem, because both Presbyterians and Roman Catholics had received such assistance in the past, but the request was for payment from the income from the Clergy Reserves because Presbyterians were members of the Church of Scotland, which was an established church in Britain. Sir Peregrine Maitland saw at once that a novel interpretation of the Constitutional Act was involved. The colonial Law Officers had already decided against the Presbyterians, but Maitland felt that no one in Upper Canada was likely to accept that ruling as unbiased, let alone unprejudiced, so he very sensibly asked for a ruling from Bathurst. Bathurst referred the question to the Law Officers of the Crown in Britain, and received in reply the opinion that, while the support for religion provided in the Constitutional Act need not be confined to the Church of England but could be extended to the Presbyterians of the Church of Scotland because that Church was established, nevertheless it could not be extended to Dissenters. At the same time, while the Presbyterians could share in the proceeds of the Clergy Reserves, they could not be granted any land from that source.<sup>30</sup> To this legal pearl, Bathurst added his own gloss. He instructed Maitland that, while the Church of England must be provided for first, nevertheless "in every parish in which the members of the Church of Scotland may greatly predominate, it appears both advisable and proper that a proportionate allotment should be reserved for the provision of a minister of that Church."<sup>31</sup>

Unfortunately, we have no record of any comment made by Maitland

<sup>30</sup>Cf. Q.D.A., Series D, Vol. 8, Law Officers to Bathurst, May 17, 1819.

<sup>31</sup>P.A.C., Series G, Vol. 59, Bathurst to Maitland, May 6, 1820.

when he received this dispatch. Probably he had an acute attack of nausea, for the only result could be the most serious dissension in the colony. The Presbyterians would be as well aware as the Anglicans that no assistance would be forthcoming, since there was no money in the Clergy Reserves account, and the denial of land ensured that they could not obtain support by their own exertions. Lord Bathurst's imaginative suggestion was not worth the paper it was written on for, besides being a direct contradiction of the opinion of the Law Officers, it would fail for precisely the same reasons which prevented the endowment of Anglican parishes. The Presbyterians however, continued to hope and work for a share in the Clergy Reserves, thus keeping the colony in a constant state of political and religious warfare for more than ten years.

In the colony itself, there was increasing opposition to Anglican claims after the new wave of settlers arrived in the early 1820s. The balance of numbers tipped against the Church of England, the Methodists increasing most rapidly, but it was the suggestion of disloyalty because of their American connexions which brought Methodist opposition out into the open. Their attitude towards the Establishment was presented in the *Christian Guardian*, of which Egerton Ryerson was soon to be editor. Against the "sectarian and selfish views" of both Anglican and Presbyterians, the Methodists advocated the principles of the liberal party. "One grand principle in which they could all agree is this: viz., that liberty of conscience and worship is the inalienable birthright of every man. . . . in this Province no particular form of Christianity is established by law . . . every peaceable and loyal subject has equal rights and is entitled to the enjoyment of equal privileges and immunities."<sup>32</sup> The egalitarian sentiments of that editorial are sufficient reason for Strachan's dislike of the Methodists and for their opposition to him. Not until Ryerson's break with Mackenzie and the obvious loyalty of the Methodists during the 1837 rebellion did the acrimony which characterized Anglican-Methodist relations begin to subside; then, for a short time, there was a truce.

The importance of the Methodists was that they had no legal grounds for requesting government aid, although they did in fact receive some, but their principle of voluntarism in the support of religion, the democratic structure of their church institutions, and their numbers in the province enabled them to obtain a hearing in the Legislature by allying themselves with the Reform Party. Their solution of the church problem was to sell the Reserves and apply the proceeds to general education, a plan which all Reformers could support. When Anglicans also joined the Reform Party, it was impossible for Strachan to maintain Anglican solidarity in defence of the Establishment. By keeping the question of the Clergy Reserves before the Legislative Assembly with the assistance of their Reform allies, and petitioning the British Government when the Legislative Council rejected their enactments, the Methodists helped to force that Government to give

<sup>32</sup>*Christian Guardian*, Dec. 26, 1829.

up its policy of non-interference in the affairs of the colony. The result was an interim measure which nevertheless ended the possibility of establishment of the Church of England.

Strachan himself contributed to the breakdown of his policy by his attitude towards other churches. As Professor Eugene Fairweather remarked in an earlier issue of this *Journal*, Strachan was never "a mere defender of hierarchical or denominational privilege."<sup>33</sup> In his very first communication on religious matters with the government he urged an increase in salary to the Presbyterian minister and Roman Catholic priest in the Eastern District of the province, and further urged that any group of Presbyterians who formed a congregation should be paid an allowance "to enable them to obtain a minister, and such minister ought to be ordained regularly in the Church of Scotland."<sup>34</sup> Ordination in the Church of Scotland was the sign of respectability, for the Kirk like the Roman Church was a member of the established-churches union, so to speak, and was therefore likely to support sound government and the British character of the province. Even the Methodists shared to some extent in the government bounty, with Strachan's approval, but only through the headquarters of the British Wesleyans in London, the British Wesleyans having a proper regard for the position of the Church of England. Strachan had a great respect for any minister who was faithful in his work and was willing to assist him financially, saving the respect that everyone should have for the Established Church. But to the members of the other churches, struggling against difficulties which the Anglicans had never suffered, it must have seemed uncharitable, to say the least, that Strachan should be so reluctant to share the Clergy Reserves, which seemed to be much more than the Church of England needed.

