

THE RELIGIOUS FOUNDATION OF JOHN STRACHAN'S SOCIAL AND
POLITICAL THOUGHT AS CONTAINED IN HIS SERMONS, 1803 TO 1866

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to show how the religious thought of John Strachan formed the foundation of his social and political thought. This study is confined to an examination of Strachan's sermons written over a period of sixty-three years, from 1803 to 1866. The thesis begins with a presentation of Strachan's thoughts on God and proceeds to a discussion of his ideas on the relationship between God and man. The remainder of the thesis examined the social and political implications which arise from this relationship.

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Progressivist historians do not write much about the losers of history, because belief in progress often implies the base assumption that to lose is to have failed to grasp the evolving truth. Nevertheless, the losers existed and they are worth reading now that we see what kind of society the winners have made . . .¹

Certainly living in Canada in the 1970's one wonders if this society which the winners have made indeed bears any resemblance to the vision of those who settled this land. One questions whether the choices men have made over the period of the last one hundred years have been for the good. It is in this questioning, this examining, that one wants to know exactly what the alternatives were in the early stages of Canadian history, making the assumption that there were indeed alternatives and that it was not just a series of inevitable, interconnected events that have brought Canada to the present time.

Among the greatest "losers" in Canadian history are those men who held central power in Upper Canada between 1815 and 1841. We recognize that they are losers because the label applied to them originally as a term of political abuse, "The Family Compact", has become an accepted term in the study of political history. One of the very central, if not the most influential member of this group

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G. P. Grant, Technology and Empire (Toronto, 1969), p.67.

was John Strachan. At different times in his long career Strachan was a member of the executive and legislative councils, President of the Board of the Superintendence of Education, President of King's College, pastor and archdeacon of York and the first Bishop of Toronto. Strachan had very definite ideas about Upper Canada -- its organization, its relationship to Great Britain and its future. Strachan, however, was not always successful in what he strove to establish and maintain. Indeed what he stood for was essentially overcome by the time of Confederation. It is exactly because Strachan lost and that his vision was defeated that an examination of his ideas is an important undertaking.

As historian S. F. Wise has noted² sermon literature is of special value when one is trying to gauge the feeling of an age. This is especially true in the early years of Upper Canada. Clergymen were accepted members of the colonial upper class and as such were respected and listened to. Because of their higher education they were also regarded as a good source of opinion. As Wise remarks:

In defining public philosophy and the public morality, the conservative clergy had little competition and that chiefly from the judges of the high courts, whose jury charges invaded periodically, the ideological monopoly of the ministers. Legislative debates were not reported at this time . . . The day of the journalist politician had scarcely dawned.³

² S. F. Wise, "Sermon Literature and Canadian Intellectual History", The Bulletin, Number Eighteen, (1965), p. 6.

³ Ibid., p. 6.

Clergy also had the advantage of travelling, sometimes extensively outside of their own area and this made their influence far-reaching.

Oddly enough Strachan's sermons, which cover a period of over sixty years of Upper Canadian history, seem to have been left unexamined in any formal manner. Such a study is, therefore, long overdue. Since Strachan believed that "religion is essentially practical,"⁴ his sermons are often concerned with the society and politics of the times. His "victory" sermon in 1814, his "rebellion" sermon and his sermon given at the end of one of the cholera epidemics are some of the overt examples of such commentary. In many other sermons one witnesses a discussion of the importance of individual duty and Christian virtues. Yet others are confined to an examination of scripture in a way which is directly applicable to a particular weakness or fault which Strachan sees in the church or the society. It is only when the sermons are read as a body of literature that one can put together a picture of what Strachan "thought". The result is a remarkably consistent vision. Strachan was not a great thinker nor did he pretend to be.⁵ He was, however, a very intelligent man who wrote quite clearly about the relationship between religion and man as he thought applicable to the young and

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John Strachan, A sermon preached on November 10, 1849, on the text Luke 20:38, Strachan Papers, Public Archives of Ontario.

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In fact Strachan admits to having a prejudice against philosophers which dates back to his days at Aberdeen: "I have since learned to despise the meanness and injustice of the philosopher." - From John Strachan: Documents and Opinions, J. L. H. Henderson, Ed. (Toronto, 1969), p. 9.

sometimes troubled colony, Upper Canada. His thoughts were quite comprehensive in the sense that in the sermons he spoke on topics relevant and appropriate to people in all stations of life. His thoughts were not for the elite alone despite the fact that his home congregation in York, St. James, was made up mainly of the York elite, many of whom were United Empire Loyalists or their descendants. But not all of Strachan's sermons were preached to his home congregation. This one can see from his notations on each sermon which give the dates and places of its delivery. Each sermon was preached several times but almost always to different congregations.

Strachan's sermons⁶ are housed in the Public Archives of Ontario in Toronto. They have not been microfilmed, which gives to one the advantage of working with the originals. This also means, unfortunately, that access to the sermons is limited mainly to those who want to read them in the archives. A few of Strachan's sermons have been published. Mainly, however, there are just excerpts available.⁷ Until recently they were not arranged in any order but are now organized by the date when each sermon was first delivered.⁸

⁶ There are three hundred and eighty-two sermons in the Strachan Papers in the Public Archives of Ontario in Toronto. Of these, ninety-four are based on texts from the Old Testament and two hundred and eighty-eight on New Testament Texts. This information is noted by R. L. Fraser III in an unpublished Ph.D. thesis, History Department, University of Toronto.

⁷ Some excerpts are quoted in John Strachan: Documents and Opinions, J. L. H. Henderson, Ed., as cited above.

⁸ For the purposes of this thesis the sermons will be documented by the day on which the sermon quoted was first delivered.

Concerning the state of the sermons, the paper has become very brittle and the ink has sunk through the pages -- Strachan wrote on both sides of the page. This coupled with the fact that, for a schoolmaster, Strachan's handwriting was not a model, makes reading the sermons a long process. Some words are altogether illegible.⁹ Some of his sermons are missing, such as those which were lost or destroyed when his house burned at York.¹⁰

Strachan prided himself on his sermons. He felt that they were sufficiently uplifting without being too learned for the congregation. There is evidence that others thought well of his sermons also.¹¹

It has been claimed¹² that the driving force behind Strachan's activities was ambition. It is the aim of this thesis to show that an alternative to this claim is that indeed religion was his central

⁹These cases are signified by _____. Spelling errors are noted by (sic). The punctuation is Strachan's.

¹⁰"My papers and Manuscripts were in drawers I had just been putting them in order to make them up in bundles -- they were taken out carelessly & being loose they were scattered by the wind that blew furiously. A great number of sermons are gone and many schemes of works for which I was gradually collecting materials Perhaps none of them would have ever brought to Maturity but they were a source of rational & innocent amusement". (Strachan to the Lord Bishop of Quebec, May 1815). The John Strachan Letter Book, 1812-1834, G. W. Spragge, Ed., (Toronto, 1946), p. 82.

¹¹See A. N. Bethune, Memoir of the Right Reverend John Strachan (Toronto, 1870), p. 31.

¹²This claim has been made both by Strachan's contemporaries such as William Lyon Mackenzie and Robert Gourlay and Whig historians such as J. C. Dent.

motivating force. We will attempt to establish this claim by showing that his religious ideas were the foundation for his social and political ideas as expounded in his sermons.

We will proceed in the following manner. First we will attempt to establish Strachan's context in history. This will be accomplished through a short discussion of the events of his life which directly relate to a discussion of his sermon literature, a brief outline of the historical issues important to Strachan and a short examination of the state of the Church in Upper Canada during Strachan's life.

Second, we will proceed directly to an examination of Strachan's thoughts on God, His Providence and His relationship to man. This will be followed by a chapter which deals with Strachan's conception of the Christian character and duty resulting from man's relationship to God.

In the fourth chapter we will examine Strachan's social thought as based on his concept of Christian duty. This chapter will demonstrate Strachan's ideas on the nature of social institutions which are necessary for the establishing of a Christian nation.

The final chapter of the thesis will examine Strachan's ideas on Great Britain and her colony as the epitome of the Christian nation. We will also examine how this Christian nation deals with the "infidel spirit" in other countries of the world.

This thesis will attempt to put forth in a clear and organized manner what Strachan said on the above issues. There are several points

which must be made concerning this undertaking. It is not within the scope of this thesis to speculate or comment on the origins of Strachan's thought--religious, social or political. We also do not intend to comment on the accuracy or inaccuracy of Strachan's comments concerning the historical events or situations mentioned in his sermons.

In this thesis we have quoted Strachan extensively, wherever possible. This was done for the following reasons. First, since Strachan's sermons are not published or even microfilmed, they are not available to the reader of this thesis. This obliges the writer to quote in depth in order that statements made about Strachan's sermons may be supported readily without the reader having to search through the originals in order to be satisfied concerning accuracy. As importantly, quoting Strachan extensively will mean that large portions of his sermons will be made available to a larger audience through their presence in the thesis by means of the good system of inter-library loan. This is important because no microfilming of the sermons is scheduled for the foreseeable future. The final motive for such frequent quotation is fairness to Strachan himself. Sermon literature by its very nature is meant to be read aloud and, one may assume, with feeling. Thus to paraphrase Strachan's particularly good brand of oratory when it is already once removed from its original medium seems unnecessary when the reader may be exposed to exactly what he said.

These points having been made concerning our perspective and

method of procedure, we will now proceed to establish Strachan in his context within history.

CHAPTER ONE

CHAPTER ONE

John Strachan was born in Aberdeen on April 12, 1778. He was the youngest of six children born to a quarrier and his wife. Due to his mother's urging it was decided that John should take at least the preliminary steps towards becoming a clergyman. After attending the Aberdeen Grammar School he won a bursary and enrolled at King's College Aberdeen. After one term his father was killed in a quarrying accident and Strachan was forced to support himself through the remainder of his Master of Arts degree by teaching at various places each summer. After completing his degree in 1797, a teaching job took him near St. Andrews where he registered as a "partial attender" in the Faculty of Divinity at the university there. He did not, however, complete the degree or take orders in the Presbyterian Church. It was during this time that Strachan became acquainted with Dr. Thomas Chalmers who was to play a central role in the establishing of the Scottish Free Church.

With the financial responsibility of his mother's care present in his mind, Strachan next accepted a teaching post at Kingston in the colony of Upper Canada. Along with this post there was mention made of a college or academy but this was not yet in existence. Strachan arrived in Kingston on the last day of the century. During his very happy three years there he taught one student who was to remain a life-long friend: John Beverley Robinson.

In 1803 Strachan applied for and obtained his first parish: a Church of England congregation in Cornwall. There have been those who have criticized Strachan for this move from the Church of Scotland to the Church of England, saying that it was one of expedience, based on ambition.¹ But to reiterate, Strachan was never a member of the clergy of the Presbyterian Church. Also it must be noted that Strachan's father was a Scottish Episcopalian and it was said that he went to Church with his father.² We also have Strachan's own words on the subject:

I consider myself a true churchman, and neither high church nor evangelical, but my abhorrence of Calvinism as presented in the Scotch Confession of Faith and in the writings of some popular English divines, dates from my early youth . . .³

After Strachan constructed his church in Cornwall, he set about building what became the Cornwall Grammar School or what Strachan called his "academy". His students, who attended classes six and one-half days per week, were taught practical subjects such as geography, history, science and mathematics in addition to the Classics because Strachan believed that their studies should be

¹One of the more famous quotes in this vein was that of Robert Gourlay who accused Strachan of being "a lying little fool of a renegade Presbyterian." Quoted in John Toronto by S. Boorman (Toronto, 1969) p. 100.

²D. Flint, John Strachan: Pastor and Politician (Toronto, 1971), p. 19.

³Strachan to William Tucker, 1853, Strachan Letter Book, 1853-1854, 321, as quoted in John Strachan: Documents and Opinions (op. cit.); p. 282.

appropriate to their lives in a rural colony such as Upper Canada. Strachan's school was considered a sound one by all those who attended and his students were highly successful.⁴

It was during his time at Cornwall that Strachan married Anne Wood McGill, widow of the wealthy Montreal merchant, Andrew McGill.⁵ Their marriage, a long and apparently happy one, produced nine children, all of whom predeceased Strachan except one.⁶ It was also during Strachan's stay at Cornwall that he was awarded an honorary degree of D.D. by King's College, Aberdeen.

In 1812 Strachan was offered the post of Rector of York and chaplain of the troops.⁷ After some discussion and negotiation he accepted and he removed his family to York in June of that year.

It was his early times at York which settled Strachan's position in that community for the rest of his life. His duties

⁴A. N. Bethune in his biography of Strachan (*op. cit.*) lists some of the more prominent of Strachan's students, p. 147:

John B. Robinson, York, Chief Justice of Upper Canada
 George Ridout, York, Judge of District Court of Niagara
 J. B. Macaulay, York, Judge of King's Bench, Upper Canada
 G. S. Boulton, Cobourg, Barrister, M.P.
 W. B. Robinson, Newmarket, M.P.
 W. Macaulay, Picton, Rector of Picton
 A. N. Bethune, Cobourg, Rector of Cobourg
 A. B. C. Gagy, Quebec, Barrister, M.P.
 Arch. McLean, Cornwall, Speaker of House of Assembly
 G. H. Markland, York, Inspector General, U.C.

⁵The Strachans remained very close friends with the influential James McGill until his death.

⁶James McGill Strachan.

⁷The latter post was obtained through the wishes of Major-General Isaac Brock.

during the War of 1812 were many and varied. He was involved in the negotiations with and the surrender of York to the Americans twice in the war. In his capacity as Chaplain, he tended the sick and buried the dead. To help raise money in order to relieve the economic distress of the families torn by the war, Strachan founded the Loyal and Patriotic Society of Upper Canada.

It was also during the War of 1812 that Strachan's thought grew stronger and more consistent. This was particularly the case in respect to his ideas on the importance of the British nation in the world and the negative influence of a country such as the United States so close to the borders of Upper Canada.

The end of the war brought great joy to Strachan as well as certain benefits. Due mainly to his outstanding efforts during the war Strachan was appointed honorary member of the Executive Council in 1815.⁸ The postwar period also marked the beginning of Strachan's battle for the Clergy Reserves, precipitated by his stand on the issue of land speculation. Robert Gourlay, a Scot who emigrated to Upper Canada after the war, made public the question of the justice of the reserves and how this policy hindered settlement and area development. Although Gourlay later was banished from Upper Canada the seed of protest he planted began to grow on the issue of the Clergy Reserves and others as well.

For Strachan the Clergy Reserves were fundamental to the idea

⁸He became a full member in 1817.

of an established church in that their existence indicated the government's support of one church as the true church. Strachan also realized that the reserves were crucial financially to the survival of the Church of England⁹ in Upper Canada. The government of Great Britain, as Strachan points out in one sermon, did very little financially to support the Church of England in Upper Canada. In addition to the reserves Strachan had to depend heavily on funds from organizations such as the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts.

The struggle over the secularization of the reserves was one which lasted close to forty years. The battle ended in 1854 with a bill introduced by John A. Macdonald which stated that all proceeds from the reserves would go to the municipalities in which they were located, rather than towards the support of the clergy of the Church of England or otherwise.¹⁰

Another reason for Strachan's support of the institution of an established church was that Strachan believed that education should be under the direction of religion. The belief coupled with his early desire for a university in Upper Canada was the basis for all of his efforts to obtain a university charter. He was successful in being granted what he believed was a very liberal charter for the founding of King's College in 1827. The charter stated that "the

⁹As J. L. H. Henderson notes: "There were, of course, no Anglicans. That was a Latinism. There were Churchmen, English Churchmen or members of the Scotch Church or Kirk." J. L. H. Henderson, John Strachan, (Toronto, 1969), p. ix.

¹⁰The Clergy did receive some financial consideration.

President or Principal should be a clergyman of the Church of England for the purpose of giving it a religious character, and that in everything else it should be free."¹¹ After a delay of several years, King's College was built. Strachan's dream, however, was short-lived because in 1849, amidst Strachan's rigorous protests, a bill was passed which produced a secular, provincial university, the University of Toronto. This institution took over the site and buildings of King's and enjoyed all of its endowments without having any ties to religion.

