A Full-Orbed Christianity
The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada,
1900–1940

Challenging widely held views that religious institutions entered a period of decline and irrelevance after 1900, Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau argue that the Methodist, Presbyterian, and United Churches enjoyed their greatest cultural influence during the first four decades of the twentieth century. By examining the relationship of these churches to both popular culture and the emerging welfare state, the authors challenge the main tenets of secularization theories.

Christie and Gauvreau look at the ways in which reformers expanded the church’s popular base through mass revivalism, established social work and sociology in Canadian universities and church colleges, and aggressively sought to take a leadership role in social reform by incorporating independent reform organizations into the church-sponsored Social Service Council of Canada. They also explore the instrumental role of Protestant clergymen in formulating social legislation and transforming the scope and responsibilities of the modern state.

The enormous influence of the Protestant churches before World War II can no longer be ignored, nor can the view that the churches were accomplices in their own secularization be justified. A Full-Orbed Christianity calls on historians to rethink the role of Protestantism in Canadian life and to see it not as the garrison of anti-modernism but as the chief harbinger of cultural change before 1940.

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