

WILFRED THOMASON GRENFELL  
AND THE CHRIST OF CULTURE

by

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BARBARA D. ROBINSON

**A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

MASTER OF ARTS

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## Abstract

The medical mission established by Wilfred Thomason Grenfell (1865-1940) in northern Newfoundland and Labrador was an anomaly among Protestant endeavours in the Canadian north, both for the ease with which professional personnel were recruited and for its trans-continental philanthropic support. This was partly the result of Grenfell's ability to popularize an inclusive culture-accommodating Christian theology most closely associated with nineteenth-century Anglican Broad Churchmanship.

After a general biographical introduction, this thesis examines Grenfell's prolific inspirational literature to determine the implicit Christology, concept of faith and its facilitation, understanding of immortality, sin and grace, ecclesiology and social ethics. The thesis demonstrates the connection between the author's religious understanding and his pursuit of particular social and political policies. A belief in the kingdom of God as a realizable historical reality, a stress on stewardship of one's gifts and aptitudes as the criterion for final judgement, a confidence in a steadily evolving human rationality, an optimism with respect to human potential - all of these assumptions influenced the English physician's approach to medical practice and cultural intervention.

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## PREFACE

Completing a thesis, thousands of miles distant from one's university community would not have been possible without considerable flexibility on the part of the University of Manitoba, Department of Religion, and the Correspondence/Off Campus Service of the Elizabeth Dafoe Library.

I am particularly indebted to Dr. Egil Grislis, my thesis advisor, not only for countless helpful comments and corrections, but also for his warm, ever-wise, pastoral concern. Dr. Grislis is both a scholar and a churchman. His lovely integration of these functions has impressed and inspired me. I have been greatly helped and frequently redirected by comments from my other University of Manitoba committee members, Dr. Klaus Klostermaier, Dr. Larry Hurtado, and Dr. John Stackhouse.

Dr. Ronald Rompkey, of Memorial University, Department of English, kindly agreed to act as the external examiner for this thesis. Most of my preliminary research on Wilfred Grenfell was pursued prior to the 1991 publication of Dr. Rompkey's Grenfell of Labrador, which is sure to remain the definitive biography of the Labrador physician. I am especially grateful for the manner in which Dr. Rompkey steered me clear of popular, but not always credible sources of Grenfell information in the months preceding the publication of his book.

The late Mr. Ray Condon, then principal of the Labrador West Community College, not only permitted me to use the library facilities of Memorial University, but through his personal fascination with the lore of Newfoundland and Labrador made me want to know a place and a people better.

I am grateful to The Salvation Army for funding my studies, and to Lieut.-Colonel Earl Robinson of the Catherine Booth Bible College, for the hospitality and consistent encouragement of the College on visits back to Winnipeg.

And to Mal, my husband, who has endured my technical ineptitude, and with his computer expertise has retrieved and reformatted so much material, thereby salvaging me, my deepest love and thanks.

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis represents the attempt to delineate the theology of Wilfred Thomason Grenfell (1865-1940) as suggested in his published writings on religious themes. There is an inherent irony in the endeavour. Grenfell was neither a theologian nor a systematic thinker. He repeatedly disavowed any interest in formal dogmatics or speculative systems of philosophical thought. He was a physician. His heroes were never mystics and seldom scholars. Instead they were social reformers or entrepreneurs. But because Wilfred Grenfell regarded his professional activity and schemes, whether medical, educational or socioeconomic, as concrete expressions of a personal loyalty to Jesus Christ, his is a theological story.

It is a story which is broader than Grenfell's personal interiority. To seek to account for his thought is important for more than acquiring insight into a complex, and celebrated human being. To understand Grenfell's religious thought is to better account for the success of a missionary venture which is an anomaly in the story of Protestant endeavour in the north. It is to acknowledge the motivational effectiveness of a particular Christian vision in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Considerable academic attention has been paid to the story of Protestant missions in western Canada.<sup>1</sup> Studies have noted the manner in which missionary aspirations were chronically frustrated by a lack of personnel and funds. Scholars have documented the academic mediocrity or marginalized social backgrounds of many missionary candidates, both lay and ordained.<sup>2</sup>

Conversely, Wilfred Grenfell's work in Northern Newfoundland and Labrador attracted scores of young, well-educated men and women who came prepared to work without pay in any capacity of service. Association with Grenfell's work was perceived as glamorous and worthwhile. Why was this so?

Coastal Labrador remains an exotic destination, but not more so than the Canadian northwest. Wilfred Grenfell aggressively deputized. So did the bishops and missionary superintendents responsible for the west. Grenfell was initially backed by an established mission organization with developed policies and structures. The same can be said for western workers associated with organizations like the

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Barry Ferguson, ed., The Anglican Church and the World of Western Canada, 1820-1970 (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1991)

<sup>2</sup>see C. P. Williams, "Not Quite Gentlemen: an Examination of 'Middling Class' Protestant Missionaries from Britain, c. 1850-1900," Journal of Ecclesiastical History vol.3 (July 1980), 301-305. Also Kenneth Coates, "Send Only Those Who Rise a Peg: Anglican Clergy in the Yukon, 1858-1932," Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society vol.28, no.1 (April 1986), 3-18.

Church Missionary Society, or the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.

It is not the intention of this thesis to compare and contrast Canadian Protestant missions, northeast and northwest. It is the intention to argue that one operative factor in Wilfred Grenfell's mission success was his ability to popularize a particular approach to Christian theology. His manner of interpreting the historic Christian faith resonated with a generation of well-educated young idealists. His practical theology seemed capable of synthesizing sophistication and sacrifice. His personal philosophy integrated dominant cultural presuppositions and streams of Victorian consciousness with the personalism of an evangelical faith. In a remarkable way he made participation in what he always unapologetically described as a Christian mission palatable to self-proclaimed agnostics. Grenfell's theological thought can be demonstrated to be both one-sided and 'thin,' yet it connected with the religious, or at least humanitarian, aspirations of many, many people.

The contours of this culture-accommodating theological approach is what this thesis endeavours to sketch.

There is an extensive literature surrounding Grenfell's life and work in Newfoundland and Labrador, and a much larger oral tradition perpetuated by those who were in any way associated with what became the International

Grenfell Association. This "canon" includes at least five types of material.

A historical overview of the mission which came to play an integral role in the delivery of health care services for northern Newfoundland and Labrador was written by Gordon Thomas, M.D. and published in 1987. From Sled to Satellite: My Years with the Grenfell Mission<sup>3</sup> is the account of the author's thirty-three years of work with the Grenfell organization, including two decades as superintendent (1959-79). Thomas devotes only half a dozen pages to the life of Wilfred Grenfell, and does not deal with the founder's thought or personal philosophy. But the author had a long working association with Dr. Charles Curtis, who succeeded Grenfell in the administration of the St. Anthony hospital, and cooperated as the primary informant for the earliest attempt at a Grenfell biography. Through Thomas' descriptions of Dr. Curtis' management style, one is in a better position to appreciate the potential for organizational conflict in the consolidating years of the work in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Numerous accounts, most of them decidedly hagiographic, were written by former patients of Grenfell's or by individuals who accompanied the doctor on his coastal

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<sup>3</sup>Gordon Thomas, From Sled to Satellite: My Years with the Grenfell Mission (Canada: Thorn Publishing, 1987).

See also W. Paddon, Labrador Doctor: My Life with the Grenfell Mission (Toronto: James Lorimer & Co. Publishers, 1989).



rounds. Such books as Grenfell of Labrador<sup>4</sup> by James Johnston, With Grenfell on the Labrador<sup>5</sup> by Fullerton Waldo, or the recently published Snapshots of Grenfell<sup>6</sup> by Canon J. T. Richards were based primarily on personal reminiscences. Earl Pilgrim's, The Price paid for Charley<sup>7</sup>, 1989, is the published preservation of a family's folklore. The purpose of much of this literature was promotional: to publicize Grenfell's work, and attract both financial support and personnel to the cause.