Because of his belief in the necessity of a religious education to a Christian nation, Strachan did not give up -- he set about establishing another university in Toronto for the specific purpose of training clergy for the Church of England. He was successful in obtaining a second charter as well as funds and the result was Trinity College, where other academic subjects were taught in addition to theology.

In the meantime Strachan had been very active politically. In 1820 he became a member of the Legislative Council. Three years later Strachan was appointed President of the Board of the General Superintendence of Education. These times, however, were not quiet ones in York. Cholera struck the town in 1832 and claimed one-twelfth of the total population. During this epidemic Strachan's time was divided between his church, which was converted to a hospital, and the graveyard.

¹¹J. L. H. Henderson, John Strachan: Documents and Opinions, cited above, Letter from Strachan to John McLaurin, October 3, 1831, p. 124.

The late 1820's and early 1830's also witnessed the growth of the reform movement within the Canadas. Within this movement in Upper Canada there were several factions and the most famous was perhaps that group of people who supported William Lyon Mackenzie, editor of the Colonial Advocate. Strachan and Mackenzie held directly opposing views on most matters, including such issues as an established church; the Crown and Clergy Reserves, education and government structure. This conflict of opinion was made evident publicly when Strachan was called as a witness before the Select Committee on Grievances, Mackenzie posing the questions which Strachan was answering:

557. The undue advantages and exclusive religious privileges granted to certain religious denominations are much complained of; would it not tend to strengthen a good government if they were altogether abolished? -- There should be in every Christian country an established religion, otherwise it is not a Christian but an Infidel country.

559. The government of Upper Canada does not confine itself to maintaining one form of the Christian religion; it selects four particular denominations; and within the last two years appears to have paid them about £35,000, while the other sects received no part of the public monies. Do you think this was a just course? -- The Government does so little in support of the Christian religion, that I am thankful they do this much.¹²

These and other issues¹³ resulted in the Rebellion of 1837 at York where the rebels were defeated.

¹² Ibid., p. 138, "Upper Canada, House of Assembly, the Seventh Report from the Select Committee of the House of Assembly."

¹³ Due to the aims and limitations of this thesis we cannot go into the other issues which resulted in the Rebellion of 1837.

To make recommendations concerning the colonial governments, the home government sent Lord Durham. His report on Upper Canada was based on a nine-day visit there. His main recommendation, the union of the Canadas, was opposed by Strachan. Among other reasons, Strachan feared Catholic and reform domination in the government. What Strachan desired, indeed what he had already proposed in 1824,¹⁴ was the union of all of the British colonies in North America, something which he lived to see in 1867.¹⁵

In the meantime Strachan succeeded in attaining a position which he had wanted for a long time: that of bishop. He was consecrated first Bishop of Toronto on August 4, 1839 at Lambeth Palace in England. As Bishop he continued to travel extensively in the colony, ordaining clergy, opening churches and confirming new members. These trips were extremely strenuous but in Strachan's view, they were necessary to the growth and strength of the church. They also gave Strachan a first-hand perspective as to the state of the province in terms of secular growth and development. In this sense Strachan was not a man who was ever isolated from the people.

¹⁴ These ideas of Strachan's were written up for him by his former pupil John Beverley Robinson in "Observation on the Policy of a General Union of all the British Provinces of North America.", contained in John Strachan: Documents and Opinions, cited above, p. 165.

¹⁵ About Confederation Strachan remarked, "I trust to God that the measure may prosper." Strachan Letter Book, 1862-1867, p. 243, quoted in J. L. H. Henderson's biography of Strachan, op. cit. p. 34.

In the early days of his archdeaconry he travelled on foot, by horse or even by canoe. In later times he experienced travel by steam boat and, in limited areas, train travel.

Strachan was a crucial figure in the growth of the Church of England in Upper Canada. He started as one of the few original churchmen in the province and with a typical congregation of the time:

Every parish in this country is to be made; the people have little or no religion, and their minds are so prone to low cunning, that it will be difficult to make anything of them . . . My flock is not numerous. A great part of my parish belongs to the Lutheran persuasion, a greater has no religion at all. A number of the people are Catholics, and plenty of Presbyterians with a few Methodists. You see I am in a pickle.¹⁶

By the year 1820 Strachan found himself one of twenty-two Church of England clergymen in Upper Canada.¹⁷

One of the main rival groups of the Church of England was the Methodists, who, because of their reputation for having a strong connection with the United States often were regarded as "renegades from the Church of England, traitors to their king and uneducated enthusiasts to boot."¹⁸ During Strachan's time, the Methodists found their strongest leadership in men like Egerton Ryerson. The Methodists at times and in spite of some ambivalence were strong

¹⁶Strachan to Brown, Cornwall, 27 October 1803, Strachan Papers, quoted in J. L. H. Henderson (Ed.), John Strachan: Documents and Opinions, op. cit.

¹⁷J. S. Moir, The Church in the British Era (Toronto, 1972), p. 87.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 87. Strachan would not have disagreed violently with this assessment.

backers of radical reform, due to issues such as the clergy reserves, for example. Before the rebellion, however, the Methodists had withdrawn a major portion of their support from this group.¹⁹

The Presbyterians also were rivals of the Church of England. If anything, they had the most to complain of in issues such as the reserves. The Constitution Act of 1791 had provided for

a permanent appropriation of lands . . . for the support and maintenance of the Protestant clergy [the amount to be] equal in value to the seventh part²⁰

of the lands granted in every township in Upper Canada. The terminology of the act such as "Protestant" and "established church" did not help to clarify matters since the Presbyterians were both Protestant and members of an established state church in Great Britain.

Roman Catholics, of course, also were found in goodly numbers in Upper Canada, as well as various other sects and denominations.²¹

Even though Strachan's efforts to have the Church of England become an established church ultimately were not a success, he did succeed in building a strong, province-wide foundation for the Church of England. He had seen very early the need for an institution which would train clergy. He preferred to have the candidates

¹⁹ For further information regarding the Methodists and politics see G. S. French, Parsons and Politics: the Role of the Wesleyan Methodists in Upper Canada and the Maritimes from 1780-1858 (Toronto, 1962).

²⁰ G. M. Craig, Upper Canada, the Formative Years (Toronto, 1963), p. 16.

²¹ A good account of the religious makeup of Upper Canada is available in J. S. Moir's book, cited above.

native born who would know well and fit into a growing colonial society. Indeed, Strachan was critical of Bishop Jacob Mountain, first Bishop of Montreal, in this regard. Mountain's sermons he felt were too elegant and not geared towards a colonial society.²²

Mountain, accustomed to comfortable existence, was also not a "travelling" bishop, which, as we have said, Strachan believed to be a crucial trait. To this end he founded a theological college in 1824 under the Rev. A. N. Bethune, a former student of Strachan's. Strachan himself later consecrated Bethune as his own successor. Strachan also organized a church society for the diocese to provide a stronger organizational base for the church. All of the clergy met together every three years for a "visitation" and were addressed by Strachan until 1853 when the first official synod was held. Under his guidance the large see of Toronto was divided to form the Diocese of Huron to the west and the Diocese of Ontario to the east. This was accomplished by 1861.

Strachan himself buried many members of his family. Next to his wife's death, the one which most distressed him was that of John Beverley Robinson, whom he considered as a son, in 1863. Robinson, Chief Justice when he died, had been friend, student and political colleague to Strachan throughout his life in the province.

It was not until after his eighty-ninth birthday that Strachan gave up many of his activities. One of his great disappointments was

²²S. Boorman, John Toronto (Toronto, 1969) p. 77.

that, although he was invited, he was not able to attend the first Pan-Anglican Conference in Lambeth in 1867:

Never probably since the era of the General Councils of the Primitive Church would a more interesting and important assemblage of the Prelates of the Christian Church have been held than the meeting which is now proposed²³

Strachan died on All Saints' Day the same year.

We have attempted to put forth the events of Strachan's life which are relevant to the discussion of his sermon literature. It is not within the scope of this thesis to go into further details about his very full life, nor can we explore further the history of the times or the growth of the Church.²⁴ Instead we must now proceed to a discussion of the sermons themselves.

²³ Strachan to the Archbishop of Canterbury, 11 April 1867, Strachan Papers as quoted in A. N. Bethune's Memoir of the Right Reverend John Strachan (Toronto, 1870), p. 294.

²⁴ See the bibliography concerning reading related to these areas.

CHAPTER TWO

CHAPTER TWO

When one attempts to say clearly what Strachan thought about the nature of God one is immediately faced with two situations." First, Strachan did not write complete sermons which dealt exclusively with this topic. Where he does talk about God it is in terms of being an essential mystery. Second, one notices that when Strachan does speak about God, he does so in relation to man: what man can know about God, the sources of this knowledge, the means by which one could know and the relationship between God's will and man.

The existence of God is for Strachan unquestionable. God is

that perfect Being who made and preserves all things and conducts his Creatures to the perfection and happiness of their several natures.¹

God is perfect, eternal and unchanging but above all He is the Creator, the Father. Throughout Strachan's sermons it is this aspect of the nature of God which is emphasized most. In discussing the Trinity Strachan uses the distinctions of Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. Christ's role as redeemer is to mediate between man and God,

so that in consequence of his [Christ's] obedience unto death the way is opened for the reconciliation of fallen man to his offended Creator.²

¹Strachan, A sermon preached on April 8, 1855 (Good Friday) on 1 John 3:16.

²Strachan, A sermon preached on May 26, 1839, on 1 Corinthians 2:7, on the Holy Trinity.

The Father sent His son to redeem His creatures because God is above all else love:

. . . love is the most endearing of all of God's attributes and not only comprehends them but sheds upon them all the most exalted and encouraging glory and accordingly Love has ever been the foundation of all of God's dealings with man . . .³

For Strachan the Holy Spirit helps man to reciprocate this love through faith and obedience.

Strachan believed that there is a definite hierarchy in the chain of being. Where a creature fits in this hierarchy depends on how it can "know" something. At the lowest level are inanimate objects and then one progresses to animals which know by instinct.

Between the low animals and man the difference is great -- animals are mere instruments in the hand of man or follow simply the use and perfection of their nature by what is called instinct or more correctly by the divine power impressed upon them.⁴

Man, however, possesses reason which aids him in both secular and religious knowledge. Reason, for instance, can help us learn

those simple rules for virtuous conduct, which all good men had known and endeavoured to act upon in all ages and which the heathens ought to have known as well as the Jews -- For example such graces as veracity, purity, charity, piety, in fine all that constitute natural religion -- All that human reason assisted by the natural light of conscience might have taught to persons anxious after truth. This is the class of Doctrines which our Lord here speaks of under the title of earthly things.⁵

On the other hand man has access to heavenly things through revelation. Heavenly things

³Strachan, A sermon preached on January 20, 1856, on 1 John 4:16.

⁴Strachan, A sermon preached on April 8, 1855 (Good Friday) on 1 John 3:16.

⁵Strachan, A sermon preached on September 23, 1855 on St. John 3:12.

are those mysterious truths which we could not have known except by a revelation from God and which he has thought fit to communicate to us by Messengers especially commissioned for that purpose.⁶

Strachan does not give a lower place to religious knowledge and duties to which one has access through reason because they are emphasized so strongly in scripture:

Indeed the stress which our Lord lays on natural religion is so great that the peculiar doctrines of Christianity -- the heavenly things are only gradually and slowly put forward chiefly towards the end of his Ministry and just before he was to go to his Father.⁷

It is impossible for man to attend to his heavenly duties if he neglects his earthly ones:

As a man cannot be said to believe in any God at all who lives as if he looked to nothing beyond this world so no one can be said to believe rightly in the Doctrine of the Trinity and the Incarnation and atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ unless he acts consistently with that belief . . .⁸

Both types of knowledge are "wedded together" through Christ. To both types of knowledge the highest and the meanest human intellect have access.

Strachan believed that from the many links below man in the chain of existence one could

infer that the chain above us of more perfect beings is at least equally long . . . there are myriads of intelligent Beings above us and if there are beings superior then is man the link which connects the material with the Spiritual world, yet without revelation all this is conjectural . . .⁹

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Strachan, A sermon preached on September 29, 1847 on 2 Kings 6:17.

And how is it that God reveals Himself to man -- how is revelation communicated across "the infinite distance between the Creator and the highest created being"¹⁰? For Strachan the answer is twofold. First, we know about God through the Bible and Strachan does make a very definite distinction concerning the differences in revelation between the Old and New Testaments.¹¹ In the Old Testament Creation is a very important aspect of God's revelation. As important, however, are two further aspects: that God's communication was direct and that it was to a particular people that He revealed Himself:

In ancient times the will of God was made known by direct communications from on high. Sacrifices were appointed from the most early days and the Divine Grace was in this manner imparted to the Patriarchs, the Prophets and chosen servants of God . . . Such was the case before and after the Flood and in her [the Church's] typical state during the Mosaical dispensation when communications from heaven were greatly enlarged tho' confined to one nation the Jews.¹²

The idea of a chosen nation is absolutely central to Strachan.¹³ Another aspect of God's revelation in the Old Testament which Strachan stresses is the material, as opposed to a spiritual, way by which God is represented: a pillar of fire, a burning bush, and a cloud.

¹⁰Strachan, A sermon preached on April 8, 1855 (Good Friday) on 1 John 3:16.

¹¹See footnote #6 of the introduction for the number of sermons written on texts from both testaments.

¹²Strachan, A sermon preached on May 10, 1844 on Judges 13:23.

¹³This idea will be discussed in detail at a later point in the thesis.

With the New Testament and Christ, Strachan sees a radical change in the way that God reveals himself. God is now revealed as the Trinity whose essence is love because the three persons are united as one in order to accomplish the work of human redemption:

Thus the Doctrine of the Trinity exhibits God as the God of love. It was revealed for the purpose of shewing how God could be faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. It is because . . . man in the pride of his heart sees no need for the method of Salvation which the Holy Scriptures make known to us he thinks that by some work of righteousness which he does or can do he may save himself and therefore a propiation for sin is unnecessary. The mystery of redeeming love can never be unravelled by our finite understandings; but the exhibition of it which is made in the Word of God must commend itself to the reflecting and as admirably adapted to the necessities of fallen man.¹⁴

Also central to Strachan's ideas on the New Testament is the concept that the Kingdom of God is within man and that God should be worshipped as a spirit, "present in no one place, in no one man, but in his new body the Church, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."¹⁵

Strachan believed that the principles of man's knowledge of God have remained the same between the Old and New Testaments:

¹⁴Strachan, A sermon preached on May 26, 1839 on 1 Corinthians 2:7, on the Holy Trinity.

¹⁵Strachan, A sermon preached on March 4, 1832 on 1 Timothy 3:16.

. . . the religion set forth in the holy scriptures of which not one fundamental principle has changed since the Creation of the world. Its exterior aspect has we admit been very different at different times and its influence has been various during its progress from the fall to the gracious dispensation of the Gospel but its nature and character have been as unchangeable as its Almighty author . . .¹⁶

Strachan does maintain, however, that our knowledge of God, indeed Christianity itself, is "progressive".¹⁷ God's communication has been slow and gradual as God in his wisdom thought was most appropriate to both his own perfect nature and man's fallen character:

It appears that intelligent beings should pass through a kind of infancy of knowledge . . . that new discoveries and more enlarged views should be gradually made known to them that the advance which they make may be more regular and complete.¹⁸

For example Strachan believed that progress had been made since the true but coarse conception of God's presence in the Old Testament:

God's presence with his reasonable creatures has gradually assumed a Character more and more unlike our gross corruptions of any earthly or created object, until we of these latter days are found acknowledging the reality of the Divine presence and communion without any sensible manifestation at all.¹⁹

In Strachan's ideas the second and perhaps the more important source of revelation concerning God is through His providence and moral

¹⁶Strachan, A sermon preached on November 4, 1827, on 1 Corinthians 3:11.

¹⁷This point is central to his social and political ideas which will be discussed at a later point in the thesis.

¹⁸Strachan, A sermon preached on January 4, 1824, on Colossians 3:11.