In the end it was the British Government which decided against Strachan. It had been one of his principles from the very beginning that questions concerning the Church and especially the disposition of the Clergy Reserves should be settled by the Imperial Parliament.<sup>35</sup> This was not mere obstruction because, although the local legislature was allowed by the constitution to vary or repeal any of the religious sections of the Act, any such measure required the concurrent agreement of the Imperial Parliament, so that Britain was the final judge in any case. In opposition to action by the Upper Canada Legislature, Strachan always suggested the reinvestment of the Reserves in the Crown and their disposal by Britain. Whatever was done by the British Parliament he would be obliged to accept—but only, of course, after a long fight. When it became apparent that Britain was finally going to act, Strachan drew up a proposed division of the Reserves which he would accept. For the Church of England there should be a "subdued establishment" including one-half of the Reserves. From the remainder,

<sup>33</sup>Eugene R. Fairweather, "John Strachan on Church and State: Two Letters to William Ewart Gladstone," *Canadian Journal of Theology*, 12 (1966), 283.

<sup>34</sup>P.A.O., Strachan Letter Book 1812-1834, Strachan to Elmsley, March 1, 1815.

<sup>35</sup>Cf. *ibid.*, Macaulay Papers, Strachan to John Macaulay, May 31, 1839.

one-fifth could be paid to the Presbyterians, and the Methodists should receive their usual grant in support of their missions to the Indians. From what remained, the colonial government should grant assistance to "other respectable and deserving denominations."<sup>36</sup> While this represented a considerable change in Strachan's thinking, it is apparent that the principles upon which he always acted remained unchanged. It is doubtful whether he yet realized that the basis of his thinking on religious matters had no foundation in the realities of Upper Canadian life, so that even as close a friend and collaborator as John Macaulay, disappointed though he was by the terms of the Canada Clergy Act in 1840, was yet convinced that it was better to accept whatever was offered, in order to end the strife which had continued for more than twenty years and was retarding the development of the province.<sup>37</sup>

The Canada Clergy Act really ended the Establishment. The Reserves were divided much as Strachan had indicated, except that the Anglican proportion was smaller than he would have liked. The ten-year truce which followed allowed Strachan to settle into his new tasks as Bishop of Toronto, so that, when the province moved into the new era of responsible government and the Clergy Reserves were finally liquidated, Strachan was able to lead the Church with resource and calm into a period of expansion, unaffected by government support or lack of it.

#### IV

Our original question was: to what kind of Erastianism did Strachan feel able to commit himself? We might now go further and ask whether the term "Erastian" can properly be applied to Strachan. He certainly subscribed to the principle that the State had a duty to support religion—a principle which, in the religious situation at that time, would mean that the government would have to select which form of Christianity it would recognize officially. In that sense he might be termed Erastian. Beyond this point, however, it is less easy to define his position, for while he was convinced that Anglicanism was the best expression of the Christian religion, he was never so rigid as to deny that other bodies had the root of the matter in them. Only those groups which showed their essential wrongness by opposing what Strachan considered to be the proper form of stable government and society were considered to be beyond the pale and therefore unworthy of support and recognition. But that the government should control the Church in its religious activities was never an acceptable proposition.

This is made clear in his attitude toward government officials, to whom he was neither subservient nor obsequious. In his private correspondence, of course, he felt no need to disguise his feelings, but even in official letters we can see that he expected the government to do its duty according to

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup>*Cf. ibid.*, Macaulay to his Mother, January 23, 1840.

law, and that he had no hesitation in using every means to compel officials if they sought to evade their responsibilities. To Colborne he wrote that he "would rather perish on the scaffold than give up the Reserves," and to surrender the charter of King's College "at the bidding of a Minister" was something to which he would never give his consent.<sup>38</sup> He informed another correspondent that, whatever instructions came from the Colonial Office, he would not allow the position of the Church to be changed or the Reserves to be "dissipated by the breath of an unprincipled Minister."<sup>39</sup> Governments and their officials changed, but the law remained, and every government must be governed by law in its dealings with every institution of society, including the Church, for of course Strachan equated the Church, not with the government, but with the State.

Looking at Church-State relations in a wider perspective, we might compare Strachan's outlook with attitudes in our own time. With the exception of his commitment to an established church, in what way does Strachan differ from churchmen in our day? What is the difference in kind between Strachan's pressure on the government to fulfill its freely accepted responsibilities and similar pressures today to compel the government to appoint and pay chaplains to the armed forces and public institutions, to exempt church property from taxation, and to make church contributions exempt from income tax? All these are direct support of the church by government, not unlike the application of income from the Clergy Reserves to religious purposes. If Strachan was truly Erastian, his efforts to compel the government in his day to support the Church can only be termed heroic compared with our modern freedom to apply pressure without accepting any control. But the truth is that Strachan was first and foremost a churchman and tried to do his duty by the Church as he saw it. We cannot say more of any man, and who is to say that our methods are more consonant with Christian principles than his?

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, Strachan Letter Book 1812-1834, Strachan to Colborne, January 15, 1832.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, Strachan Letter Book 1827-1839, Strachan to Cartwright, February 2, 1832.