Edificatory "lives" were written for the moral improvement of juvenile readers and apparently bore fruit. Basil Matthews' Wilfred Grenfell: The Master Mariner<sup>8</sup> was presented to the ten year old Gordon Thomas as a Sunday school prize!<sup>9</sup>

Obsequious prose characterized most of these early books. Waldo's description of Grenfell is typical:

He walks in the steps and in the name of Christ with a child's humility, a man's strength, an almost feminine tenderness and never a breath of that

<sup>4</sup>James Johnston, Grenfell of Labrador (London: S.W. Partridge & Co. Ltd., n.d.).

<sup>5</sup>Fullerton Waldo, With Grenfell on the Labrador (New York, Chicago, London & Edinburgh: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1920).

<sup>6</sup>J. T. Richards, Snapshots of Grenfell (St. John's, Newfoundland: Creative Publishers, 1989).

<sup>7</sup>Earl Pilgrim, The Price Paid for Charley (Roddickton, Newfoundland: Earl B. Pilgrim, 1989).

<sup>8</sup>Basil Matthews, Wilfred Grenfell - The Master Mariner (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1924).

<sup>9</sup>Thomas, From Sled to Satellite, 2.

maudlin, unctuous sanctimoniousness which always must repel the virile and vertebrate fibre of the Thomas Hughes brand of "muscular Christianity."<sup>10</sup>

Although Grenfell the man is veiled in Grenfell the myth, this literature does convey the degree to which the Grenfell charisma captivated the popular imagination. Fullerton Waldo claims to have taken notes on several occasions when Grenfell preached.<sup>11</sup> Because Grenfell preached extemporaneously, these are some of the few records of Grenfell's sermon content. As such they proved of some use for this thesis.

A third source of Grenfell material is found in fictional accounts based upon the experiences of the venturesome physician. A 1904 novel, Dr. Luke of the Labrador<sup>12</sup> by the journalist Norman Duncan, further attests to the romantic attraction of the Grenfell story but has no significance for this thesis. Ronald Rompkey does claim that the vigour of Duncan's literary style, both in this novel and in an 1903 article for Harper's, "contributed the most to Grenfell's transformation into a figure worthy of American attention."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Waldo, With Grenfell on the Labrador, 127-128.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 27, 119.

<sup>12</sup>Norman Duncan, Dr. Luke of the Labrador (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1904).

<sup>13</sup>Ronald Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador: A Biography (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 115.

Notable examples of serious biography, the fourth source of information, are J. Lennox Kerr's Wilfred Grenfell: His Life and Work<sup>14</sup> published in 1959, and Ronald Rompkey's exhaustively researched Grenfell of Labrador: A Biography<sup>15</sup>, 1991.

An article on "Heroic Biography and the Life of Sir Wilfred Grenfell"<sup>16</sup>, by Ronald Rompkey, documents the arduous selection process of an appropriate author to write the first full biography of Grenfell after his death in 1940. The Grenfell Association of America was not initially convinced of the need for such a project, doubting that Wilfred Grenfell's autobiography, A Labrador Doctor, 1919, and the 1932 revision Forty Years for Labrador could be surpassed. Gradually they came to see the value in commissioning a "first class biography"<sup>17</sup> and after pursuing numerous other leads, settled on Lennox Kerr as their candidate. Kerr was a prolific writer, known to Oxford Press for a children's series published under the pseudonym, Peter Dawlish. When Kerr accepted the commission he knew nothing about Wilfred Grenfell. Rompkey comments,

In his ignorance of the task ahead, he committed himself to completing the manuscript in twelve

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<sup>14</sup>J. Lennox Kerr, Wilfred Grenfell: His Life and Work (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1959).

<sup>15</sup>Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador.

<sup>16</sup>Ronald Rompkey, "Heroic Biography and the Life of Sir Wilfred Grenfell", Prose Studies, 12, September 1989, 159-173.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 163.

months, and the prospect of such a quick conclusion appealed to Sir Henry Richards,<sup>18</sup>

then chairman of the British association.

Lennox Kerr all but completed the first draft of the biography in six months. Drawing extensively upon Grenfell's autobiography, and conversations with Dr. Curtis, he produced a "good seller if not a good biography."<sup>19</sup> Curtis approved of Kerr's work, claiming that he had produced "as true a picture as anyone could."<sup>20</sup> But Curtis' more candid revelations did not prevent Kerr from producing yet another idealized account of Grenfell's life. Rompkey maintains that the biographer was caught between two conflicting editorial agendas, and ended up satisfying neither. The American-based International Grenfell Association had hoped for a professional, analytic biography. The British Grenfell Association wanted a further edifying tribute to its founder. Nevertheless, until the publication of Professor Rompkey's biography in 1991, Kerr's book provided the most useful historical account of Grenfell's life.

Ronald Rompkey, Associate Professor of English at Memorial University of Newfoundland, wrote the first scholarly biography of Wilfred Grenfell. In addition to the assiduous research of the facts of Grenfell's life which

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 167.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 168.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 169.

provide a needed historical context for the consideration of his thought, Rompkey's research is vital to this thesis for the manner in which he identifies the religious construct through which Grenfell sought to disclose himself.

Professor Rompkey argues that in order to write an autobiography, as Grenfell did, an individual "must literally invent himself in retrospect as he shuffles, selects and discards the accumulation of a lifetime."<sup>21</sup> Consciously or unconsciously, Grenfell adopted literary conventions of spiritual biography as established in the seventeenth century. Puritan writers, with their rigorous concentration upon the pastoral dimensions of ministry, popularized a genre of Christian testimonials.<sup>22</sup> This literary form included the following features:

1. an account of early mercies experienced by the subject,
2. a period of sin, indifference or active resistance to grace,
3. an "unforeseen act of conversion, which was often induced by an awakening sermon,"<sup>23</sup>
4. a call to ministry, and descriptions of the manner in which this calling was worked out in an individual's life,

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<sup>21</sup>Ronald Rompkey, "Elements of Spiritual Autobiography in Sir Wilfred Grenfell's: A Labrador Doctor", Newfoundland Studies, vol.1, no.1, 1985, 17.

<sup>22</sup>Owen Watkins discusses the development of this literary convention in The Puritan Experience (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), 28-36.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 21.

5. a conclusion on "a note of spiritual satisfaction as the writer oriented himself to the future."<sup>24</sup>

That a religious self-understanding so centrally informed Wilfred Grenfell's literary output has obvious implications for a thesis on his theology.

Professor Rompkey considers Wilfred Grenfell to have been

one of the last of that peculiarly nineteenth-century breed, the spiritual adventurer, the manly Christian who carried the code of service to the remote places of the earth at a time when such a chivalric sense of life was still possible.<sup>25</sup>

He ably identifies his subject's religious influences. But the substance of Wilfred Grenfell's religious thought is not of primary concern in the very fine Grenfell of Labrador. What kind of man was this Victorian social reformer? What were the historical circumstances that contributed to his ability to achieve so much internationally acclaimed work? These are Ronald Rompkey's investigative goals. Through his astute analysis of a man of considerable complexity, the biographer concludes that Grenfell was essentially a politician, whose "true field of endeavour lay in the politics of culture."<sup>26</sup> Rompkey demonstrates that Wilfred Grenfell was as interested in structural intervention as he was in preaching the gospel and treating patients. While his earliest letters home told of patients examined,

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador, xiv.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., ix.

clothing distributed and public professions for Christ, they also included criticism of government policies and economic systems and expressions of his desire to be involved in catalyzing change.<sup>27</sup>

This thesis is less concerned with Grenfell the man than with the type of Christian thought which motivated his commitment to social and cultural intervention. While Grenfell was admittedly highly individualistic, a soloist, inclined to grandstand, he is representative of an approach to missions which permeated much Christian consciousness in the late nineteenth century. To identify his thinking within theological categories is to gain insight into why he would pursue particular social and political policies. A belief in the kingdom of God as a realizable, historical reality, a stress on the stewardship of one's gifts and aptitudes as the criterion for final judgment, an expectation that science would function as a grace gift for the healing of society, a confidence in a steadily evolving human rationality, an optimism with respect to human potential--all of these assumptions influenced the actions of Wilfred Grenfell.