¹⁹Strachan, A sermon preached on March 4, 1832 on 1 Timothy 3:16.

government. God's providence is a divine and uniform plan for the restoration of the human race

through a long period of accomplishment by a series of events falling at last into one great completion. Prophecy communicates his design viewed as a whole, and as one from first to last gathered into one object of sight, the end anticipated in the beginning . . . God is one and his will one and his purpose one and his work one . . .²⁰

Strachan sees this restoration of man as being accomplished by Providence through the propagation of the gospel in every corner of the earth. In order for God to maintain his absolute sovereignty he uses "instruments" to carry out his plan. These instruments may be individuals, families, groups of people or nations. It is because these instruments are imperfect that the Gospel has not been spread over the earth:

Had the Christian World my Brethren been truly Christian and not been too often swayed by the worst and most worldly principles and passions the light of the Gospel would have long ago penetrated into every corner of the earth . . .²¹

In order that God's plan for man be carried out through these imperfect instruments there exists on earth God's moral government which

is based on his immutable justice and goodness and it is because of our limited faculties that we do not behold these blessed perfections in every event which arrests our attention.²²

Although the judgements of God's moral government are grievous they

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Strachan, A sermon preached on January 6, 1852, on St. Matthew 24:14.

²¹Strachan, A sermon preached on January 6, 1844, on Isaiah 63:16.

²²Ibid.

are sent for man's correction and "our heavenly father never correcteth his children without reason."²³

Strachan sometimes feared that God's moral government might give man an inaccurate view of God's motives:

God punishes not for the sake of punishment for he requires not our misery to make him happy being completely happy in the perfection of his own nature, but he punishes us entirely to prove for our good the consistency of his decrees and his hatred of sin which is continually filling the world with grief and lamentation and is to be checked in no other manner than from sad experience of its malignant effects . . .²⁴

The sources of misery on earth, according to Strachan, are threefold: those which men bring upon themselves and others accidentally, physical evils (which are few) and those brought about intentionally by the unregulated passions of men. It is the last that is the most destructive:

It is the passions of men which are continually overflowing and dealing around them destruction and death. From their baleful influence there is no escape since those who are able to regulate their own affections are plunged into calamity by the rashness of others . . .²⁵

When speaking about God's providence Strachan says that it is both "visible" yet "unsearchable". This distinction can be explained in terms of the following example. That war is

²³ Strachan, A sermon composed on March 14 and 15 and delivered on the 16, 1804 being appointed for a day of humiliation and prayer on account of the war against Buonaparte (sic).

²⁴ Strachan, A sermon preached on December 27, 1822, on Deuteronomy 34:4.

²⁵ Strachan, A sermon composed on March 14 and 15 and delivered on the 16, 1804 being appointed for a day of humiliation and prayer on account of the war against Buonaparte (sic).

a visible judgement in God's moral government is apparent to

Strachan:

. . . the judgements of God are abroad on the earth.
The hand of God appears visible and he hath no
doubt raised up this enemy against us to serve the
wisest purposes . . .²⁶

What is "unsearchable" are the purposes and results of this action:

The whole plan of Providence is far beyond our compre-
hension -- we cannot tell what shall be the issue
of any train of events, but this we certainly know
that so long as we remain in sin, we can have no
ground to hope . . .²⁷

This is an important distinction to make because it clearly reflects Strachan's ideas on the character of God. In many sermons Strachan emphasizes the mysterious aspects of God's nature but that God cares for his creatures is no mystery and is not something that we should doubt. One should not try to guess at God's purpose. For example, in times of prosperity one should not assume that good fortune is a reward from God to man. Instead it may be a sort of probation to see whether or not we forget our dependence on Him. In the same way, times of adversity could be a punishment or they could be a proving ground for the strength of man's faith. These things are not for man to know with certainty. Thus man is made to feel the presence and care of a loving father yet God is still acknowledged as perfect and eternal, a being whose ways, thoughts and wisdom are higher than those of man.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

It is also important that "the Providence and moral government of God extends over all, over the small as well as over the great."²⁸

This Strachan believes to be the second great principle of Christianity:²⁹

The eyes of God are upon us all however mean and insignificant we may appear . . . everything which happens to us comes from him from whom nothing but good can come, he orders all directs all comprehends the present and the future, nothing can resist his will or frustrate his designs . . .³⁰

As previously mentioned, the judgements of God's moral government are not solely for individuals but for groups and nations:

Shall not he administer the last remedy, and before we be entirely lost, let loose judgements upon us, that haply we may be awakened from our delusion and sensible of our sins. If this be true of us considered as private individuals, what is our situation as a nation? Have we not national sins to lament: is the root corrupted and does the tree remain vigorous and undecayed . . .³¹

That God uses nations as instruments of his Providence is an idea for which Strachan finds support not only in the Old Testament but in an examination of history:

Nor would it be difficult to show from the history of the last eighteen centuries that God has upholden nations while they continued instruments for the execution of his holy will in disseminating the

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Strachan, A sermon preached on December 24, 1865 on St. John 18:37.

29

That there is only one God and that God is Love are the first and third great principles of Christianity, Ibid.

30

Ibid.

31

Strachan, A sermon composed on March 14 and 15 and delivered on the 16, 1804 being appointed for a day of humiliation and prayer on account of the war against Buonaparte (sic).

truths of his blessed revelation and that he has discarded and depressed them and even blotted them out from the face of the earth when they departed from the faith and ceased to become the mediums of its propagation.³²

It is now appropriate to discuss man's reactions in the face of God's providence and moral government.

The plans of God's providence and the nature of God's moral government are made by God so as to be appropriate to the character of man:

Man cannot become happy till he become good and goodness according to the moral and intellectual constitution of the human mind is not a thing to be produced in it by a direct act or power but only by the influence of persuasion and by the motives of reason. It is to such an end that all the plan of God's Providence with regard to man has been graciously formed, and wisely adapted to his different circumstances and situation. Even in its greatest obscurity and most apparent severity it bore still the indication of the most paternal love which the condition of his character at the time would admit, and although it is impossible for us to trace all the bearings of so an extensive system of discipline, yet they appear sufficiently distinct to satisfy us of its wisdom and loving kindness throughout . . .³³

Now when Strachan speaks of man's character it must be remembered where he places man in the hierarchy of being. This central place in the hierarchy is due to man's reason. There are, however, other assumptions about man which Strachan believes are central to Christianity:

Our religion pre-supposes the apostacy and corruption of the human race, it assumes the fact that men are

³² Strachan, A sermon preached on June 7, 1832, on Psalm 127:1.

³³ Strachan, A sermon preached in December, 1860 on St. John 3:16.

spiritually ignorant, and that they require to be enlightened from above, that their nature is impure and subject to evil affections and passions, that from the envy, malice and contention, the pride and covetousness to which they give way, they are become hateful and hating one another . . .³⁴

It is because of this corrupt side of his character, therefore, that man often reacts against God when faced with His providence. This reaction is futile, however, since God is not limited by time; he is infinite. Therefore, for a finite and imperfect creature to rail against the proceeding of the Divine administration is useless. Man is however the only creature who may choose not to obey God:

There are my Brethern no rebellious stirs, no inversions of the seasons, no brute creatures that become conscious of the laws of their instinct and turn and refuse to obey them. Resistance to God begins with man who alone knows him. He turns from God to that which is right in his own eyes, he makes a law for himself³⁵ - he becomes selfish and therefore sinful . . .

Choice of action and attitude is also central to the justice of God's moral government because before any grievous judgement is sent down upon man God sends various warnings:

No judgement is sent till after many messengers or warnings have been rejected and these intimations are marks of the patience, goodness and long suffering of God which leadeth to repentance for this is the end which our heavenly Father aims at and to this use ought we to put all these admonitions and warnings of impending calamity which we are continually experiencing in our progress through life.³⁶

³⁴Strachan, A sermon preached on January 10, 1830, on Isaiah 55:10 & 11.

³⁵Strachan, A sermon preached on April 8, 1855 (Good Friday), on 1 John 3:16.

³⁶Strachan, A sermon preached on November 9, 1823 on Genesis 7:5.

If through self-examination man truly repents of his ways it is possible that God's threatening judgement might be averted: "As vice tendeth to destruction, so virtue tendeth to stability."³⁷

For these ideas Strachan turned to both the Old Testament and the book of Revelation emphasizing that the repentance and the resulting reformation must be immediate:

Had the inhabitants of the earth repented at the preaching of Noah, as those of Ninevah did at the threatenings of Jonah, the flood might have been averted. There is a limited time, to neglect which is to fill up the measure of our iniquity.³⁸

Strachan emphasized that the choice of repentance is left up to man in accordance with his nature:

Moreover we are left at liberty to make use of these warnings as we please, for the present life, neither good nor evil are forced upon us, we are left to make a choice for ourselves. Our Saviour could have so influenced the minds of men by his words and power as would have made them pure and holy, but after granting them a sufficient degree of evidence he left them to make use of the faculties with which they were endowed . . .³⁹

Instead of resisting or rebelling against God, the Christian should accept the judgements of God's moral government. To do so is to demonstrate faith in God's goodness. It is this belief that enabled Strachan to proclaim in his old age:

³⁷ Strachan, A sermon composed on March 14 and 15 and delivered on the 16, 1804 being appointed for a day of humiliation and prayer on account of the war against Buonaparte (sic).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

All that happens to me is welcome, good and bad, progress and opposition, prosperity and adversity, life and death for it is his dispensation, it is the boon of our Father in heaven who can intend nothing but for my good.⁴⁰

Earlier in his life, just after the death of one of his sons, Strachan put forth this idea in a more profound fashion:

To throw ourselves entirely upon God, to annihilate self in our hearts and to receive without doubt, murmuring or complaint whatever befalls us is a degree of perfection in Christian life which few are able to attain . . . We are anxious that God should clear up his conduct towards us, as he proceeds, and account for every step as his designs are completing . . .⁴¹

Instead of trying to scrutinize God's motives and actions we should turn the examination back onto ourselves. In particular Strachan says that we should examine our attitude toward God, the regulation of our passions -- specifically our emphasis on material things, our relationships with our families and our duties to the community and to the nation. In general this is how Strachan says that man should react when face to face with one of God's judgements. Naturally, however, there are many questions which arise even if one does accept the present fact of God's providence. The first one is, what will be the outcome? There are, says Strachan, two definite situations which will not occur. The first

⁴⁰ Strachan, A sermon preached on December 24, 1865, on St. John 18:37.

⁴¹ Strachan, A sermon preached on December 25, 1859 on St. John 13:7, copied with some omissions from a Sermon preached on the death of Dear George on 16 December, 1837. (George Cartwright Strachan was born on January 5, 1812 and died on November 20, 1837).

has to do with a personal government by Christ in the world:

It is a prevailing opinion among many that there shall arise a reign of peace and bliss on earth under the personal government of our Lord Jesus Christ himself. Now, however alluring this opinion may be, it cannot be safely entertained by the faithful because it is not consistent with that gradual dissemination of the Gospel which the experience of eighteen centuries established and more especially because it is not sanctioned by the Holy Scriptures. Moreover it implies a miraculous interference which would supersede all human exertion and is not, therefore, in accordance with the usual proceedings of God's moral government.⁴²

The second situation which will not occur is the universal conversion of mankind to Christianity on earth. This is not possible because of man's imperfect character.

Having confidence in God rather than rebelling in times of great difficulty also helps man in his attempt to accept his earthly lot -- the shortness and uncertainty of human life. Man is surrounded by reminders of his finitude by comparing himself even to nature. But Strachan urges that the answer is in the scriptures and referring to Isaiah 54:8, says:

For even the mountains and everlasting hills shall be found too transient for the continuance of that kindness which God bears to us and that peace which he has promised to confer . . . the constancy of nature is not equal to the constancy of God's promises nor external nature equal to the true life of man . . .⁴³

⁴²Strachan, A sermon preached on January 6, 1852, on St. Matthew 24:14.

⁴³Strachan, A sermon on War and Pestilence preached on August 13, 1854 at the Cathedral in the morning on Isaiah 54:8.

But to have confidence in God often does not silence our questions about our own individual future state. This is something which man cannot know on his own:

. . . respecting a future life, unassisted reason can give no certain information on this important subject. All is conjecture and presumption leaving the inquiring mind gloomy and dissatisfied.⁴⁴

This quest for knowledge is, for Strachan, one of the central aspects of man's character from the Fall until the end of the world. To be too concerned with individual "futuraity" or the outcome of specific events on earth is inconsistent with Christianity according to Strachan:

To inquire into things proper for us to know is a laudable and noble pursuit but to institute a set of inquiries for the express purpose of overturning the evidence of God or because we doubt of his truth, can never be sufficiently reprobated. A moment's reflection may also satisfy us that such inquiries are vain, for it is impossible for us ever to acquire any knowledge of future events.⁴⁵

All that a Christian needs to know concerning the future can be known through the acknowledgement of the truth of the Crucifixion: "A full knowledge of our Saviour's death and sufferings and their effects gradually removes every fear or doubt."⁴⁶ The

⁴⁴ Strachan, A sermon preached on March 23, 1845 on Acts 13:33.

⁴⁵ Strachan, A sermon preached on August 29, 1819 on St. Luke 16:31. "Futuraity" is the word Strachan uses.

⁴⁶ Strachan, A sermon on War and Pestilence preached on August 13, 1854 at the Cathedral in the morning on Isaiah 54:8.

Christian, therefore, naturally looks to the future, but it is to the completion of his redemption, beyond his life on earth. It is this hope for future redemption which sustains him:

Our present existence would be very imperfect without an hereafter in which our views of nature and its great Author will become more clear and satisfactory. For to suppose that we should be permitted to see so far and have our curiosity so much raised concerning the works of God only to be disappointed does not accord with the wisdom which shines throughout all nature . . . This therefore leads us to consider our present state as only the beginning of our existence and as a state of preparation for future advancement . . .⁴⁷

All of these ideas lead Strachan to one conclusion regarding man in the face of God's providence and moral government: that one's thoughts and actions in daily life are of utmost importance. This behaviour is in one sense oriented to the immediate present since repentance and reformation can help to avert God's grievous judgements. In the second sense, and by far the more important, one's behaviour is oriented towards the future because it is above all a preparation for the afterlife -- for the final redemption. These two ideas are at the very centre of Strachan's thought. The remainder of the thesis will attempt to demonstrate this.

⁴⁷ Strachan, A sermon preached on January 4, 1824 on Colossians 3:11.

CHAPTER THREE

CHAPTER THREE

As was seen in the previous chapter Strachan emphasized strongly the importance of how man reacts in the world to God's revelation. He must heed the warnings of God's judgements through repenting his sins and reforming his character and actions. It is for this reason that Strachan says, "Religion is essentially practical, and the whole of revelation may be considered an exhortation to holiness."¹ It is also because Strachan believed in the revelation of God as progressive that he placed much emphasis on historical Christianity and religion in the world:

The love of Christ is the great scene of the world's history and to it all of our thoughts and feelings ought to be turning and so fixing the eye of Faith upon the historical character of our religion and upon the man Christ Jesus who has shewn us the perfection of our nature and redeemed our fallen race from God whose eternal Son he is. We are saved from the cloudy abstractions of what is called absolute religion which is so much boasted of in the present times and which vainly attempts to raise us above historical Christianity to the contemplation of absolute being a contemplation too vast for our limited powers and incapable of being reduced to any practical use.²

This section of the thesis will attempt to outline what for Strachan constituted the purpose of Christianity in the world, the duties of a Christian and the Christian character as needed to

¹Strachan, A sermon preached on November 10, 1849, on St. Luke 20:38.

²Strachan, A sermon preached on April 8, 1855 (Good Friday) on 1 John 3:16.

perform those duties in the world. This discussion will remain at a general level with a more specific discussion to take place in the following chapter.

The purpose of God's providence is to further the proclamation of the Gospel on earth. The aim of the Christian religion, therefore, is, through the light of revelation, to attempt to alter the state as well as the character of mankind. This requires that man realize the true importance of his being in the world and that he see the life of man on earth as a preparation for heaven.

It is important for man to know that the doctrines of Christianity are "in sweet accordance with the nature of man and the general constitution of things."³ God knows the character and abilities of man and he does not expect anything which is not appropriate to or impossible for that character. This knowledge gives man strength and courage to obey God.

The basic difference between a non-Christian character and a Christian character can be seen in how each views this world. The Christian believes that this world is

the first step of an endless existence when it engages to render us, by a proper disciplines, fit members of a Celestial Society hereafter. This object makes a complete distinction between the man who looks no further than the present life and the sincere Christian The man of this world may be virtuous from present utility and the hope of consequent happiness but the Christian lives in such a manner as to qualify himself for the acceptance as well as, the enjoyment of future happiness.⁴

³Strachan, A sermon preached on May 8, 1825 on St. John 17:15.

⁴Strachan, A sermon preached on March 30, 1806 on 2 Corinthians 4:3.

It is possible for the man of the world to live a good life by not committing any crime or by not breaking any laws but this is vastly inferior to the Christian character because

the virtues which are the immediate object of the laws are the lowest of all human virtues. He therefore who makes the laws of his country the only rule of his conduct, may be guilty of innumerable crimes . . .

The difference, therefore, between a non-Christian and a Christian are the virtues which each holds as important:

The first has only to cultivate Justice, prudence, temperance and benevolence. To these the Christian must add constant piety, humility, resignation and charity.⁶

A man who looks only to this world cannot long remain without sin. For

to love the world . . . is to neglect the happiness of eternity for the transitory pleasures of this life . . . The lover of the world has his affections gradually corrupted and rendered selfish and debased . . .⁷

The reason that the pleasures of the earth are sinful finds its source in their nature:

Their character and nature belong too much to this world, too much to man in his degenerate state. They are commonly in opposition to spiritual things and as they bind us to earth they impede our progress towards heaven . . .⁸

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Strachan, A sermon preached on February 7, 1841 on 1 John 2:15.

⁸Strachan, A sermon preached on May 10, 1822 on 1 Peter 4:7.

The "things of the earth" do not satisfy man's needs in any ultimate way and for this reason man's character, if directed toward these things only, will become inevitably one of discontentment. This discontentment is the source of many other dreadful sins such as love of money and covetousness:

. . . for the love of money is as much the root of evil now as it was then. The danger of possessing riches is the carnal security to which they lead. The desire of acquiring . . . them is an object of the world and becomes criminal when it becomes the end and aim of our life.⁹

The desire for more money feeds the sin of ambition, a sin which was for Strachan one of the worst and one about which he often spoke:

Let us not refuse to taste that portion of bliss however small that heaven has allotted us, a change of condition may not be easily affected and when obtained it may be found pregnant with cares and with dangers more intolerable than those we have escaped. You despise the obscurity of Your station. You are eager to raise yourself to a place of distinction. This you may reach but there are numberless difficulties to be surmounted. You must sacrifice Your care and the tranquility of your mind. Your eagerness will beget impatience and impatience will beget anxiety . . . You are at last disappointed and you retire from the contest disgusted with yourself and with the world . . . alas in most cases of this sort it will be found that the late fever of your mind has weakened your power of enjoyment. Chagrin, melancholy, envy, hatred and other wretched passions now rack your soul and these growing by indulgence render you completely miserable. . . . To your distorted eye all is gloomy and disordered . . . Thus insensible to pleasure, tortured by wicked passions and hating

⁹Strachan, A sermon preached on September 21, 1817, on St. Luke 18:23.

your species you become worse than the wild beasts of the desert . . . Heaven itself could not satisfy your desires or compose the tumult of your soul . . .¹⁰

The Christian, however, is able to face the things of this world in a more temperate way so as to not deny himself the pleasures which the earth offers to him:

The object of Christianity is not to detach us altogether from the world but to teach us its true value while we are in it for while it joins reason in permitting us to taste in moderation the blessings it offers we are taught to fly from its corruptions and without rendering us insensible to its pleasures we are exhorted not to love it when placed in comparison with the world which is to come.¹¹

It is the knowledge of the relationship between this world and the world which is yet to come which forms the basis for a Christian character and the resulting Christian duty in the world:

Having fixed these truths in the mind, Christian morality points always to the other world and considers every thing done as promoting happiness or misery there. It looks upon human life as a system in which there is nothing light, nothing indifferent . . . It shews those who are under its influence that the smallest deviation from rectitude impedes their progress toward perfection . . .¹²

¹⁰Strachan, A sermon written at sea September 7, 1824 and preached at sea September 24, 1824 on 1 Timothy 6:6 and 7. Notation: "Read this sermon on 12 March 1858 and found it very inferior to what I expected."

¹¹Strachan, A sermon preached on February 7, 1841 on 1 John 2:15.

¹²Strachan, A sermon preached at Cornwall before the Governor on August 3, 1806, on 1 Corinthians 10:31.

Therefore, our destiny is determined by the good or ill use of our time on earth -- by the character of our thoughts and actions. We know this to be the case because of God's moral government. Man must realize that he was sent into the world for some great purpose and that this world is the great

theatre in which he is appointed by Providence to exhibit a display of his character; he must feel that it is intended by Providence that he should be made better by the discipline of this state and prepared for another . . .¹³

On the other hand, man knows that this is only part of God's providential plan. The knowledge that this plan works towards the good helps man to accept his lot more easily in life as that of a creature possessed of reason and craving understanding:

It is the only clue that can explain and vindicate the ways of God to man, the only guide that can direct us through the maze of human affairs and the only way by which we are able to comprehend the history of the world.¹⁴

When Strachan speaks of life as a "theatre", a state of discipline, or a state of probation he is in fact saying that life on earth is a testing-ground for the strength of our faith because "the true measure of our faith is obedience."¹⁵ Strachan emphasizes the importance of such traits as resignation, patience, perseverance

¹³ Strachan, A sermon preached on February 7, 1841 on 1 John 2:15.

¹⁴ Strachan, A sermon preached on March 30, 1806, on 2 Corinthians 4:3.

¹⁵ Strachan, A sermon preached on November 10, 1849 on St. Luke 20:38.

and reliance on God as being those traits which lead to pure obedience to God's will. The result of this obedience leads to

the exercise of our other virtues and the improvement of our minds and further rendering us more fervent in our devotions and more earnestly sensible of the value of the blessings we pray for . . .¹⁶

Strachan believed that the end for which man is given the gift of life is happiness. This state of happiness, however, is not for man's sake alone:

And this is the great object of our religion, for the happiness of man magnifies the glory of God -- such is the high and holy object which our religion proposes to accomplish . . .¹⁷

Happiness which man may know on earth is but a reflection of the future since "perfect happiness is not to be found in this state of our existence."¹⁸ But while this life offers many opportunities for happiness and enjoyment, the Christian must be aware of the duties and obligations which it entails:

As every gift imposes certain obligations so the gift of life requires on our part the performance of certain conditions . . . [the gift of life] is an act of divine goodness and bounty and this imposes thankful gratitude to God. Again we are enjoying this gift of life along with others of the same rank and species hence spring a new class of duties

¹⁶ Strachan, A sermon preached on August 28, 1833, on St. Luke 18:1.

¹⁷ Strachan, A sermon preached on February 22, 1829, on St. Matthew 5:16.

¹⁸ Strachan, A sermon written at sea September 7, 1824 and preached at sea September 24, 1824 on 1 Timothy 6:6 and 7. Notation cited above.

or obligations which we cannot neglect. Here then we have our duty to God and to man . . .¹⁹

This brings us back to Strachan's statement concerning the practical nature of religion. We will attempt to examine now how Strachan believes religion should be united with our daily conduct and how, in turn, Christian virtues are essentially "practical".

A brief look at Strachan's own life shows that he believed very strongly in the union of religion and one's daily activities. This was one of his favourite ideas and one on which he preached many times in Upper Canada. In fact one of the first sermons which Strachan ever preached had this idea as its central theme:

Mankind are too much accustomed to keep religion from their ordinary employments. Many good men suppose that the duties she requires ought not to be intermingled with the affairs of life, that they are of too solemn a nature to be often introduced, that they demand a distinct portion of time and minds detached from all of the little occurrences of the world. In this distinction which we too frequently find most anxiously preserved there is much fallacy and danger. For religion being kept at a distance is never familiarised to the mind. We may admire her with reverence but she neither warms our hearts nor excites our love.²⁰

Strachan would even go as far as to say that we cannot fully do our duty to ourselves and to others unless we

place ourselves under the guidance of religion. For no man can improve and use in a proper manner his moral and intellectual powers unless under the direction of Gospel principles.²¹

¹⁹Strachan, A sermon preached on May 11, 1834, on Psalms 116:18.

²⁰Strachan, A sermon preached before the Governor in Cornwall on August 3, 1806, on 1 Corinthians 10:31.

²¹Strachan, A sermon preached on May 2, 1830 on Hebrews 3:7 (annual sermon to pay off the debt).

The basis for this idea in Strachan's thought is found in the need for man to know the proper relationship between himself and

his Creator, his Preserver and his Saviour . . . that he was sent into this world not to look around him for a little while in foolish wonder at the Majesty and grandeur of nature and then by the indulgence of Heaven to be suddenly exalted to the abode of his maker but to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling, to derive salutary lessons from the troubles of life and to draw refreshment from those rational, innocent and pleasing joys which are allowed him, that by delighting in the exercise of virtue and piety he might at length become qualified to enter upon the full fruition of all that is fair and grand and lovely in the life to come.²²

This idea of the unity of religious and social duties is one to which one must adhere regardless of one's profession. The gospel does not sanction the idea that spiritual duties

are for the men of leisure and the social for the men of toil . . . it is the joining, the amalgamating, not the separating of spiritual and social excellence that meets the standard of the Gospel . . . The gospel does not suffer us to be neglectful of our immediate duties under any pretext of religion nor yet does it allow us to forget the things of heaven under the pretext of worldly engagements. It teaches us to join both together. It wills that all things should be done by us as serving the Lord.²³

²²Strachan, A sermon preached on May 8, 1825, on St. John 17:15.

²³Strachan, A sermon preached on September 25, 1852, on Galatians 6:9.

In this way when we render unto Caesar what is Caesar's we should know that "Caesar's (sic) portion is to be given for God's sake and as evidence that we love God."²⁴

In the general sense Strachan says that one may unite the social and the religious through the doing of good works. Good works, according to Strachan are not absolutely indispensable to our acceptance by God but he does think that "we are supported by reason as well as by scripture in asserting that they are the necessary sign of our Justification . . ."²⁵ The works which are expected of us are in accordance with our nature:

Our religion addresses us not as Angels but as men who tho' surrounded with infirmities have a perception of moral excellence and are accountable to God for the virtues and vices of their conduct . . .²⁶

Strachan was not one, however, who had no sympathy or understanding of human weakness. On the contrary, he said

The Apostle under the word infirmities means spiritual feebleness and defects in grace and all those failings and mistakes which proceed from unavoidable ignorance and moral weakness. For the best men have ever acknowledged what we must all be conscious of that no human character is entirely perfect.²⁷

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵ Strachan, A sermon preached on February 22, 1829 on St. Matthew 5:16.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷ Strachan, A sermon preached on October 22, 1825 on 2 Corinthians 12:9.

Instead Strachan believed that

infirmities which bring us in closer communion with God, or cause the power of Christ to rest upon us become a source of comfort exaltation and joy.²⁸

Good works often help us to become stronger in those areas in which we are weak. Above all, however, good works help man to reflect the goodness and love of God on earth:

. . . to shew both the spirit of our religion in our daily conduct, to bring down upon earth something of the purity and happiness of heaven and while we centre all of our hopes in Christ endeavour to catch something of his holy fire that we may be enabled to lighten the distress of our neighbours . . .²⁹

In more detail Strachan talks about the necessary unity of specific Christian virtues within our daily life. For example the central virtues of faith, hope and charity are perceived by Strachan to be essentially "active" virtues.

Strachan defines faith as "confidence in the power and love of Christ."³⁰ His favourite example of true faith was the belief of the woman of Canaan (St. Mark 7:29), who believed and had faith even though she did not know of God's promises. The Christian, on the other hand, has the

promises of God's everlasting covenant, the entreaties and invitations of Christ, the glorious efficacy of his death, his blessed

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Strachan, A sermon preached on January 4, 1824 on Colossians 3:11.

³⁰ Strachan, A sermon preached on October 23, 1864, on St. Mark 7:29.

example in well doing, the gracious character of God unfolded in all its majesty and beauty, reconciling by the most precious sacrifice a lost world to himself, all which present a foundation for our faith . . .³¹

Our faith, our trust in God, is measured by our obedience to his commands whether through the Bible or through the evidence in his moral government on earth. Our faith must become more strong and pure through adversity as well as prosperity and this purification must be a daily proceeding:

Thus must he proceed in all virtue and godliness of living, proving his faith by his works till he arrives at that eternal blessedness which was purchased for him by his Saviour, and is freely conferred on him through faith . . .³²

Faith, therefore, is the foundation for Christian virtue, "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen

. . ."³³ But, as according to St. Paul, the greatest of the three central Christian virtues for Strachan is charity,

because it includes the whole business of religion and more especially because it is the Christian's working principle in all of his intercourse of daily life. Faith worketh by love and it is by love or charity which is the fulfilling of the law of duty that faith is made perfect.³⁴

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Strachan, A sermon preached on October 6, 1861 on 1 Corinthians 13:13.

³⁴ Ibid.

Charity is the one virtue that binds heaven and earth together in that it "regulates our daily life to the happiness of salvation."³⁵

By the practice of charity, Strachan did not mean simply that one gives of one's financial superfluity, but instead that one gives to those who need without worrying about one's own needs. Anxiety for one's own needs is normal but this must be kept within very strict bounds. If not one begins to become too attached to the things of this world and to one's future on earth. Those who practise charity out of selfish motives and out of concern for the present practise only a false charity, one which has no connection with the love of God. Instead our faith and confidence in God should replace our fear as individuals about the future and make us open to true charity, the giving without concern or regret:

There is perhaps no motive that more certainly leads us to true disinterestedness and consequently to active and untiring benevolence than the habitual contemplation of the present as connected with the future life. This points out its value and importance: our everlasting destiny depends on the good or ill use of the years of probation and discipline which we pass in this world . . .³⁶

It is for this reason that for Christians

charity is the consummation and perfection of faith and hope, the glorious object at which all their powers aim and in which all their energies terminate . . .³⁷

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Strachan, A sermon preached on September 25, 1852, on Galatians 6:9.

³⁷Strachan, A sermon preached on October 6, 1861 on 1 Corinthians 13:13.

From the three central Christian virtues we will move on to the other virtues which arise from the Christian religion. In general, Strachan says, man should try to cultivate all those virtues which result in harmony and peace. In the development of these virtues we are given support by the Divine spirit as a reward for our faith in God. One important virtue in this regard is a love of order.³⁸ The basis for this love of order, if it is to be true and longlasting, is religion

which is the only firm and lasting foundation upon which the tranquility and security of a people can be strengthened and established.³⁹

This is the case because the only effective check on man's passions and actions is a belief in God and his providence.

The fear of God must be always considered as surest foundation of freedom. It forms and fixes every virtue of the heart, gives life and motion to every good principle of the mind . . . and directs the hopes and fears of men to their proper objects . . .⁴⁰

This fear of God or piety (the two were interchangeable for Strachan) must be united with our daily duty in order to maintain a proper perspective of earthly things. Two virtues which arise from faith

³⁸This will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

³⁹Strachan, A sermon preached on February 4, 1821 on 2 Corinthians 3:17.

⁴⁰Ibid.

are patience and resignation, which, according to Strachan comprehend the sum and substance of religion. When confronted by the short and uncertain nature of existence and the judgements of God's moral government one immediately looks around for a source of comfort. When man looks for comfort only from the things of this world he often will be faced with despair.

But when we consider ourselves the children of immortality the scene assumes a new character. Storms and darkness may indeed still surround us but the day star is arising. We may be walking in the valley of the shadow of death but our faith in a happy result stands firm and undismayed. The sufferings of this life when most appalling and severe appear as nothing. We are living under the Government of a merciful and just God who wills the happiness of all of his creatures and who will never leave us or forsake us. To murmur against these events which he permits us, to rebel against his Government and to complete our own misery -- how much more rational and becoming to bow to his will, to submit with patience and resignation to all his dispensations.⁴¹

Faith in God's goodness and mercy also helps man in his daily life in another respect: it helps us to "Love not the World." Strachan preached one entire sermon on this topic and it is an important sermon -- he had to adhere to the text yet maintain his belief in the importance of acting in the world. His explanation, to quote again, was short and clear:

The object of Christianity is not to detach us altogether from the world but to teach us its

⁴¹Strachan, A sermon written at sea September 7, 1824 and preached at sea September 24, 1824 on 1 Timothy 6:6 and 7. Notation cited above.

true value while we are in it for while it joins reason in permitting us to taste in moderation the blessings it offers we are taught to fly from its corruptions and without rendering us insensible to its pleasures we are exhorted not to love it when placed in comparison with the world which is to come.⁴²

The pleasures of this world, then, must be placed in their context as a reflection of greater future pleasures. In order to do this, says Strachan, we must cultivate the virtues of moderation and temperance.⁴³

There were for Strachan some virtues which were directly oriented to the world and one of these is patriotism:

Again our religion has been blamed for not recommending Patriotism and if by this be meant that bad ambition which so frequently afflicts the world and gives birth to crude and ignorant violence, religion knows it not.