This thesis will proceed from the assumption that the most productive way to identify the theological patterns shaping Wilfred Grenfell's religious understanding is to concentrate upon a fifth source of Grenfell material: his own writing on religious themes. But the attempt to con-

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 54.

sciously limit the source material to Grenfell's own writing is not without problems. First, Grenfell's writing was voluminous. He wrote over thirty books or tracts and numerous articles for journals as diverse as The British Medical Journal, Ladies Home Journal, Atlantic Monthly, and Journal of the Royal Society of the Arts.<sup>28</sup>

After Grenfell's mid-life marriage his writing was frequently a joint endeavour. Professor Rompkey claims that Anne Grenfell extensively edited her husband's work.

The manuscripts of A Labrador Doctor preserved at Yale University show that after Grenfell had composed the first draft by hand, she would then transform the text into a typed copy, at the same time eliminating anecdotes, softening judgements, and curbing Grenfell's dilations on religious subjects.<sup>29</sup>

This may account as significantly for the rather different theological voice which emerges in the later Grenfell as does any theory of a modification of his theological beliefs.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup>For a full catalogue of Wilfred Grenfell's articles, see Ronald Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador: A Biography, bibliography, 337-339.

<sup>29</sup>Rompkey, "Elements of Spiritual Autobiography", 20.

<sup>30</sup>This thesis will attempt to demonstrate that, although Grenfell makes reference to personal alterations in theological perspective (see for example Ronald Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador, 167: "Grenfell had felt constrained by the Mission's theological position, and less comfortable with it as time went on. He was beginning to prefer the Liberal theology of his New York committee." Also see Ibid., 192: "I have a lessening value for the emotional doctrines of Methodism ... we are coming to your views, which are much those of Kingsley." Also see Ibid., 231), the more significant theological modification was not in Grenfell's thought, but in Evangelicalism's positional hardening. For further discussion of this matter see pp. 88-95 below.



It is not easy to slot Wilfred Grenfell into a particular theological camp. His religious influences were various. Evangelicals would claim him as one of their own,<sup>31</sup> and he did acknowledge a significant debt to his Evangelical teachers. He may or may not have shared the evangelistic fervour of the sixteen thousand British and American student volunteers<sup>32</sup> who embarked on careers in missions in the years between 1888-1920, motivated by the catch phrase, "The Evangelization of the World in This Generation."<sup>33</sup> He did effectively capitalize on this resource of manpower to extend his work in Labrador. On the other hand, it seems certain that as a child he would have heard proponents of British Christian socialism debating with his father at the Grenfell family estate.<sup>34</sup>

Grenfell professed to reject all theological labels. He claimed indifference with respect to doctrinal controversy<sup>35</sup> or theories of Biblical interpretation. But he was

<sup>31</sup>Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador, 23. The Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen required that their staff physician be one with "a commitment to preach the gospel along strict Evangelical lines."

<sup>32</sup>Kenneth Scott Latourette discusses this cross-denominational, university-based, Protestant phenomenon in A History of Christianity (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), 1163, 1257-1258, 1271-1272.

<sup>33</sup>Sherman Eddy, Pathfinders of the World Missionary Crusade (New York: Abingdon, Cokesbury Press, 1943), 296.

<sup>34</sup>For a description of Wilfred Grenfell's father, Algernon, see pp. 42-45 below.

<sup>35</sup>See pp. 88-93 below.

perennially occupied with the question of Christ's relationship to the world. In H. Richard Niebuhr's classic discussion of the way historical Christianity has variously addressed this question we have an interpretative key or organizing principle for a theological placement of Grenfell.

Niebuhr's particular historiographical genius was the manner in which he identified symbolic congruences influencing seemingly antithetical Christian traditions. As a theologian and social ethicist he was vitally interested in the manner in which Christians understood the nature of social responsibility. He observed that there was no homogeneous Christian response to the question of how followers of the Christ were "to be" in the world. Instead, Niebuhr suggestively identified five "typical" answers or motifs which shaped the attitudes and choices of Christian communities in history. In his assessment, each "type" was partial and historically relative. He contended that the various understandings functioned within the church in a mutually corrective manner. But he noted that it was not unusual for one type to so dominate a given period of history as to approach the status of an orthodoxy. According to Niebuhr, this was the situation in the nineteenth century. In this period, four typical configurations - the radical cultural opposition of Tertullian or Tolstoy, the synthetic vision of a St. Thomas of Aquinas, the pronounced dualism of a reformer like

Luther, and the transformative solution best illustrated in St. Augustine, were subordinated to a multitude of culture accommodating interpretations of the Christ event. Christianity was broadly assumed to embody all that was most admirable in western civilization. Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ of Culture. In the religious analysis of the nineteenth century labels like "liberalism" and "rationalism" were not, for Niebuhr, heuristically helpful. "They indicate what lines of division there are within a cultural society, but obscure the fundamental unity that obtains among men who interpret Christ as a hero of manifold culture."<sup>36</sup>

Grenfell typifies that approach to the question of the Christian and the world which Niebuhr calls "Christ of Culture," or "Culture-Protestantism," attributing the original use of the term to Karl Barth. This resolution of the Christ-world dialectic identifies Christ "with what men conceive to be their finest ideals, their noblest institutions and their best philosophy."<sup>37</sup> Jesus of Nazareth is celebrated as the enlightened teacher of an ethic for the universal improvement of life.

Culture-Protestantism modified Grenfell's evangelicalism.<sup>38</sup> It influenced his understanding of his personal

<sup>36</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), 91

<sup>37</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), 103.

<sup>38</sup>See p. 67 below and pp.167-169 below.

vocation, determined his Christology and limited his soteriology. Ultimately it subordinated his theology to ethics.

Grenfell's motivation to work in Labrador indicates a Christ of Culture concern. The nineteenth-century Christian of this persuasion stressed the essential conflict between man, the moral being, and the impersonal forces of nature, whether physical or psychological. The human person had a religious duty to harness the salvific powers of science and technology for the reduction of natural threat. This theme can be heard in Grenfell's description of his first voyage to Labrador, "It is not given to every member of our profession to enjoy the knowledge that he alone stands between the helpless and suffering and death."<sup>39</sup> The image here is of the doctor as scientist, armed with a medical arsenal and holding death at bay. The Christ of Culture stands over against the hostility of nature.

The language of Grenfell's Christology is characteristically Culture-Protestant. Jesus of Nazareth is presented as "the great exponent of man's religious and ethical culture."<sup>40</sup> In the manner of Albrecht Ritschl (1822-89) and Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930), Grenfell describes Jesus as a moral hero who exhibits perfect fidelity to an ethical vocation. Through Christ's example, culture is inspired and uplifted.

<sup>39</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, A Labrador Doctor: The Autobiography of Wilfred Thomason Grenfell, M.D. (Oxon) (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1919), 122.

<sup>40</sup>Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, 92.

Although Wilfred Grenfell expressed his desire to "bring men to God,"<sup>41</sup> he never writes in any sustained way about human sin or estrangement from God. References to the cross of Christ are few and stand without explanatory elaboration. Here too, Grenfell stands firmly in a tradition which neglects to state

that man's fundamental situation is not one of conflict with nature but with God, and that Jesus Christ stands at the center of that conflict as victim and mediator.<sup>42</sup>

Culture-Protestants collapse theology into ethics. They are Pelagian in their high regard for human potential. They say much more about society than about God. And historically they have been extremely successful as missionaries to the middle and upper classes, calling on their followers to participate in noble schemes of cultural reformation.<sup>43</sup> Again, Grenfell's story well illustrates this approach.

Niebuhr contends that variations on the Christ of Culture theme run through most late nineteenth-century theology. It echoed through teaching at the poles of the theological continuum. Although most closely aligned with rationalist or humanistic Liberalism, an ardent Evangelical like D. L. Moody (1837-99) when preaching hard work, self reliance, and personal initiative conveyed dominant cultural

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<sup>41</sup>Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador, 176.

<sup>42</sup>Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, 101.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 104-106.

values through Biblical forms. But Moody, unlike Grenfell, consistently emphasized the fact that all human culture stood in radical need of the transforming grace of God. Such theological assertions were quite rare in Wilfred Grenfell's writing.