⁴²Strachan, A sermon preached on February 7, 1841 on 1 John 1:15.

⁴³Strachan did preach temperance -- not abstinence. There is a story told by many of his biographers which relates a conversation between Strachan and a retired army officer in central Upper Canada. The officer is critical of the clergy in his district -- that they dance and drink:

"Indeed," said John. "I have attended not a few balls myself." "But the drinking is worst of all," his host added quickly and excitedly . . . "Our Reverend--mentioning no names but you know who--imbibes in whiskey. I have it for a fact. He buys it by the bottle, my Lord." "Tut tut, I shall have to reprove him," John returned blithely. "That's a most extravagant way to buy whiskey. I have always bought mine by the barrel." - from S. Boorman, John Toronto, cited above.

But if by patriotism we understand a real love of our country, an earnest desire for its moral and religious advancement and temporal prosperity, hallowed by extending the affections and the pure and tender associations of the domestic circle then is it recognized and enforced in the most effective manner throughout the whole of divine revelation . . .⁴⁴

Another worldly virtue which finds its source in a central Christian virtue is that of industry. Industry arises so that we may fulfill the virtue of charity:

Among other necessary Christian duties the Apostle here recommends by his own example continued industry in our respective callings adding that those who were diligent in their business would not only be able to supply their own wants but likewise to support or assist those who were unable to labour or who were otherwise objects of commiseration . . . it is more Godlike, a mark of a more noble Christian spirit to relieve the wants of others and lay out ourselves for their good without a recompence than to be burdensome to them for a maintenance.⁴⁵

But in recommending that we do good works and be virtuous, by what standard do we know that something is good? For Strachan the first step is to turn to the Gospels. That for which a Christian should strive is an imitation of Christ's conduct:

If we are animated with a strong desire of imitating the perfections of the Divinity, confirm ourselves in his perfections then adding contentment, a patient, tranquil and resigned spirit we have great gain . . .⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Strachan, A sermon preached on January 20, 1856 on 1 John 4:16.

⁴⁵ Strachan, A sermon preached on April 13, 1834 on Acts 20:34.

⁴⁶ Strachan, A sermon written at sea September 7, 1824 and preached at sea September 24, 1824 on 1 Timothy 6:6 and 7. Notation cited above.

Studying the conduct and character of Christ not only presents us with examples of moral perfection but we also see that

the sweet and amiable humanity of his precepts can only be surpassed by that divine spirit which he displayed in his marvellous works -- so that while we admire him as a Messenger of Heaven we love him because he manifests a fellow feeling for our infirmities . . .⁴⁷

Christ's devotion to the Father is something that man should attempt to exemplify. His love was not something temporary which altered due to circumstance. Instead his love for the Father was constant and uniform:

From the first notice of his active life until his impressive behaviour on the cross gains from the Centurion the confession "Truly this was the son of God" by all that he does and all that he says he declares himself to be under the complete government of love to his Father and reverence of joyful acquiescence in his will, of dependence on his Providence and an ever active desire of promoting his Glory. Strive my Christian Friends to acquire this . . .⁴⁸

Seeing that Christ in human form faced many of the moral dilemmas that man does, not only gives man a model of conduct to follow but also the strength needed to follow it; the knowledge of Christ's sympathy, love and understanding of man's character.

One idea which Strachan stresses constantly is that man has the ability to choose what action he may take and that our future happiness lies in that choice. The choice, says Strachan, is made

⁴⁷ Strachan, A sermon preached on May 8, 1825 on St. John 17:15.

⁴⁸ Strachan, A sermon preached on January 4, 1824 on Colossians 3:11.

according to man's conscience, that gift of God's which distinguishes us from the beasts. The conscience has two aspects: that of reason and revelation.

Conscience when duly informed is the Viceregent of God in the human breast and is a most steady friend and faithful master. There is a wide difference between vilifying reason as totally useless, as leading continually to error and freely admitting its imperfection. Our holy religion admits its weakness but nevertheless appeals to it as the judge of its truths.⁴⁹

On a larger scale when we make our choices we may know of what conduct God approves or disapproves by looking to history:

The dispensations of providence as they happen to ourselves and others may likewise be considered the counsel of God. Every event recorded in the pages of history or in our own individual experience contains the language of instruction and evinces on the one hand judgements and calamities -- God's displeasure at sin from which the Inhabitants of the world should learn righteousness or by deliverances, mercies and loving kindness on the other declare God's favour towards the righteous and the good.⁵⁰

It is in these same ways that man may know how and where to direct his desires and how to moderate his appetites and passions in order to choose positive enjoyments of earthly things. It is up to man to try to do what is good in an effort to correct the weaknesses and imperfections basic to his nature.

Let us remember that the system of the world depends in a way unknown to us on God's

⁴⁹ Strachan, A. sermon preached on November 4, 1821, on Psalms 73:24.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Providence and on human agency. Every event, every cause of action has two faces or aspects. In the one it is divine and perfect and in the other it is marked with sin and imperfection because it belongs to man.⁵¹

Strachan goes further to attack those who believe that man can choose moral conduct which is not based on these Christian principles:

The more we inquire the more we shall be convinced that all human attempts to distinguish between moral and religious subjects will be found vain and delusive. For no subject can be moral that is not religious . . .⁵²

To reiterate, religion for Strachan is something which must be certain, practical and active. He much prefers that people maintain opposing religious beliefs or ideas to a passive and neutral agreement. For he says "a state of Neutrality in matters of religion and virtue is a state of Death . . ."⁵³ It is for this reason that Strachan has a definite fear of and dislike for "liberality":

I am the more particular upon this point because a spirit hath gone abroad under the name of liberality which professes to reconcile all denominations of Christians together not merely as men and joint heirs of immortality but as partakers of the same worship. For

⁵¹ Strachan, A sermon preached on January 6, 1848, on Isaiah 60:3.

⁵² Strachan, A sermon preached on January 20, 1856, on 1 John 4:16.

⁵³ Strachan, A sermon preached on June 29, 1806, on St. Matthew 25:25.

this purpose they have endeavoured to explain away their differences, to give up points to each other and having prostituted their opinions by this insidious reconciliation they join together in the same religious services. But is not this a mockery of heaven? Can they offer up the same prayers when they differ in their hearts about the person to whom they are addressed?⁵⁴

These, then, are Strachan's thoughts on the Christian character and the general obligations and duties of a Christian. We will next attempt to see how Strachan expands these ideas to a more specific discussion of how the Christian actively participates in society.

⁵⁴ Strachan, A sermon preached on December 15, 1804 on St. Matthew 20:16.

CHAPTER FOUR

CHAPTER FOUR

Let us suppose that all the individuals of which a great nation is composed to be animated with the Christian spirit and constrained by Gospel principles to do the things that are just, holy and lovely. Would not such a nation enjoy a much larger share of happiness -- temporal and spiritual -- than could have been enjoyed by acting on the opposite spirit and principles?¹

It is to move towards this idea of a Christian nation that is the aim of Strachan's political, religious and social thought and activities. We will endeavour to examine how such a nation could be established by discussing his ideas on the role of the individual, the family, the church, education, vocation and government. For in Strachan's sermons he discusses all of these areas in respect to their role in the establishing of a Christian nation.

In the previous chapter we have discussed the virtues which the individual should cultivate. In addition we examined the importance of activity and also the basis for acting in a certain way. To sum up:

We came not into the world to gratify sense and to serve our appetites and passions but to

¹ Strachan, A sermon preached on the occasion of the Consecration of St. George the Martyr Church on November 30, 1853, on Revelation 21:22.

discharge our various duties as rational and social beings preparing for eternity. As soon, therefore, as we come to the years of discretion we are guilty if we perform not our duty to God, society and ourselves. Now this is best done by placing ourselves under the guidance of religion.²

Now for Strachan, to place ourselves under the guidance of religion should not be a difficult task because

It is natural to man to be religious . . . some kind of Religion or Worship has prevailed universally in all ages and places of the world. It is the strongest bond of human society and without it the decency and order necessary for its existence could not be attained. Take away Religion and all obligations of conscience cease.³

One of Strachan's greatest worries was that religion was gradually taking a less important role in people's lives. He was wary for instance of the trend of thinking that it was sufficient reason for rejecting a doctrine because it was "old". He also criticized those who felt that they could deal with a certain situation without religion,

that their natural powers are quite sufficient for every purpose. It is in vain to tell them or indeed any of the enemies of revelation that it is more in a moral than in an intellectual point of view that man has degenerated.⁴

Indeed it was the influence of the "atheist intellectual" that Strachan feared the most in this regard. He tried to account for such atheism:

² Strachan, A sermon preached on May 2, 1830 on Hebrews 3:7.

³ Strachan, A sermon preached on October 17, 1857 on Joshua 24:15.

⁴ Strachan, A sermon preached on October 2, 1825, on Jeremiah 6:16.

We have only to recal (sic) to our attention the literary characters of the present age to find several of the most eminent of the enemies of the Gospel. Nor is it difficult to account for this: the Gospel reminds them of a Superior -- it tells them of their weakness, their infirmities, their need of a Saviour and their mortality -- truths which many are unwilling to know. It calls upon them to be humble and meek while the world is filled with admiration at their genius⁵

Most of all Strachan worries about the people who feel too proud to be religious:

They think it shews a superiority to despise the religion of their fathers, that it indicates liberal minds, freed from the trammels of prejudice and above superstition; that they are too wise to give credit to mysteries; that everything must submit to reason and must be carefully analysed and sifted before they can believe; they are unable to perceive that all nature is full of mysteries.⁶

Thus although Strachan believed that religion is natural to man he was very aware of the influence of various individuals and factions within society. The key was to unify the various groups in society, to find a common bond:

There is consequently one rule only to man as an individual, a member of a family and nation. What morally destroys the individual ultimately destroys the family and nation. Hence we find a great resemblance in the histories of nations, families and individuals: the same moral laws of God's government apply to all.⁷

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Strachan, A sermon for the 3rd of January 1850, being a Thanksgiving Day for the departure of the Cholera, on Psalms 31:7.

For the purposes of administering his moral government on earth God placed all of mankind in three combinations: the family, the country and the church.

. . . no man ever existed upon earth without falling into these distinct forms of social life and he never can because these forms are essential and eternal. They are the immediate creation of God himself and our perfection depends upon the correctness with which we discharge their several and distinct duties.⁸

We will proceed to examine the first combination -- that of the family. To establish the importance of the family in regard to one's religious duty Strachan once again turns to the Bible and especially to the Old Testament:

We find that God has laid the foundation of our duty to him and our fellow creatures upon the extension of the graces and instincts of domestic life and acknowledges nothing in the shape of duty which springs not directly or indirectly from our family charities and relations. God's covenant was not made with man as an individual but with man as the head of the family. It was so with Adam and with Noah and still more especially with Abraham in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed. God is the Creator and Father of all men but this endearing relation can not be adequately conceived much less felt except through family connexions . . .⁹

It is through the establishing of good relationships within the family that one cultivates the necessary virtues for one's

⁸
Ibid.

⁹ Strachan, A sermon preached on January 20, 1856, on 1 John 4:16.

behaviour outside of the family:

And when these individuals are good Fathers, good sons, good brothers and good husbands they will be good citizens because the principles which make them just and kind under the domestic roof will make them just and kind to those who inhabit with them that country which is only a larger home. It is wisely ordained that all the virtues have their origin in the charities of domestic life . . .¹⁰

On the other hand if these virtues and attitudes are not established within the family this tends to undermine social duties and relationships: "Corrupt domestic life weakens national bonds, disturbs the unity of the Church and you destroy the perfection of human society."¹¹

The foundations for these virtues are laid at a very early age in one's life according to Strachan, when one is more naturally prone to goodness. Love of family, a sense of shame, trust, kindness, a readiness to forgive

all find room in the hearts of the young and are natural to their age. This holy ground is most distinct in Childhood . . . The whole state of well regulated childhood is the germ of pure religion . . .¹²

¹⁰Strachan, A sermon preached on December 27, 1841, on St. John 13:23.

¹¹Strachan, A sermon for the 3rd of January 1850, being a Thanksgiving Day for the departure of the Cholera, on Psalms 31:7.

¹²Strachan, A sermon preached on December 25, 1847 on St. John 1:29.

It is because of this belief that Strachan placed such great importance on education. Indeed his entire life was in some way devoted to education from being a simple schoolmaster in Scotland to president of Trinity College in Toronto. In short, Strachan believed that religion should not be separated from education. If one is to teach the young, then they should be taught what is true. That which is true can find its source only within religion and there can be only one truth:

And here I am reminded of one of the most false and injurious maxims that ever gained currency among mankind, namely that it makes little difference what a man believes if he only be sincere. Now the truth is that the more sincerely a man believes in a falsehood the more destructive it is to all his interests both for time and eternity. Are you desirous of becoming acquainted with the evil working of this maxim and its infidel tendency? You may behold it around you in active operation in its attempt to separate religion from education. This is one of its wicked forms, for it is separating the soul from the body.¹³

As we have remarked Strachan spent a large percentage of his time trying to establish institutions of education which were based on religion. His lengthy struggle for King's College and then Trinity covered almost thirty years. But Strachan would not give up because it was unthinkable for him to separate education from religion:

¹³ Strachan, A sermon preached at the Cathedral, on August 17, 1862 on Romans 10:17.

Posterity will be astonished to think that in the nineteenth century it has been made a question whether religion -- the Christian religion -- in a Christian country should form a portion of the instruction of the young . . . but happily we no longer hear the same confident boastings of the progress of the human mind and of its power to direct the religious as well as the physical energies of man. It is now acknowledged . . . that if you desire to make men sober, honest children of God it is not enough to cultivate the understanding that virtue and piety are not the offspring of men's knowledge and it has become a settled axiom that a sound education must be based on religion . . .¹⁴

Religious education in Strachan's terms should not be confined merely to the study of scripture and doctrine. Instead the object of education must also be

to touch the heart, to enlist the feelings, to engage the affections, to mould and purify the habits, to guide the conscience, to discipline the body, to govern the will and carefully to avail ourselves of those various influences whether divine or human, which, if rightly used, act with so powerful effect on the whole inner man . . . For the great and true object of education is to bring religion to bear upon all the faculties of the soul since it consists in the process of training that soul for heaven . . .¹⁵

When Strachan talks about a "religious education" he does not mean that one educational system should be set up which would cater to all denominations:

¹⁴ Strachan, A sermon preached for the Benefit of the Young, in July 1845, on Daniel 6:10.

¹⁵ Ibid.

The more enlightened of the present age have also pronounced sentence against latitudinarianism or indifference to religion and the attempts to educate all denominations on a neutral system. There is no such thing as neutrality in religion or falling between two opinions. Its principles are fixed and steadfast and when we go to the proper sources they are easily discovered and understood.¹⁶

By religious education Strachan meant an education based on the doctrines and beliefs of the Church of England. In order to have the Church of England as the basis for religious education in a Christian nation Strachan believed in the importance of an Established Church. This was an idea for which Strachan fought during most of his years in Upper-Canada. An established church existed in the mother country and the colonies, therefore, should receive the same blessing. It was also to Strachan's own advantage to have an established church in terms of funding. For there were many different denominations in Upper Canada and the only hope for the survival of Strachan's church was through support -- both financial and political -- from the government. To support his ideas, he once again goes back through history to the times of the Reformation:

At the Reformation the civil rulers of our country recognized the principle that a Christian

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Strachan, A sermon preached at the opening of St. George Church on September 25, 1845, on Psalms 68:10.

nation as such should consider itself a branch of the Apostolical Church of Christ. They therefore acknowledged and gave temporal dignity and a voice in the General Council of the state to her ministers, privileges which in England they still enjoy. And the Church on her part acknowledges the head of state, whether King or Queen to be her temporal head investing them respectively with that general supremacy in ecclesiastical affairs which they possessed in civil.¹⁷

Wanting to maintain the doctrinal independence of the church, however,

Strachan continued:

But we are not then to infer that she gave or that she could give to an earthly monarch or to his temporal legislature the right to interfere with things spiritual -- with her doctrines, with her liturgy, with her ministration of the sacraments or the relative positions of her ministry . . .¹⁸

In ultimate terms, it is not within the power of the government to interfere with the church anyway:

It is true the rulers of the world may suppose that the church is in their hands, that they may deal with it according to their pleasure and that its very existence is at their disposal And thus to our comfort let us remember even now though furiously assaulted on every side we know that a limit has been set by our Lord to her enemies which they cannot pass nor can they even in her weakest hour inflict one insult upon her beyond those which God in his goodness sees fit to prevent.¹⁹

¹⁷Strachan, A sermon preached at the opening of St. George Church on September 25, 1845, on Psalms 68:10.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Strachan, A sermon preached on December 25, 1838, on Ephesians 1:10.

Strachan indeed tried to embody the relationship between church and state through his own positions: pastor of York, (later Archdeacon), and member of the Executive and Legislative Councils. In many of his activities the two areas often came into conflict. As we have seen, such was the case with the lengthy struggle over the issue of the Clergy Reserves. After fighting for this issue politically for many years Strachan finally turned to the pulpit to seek support from the people through scripture:

But to prevent anything like misapprehension it is here necessary to remark that although St. Paul from special considerations declined to receive any maintenance from particular churches and lived either upon his own labour or contributions from beloved friends or other churches, he never gave up the right of such maintenance whether for himself, the other ministers or the clergy generally. Do you not know, he said, that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar and receive their maintenance from their share in the Sacrifices and oblations? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the Gospel should live by the Gospel so that it appears from divine law as well as the reason of the thing itself as may be proved at large, from the law of Moses and from Christ's express institution that the ministers of our Lord's Gospel have a right to be supported becomingly by those among whom they labour.²⁰

This brings us to another central idea in Strachan's thought: the importance of labour. The basis for his ideas are found in scripture, taking examples from Christ's own life:

²⁰ Strachan, A sermon preached on December 29, 1854 on Acts 18:29.

The great majority of mankind are from their birth destined to labour and have no other prospect before them in this world, than daily toil. In this class was the Saviour himself born and instead of retiring from the discharge of domestic and social duties, he condescended in the meekest spirit to attend to a labourious employment that he might supply the necessities of his respected parents and hence he was called the Carpenter, the Son of Mary because he assisted in carrying on his father's trade and thus he lived till he began to be about thirty years of age. Having spent his infancy, youth and early manhood in the lower class of society it is evident that his opportunities of education and mental improvement must have been confined to the sphere in which he was brought up. Nor does it appear that ever appear (sic) that during the period of his ministerial duties, he ever aspired to mix in company with the higher class of society . . . Our Lord therefore . . . belonged to the labouring portion of society. nor when he assumed the authority of a Divine Teacher did he leave it for his friendly intercourse was still chiefly confined to the lower orders . . .²¹

In this and other sermons Strachan discusses the different levels of society. In an examination of these sermons one soon sees that his social thought reflects his religious thought especially in the area of hierarchy. We have discussed elsewhere Strachan's ideas on the hierarchy of being. These thoughts he transfers to society:

In the natural world we see objects differing from one another in all the degrees of beauty and excellence and a mutual connection and independence pervades the whole. The various classes, the individuals of the same class and

²¹ Strachan, A sermon preached on October 27, 1847, on St. Luke 4: 16-20.

the various parts of the Individual all subsisting by the dependence upon one another. In many cases this connexion may not be discerned . . . Among these productions we conceive some to be of a nature superior to the powers of vegetation, and the powers of vegetation superior to the properties of inert matter; one creature of the same species is well proportioned and strong -- another is deformed and feeble. It is evident then that there is a subordination in the Natural World. We may extend the analogy and suppose that it is the intention of nature that the like subordination should prevail in the Moral World. Accordingly we find an infinite diversity in the tempers, dispositions and talents of men . . .²²

Strachan expands this idea of subordination and speaks of men being "formed" for different things: "One is formed to rule, another to obey . . ."²³ Strachan thinks that these differences arise from both the individual's original constitution as well as the circumstances of his life, particularly the early part:

But be this as it may subordination in the Moral World is manifest and this appearance of nature indicates the intention of its Author. The beauty and advantages of this arrangement are obvious and universally acknowledged. Man must be a wretched Being. His wants and the social principles of his nature attach him to his species. The various relations of individuals and societies require a mutual exchange of good offices. The happiness of one is subservient to that of his Neighbour. Private Interest is inseparably connected with the interest of the community and the union

²²Strachan, A sermon written at sea on September 7, 1824 and preached at sea on September 24, 1824 on 1 Timothy 6:6 and 7. Notation cited above.

²³Ibid.

and happiness of the whole acquire a degree of strength and security which the unnatural disjointed systems of solitude and selfishness could never attain. Hence it would appear that they who labour in the inferior departments of life are not on that account the slaves of their superiors . . .²⁴

It is because subordination is "natural" and authored by God that man should be content with the lot he has been given, that

all murmuring at the inferiority of our station is most unreasonable . . . We presume that the Author of our nature has given us that temper, understanding and taste which will qualify us for that place in the System we were ordained to fill. The due improvement of our Talents, the regular discharge of our duty will render us respectable in our several departments and the profits of honest industry will raise us above the inconvenience of poverty.²⁵

Because of his belief in the individual goodness of the various classes of society Strachan on different occasions devoted a sermon to praise a particular class. For example, when speaking to a garrison of soldiers Strachan extolled the Christian virtues which arise from the military profession.

To command a British regiment has always appeared to me one of the noble and desirable positions on earth. It is indeed attended with many grave and important responsibilities. But its occupant if possessed of ample of

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid. The results of refusing to accept one's lot in life have already been discussed in the previous chapter in a discussion of the vices of ambition.

even ordinary means and of manly and feeling heart like the Centurion, will find his happiness great . . . Aware of the privations endured by many of the families under his command, his sphere of doing good can never be exhausted . . . Now although the common soldier has little to spare from his small pittance yet we have frequently the pleasure to congratulate him for taking more than his proportionate share in the luxury of doing good to others -- sharing a mite from his poverty to the poor and not unfrequently subscribing a day or two days pay for the purpose of relieving distress . . . Our holy faith is spreading more rapidly throughout the world than in any former period of its history and no where more truly than in the British army which has always been distinguished in an eminent degree for the noble qualities which adorn the profession . . .²⁶

Strachan also has much praise for the people of the land -- the farmers -- because he believed that Upper Canada was "essentially an agricultural country. Whatever wealth may have been accumulated within its bounds has been derived from the culture of the land."²⁷ In very few professions can one practise the virtues of fortitude, courage, patience and resignation than in farming, according to Strachan. Preaching a sermon on a day of Thanksgiving appointed by the Provincial Government "for the late Bountiful Harvest" Strachan talks about the judgements of God's moral government

²⁶ Strachan, A sermon preached at a garrison on October 20, 1861 on Acts 10:1 and 2.

²⁷ Strachan, A sermon preached on November 3, 1859 Being a day of Thanksgiving appointed by the Provincial Government for the late Bountiful Harvest, on Genesis 8:22.

which one can discern during times of feast and famine:

From 1850 to 1857 was a period of uncommon prosperity to this Province . . . the abundant crops and consequent extension of commerce produced a general excitement almost incredible. The public mind became bewildered and lost its balance . . . The abundance and rapid circulation of money which is the root of all evil quickly introduced waste, luxury and extravagance . . . the ruling propensity was to get rich in haste . . . All these delusions continued to assume greater and greater proportions till towards the autumn of 1857 when they began to collapse and apprehensions for the future began to be entained (sic) . . . The harvest of 1857 was less than average and that of 1858 was far below it . . . The eyes of the people were opened and they looked back with fear and astonishment at the delusion under which they had been acting . . .²⁸

The two poor harvests, according to Strachan, were sent by God to check presumption and covetousness. God's judgement was sent down also to teach man that the possession of wealth should be dreaded "unless it has been the fruit of patient and diligent industry."²⁹

For Strachan, however, the ideal class of society was the middle class:

Now here we may observe that there are perhaps, very few countries so favourable to the acquirement of a moderate competency as this colony and no man who follows the industry of the Apostle can fail in placing himself in this position, a position which embraces the middle

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid.

of society, that class which is most favourable to natural affection and domestic virtue. They live chiefly at home and mind their own business. They spend their leisure hours with their families and yield themselves to those pleasures and cares which are the sweetest and tenderest in human life and the most friendly to true religion. Their affection is not chilled by want, a numerous family gives them no alarm. Moreover their state is most favourable to devotion: our Churches and communion table are mostly fitted by them . . . By looking around us to the families with whom we have been long acquainted and selecting one after another, ask what has made one family prosperous and happy and another poor and miserable and we shall uniformly find that the members of the happy family have been on the whole attentive to their business and frugal in the regulation of their affairs . . .³⁰

This is not to say that Strachan had no compassion for the poor. He saw poverty arising from two different sources which could roughly be labelled avoidable and unavoidable poverty. The latter arises from "misfortunes which could neither be prevented nor foreseen and therefore are accompanied with no moral guilt".³¹ With his own youth Strachan had direct experience with this type of poverty. Strachan, however, did not have sympathy for those who could avoid being poor: to do so would, in his mind, support sloth:

They are not industrious or not prudent.
The husband falls into irregular habits and provides not sufficiently for his Family or

³⁰Strachan, A sermon preached on December 24, 1854, on Acts 18:3.

³¹Ibid.

his wife wastes what he brings home in follies. . . In the mean time the children are neglected, the Parents lose their mutual love and confidence, one blames the other as the cause of their mutual distress and confusion and misery advance.³²

No class of society, however, can be called Christian unless it acknowledges one final element: a Christian government.

It is not enough that God has filled this world with inexhaustible blessings but, it is also necessary by human institutions to regulate their mode of fruition and to prevent our perverting them to our own injury and that of society in general . . . the history of eighteen centuries sadly proves that Christianity can only flourish when the waywardness and selfwill of individual caprice is subjected to the restraints of wholesome and enlightened authority.³³

Thus in Strachan's thought the church needs, the State for political and financial support but the state needs the Church, in order to ensure that the more secular legislation and activities are still based on Christian truth and that they do nothing to go against virtue in daily affairs:

They who would separate the Government of Christian nations or the relative and social duties of life from Christianity, would deprive men of the only sure basis of rational freedom and happiness the only pure standard of morals, the only effectual restraint on the base passions and the only source of true consolation for the miseries incident to human nature while we remain in this lower world.³⁴

³² Ibid.

³³ Strachan, A sermon preached on the occasion of the Consecration of St. George the Martyr Church on November 30, 1853, on Revelation 21:22.

³⁴ Strachan, A sermon preached on February 1, 1835 on St. Matthew 13:33.

Government, that is, a Christian government, is necessary in order that true liberty be maintained. What Strachan did not mean by liberty was very clearly defined:

It does not consist in acting without principles or in breaking down restraints, in rejecting or opposing laws because their operation may be sometimes attended with inconvenience. There must be laws binding on all states and conditions of men on princes and magistrates as well as subjects and such laws are the surest foundation of true liberty. It is only where they govern that men can live happily and securely together and enjoy the comforts of society. Nor does liberty consist in the indulgence of a querulous disposition, in opposing and finding fault with established institutions and received opinions. No, the friends of true liberty are more indulgent to the sentiments of others than to their own and never controvert them but by argument in the spirit of humility and meekness . . . ³⁵

By liberty, therefore, Strachan means Christian Liberty:

the restraining of our appetites and passions, seeking happiness not so much in outward as in inward perfection, in willing nothing but what God wills, and in doing nothing but what is in conformity to the divine will. ³⁶

According to Strachan this true Christian liberty rests on two main virtues: love of order and a love of religion.

A love of order is not only essential to the tranquility but to the very being of any State. It becomes the foundation of mutual faith, confidence and security. ³⁷

³⁵ Strachan, A sermon preached on February 4, 1821, on 2 Corinthians 3:17.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

Without love of order people become indifferent to the laws which, as we have already observed, are aimed only at the lowest of human virtues. If a society does not love order, respect for government offices and officials also declines and perhaps what is worse, there is a growing feeling of absolute independence in people's behaviour rather than putting the good of the whole foremost in one's mind.

. . . we perceive . . . a general forwardness, selfsufficiency, presumption and licentiousness cultivated, commended and propagated through the different classes of the people . . . in such cases every little disappointment, every imaginary grievance, every wanton desire of change produces a ferment and threatens public peace.³⁸

This situation promotes the passions of revenge which along with being the most anti-Christian vice is also for Strachan the most anti-social one as well:

. . . revenge weakens all the social affections and tends to dissolve the ties of civil obedience. In as far as they prevail they reduce men to a wild lawless and brutal condition; promoting and perpetuating strife and contention, broils and quarrels, barbarity and bloodshed. In short they corrupt society to that degree as to render it a curse instead of a blessing and were they generally to prevail would produce such disquiet, disorder and confusion as to make solitude . . . a non-desirable situation . . .³⁹

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Strachan, A sermon written on April 20, 1828, Sunday after Mr. Boulton's trial but not preached till the 15th day of June, on Ephesians 4:31 and 32.

But because a love of order could be based on temporal, and therefore not ultimate aims, Strachan believed that we must call in the love of religion to make this order steadfast and true.

Love of religion is the only firm and lasting foundation upon which the tranquility and security of a people can be strengthened and established. . . . The experience of all nations teaches us that neither the unassisted dictates of reason nor the active principle of public spirit, not the punishment of the civil magistrate are effectual checks upon man's appetites and passions if we leave out a belief of a God and a Providence or cease to cultivate these affections of the heart which that belief tends naturally to produce. The fear of God must be always considered as the surest foundation of freedom. It forms and fixes every virtue of the heart, gives life and motion to every good principle of the mind, directs the hopes and fears of men to their proper objects and supplies the unavoidable defects of human laws.⁴⁰

Without, therefore, a religious spirit within the laws all civil liberty and virtues will vanish and the country will be on the way to anarchy and tyranny. Only when there is pure religion in the land will there be true government and true liberty: "Let, then the purity of our lives justify our love of true liberty and a deep sense of religion guard our minds from abusing it."⁴¹

Although Strachan believed that "perfection belongs not to any society of men"⁴² there was one nation which, in his mind surpassed all others in its goodness as a Christian nation. It is this Christian nation which we will now proceed to examine.

⁴⁰ Strachan, A sermon preached on February 4, 1821 on 2 Corinthians 3:17.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

CHAPTER FIVE

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John Strachan survived to live well into his ninetieth year. During his lifetime he observed many events which changed the face of the world. In his view all of these events were part of God's providential plan. He believed that God's motives behind the judgements in his moral government were more understandable during these times relative to other times in history because of growing unchristian tendencies in different areas of the world. Just as knowable for Strachan was the fact that, in order to deal with these unchristian tendencies, God had a chosen nation, as in the days of the Old Testament, His own peculiar people, to act as the instrument of His intention in the world:

Nations are chosen to be his servants or rejected as their obedience or disobedience deserve. Yet his designs are not impeded whether they refuse or obey . . . Although no one people has been selected as the Jews were yet those who discern the signs of the times can during the last 1800 years perceive that certain nations have had at different periods more influence than others in promoting or impeding the progress of Christianity. And at the present time no one can be so blind as not to see in the British Empire a great fortress of Scriptural Faith and true liberty within whose institutions are contained elemental principles for the gradual regeneration of mankind and the purification and extension of true religion.

¹Strachan, A sermon preached on the 3rd of January, 1850 being a Thanksgiving day for the departure of the Cholera, on Psalms 31:7.

Not only is Britain a chosen nation because of her institutions but also because of the character of the British people:

If then we find the people of God in every nation where the Gospel has been preached we shall find them in that to which we belong and as we have been especially favoured by divine providence in this respect we have reason to believe and to say without boasting but in earnest truth that the number of God's people in our Father land is comparatively great. Hence by their presence the whole population is cherished, sanctified and protected and for their sake the divine² blessing has been for ages among them.