Despite Grenfell's rejection of theological labels, this thesis requires some clarification of the meaning of particular terms in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Who was an Evangelical? How could one characterize a theological Liberal? The fact that Grenfell was no rigourist cannot be overstressed. Both he and the mission with which he was initially associated used the term "Evangelical" without expanding on their understanding of the term.<sup>44</sup> When Grenfell stated that as a young man he believed the "Evangelical to have a monopoly on truth,"<sup>45</sup> his meaning can only be inferred by the contextual contrasts he drew. In this case, the contextual opposition is Evangelical versus Unitarians and Roman Catholics.

Workers with the Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen were required to go "into the field with a wise, prudent, Evangelical teaching"<sup>46</sup> but the organization never mandated particular beliefs in a published credal statement.

Wilfred Grenfell's explicit references to theological influences include men associated with quite different

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<sup>44</sup>Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador, 23, 166.

<sup>45</sup>See p.55 below.

<sup>46</sup>Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador, 33.

Protestant theological leanings: Charles Kingsley (1819-75), associated with what in Victorian England was known as Broad Church; Lyman Abbot (1835-1922), an American Liberal to whom Grenfell wrote, "I do not think, as far as theology goes, there can be a pin of difference between your views and my own";<sup>47</sup> and D. L. Moody, indisputably an Evangelical.

Grenfell shared important assumptions with each of these men. Each articulated his faith within the broader contours of Victorian religious thought. It is possible to identify some theological distinctives which have come to characterize their respective positions.

How did one demarcate the Evangelical in the nineteenth century? D. W. Bebbington, in his comprehensive analysis Evangelicalism in Modern Britain, contends that Protestant denominations, or movements which characterize themselves as Evangelical, have four consistent and abiding emphases in common. Evangelicals have always stressed what he terms conversionism, activism, Biblicism and crucicentrism.<sup>48</sup>

Conversionism proceeded from the theological assumption that humankind, in an unregenerated state, was alienated from God and in need of reconciliation. Inward change, or reorientation of the will, through an act or attitude of repentance was necessary. Assurance of such

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 110.

<sup>48</sup>D. W. Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 5-17.

change could be internally attested. There was considerable variation in the understanding of the manner of conversion, whether it needed to be a datable crisis or could be a gradual growth into grace, but all Evangelicals believed that an individual became a Christian only through an experience of conversion.

Activism is the second Evangelical emphasis identified by Bebbington. Evangelicals were quick to deny that they "worked" to obtain salvation. Rather they were "working out" their salvation. They saw rigorous endeavour as the most natural expression of gratitude for their own changed lives. There were always other souls to be saved. This was the gospel task. A Congregational clergyman by the name of R. W. Dale described the ideal nineteenth-century Evangelical saint as

not a man who spends his nights and days in fasting and prayer, but a man who is a zealous Sunday-school teacher, holds mission services among the poor, and attends innumerable committee meetings.<sup>49</sup>

Owen Chadwick locates this activist bent in the Victorian consciousness of vocation which he considers to be the most distinctive feature of the century's religiosity.<sup>50</sup>

Thirdly, to be Evangelical was to respect the authority of the Bible. Chadwick claims that at least until the 1860's most people in the English pews believed the

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>50</sup>Owen Chadwick, The Victorian Church, pt.2 (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1970), 466.



Bible to be true as history.<sup>51</sup> The degree of willingness to interact with the burgeoning insights of Biblical criticism proved to be the watershed on which a broader Evangelical orientation polarized into conservative and liberal approaches to the Scripture. All Evangelicals believed the Bible to be inspired. But theories of inspiration and the nature of revelation varied considerably.

Finally, to be Evangelical was to stress the doctrine of the Atonement. Christ was the man born to die. States Bebbington, "To make any theme other than the cross the fulcrum of a theological system was to take a step away from Evangelicalism."<sup>52</sup> It must be noted however that a powerful proclamation of the cross was not the sole prerogative of conservative Evangelicals. Social Gospel thinking in the late nineteenth century emphasized Christ's vicarious suffering as the demonstration of a divine solidarity in adversity. The Evangelical distinctive was usually the emphasis on a substitutionary atonement.<sup>53</sup>

Conversionism, biblicism, crucicentrism, even activism, are theological categories. It was assumed that such a quadrilateral of concerns could construct an intellectual frame within which "culture," meaning those basic assumptions, beliefs, values, arts and politics of a

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 57.

<sup>52</sup>Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain, 15.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 15-16.

society, could be viewed. It was assumed that theological assumptions were useful and trustworthy tools for cultural critique.

Liberalism is rarely delineated by a particular set of theological presuppositions. It is better understood "in terms of its effort to harmonize Christ and culture under conditions set by the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries."<sup>54</sup> Bebbington argues that Liberalism was a manner of thinking which

clung to the integration of Evangelical religion with society that was the legacy of the nineteenth century; conservatives changed their approach because they judged society to have moved too far from Christian values.<sup>55</sup>

By "Liberalism" I am referring to the theological perspective which strengthened in the final quarter of the nineteenth century and which in America was designated the "new theology." Lyman Abbott, with whom Grenfell corresponded, is considered representative of this theological approach.<sup>56</sup> It is noteworthy that Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918), in the later outgrowth of this "new theology" known as "social gospel," would entitle a chapter of A Theology For the Social Gospel "Neither Alien nor Novel," and cite as his own theological influences the writings of Frederick Denison Maurice and Charles Kingsley.

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<sup>54</sup>Kenneth Cauthen, The Impact of American Religious Liberalism (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 27.

<sup>55</sup>Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain, 227.

<sup>56</sup>Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador, 109-110.

Rauschenbusch claimed that these English Broad Churchmen had first asserted "solidaristic ideas on theology."<sup>57</sup> They were the British, Anglican, Liberal thinkers of a previous generation.

Kenneth Cauthen, in The Impact of American Liberalism, identifies three intellectual presuppositions permeating all thinking characterized as Liberal in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The influence of these on the Evangelical quadrilateral of theological concerns can be readily identified.

First of all, Liberal thinking stressed continuity rather than discontinuity in the world. Clear distinctions between the natural and supernatural were levelled. Emphasis on miracle as proof or demonstration of God's unique intervention in history was reduced. Divinity was continuous with humanity; divine immanence was expressed in nature and human personality. Revelation was accepted as continuous with reason.

Liberalism's commitment to the principle of autonomy, Cauthen's second determinative category, made it difficult to accept the idea of any arbitrary appeal to an external, objective authority. Knowledge was believed to be obtainable through observation and experience. Religious affirmations needed to be grounded in the experience of the believing subject, and confirmed by the sense of moral

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<sup>57</sup>Walter Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1919), 29.

responsibility engendered. At the same time, this stress on autonomy reacted against the mechanistic philosophies and theologies which so dominated eighteenth-century thought, and which tended to minimize freedom, values and purpose in human experience.

Hence, the conversionism so emphasized by Evangelicalism was a source of psychological interest to Liberals. The systematization of religious experience rather than the systematization of scriptural facts came to be regarded as theology's most authentic task. Biblicism had to be re-understood. Increasingly, revelation was associated with attuned capacities for insight and intuition. Activism was stimulated, supported by the belief that theology was a practical, rather than a speculative, discipline. Evangelical crucicentrism was weakened by the sense that correct formulations of doctrine were neither necessary nor possible.

Kenneth Cauthen identifies dynamism as the third broad intellectual presupposition of the nineteenth century. This was the belief that the world was involved in a process of continuous change. Characteristically, change was equated with progress. Cauthen defines dynamism as a belief in "an unending ascent toward individual and social perfection."<sup>58</sup> This world view claimed validation in the discoveries of then current science. The French astronomer and

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<sup>58</sup>Cauthen, The Impact of American Religious Liberalism, 21.

mathematician, Laplace (1749-1827), hypothesized regarding the evolution of the solar system. Sir Charles Lyell (1797-1875), in 1830, advanced the idea of gradual development of the earth's surface. And most convincingly, Charles Darwin (1809-82) published his theories of organic evolution. Human institutions and ideals were also seen as evolving, realizing themselves in a dynamic historical process.