Strachan believed that in the future there would be established what he called the "Universal Empire of religious opinion." This empire is opposite to the "Universal Empire of Arms."³ Basically the former signified how nations should relate to each -- united through Christianity rather than separated through warfare. It was Strachan's belief that this universal empire would be set up and headed by the British people:

And if this Empire of Goodness is to be established by one or more nations as human agents appointed by God for this purpose, there is not one so fitted to the task at present, not one to which this design has been hitherto so clearly and graciously entrusted as to the British people in their Protestant Constitution of Church and State.⁴

²Strachan, A sermon, preached on November 4, 1855 on Psalms 29:11.

³Strachan, A sermon preached on the 3rd of January, 1850 being a Thanksgiving day for the departure of the Cholera, on Psalms 31:7.

⁴Ibid.

When speaking of Britain as God's chosen nation Strachan often refers to the relationship between God and the Jews. He does this both to establish precedent for the idea of a chosen nation but also to contrast how the Jews failed as God's chosen people and why the British nation incurred God's favour. The main sin committed by the Jews was idolatry as well as the licentiousness which accompanied it. These sins caused the Jews to

quit the service of Jehovah and to forget his wonderful interpositions for their deliverance and advancement. But this dereliction of duty was found no less impolitic than irreligious. It split them into parties and enervated their character⁵

The case of the Jews should, therefore, be a warning to people of the time:

Hence the history of the Jews tho' merely a fragment of that world unfolds most distinctly the moral government of God and demonstrates that as he dealt with that people so does he deal with all nations. By this we are taught to contemplate profane as well as sacred history . . .

⁵ Strachan, A sermon preached in Toronto on December 14, 1837 - A Fast Day by public proclamation on account of the rebellion and attacks from the United States, on Hosea 6:5. About the date on this sermon S. F. Wise has noted the following:

"Strachan was a year out in his reckoning. No attacks from the United States had occurred by December 14, 1837, nor had secret societies like the Sons of Liberty or the Patriot Hunters, to which Strachan refers in the body of the sermon, yet been organized. On Dec. 8, 1838, The Church published Lt. Gov. Arthur's proclamation fixing Friday, Dec. 14, 1838, as a day of public fasting and humiliation. Attacks from the United States took place very shortly before that date, on Nov. 11 at Prescott and on Dec. 4 at Windsor and Sandwich. Most of the superscriptions on Strachan's manuscript sermons appear to have been made by him in the 1850's" - from a footnote to "God's Peculiar Peoples" in The Shield of Achilles: Aspects of Canada in the Victorian Age, W. L. Morton, Ed. (Toronto, 1968), p.61.

⁶ Ibid. Strachan further points out the judgements of God which the . . . and the . . . for their . . .

Because the Jews failed in their obedience to God, God decided to extend the light of his truth beyond the Jews to the Gentiles. Strachan emphasized that the breaking of the old covenant with the coming of Christ for all men would never allow one nation to be chosen for all time, to the exclusion of all others. Instead God would use nations, different nations, as instruments in order that His divine will be carried out in the world. It is very clear to Strachan that, since the period of the Reformation of the Church, God has favoured the British nation because of her obedience to true religion:

At the reformation the holy spirit seemed to be with our Fathers and they separated no farther from Romanism than Romanism separated from Christian truth and the Apostolic Church which they purified and renewed has ever stood forth as the bulwark of the Protestant or true Faith . . . She has stood since that period with the Bible in her hands abiding firmly by the doctrines it reveals and whatever may be the shocks she may have to sustain from scoffs, doubts, clamour and licentiousness . . . she will in the strength of the Lord prevail against them all . . .

Strachan sees Britain, therefore, as the guardian of true religion and morality and as such is the light to all of Europe. Through her obedience to true religion Britain has been favoured with preeminence in secular areas as well:

⁷ Ibid.

Hence the British nation is the most intellectual and moral in Europe -- the world's centre of arts, commerce and civilization. Here the light of freedom burns with the brightest radiance and the rights and liberties of man are the best understood and the most abundantly enjoyed and here a lofty sense of independence is of universal growth. From this nation, the cherisher and supporter of religious establishments have come almost all the lights that exalt modern times. She takes the lead in those mighty efforts, which are changing the face of the World . . . It is to religion that she owes her preeminence -- it is this that throws a holy splendour round her head, makes her the hope of every land, and urges her to achieve the evangelization of mankind . . . 8

Thus it is evident to Strachan that Britain, through her institutions and people, is the ideal Christian nation. It is equally evident to him that Upper Canada, by virtue of her relationship to Great Britain, shares in this ideal. First, he says, the people of Upper Canada share in the British character:

. . . but though distant we are of the British people. We breathe their freedom, we enjoy their independence, we are of the same blood and lineage and recognized as fellow subjects. Nay, our voice has been heard from one end of the empire to the other and our filial gift has been received with marked affection as a proof of our strong and abiding attachment to our Father land.

The most important aspect of things British in which Upper Canada shares is by far the British system of Government. It is an inestimable blessing:

⁸ Strachan, A sermon preached at York, Upper Canada, July 3, 1825 on the Death of the Late Lord Bishop of Quebec.

⁹ Strachan, A sermon preached on the fast day appointed for the 18th April 1855 in the forenoon, 11 A.M. on Proverbs 19:21.

Our wise and brave ancestors had judgement to perceive and courage enough to vindicate the national rights of man; at the same time they generously submitted to the reasonable and high prerogative of supreme executive power . . . They have succeeded in establishing a Constitution of Government, the wonder and envy of surrounding nations; they have shewn the world that British subjects are free men in the best sense of the word and that rational liberty is no way incompatible with prompt obedience to legitimate authority . . . we in this remote Province are blessed with an exact epitome of its government, as far as suits our infant state; and enjoy the invaluable privilege (sic) of its mild and equitable laws; which secure to us and our posterity all the civil and religious¹⁰ rights and free born British subjects . . .

This brings us to the second way in which Strachan sees Britain as the ideal Christian nation: she is the parent land for many thriving colonies around the world. Britain's objectives in colonizing were clear: to give the excess population an opportunity for a more prosperous life, to make use of nature's bounteous uncultivated land, to have a place which could have a beneficial effect on those banished from their native land and finally, to provide for the expanding of commerce in the father land.

In return for these obvious benefits, Strachan believed that the father country had certain obligations to fulfill in regard to the rights of the settlers in the new colony: namely an established church and the opportunity for religious education.

¹⁰ Strachan, A sermon on Ecclesiasticus 4:3. Not dated but must have been written after the death of Isaac Brock -- August 1812.

Surely if they are entitled to all the comforts of a moral and religious education by remaining at home, much more ought such comforts to accompany, or as soon as possible follow them to the remote settlements which they are employed in establishing. And if any colony can have a paramount claim over another . . . it is . . . Upper Canada which was settled by men driven from their homes by the enemies of their country . . .

This privilege of a religious education can only be granted by means of an established church: "Indeed a Christian nation without a religious establishment is a contradiction . . ." ¹² A country cannot be made Christian through, for example, the efforts of itinerant ministers or what Strachan would term "unauthorized modes of worship." Only through an established church could a new colony be organized and unified in their beliefs and have access to a minister of that church at regular intervals, within a reasonable distance from their homes. This idea, in addition to the opportunity for religious education, needed government support for purposes of organization but, more importantly, for purposes of funding.

In return for establishing these two institutions the mother country receives two great things. First the "child" will be grateful to the "parent" for demonstrating care and affection. This will tend to prevent unrest within the colony. Secondly, these two institutions will mark the colony indelibly as English:

. . . Support of Church establishments must take the lead of all others if their preservation be of importance; and can it be doubted that it is only through the Church and its institutions that a truly English character

¹¹ Strachan, A sermon preached at York, Upper Canada, July 3, 1825 on the Death of the Late Lord Bishop of Quebec.

¹² Ibid.

and feeling can be given to or preserved among the population of any foreign possession?¹³

Strachan did not confine his comments on Britain as strong parent land to her relationship with Upper Canada; he spoke of other colonies as well. For example, on the occasion of the Indian Mutiny in 1857 Strachan delivered a sermon which once again outlined the purposes and obligations of colonization:

The possession of India imposed on our country three great objects: the extension of commerce, the well being of the people and the Propagation of Christianity . . . we have in a manner ignored the two last and confined our policy almost exclusively to the first -- the securing of our temporal interests.¹⁴

According to Strachan there was some measure of success in that he believed that Britain had imparted some civilization to India through establishing a government "far superior in administering justice and in protecting person and property to any other government ever known or enjoyed in India."¹⁵ The mutiny served to remind the British that this was not enough and as a result:

. . . the British Nation has resolved that in the future the government of India shall rest upon a religious basis and upon no other . . .¹⁶

It is the same lack of support for an established church and religious education which, according to Strachan, was in a great measure responsible for the revolution of her American Colonies:

Our parent state . . . has allowed a powerful nation to grow up in this quarter of the

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Strachan, A sermon preached on a fast day on the occasion of the Indian Mutiny, November 27, 1857, on Psalms 119:137.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

world with scarcely an endeavour to promote its spiritual advancement. The first inhabitants quitted their native land for the purposes of commerce and aggrandisement both public and private and in such matters they were readily recognized but they were left in utter destitution of the means of grace . . . Is it then to be wondered that liberalism, fraud and infidelity increased and that these again promoted discontent, sedition, anarchy, successful revolt and the dismemberment of the Empire . . .¹⁷

This was for Strachan the one great case of neglect which changed the course of history in North America:

Had it been otherwise, -- had the British nation really acted as a Christian people with one heart what glorious things might have been effected in North America. The brightest imagination is unable to picture the scenes of peace and happiness . . . these provinces instead of being exposed to traitorous conspiracies both from without and from within would have presented a Christian Society built up in righteousness. Sad indeed are the judgements which have for some time been upon us.¹⁸

Strachan used such examples as these to criticize indirectly Britain's lack of support in Upper Canada, especially related to issues such as the Clergy Reserves and the establishment of a university. His criticism of Britain, however, is extremely rare. Instead we usually find Strachan directing his energies against those who murmur against the mother country. One particular sermon singles out those citizens who are finding fault

¹⁷ Strachan, A sermon preached in Toronto on December 14, 1837 - A Fast day by public proclamation on account of the rebellion and attacks from the United States, on Hosea 6:5.

¹⁸ Ibid.

with Britain's treatment of her colony. To them he preaches patience by telling of the calamities which Britain has endured:

You must be aware, my brethren, that for some years Great Britain has been a suffering nation and labouring under a series of visitations which the most acute discernment could neither anticipate, nor the wisest measures control . . . In a moment the food on which the life of eight millions of her people daily depended was swept away . . . Next her general trade and commerce fell into great embarrassment . . . Lastly cholera spread itself with malignant and fatal rapidity over her provinces. Surely then terrible judgements from which she is slowly recovering furnish more than sufficient grounds for patience and forbearance on our part and instead of murmuring we ought to be filled with affection and admiration at the unparalleled spectacle which she has exhibited to the world for amidst all her difficulties she did not slacken one instant in the discharge of her high and holy duties . . . Be assured that if there be anything wrong it will be generously redressed and the cordial attachment which has so long existed between her and this favoured colony fully restored . . .¹⁹

Thus by having patience with and supporting the parent land in times of difficulty, Strachan sees Upper Canada fulfilling its part of the colonial relationship with Britain in a Christian manner. Therefore, both Britain and Upper Canada are sharing, in Strachan's eyes, in the ideal of a Christian nation through their mutual care and generosity in their colonial relationships.

Strachan believed that the third trait of the ideal Christian nation was that it was a defender of the faith and in this role

¹⁹ Strachan, A sermon preached on the 3rd of January, 1850 being a Thanksgiving day for the departure of the Cholera, on Psalms 31:7.

would constantly be prepared to battle what he termed "the infidel spirit". There was no doubt in Strachan's mind that the source of this "infidel spirit" could be traced directly to the French Revolution:

. . . during the greater portion of the last century the Protestant Church was at a very low ebb . . . it was the age of infidelity. The French Revolution marked the darkest period of the time . . .²⁰

In an earlier sermon Strachan was more specific:

There were doubtless many unbelievers in Christendom before the French Revolution but it was not till the consummation of that appalling event that it was openly avowed and boasted of as a new discovery, an advancement in knowledge and civilisation and to render all the more manifest it was called the age of reason. God was dethroned and the gullible reason of depraved man worshipped in his stead.²¹

The result of the revolution was bloodshed, wars and cruelties "not surpassed at the siege of Jerusalem." The revolution sowed many bad seeds,

the most deadly and prolific of these was the separation of religion from education as if there can be any knowledge worthy of the name of said education unless based upon and hallowed by Christianity. Hence during the last sixty years the far greater portion of the youth of the European Continent has been brought up not merely in utter ignorance of our holy religion but they have been taught to condemn, despise and persecute it.²²

²⁰ Strachan, A Missionary Sermon preached August 21, 1864.

²¹ Strachan, A sermon preached on the 3rd of January, 1850 being a Thanksgiving day for the departure of the Cholera, on Psalms 31:7.

²² Ibid.

The Infidel Spirit not only brings about cruelty and death but it also "eats into domestic and social life and destroys our happiness both here and for ever."²³ Thus, said Strachan, men should be on their guard "against those who are given to change."²⁴ Only in this way may people save themselves from the delusion suffered by the French:

In vain did they proclaim liberty to the people and destruction to the nobles. All felt the rigour of their oppression. The thatched cottage of the innocent peasant was as frequently in flames as the gilded palace and the deluded inhabitants that yet remain, in addition to their sufferings, have the corroding reflection of being instrumental in bringing them upon themselves . . .²⁵

That Britain escaped the effects of the revolution in one way may be attributed to her geographical separation from the Continent. Strachan feels, however, that the most important factors were her civil institutions and her religion. But

the leprosy of a secular education . . . has been seeking entrance and tho hitherto successfully resisted by our beloved church it has in its political bearing made some progress tho not yet sufficient to create any great apprehension. For the more rational and scriptural Christianity which hallows the great majority of her people protects her from civil outrage on the one hand and dark impiety on the other . . .²⁶

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Strachan, A sermon composed March 14 and 15 and delivered on the 16th, 1804 being appointed for a day of humiliation and prayer on account of the war against Buonaparte (sic) on Hebrews 12:11.

²⁶ Strachan, A sermon preached on the 3rd of January, 1850 being a Thanksgiving day for the departure of the Cholera, on Psalms 31:7.

In contrast to Britain who tried valiantly to maintain the Christian character, France, according to Strachan, arrogantly ignored the warnings which God had issued before sending down his judgement upon that nation. The warnings were visible even to those outside of France:

Never had a nation more certain warning of approaching evil than we possess at this moment. All the arts of our implacable foe have been detected and exposed. Even those who had been at first so far deluded as to believe their fair speeches and to suppose that they were the friends of liberty and humanity as they pretended, are at length convinced that they are the cruel enemies of both.²⁷

Strachan saw the evils of France increasing until it was time for the judgement of God -- war -- to be handed down. God's instrument: the British nation:

We only are left and against them as their enmity is without bounds. The ruin they have brought upon others is great beyond conception, but it would be little to what they would inflict upon us. Never did we stand up in a more glorious cause. We have often contended for single rights or distant territories but now we combat not only for our existence as a nation but for religion and liberty. Those unhappy nations that groan under the galling yoke behold us with admiration and secret blessings. From us they still hope for relief and if we are victorious in the contest the chains of Europe will be broken and peace and happiness again shine upon its dejected inhabitants.²⁸

²⁷ Strachan, A sermon composed March 14 and 15 and delivered on the 16th 1804 being appointed for a day of humiliation and prayer on account of the war against Buonaparte (sic) on Hebrews 12:11.

²⁸ Ibid.