In this intellectual climate, conversionism was reinterpreted as moral growth toward perfection. The Bible, according to Liberal categories of thought, recorded the dawning religious consciousness of a faith community. Biblical authors were assumed to hold differing perspectives and the usefulness of the text varied according to the development of the theology. Again, Evangelical activism both strengthened and was itself bolstered by the dynamism of Liberal thought. The future could culminate in a perfected humanity. Societies, no less than individuals, could be redeemed. This position seemed to have an affinity with the postmillennial eschatological expectations held by many Evangelicals. Once again, the necessity of an emphasis on the doctrine of the Atonement was minimized by more Liberal thinking. Evolving humankind was not radically alienated from God by sin and rebellion. Rather a person was "hindered mainly by the drag of animal passions from within, and the impersonal mechanisms of nature from without."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 24.

It is of course false to suggest that Evangelicalism remained untouched by broad intellectual assumptions.

Clearly the Romanticism of the century, defined here as

the movement of taste that stressed against the mechanism and classicism of the Enlightenment, the place of feeling and intuition in human perception, the importance of nature and history for human experience<sup>60</sup>

contributed to the respectability of Evangelical revivalism throughout the century.

Most simply, the nineteenth-century Liberal Christian was one seeking a thoroughgoing integration of Christianity and modernity, Christ and Culture. Cauthen unites terms and trends, classifying as "Evangelical Liberals" those who

stood squarely within the Christian tradition and accepted as normative for their thinking what they understood to be the essence of historical Christianity. These men had a deep consciousness of their continuity with the main line of Christian orthodoxy and felt that they were preserving its essential features in terms which were suitable to the modern world.<sup>61</sup>

Cauthen suggests that men like Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878-1969) and Walter Rauschenbusch were Liberals of this sort. So was Wilfred Thomason Grenfell.

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<sup>60</sup>Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain, 81.

<sup>61</sup>Cauthen, The Impact of American Religious Liberalism, 27.

## CHAPTER 1

## LABRADOR: LAND OF CHALLENGE

Labrador was discovered by the English. There is nothing in it of any value.<sup>1</sup>

This inscription, which Grenfell claims appeared on an early map of Labrador, tersely summarized one explorer's evaluation of what remains a relatively unknown region of North America. For those in quest of fertile farmlands and accessible trade routes to a resource rich interior, the Labrador terrain offered nothing. The stark landscape was "a source of dismay and even horror."<sup>2</sup>

Unlike the unknown and disappointed cartographer, Wilfred Thomason Grenfell glimpsed something of value in Labrador. He evaluated the region's potential according to a different criterion. He saw along this wildly isolated and geographically inhospitable coast<sup>3</sup> an almost unlimited

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<sup>1</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, A Labrador Doctor: The Autobiography of Wilfred Thomason Grenfell (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1919), (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1920), 156.

<sup>2</sup>Carol Brice-Bennett, ed., Our Footprints Are Everywhere (Nain: Labrador Inuit Association, 1977), 313.

<sup>3</sup>Time-Life author, Robert Stewart, comments in The World's Wild Places (Amsterdam: Time-Life International, 1977), 24, "In spite of the technology that has made possible tunnels through the Alps and super highways across deserts, it still is extremely difficult to run a reliable transportation system in Labrador, if only because of its frigid and blustery climate through most of the year. As long as goods and people cannot be moved from place to place

scope for the actualization of his practical theology. Sun-warmed rocks, encrusted with silvery lichen, supported lush crops of late summer berries, and seemed to hold the promise of fruitful productivity. Rock cliffs rising from foaming fiords suggested to the young English idealist "sculptured monuments of elemental strife."<sup>4</sup> Here was a land not yet subdued. Here was a land where "man the moral being, the intellectual spirit ... could confront impersonal natural forces, mostly outside himself, but partly within him."<sup>5</sup> Here was a place for the testing of limits. Here was a place where a visionary could "do things."

This chapter will sketch the conditions, both political and medical, which Wilfred Grenfell encountered at the commencement of his work in Newfoundland and Labrador, and the personal qualifications he brought to the missionary task.

#### Summons for Assistance

In 1886, the Council of the National Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen, a British organization providing medical and spiritual services among the sailors of the North Sea fishing fleet, received a request from a Church of England clergyman in St. John's, Newfoundland. The Reverend Henry

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with regularity, this wilderness will remain out of bounds to all but the hardiest human beings."

<sup>4</sup>Grenfell, A Labrador Doctor, 158.

<sup>5</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1951), 101.



How wanted to commence a similar work under the auspices of the established mission. His particular concern was for the welfare of the fishermen on the Grand Banks. How's request was turned down by the Council. The Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen was extremely anxious to preserve its non-denominational status. It could not become as directly aligned with any faith tradition as How would have liked without compromising this facet of its charter.

At the time the request was denied, the Mission Council conceded its virtual ignorance about the colony making the request. Although Newfoundland had been explored by John Cabot in 1497 and fished by Englishmen for three hundred years, it was thirty-five hundred kilometres distant and easy to ignore. True, the cod stock was regarded as virtually inexhaustible, but colonial politics were suspect. Lennox Kerr claims that it was "reputed to be a poor and unprofitable place, its governments said to be corrupt and always asking for help from England."<sup>6</sup>

In the spring of 1891, five years after Reverend How's initiatory appeal, Mr. Francis Hopwood, an assistant solicitor with the British Board of Trade, became involved in trade talks with Sir William Whiteway, Premier of Newfoundland.<sup>7</sup> Hopwood served on the Council of the Mission

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<sup>6</sup>J. Lennox Kerr, Wilfred Grenfell: His Life and Work (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1959), 60.

<sup>7</sup>The British Parliament granted the colony of Newfoundland responsible government in 1855 with a thirty seat House of Assembly. William Whiteway, Premier, 1878-85, 1889-94, 1895-97, vigorously pursued policies of economic

to Deep Sea Fishermen, so he had more than a secular interest in the premier's cogent presentation of the crisis in the colonial fishery. As he was then in the process of planning a trip to Canada for a review of Canadian fishery regulations, Hopwood decided to stop in St. John's on his way home and meet with those who had instigated the contact five years prior. Despite the fact that Francis Hopwood spent only one week in St. John's, he produced what Lennox Kerr terms a "remarkable document":<sup>8</sup> remarkable, one presumes, in its comprehensiveness. He was directed by the editor of the Daily Colonist to three particularly credible informants: Judge D. W. Prowse, a respected Newfoundland jurist, Adolf Nielson, Superintendent of Fisheries, and Dr. Moses Harvey, Presbyterian clergyman and historian.<sup>9</sup> Hopwood managed to graphically describe life in a colony still struggling with self-government.

According to Hopwood, the population of the colony was approximately 140,000, with thirty-seven thousand of these employed in the fishery.<sup>10</sup> These people were predominantly

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diversification in an attempt to stabilize an economy then, as now, dangerously dependent on the health of the fishery.

See Ronald Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador: A Biography (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 39. Also see Patrick O'Flaherty, The Rock Observed. Studies in the Literature of Newfoundland (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 71.

<sup>8</sup>Kerr, Life and Work, 61.

<sup>9</sup>Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador, 39.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

of English, Scottish, or Irish extraction, with the exception of those living in the French settlements along the north shore. Included in this number were between four thousand and five thousand permanent residents of Labrador. Moravian sources indicated that seventeen hundred of these were Inuit.<sup>11</sup> The other Labradorians were either Nascoptic or Montagnais Indians, of mixed race or what the Newfoundlanders had come to term "Liveyeres". These, "the people who live here," were most often the descendants of seamen from Cornwall or Devon, England.