For Strachan Britain's war against France was completely justified because he regarded it as a war of defence. That which must be defended above all was the British Constitution: "God forbid that ever we should live to see this admirable model of wisdom defaced by sacriligious hands."²⁹ As long as Britain was united the outcome of the war with France was certain:

Britain has little to fear from lawless tyranny however formidable. Confident in the justice of our cause and trusting in Divine Aid, we shall march boldly against the enemy and the God of battles will be with us. Although we, my friends, be at a great distance from the scene of commotion, we are nonetheless interested for we must rise or fall with our beloved Mother country. Let us then perform our part, and offer up our sincere prayers to Almighty God for her deliverance, knowing that the prayers of the righteous avail much . . .³⁰

As the war progressed things did not look hopeful for Britain: "In fine, Europe had virtually become the French Empire, and its whole force was directed against the British Isles."³¹ Britain stood alone. It was in this situation, much to Strachan's amazement, the United States joined the war -- on the side of France:

The only nation from which she might have hoped for kindness, sympathy and gratitude; a nation descending from herself, pretending to greater freedom and still connected by all the charities of private life; instead of encouraging her efforts in maintaining the liberty and happiness of the world, deserted the cause of humanity and joined the tyrant. She made a boast to her ally of the value of her assistance . . . Posterity

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Strachan, A sermon preached at York Upper Canada, on June 3, 1814 being the day appointed for a general thanksgiving; on Romans 8:28.

will hardly believe that a nation so degenerate, so lost to every honourable feeling could have existed. That a nation far beyond the tyrant's reach and enjoying peace and tranquillity by the generous labours of the people she fought to destroy, would have so eagerly claimed the execrable pre-eminence of being the only nation that volunteered its aid to the oppressor of the world. No state but ³²this became the ally of France by choice . . .

Thus in 1812 Upper Canada was called upon to fulfill her role as a Christian land, like her mother land, by entering into a battle against the "infidel spirit": the United States. This occurred just before Strachan moved to the capital of Upper Canada, York. Once established in York Strachan played an active part in the war effort. As a result Strachan met and became good friends with General Isaac Brock, Commander of the Troops in Upper Canada. Strachan greatly admired Brock's active approach to the war. Brock very soon became the epitome of British heroism for Strachan and Brock's sudden death was a great blow to him:

He was always considered as an Officer of the greatest bravery and most promising talents and the Immortal Nelson marked him for courage and conduct and graced him with high approbation . . . he put so much of his heart into the concern as to insure success if attainable by human powers . . . In all of his actions he was independent and honourable. He had no views of private interest . . . The public good was the prime motive of his conduct . . . He has long been known . . . for his affability and kindness of heart . . . industry, activity and perseverance . . . His religion was without hypocrisy, the homage and veneration of an upright heart to the Supreme Being. As a believer in revelation he owned the superintendency of God's providence and declared

³²Ibid.

that the hand of the Almighty was evidently with him when he took the invading General prisoner in his own fortress . . . it is an irreparable loss to the public, to the service of our revered monarch, to our great parent nation . . .³³

As Brock was the epitome of the Christian spirit so was Napoleon the incarnation of the infidel spirit:

Bonaparte is one of those bold, restless enterprising spirits who reckon every means lawful and good that appears necessary to promote the ends he has in view. He looks upon justice, probity and sincerity as empty names and has never made any scruple to employ lying, fraud, treachery and perjury to circumvent his neighbours. He thinks nothing of ruining nations for the purposes of extending his power; deems no sacrifice too precious to his ambition and acknowledges no rule for his actions; and no other God but interest and fortune. In other Tyrants and Usurpers we commonly discover some transient beams of magnanimity . . . In the life of this man we look in vain . . . he is a person so destitute of moral virtue, dependent on terror for his safety; and the terror itself depended upon the continuance of victory . . . Men were machines in his hands . . . From him everything must emanate; he must be the centre of all.³⁴

It is important when reading Strachan's sermons to be mindful of the British (and therefore Christian) character of his congregations. During the War of 1812 Strachan reminds his congregation of their heritage:

But of the patriotism of some of you, there is the strongest proof, for I see many here who have hazarded their lives in defence of their

³³Strachan, A sermon on Ecclesiasticus 4:3. Not dated but must have been written after the death of Isaac Brock -- August 1812.

³⁴Strachan, A sermon preached at York Upper Canada, on June 3, 1814 being the day appointed for a general thanksgiving, on Romans 8:28.

country, who have spurned the dastard course of the coward who veers to either side as fortune smiles and have come forward boldly against the storms of faction and ambition and sealed their sentiments by the most precious sacrifices. To exhort you to appear in the same cause would be superfluous.³⁵

Strachan uses his position in the pulpit to exhort his listeners to strength and courage nevertheless:

I trust that you will not tamely resign your invaluable possessions to a band of lawless and desperate plunderers who have twice invaded the province in great force; and by the blessing of God on your bravery and conduct have been twice repulsed with disgrace. They are kept from making another attempt only by their dastardly fears . . . a war of defence like ours is always just; and we may with humble confidence implore the aid of Omnipotence to repel an invading foe . . .³⁶

That the War of 1812 ended in victory was for Strachan another example of God's moral government: the triumph of the Christian over the infidel spirit.

Never have so many unquestionable proofs of a superintending Providence appeared in so short a period as those which may be read in the passing age . . . evil is necessary in this stage of our being, to the existence of moral good; where is pleasure without pain or the enjoyment of success without disappointment. To ascertain its value every good must be contrasted with its opposite evil . . . All things are directed for the advantage of the good.³⁷

³⁵ Strachan, A sermon composed March 14 and 15 and delivered on the 16th 1804 being appointed for a day of humiliation and prayer on account of the war against Buonaparte (sic) on Hebrews 12:11.

³⁶ Strachan, A sermon on Ecclesiasticus 4:3. Not dated but must have been written after the death of Isaac Brock -- August 1812.

³⁷ Strachan, A sermon preached at York Upper Canada, on June 3, 1814 being the day appointed for a general thanksgiving, on Romans 8:28.

For the Loyalists the victory was proof that "the same spirit animates the children . . . which inspired their fathers to put down treason and rebellion and to stand up for the unity of the empire."³⁸

In the same way that the victory was a reaffirmation of the British as a true Christian nation, the outcome of the war clearly showed God's providential judgement on the infidel French, according to Strachan. Concerning the retreat by the French in Russia Strachan said:

In this terrible calamity we clearly perceive the operations of a superintending Providence. The tyrant's cup in iniquity was full and the judgements of God were upon him . . . Hail destroyed the Canaanites, an angel the army of Sennacherib and frost the disturbers of Europe.³⁹

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid. In 1855 Strachan notes that God's choice of instruments for his moral government has taken an ironic turn: France and England have united in order to fight Russia:

"In their Union we behold the finger of God -- a dispensation of divine Providence most marvellous and which human sagacity never could have anticipated." (From a sermon preached on the fast day appointed for the 18th April 1855 in the forenoon 11 A.M. on Proverbs 19-21).

Although Britain was again victorious the celebrating in 1856 was very different from that of 1815:

"I am old enough to remember the rejoicings of the peace of 1815. The delight was unbounded for the liberation of many oppressed nations and for the cessation of bloodshed which had spread their baleful miseries for so many years over the fairest portion of the civilised world but although with the victors there was much exultation, the vainquished were made to drink the cup of humiliation to the very dregs . . . But no such grievances have been attached to the present peace and fair joy be not so intense and exuberant. It is far more pure and meets in all quarters with a more cordial reception. No governments have been overturned, no tribe or people oppressed. The Map of Europe is left untouched and as it was before the war with one or two slight alterations which will contribute to the common good." (Strachan, A sermon preached on June 4, 1856 being appointed a day of Thanksgiving

(continued)

There was no doubt in Strachan's mind that God's instrument of justice had been successful in overcoming the infidel spirit:

Alas, my friends, victory itself is associated with many painful images; it is only valuable as it averts greater evils, and leads to security and peace; that peace which is now diffusing its general beams over Europe has already given liberty to the thousands of prisoners torn for those they love by this terrible war.⁴⁰

More specifically Strachan believed that the victory would result in rulers becoming wiser in regard to their governing:

. . . justice must be separated from ferocity, punishment from revenge . . . Industry will be encouraged; agriculture promoted and commerce extended. From a more correct knowledge of political economy systems of taxation less oppressive and unjust will be introduced, monopolies destroyed . . . and the advantage of individuals be made subservient to the good of the whole . . .⁴¹

Strachan warned his congregation, however, that one should not expect perfection because a "government is like a family which cannot always flow smoothly."⁴² More importantly, Strachan reminds

39 (continued)

for the peace at the termination of the war with Russia, on 1 Kings 8:56.)

For Strachan the end of the war also meant that the world was opened to "missionary enterprise": to convert Turkey to Christianity will remove "the fetters under which the Christian population of the East has groaned for centuries." (Ibid.)

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

his congregation, that perfection of any kind is not of this earth and that it should not be expected:

In fine the present age has demonstrated that no great and decided amelioration of the lower classes of society can be reasonably expected; much improved they certainly may be; but that foolish perfectability with which they have been deluded can never be realized. Of the two experiments made in America and France to constitute governments productive of virtue and happiness only . . . [both] have completely failed. In the former the most base and wretched policy is pursued; and the latter ended in a military despotism. It is by peaceable and gradual steps and not by revolutions that the most solid improvements in the science of government can be obtained.⁴³

In terms of Upper Canada the victory strengthened the relationship with the mother country, the epitome of the Christian nation:

Can we forbear rejoicing that we belong to a nation so generous and noble whose children nourish the most exalted principles of moral rectitude . . .⁴⁴

Most importantly the war had been a successful test of the Christian spirit of Upper Canada against the infidel spirit on her border: the United States

mocked our attachment to the best of kings, and tho born to the most exalted freedom and independence, they reproached us with being slaves; and sought to poison us with their crude and debasing principles. Let the recollection of these things

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

urge you to new exertions and as you are anxious to secure your homes from such cruel invaders; to preserve them from pillage and conflagration . . . continue in the career of glory which you have begun.⁴⁵

Upper Canada successfully stopped the spread of the infidel spirit but did not destroy it for it was to rear its head from time to time over the next thirty years until it came out in force in the Rebellion of 1837. That this revolt was another test of the Christian spirit in Upper Canada, Strachan had no doubt. In his "Rebellion Sermon"⁴⁶ Strachan sees the uprising as the most recent event in a series of God's visible judgements:

It is not easy for the most careless to cast their eyes over the history of the world during the last sixty years without being convinced that the judgements of God have been far more visible than in ordinary times.⁴⁷

Strachan believed that the struggles which occur through these judgements are for the good. Such struggles often have the effect of strengthening and purifying the land. Such was the case when the rebels were expelled from Upper Canada:

The criminal frequently receives the rewards of his deeds from the very law which he has broken and on such occasions we say with truth that the avenging hand of the Almighty is upon him. For God

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ See footnote #5 of this chapter.

⁴⁷ Strachan, A sermon preached in Toronto on December 14, 1837 - A fast day by public proclamation on account of the rebellion and attacks from the United States, on Hosea 6:5.

justifies civil society in expelling from its bosom those who have willfully and wickedly violated the foundations of public order and felicity.⁴⁸

Strachan believed that the source of the rebellion could be found in the neglect of religious establishments:

Long has God been gracious to the British nation nor can anyone doubt but that she has been raised up by divine Providence for mighty purposes . . . she owes all her power and prosperity under God to her sincere profession of the principles of the Reformation . . . misfortune has assailed her the moment that she relaxed in cherishing and defending the principles of the gospel . . . when she returned to her sacred duty . . . misfortune vanished . . . If at the present moment symptoms of darkness appear . . . it is because the Protestant principle has been in less vigorous operation and superstition and infidelity have raised their heads in high places. Hence distress and wrath threaten us as they did the Israelites when they forsook the worship of the Lord.⁴⁹

Britain's failure to provide for religious education and religious establishments in the thirteen colonies and the resulting revolution apparently has not taught the mother land the importance of these two religious institutions:

. . . with the exception of two venerable societies which have done a little to redeem the national character and to maintain something of Christianity, the British Empire has done next to nothing for the religious instruction of our people.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

The fault does not lie entirely with Britain, states Strachan, but also is present within the colony itself: "we are not innocent sufferers but are active partakers in the guilt."⁵¹

In the Rebellion Sermon Strachan sees the rebels as personifying the infidel spirit: "malignant traitors", "lawless marauders", and "robbers who thirst for our blood".

Years later Strachan refers once again to the rebellion and his opinions seem to have mellowed somewhat. Speaking about the presence of the "infidel spirit" in the province he said:

I allude to what happened a few years ago when a small band of turbulent spirits attempted to raise the standard of revolt against the imperial government from which we had received so many proofs of kindness, and protection. It is true a vast majority of our loyal people . . . rose in their might and at once crushed this incipient rebellion. It was nevertheless attended with loss of life and much misery and has left a blot on the fair name of this portion of the province which had been ever distinguished for its devotion to the peace and unity of the empire.⁵²

But Strachan did not believe that the infidel spirit was gone from the colony. Instead he feared for the independence of the province when this infidel spirit from the United States could once again gain strength -- only this time by a different means:

Nor can we conceal from ourselves that this rebellious attempt tho immediately suppressed has not been extinguished in spirit. For how else can we account for more recent outrage and the sordid cry of annexation which calls

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Strachan, A sermon preached on the 3rd of January, 1850 being a Thanksgiving day for the departure of the Cholera, on Psalms 31:7.

upon us to barter our independence and the sanctity of our solemn oath of allegiance for a piece of silver?⁵³

⁵³Ibid.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

CONCLUDING REMARKS

/ We have attempted to lay before the reader the religious thought of John Strachan as contained in his sermons. We have also shown how the social and political ideas expressed in the sermons arise from that religious thought. Before ending this work, however, a few concluding remarks must be made.

In the introduction it was noted that Strachan was not a thinker of the first order, but he was an intelligent man who, while active in many areas of the community, wrote clearly about the relationship between religion and man. Because he was not primarily a thinker, there are some ideas within his sermons which exist at least in tension with each other, if not in direct conflict. It is important at this point to question some of these seemingly conflicting ideas.

First, we have noted that Strachan believed that the nature of God is essentially a mystery. Maintaining this belief as strongly as he did it is difficult to see how God's providence is so very scrutable, so very visible for him. Can one explain the actions of a mysterious and omnipotent being with such apparent authority and certainty?

Next, Strachan believed that man's knowledge about God is "progressive". One must think that the members of Strachan's congregation must have been somewhat confused when at the same time

Strachan also warns them to be wary of those who promote the doctrine of change, that they should stick to the "old ideas", and beware of anything new.

Third, Strachan firmly believed that the source of the "infidel spirit" was in the French Revolution. He saw the revolt of the Thirteen Colonies as being of the same spirit as the French Revolution. One wonders if Strachan saw any evidence of that infidel spirit in the revolution in Britain which occurred in 1688. One questions whether or not Strachan saw clearly that that which he was most eager to "conserve" was a constitution which was itself a product of a revolution. Yet he says, "It is by peaceable and gradual steps and not by revolutions that the most solid improvements in the science of government can be obtained". (See Chapter 5, note 43).

Finally, in several sermons Strachan praises the development of commerce, financial prosperity and the strengths and virtues of the middle class of society. In other sermons he angrily condemns wealth as a terrible vice and money as the root of evil. One can understand why Strachan would be pleased with the growth and development of the young colony but the zeal with which he lauds the middle class goes beyond colonial pride. One also wonders when Strachan praises commercial growth with such enthusiasm to what extent he was aware of the social problems created by the industrial revolution. Certainly he saw one immediate effect in the form of poverty-stricken emigrants arriving in Upper Canada.

These questions and others should be considered in a second, more comprehensive work. This work could attempt to trace the origin of Strachan's social, political and religious ideas. One could also attempt to integrate and discuss his sermon literature with the rest of the Strachan Papers. For, in all fairness to Strachan, one must remember that what has been examined in this work, his sermon literature, is a medium which is essentially didactic and one composed for widespread and public hearing. We should also recall when we may think that Strachan's statements seem rather simplistic in their black and white portrayal of situations, that he made an effort not to write sermons which would be too learned and complex for his congregations. Involved as he was in so many areas of community life, including education, Strachan knew the level of his audiences.

Above all one must make sure that Strachan's real importance is not lost in a discussion of the consistency or depth of his thought. Instead we must remember that Strachan is important because of the influence he had in the practical realm while maintaining these ideas. Strachan lived in an age where he recognized the growing influence of the "infidel spirit" in daily life. It was for this reason that he believed that religion must be essentially practical. His importance lies in the fact that he was successful not only in making religion a vital and practical centre of his own life, but

also, to an important extent, he made religion a central force in the life of Upper Canada for many years.

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