Every summer, twenty-five thousand Newfoundlanders would sail to the Labrador coast for summer fishing. It was the conditions surrounding this seasonal transport of men, women and children which scandalized Francis Hopwood. Ronald Rompkey writes,

These annual migrants, as distinct from the permanent Labrador settlers (liveyeres), survived there until October with no administration, no means of preserving law and order, no relief and no medical care.<sup>12</sup>

Hopwood maintained that his formal report understated his case: conditions were so deplorable that to describe them accurately would invite accusations of exaggeration. He was, in fact, so accused.<sup>13</sup> The press attention given to the Hopwood report profoundly embarrassed Newfoundland

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<sup>11</sup>Kerr, Life and Work, 61.

<sup>12</sup>Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador, 40.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid. See 41-43 for a discussion of the controversy surrounding Hopwood's supposed "political bias and exaggeration".

politicians. In the next years Wilfred Grenfell's prolific and broadly circulated writing would intensify their discomfort.

### The Social and Medical Challenge

Grenfell's writing stressed the extreme poverty and degradation of the region at this period of Labrador history. He would quote the report of an Admiral Kennedy who described his voyages in the early 1880's:

On our visits around the island we met with sights enough to sicken one, and we felt ashamed to think that these poor creatures were British subjects like ourselves.<sup>14</sup>

It must be acknowledged that Grenfell's books were written to publicize the work of the mission, to arouse sympathy, and prompt financial support. Yet it is indisputable that there was not one resident physician on the Labrador coast.<sup>15</sup> The only medical service to as many as thirty thousand summer fishermen was provided by the sporadic visits of a government doctor who would travel on the mail steamer and hastily see patients at ports where the layover was long enough. Tuberculosis flourished in the damp, overcrowded, inadequately ventilated housing along the coast. Rickets, beriberi, and scurvy were common, due to "the poor diet and living conditions that debilitated the

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<sup>14</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, Labrador, the Country and the People (New York: MacMillan, 1909), 245.

<sup>15</sup>Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador, 50.

people and made them easy targets for every infection."<sup>16</sup> A complete lack of asepsis resulted in puerperal infection<sup>17</sup> and a high maternal mortality rate. Minor, but untreated conditions caused unnecessary suffering. "The torture of an ingrowing toenail, which could be relieved in a few minutes, had incapacitated one poor father for years."<sup>18</sup> There was an urgent need for dental services and visitors to outports were regularly met with the query, "Can ye haul teeth?"

Health care was further hampered by at least two factors emerging from the metaphysical world view of the coastal people.

Fatalism deeply permeated the religious consciousness. "Deformities went untreated. The crippled and blind halted through life, victims of what the blessed Lord saw best for them."<sup>19</sup> Considered from a more secular perspective, Lennox Kerr suggests that a mercilessly utilitarian ethic was at work.

Fishermen told Grenfell that they were not sure that a doctor on the coast was a good thing, for in this hunt for a living, weaklings had no value, and death removed a responsibility from others who were in no position to carry a burden.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Kerr, Life and Work, 160.

<sup>17</sup>Puerperal fever is a bacterial infection of the endometrium, or lining of the uterus, which results in rapid heartbeat, uterine tenderness, and discharge. It is usually the result of unsterile obstetrical practices.

<sup>18</sup>Grenfell, A Labrador Doctor, 122.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Kerr, Life and Work, 80.

Religiously, suffering might be "one's lot."

Pragmatically, life on the coast meant the survival of the fittest. When Grenfell arrived on the coast in 1892, he would comment on the large Labrador families, and relate it to an unquestioning belief in divine providence.

Whatever sins Labrador has been guilty of, malthusianism is not in the category. Nowhere are there larger families. God is ... the giver of all children. It is the animal philosophy, and makes women's lives on the coast terribly hard.<sup>21</sup>

Although Kerr claims that families were large, this is disputed by other historians. Whalen writes,

Families are small--not by choice, but by the simple mathematics of survival. A girl becomes a wife at sixteen, a mother a year later, and by twenty she has the appearance of a woman twice her age.<sup>22</sup>

The discrepancy could be resolved if one conceded both a high birth rate, and a high rate of infant death.

If fatalism prevented people from seeking or expecting treatment, superstition resulted in the use of treatments at best useless, and at worst dangerous. Boils were believed to be prevented by cutting one's nails on a Monday.

Congenital abnormalities such as cleft lip could be avoided

<sup>21</sup>Grenfell, A Labrador Doctor, 247 By Malthusianism, Grenfell was probably referring to the sexual restraint advocated by the Cambridge thinker, Thomas Malthus, as the result of his research on expanding populations. Malthus noted that the means of subsistence did not increase equally with the growth of human populations, resulting in poverty and famine. For a more detailed discussion, see David L. Edwards, Christian England, vol.3 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1985) 99-100.

<sup>22</sup>David Whalen, Just One Interloper After Another: an unabridged, official, unauthorized history of the Labrador Straits (Labrador Straits Historical Development Corporation, 1990), 80.

by clipping and keeping a corner of the dress worn when a woman spotted a hare. Ophthalmic infections were treated by blowing sugar in the eyes. Fairies were believed in, and feared. Grenfell attributed the vitality of the traditional folk culture

to the remoteness of the country from the current of the world's thought ... and the fact that the days when the forbears of these fishermen left Merrie England to seek a living by the harvest of the sea, and finally settled on these rocky shores, were those when witches and hobgoblins and charms and amulets were accepted beliefs.<sup>23</sup>

If medical treatment was complicated by metaphysical presuppositions, it was often made necessary by the harsh exploitation of the workers in the fishery.

#### The Economic Challenge

Francis Hopwood's report to the Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen roundly criticized an economic system which he considered to be primarily responsible for the poverty of the colonial fishermen.<sup>24</sup> The Newfoundland historian Prowse wrote extensively and scathingly about the manner of conducting business which was known as "truck . . . this terrible evil . . . almost coeval with the fishery." He described it as "a dishonest and degrading method of conducting trade . . . a direct encouragement to idleness

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<sup>23</sup>Grenfell, A Labrador Doctor, 143.

<sup>24</sup>See Ronald Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador, 40, for a description of the then prevalent system of monetary exchange.

and fraud on the part of the fishermen . . ."<sup>25</sup> To explain how this system worked, a lengthy report from Fogo Island, documented in Prowse, is worth quoting in full:

For a number of years back, we have been struggling with the world, as we suppose, through the impositions of the merchants and their agents by their exorbitant prices on shop goods and provisions, by which means we are from year to year held in debt so as not daring to find fault, fearing we may starve at the approach of every winter. We being at the distances of 70 leagues from the capital, where we suppose they arrogate to themselves a power not warranted by any law, in selling to us every article of theirs at any price they think fit, and taking from us the produce of a whole year at whatever price they think fit to give. They take it on themselves to price their own goods and ours also as they think most convenient to them.<sup>26</sup>

Food and supplies were exchanged for fish. Jack Buckle, a fisherman from Buckle's Point, levelly observed, "You couldn't get any money, but then, what did you need money for? There was nothing to buy here."<sup>27</sup> Prowse inveighed against the system, calling for its overthrow by a "stringent act of Parliament." He stated that "No government in Newfoundland has yet had the courage to declare that the labourer is really worthy of his hire."<sup>28</sup> The historian considered "truck" to be directly responsible for a financial crash in 1894 which plunged the colony into

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<sup>25</sup>D. W. Prowse, A History of Newfoundland from the English, Colonial, and Foreign Records (Mika Studio, 1972), 539.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 379.

<sup>27</sup>Whalen, Interloper, 77.

<sup>28</sup>Prowse, A History of Newfoundland, 380.



depression. Because the fish trade had for several years been conducted almost entirely on a credit basis, the merchants fell behind when European markets soured. Hit with high interest payments, they were unable to remain solvent.

The Reverend Dr. Moses Harvey was more conciliatory in his evaluation of the merchant community of the period. Ronald Rompkey notes that Harvey drew attention to the substantial risks assumed by the traders when they extended credit through unsuccessful fishing seasons or international market depressions.<sup>29</sup> Unlike Prowse, Harvey was not in favour of legislative attempts at economic correction. He feared further class polarization of merchants and fishermen in a struggling economy.

The search for an alternative to "truck" was seen by many as socially necessary. Wilfred Grenfell would be one more strident voice in a long debate.

#### Early Mission Responses

Any mission's investigative interest in a region would seek to determine the established churches' prior involvement in the provision of services. Hopwood was horrified, writes Kerr, by

the utter and complete lack of thought or effort for the fishermen's welfare, physical or spiritual, while they were in the north. When they sailed through the high narrow entrance from St. John's harbour, they passed into an abyss where they could

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<sup>29</sup>Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador, 43.

die or rot for all anyone seemed to care ... the white population, the summer fisherfolk, and the liveyeres could be born, mate and die without ever seeing a clergyman or hearing a word of God's truth from a churchman.<sup>30</sup>

Hopwood's report acknowledged only the work of the Moravian mission in Labrador. Established in 1771, the United Brethren, usually referred to as the Moravians, had built stations at Hopedale, Okak, Ramah, Zoar, Hebron, Killinek and Makkovik. The Inuit living in these communities were the most literate and medically well served population group in late nineteenth-century Labrador.<sup>31</sup>

The Moravians did not, in fact, have a monopoly on Christian work in Labrador. Strong ecclesiastical exception would be taken to any such inference. Throughout the century, the Roman Catholic church had supported and conducted mission work. The earliest workers had been based in the vicinity of what is now Sept-Iles, Quebec under the auspices of the Quebec diocese. Later work was extended to the Labrador interior and based at North West River. In Bishop Howley's Ecclesiastical History of Newfoundland, 1888, he cited the following census statistics. Of 1,553 permanent residents of Labrador in 1856, 315 were Catholics. By 1884, the population stood at 4,211; Catholics 566. Howley wrote of priests who "visited the scattered settlers, and administered the sacraments of baptism and matrimony,"

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<sup>30</sup>Kerr, Life and Work, 66.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

semi-annually, travelling on the supply steamers.<sup>32</sup> Given the transient nature of this involvement, it is not surprising that there is no mention of any educational initiatives under church control.

As early as 1848, the dynamic, hard-driving Anglican Bishop Field of Newfoundland visited the Labrador coast. The Methodists were active in the area of Indian Harbour and Hamilton Inlet. John Newman had established a permanent mission in Hamilton Inlet in 1884.<sup>33</sup> But it is fair to say that countless historical asides would indicate that in the nineteenth century, the religious temperament of the Colony was the antithesis of The Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen's ecumenical ideal. Sectarian divisions were deep and bitter. Governor Sir John Harvey had written, one hopes facetiously, in 1843, "there must be something in the air of this detestable island which engenders strife."<sup>34</sup>

Mission journals from the period are relentlessly critical of rival evangelistic endeavours. For example, Bishop Howley wrote of the Moravians,

More of a trading than a missionary establishment, the brothers have collected around them some Esquimaux, dignified with the name of Christian, but, if report speaks true, totally ignorant of any

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<sup>32</sup>M. F. Howley, Ecclesiastical History of Newfoundland (Belleville, Ontario: Mika Publishing Co., 1979), 253, originally published in 1888 by Doyle and Whittle, Boston.

<sup>33</sup>Arminius Young, One Hundred Years of Mission Work in the Wilds of Labrador (London: Arthur H. Stockwell, Ltd., n.d.), 62.

<sup>34</sup>Edgar House, Edward Field: The Man and his Legacy (St. John's: Jespersen Printing Ltd., 1987), 10.

religion, and principally employed in the furring trade for the missionaries.<sup>35</sup>

A listing of qualities deemed necessary for a Newfoundland Anglican bishop included the ability "to reduce his diction to the simplest terms while reserving sufficient acumen to dispute a Romanist."<sup>36</sup> A year after Wilfred Grenfell arrived on the Labrador coast he would write home to his mother:

I only touched on medical work and if I had said a word about religion the whole pack would have been at one another's throat in a twinkling. The truth is that there exists a bitter struggle between Church and Methodism.<sup>37</sup>

Francis Hopwood's report was published in *The Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen's* periodical, *The Toilers of the Deep*. Accompanying its publication was a pledge from Hopwood for one hundred pounds toward any future work undertaken by the mission in the colony. The popular response to the article stunned the mission board. In Britain, in the United States, and in Canada the press quickly picked up the story, denouncing the "Newfoundland government's neglect of the workers in its chief industry."<sup>38</sup> Public outrage was further fueled by the death of forty fishermen from Trinity Bay who were stranded in a blizzard while spring fishing.

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<sup>35</sup>Howley, *Ecclesiastical History*, 252.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>37</sup>Kerr, *Life and Work*, 104.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 67.

### The Challenge Accepted

A decision was made by the Mission council to send a hospital ship to Newfoundland and Labrador on what they considered an exploratory voyage. Wilfred Grenfell, the mission's frenetic super-intendent, volunteered to sail with the vessel. Grenfell makes no claim to have been particularly moved by Francis Hopwood's report of conditions in Newfoundland and Labrador. He was asked if he would be willing to sail across the Atlantic and continue the investigation on the mission's behalf. His decision to do so was not "made under strong religious excitement." Grenfell frankly explained, "there is everything about such a venture to attract my type of mind, and making preparations for the long voyage was an unmitigated delight."<sup>39</sup> Coupled with a restless temperament and readiness for adventure, Grenfell possessed a variety of skills much needed in Labrador in the 1890's.

### Wilfred Grenfell: Venturing Personified

Grenfell was born on February 28, 1865 in Parkgate, Cheshire, England. Parkgate was a small fishing village of several hundred residents. It had seen more prosperous times as a seaside resort, but the beaches had been polluted by an inadequate sewage system, and its major hotel converted to a school, Mostyn House.<sup>40</sup> Wilfred's father,

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<sup>39</sup>Grenfell, A Labrador Doctor, 114.

<sup>40</sup>Kerr, Life and Work, 14.

Algernon, was the owner and headmaster of this institution. Although ordained as an Anglican clergyman, Grenfell's father had spent his career exclusively as an educator. A classicist, Algernon seems to have left the primary responsibility for the care of his sons to his wife, who also supervised the practical running of a school in steadily increasing financial trouble.

Grenfell rarely mentions his father as a formative influence in his spiritual development. He does describe him as soft-hearted, generous and willing to allow his sons significant self-determination, but writes rather pensively:

How deeply and how often have I regretted that I did not understand him better. His brilliant scholarship and the friends that it brought around him, his ability to literally speak Greek and Latin as he could German and French, his exceptionally developed mental as compared with his physical gifts, were undoubtedly the reason that a very ordinary English boy could not appreciate him.<sup>41</sup>

Only with the publication of Ronald Rompkey's biography is this melancholy strain in Grenfell's writing about his father more adequately illuminated. On August 18, 1887, Algernon committed suicide in a psychiatric hospital. He had written to his wife of his fear of becoming as a result of his confinement a "helpless, hopeless lunatic."<sup>42</sup>

Algernon George Grenfell, Wilfred's older brother, implies

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 426. Algernon won entrance to Balliol College, Oxford University for excellence in classics and mathematics, but psychiatric instability contributed to a 'breakdown' during his student days, and he graduated in 1859 with a pass degree. See Ronald Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador, 6.

<sup>42</sup>Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador, 14.

that his father suffered an affective disorder. Papers cited by Ronald Rompkey from Mostyn House describe the manner in which Grenfell's father's mood swings influenced the religious environment of their home.

He was an odd man: a marvellous teacher, but liable at any moment to fly into a devastating passion about nothing at all. His early religious training had been evangelical to the verge of Calvinism. My brother Wilfred and I were brought up on these lines. Unfortunately, about once a week my father's instinct rebelled against the dogma that had been thrashed into him as a child, and he launched out, after the daily family prayers were ended, into a riot of free thinking. The result was that by the time I reached my tenth birthday, I was a finished atheist, convinced that one minus one equalled nothing at all. My brother began life as an enthusiastic evangelical.<sup>43</sup>

A decision made by Grenfell's father in 1882 may have seemed to the family consequent of this penchant for "free thinking." As a technical term in the history of ideas, the free thinker was one who claimed as a legacy of the Enlightenment the right to make decisions on the basis of reason rather than through an appeal to an external authority. Theological "free thinking" subordinated creeds to an emphasis on common causes. Creeds were seen as divisive; deeds as unifying.<sup>44</sup> Algernon Grenfell leased Mostyn House school and accepted the chaplaincy of London hospital, Whitechapel, a hospital "in what was then the most

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>44</sup>D. W. Bebbington discusses this in Evangelicalism in Modern Britain, 143-145.

foul and poverty stricken place in England, the East End of London."<sup>45</sup>

Grenfell's biographers have speculated on the factors which might have catalyzed Algernon's emerging social activism. These range from the far-reaching impact of Charles Dickens' novels on Victorian England, to a Grenfell family precedent for humanitarian service in the example of Wilfred's great grandfather who fought for abolition, to ecclesiastical movements such as the rise of The Salvation Army and the attention they were able to focus on the plight of London's poor. It is possible that the influence of Charles Kingsley, then canon of Chester and a relative of the Grenfell family played a role in Algernon's decision. Kingsley's political idealism moderated in later life but Wilfred Grenfell alludes to lively philosophical interchanges between his father and Kingsley in the parlour of his boyhood. The career change seems to have been most directly connected with a controversy surrounding the burial of a twelve year old child who studied at Mostyn House. The boy's father was a nonconformist and Algernon Grenfell was asked to conduct the funeral. The local vicar refused to unlock the gate for the grieving family, and the service had to be held on the grounds. When the curate chose to refer to the incident in a subsequent homily as an illustration of

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<sup>45</sup>Grenfell, A Labrador Doctor, 22.



the consequences of dissent, Wilfred's father walked out in protest at the bigotry.<sup>46</sup>

If Grenfell writes rather enigmatically about his father, he clearly idealized his mother. Of her he wrote,

My mother was my ideal of goodness. I have never known her speak an angry or unkind word. Sitting here, looking back on over fifty years of life, I cannot pick out one thing to criticize in my mother.<sup>47</sup>

Jane Grenfell died in April 1921, at eighty-eight years of age. A faithful life-long correspondence between mother and son indicates that Wilfred's attachment to her remained unbroken. He thought of her as confessor, advisor and friend.

Grenfell enjoyed a remarkably unstructured childhood. With his parents occupied with the day-to-day management of Mostyn House School, Wilfred was free to explore the sands of Dee. Fascinated by the lives of the local fishermen, he fished and hunted and dreamed of the life of a master mariner on the high seas.

The family relocation to London in late 1882 seems to have precipitated Grenfell's father's demand that his son explore some career options. Wilfred later claimed that medicine was not the first choice. That would have gone to big-game hunting. But Grenfell contends that his decision for medicine was made at the moment he first saw a human

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<sup>46</sup>Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador, 12-13.

<sup>47</sup>Grenfell, A Labrador Doctor, 424.

brain in formaldehyde at the clinic of a family friend who was a physician.

That this weird, white, puckered up mass could be the transmitter of all that made man, that it controlled our physical strength and growth and our response to life, that it made one into "mad G" and another into me--why it was absolutely marvellous.<sup>48</sup>

Having impulsively chosen a career, Wilfred Grenfell was presented with the need for a further choice: follow his older brother to Oxford, or accompany his parents to the city to matriculate at London University for London hospital medical school. He chose the latter and commenced his program on February 5, 1883.

The late nineteenth century was a period of startling new knowledge and techniques of practice in medicine. If Grenfell's medical school experience is typical, little of this new thinking filtered down to students. Medical education was a haphazard, primitive business. Grenfell was unusually fortunate in being taught by two exceptional teachers. The first was the surgeon, Dr. Frederick Treves, a forerunner in insisting upon scrupulous asepsis in operating theatres. Treves was a Christian and the chairman of the medical department of the Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen. Upon assuming this role, Treves outlined plans for well-staffed floating hospitals and agreed to participate in staff recruitment. He had only been able to award Wilfred Grenfell a rating of "indifferent" when it came to his surgical skill, but he knew of the young man's

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 39.

fascination with the sea and with seamen. It was Treves' job recommendation which in effect launched Grenfell upon what became his life's work.<sup>49</sup>

Another physician who strongly influenced Grenfell's philosophy of medical practice was Sir Andrew Clark, the Scottish physician to Prime Minister Gladstone. Grenfell describes this great teacher as a man who powerfully lived out before his students the quality of teachability. Clark was one who

never for a moment tried to convey to his followers that his knowledge was final, but that at any moment he stood ready to abandon his position for a better one.<sup>50</sup>

A mature Grenfell would lament at how rarely this intellectual humility was found among practitioners concerned with the cure of souls!<sup>51</sup>

To summarize, the Wilfred Thomason Grenfell who sailed to Newfoundland in 1892 possessed some knowledge of the life of fishermen, or at least a fascination with the myth of life at sea. He had been nurtured in a home environment which, although privileged, encouraged risk-taking behaviour. Grenfell was well connected socially, with educators, with clergy and with physicians. He had studied under two of Britain's finest doctors, one with superb

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<sup>49</sup>Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador, 23.

<sup>50</sup>Grenfell, A Labrador Doctor, 65.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

technique, the second with a passionate commitment to scientific method.

To the religiously sectarian climate of the colony he brought a somewhat eclectic experience of personal faith development. The variety of these influences will be included in the discussion of his theological beliefs which constitutes the remainder of this thesis.

## CHAPTER 2

## LOYALTY TO A LIVING LEADER

There is one very clear, definite point from which my assessment of Grenfell as a personality must start. It is that of his deep personal devotion to Jesus Christ. . . . That was Grenfell's secret, and unless one realizes it, it is impossible to get him into any true perspective.<sup>1</sup>

The uniquely Christian affirmation is the revelation of God in Christ. From the earliest days of the faith community gathered in his remembrance, the relationship of Jesus of Nazareth to human destiny has been variously expressed. This chapter will argue that Wilfred Grenfell consistently wrote about Jesus as He who fully actualized human moral development. Christ's life and teaching supplied the pattern for human conduct and social ethics. The exclusiveness of this emphasis on emulation in Grenfell's writing places him at variance with the Christocentrism of mainstream Evangelicalism, as will be demonstrated by comparing Grenfell and D. L. Moody.

Historian Claude Welch contends that theologically the whole of the nineteenth century may be seen as a "struggle

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<sup>1</sup>Henry Gordon, "An Address given by Henry Gordon at the Grenfell Reunion in London, England on May 21, 1965 on the occasion of the centenary of Sir Wilfred Grenfell's birth", 17, Wilfred Grenfell papers, #254 Yale University, Ace. 91-M-22. Religion and Morality, 1977-80.

to affirm the humanity of Jesus."<sup>2</sup> Wilfred Grenfell was accordingly a man of his age. An attraction to the earthly life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth dominates his religious writing and motivated his life. For Grenfell, Jesus exemplified manliness.<sup>3</sup> Jesus personified courage. Jesus was a faithful steward of the gifts of God who possessed a unique charisma which inspired men and women to undertake deeds of daring and acts of compassion.

#### Moody and Grenfell: Soteriology versus Anthropology

Dwight L. Moody, whom Grenfell regarded as a spiritual model, has been described as similarly preoccupied: "Jesus Christ was for him the power that shaped and moved life ... Moody's ultimate concern."<sup>4</sup>

Two men with a common theological emphasis? Superficially it might seem so. Indeed it may have been so in the years immediately following Wilfred Grenfell's exposure to the Moody campaigns of 1883 and 1885. In Kerr's

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<sup>2</sup>Claude Welch, Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century, vol. I, 1799-1870 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972), 6.

<sup>3</sup>See Ronald Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador: A Biography (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 10, for a discussion of what he calls the "Victorian cult of manliness," its concept of health, emphasis on sport, codes of conduct, and attendant moral ambiguity when ruthlessness and aggression are celebrated, but expected to be moderated by "courtesy in triumph, compassion for the defeated."

<sup>4</sup>J. Findlay, Dwight L. Moody: American Evangelist 1837-1899 (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), 230.

biography he describes the newly spiritually vitalized Grenfell's evangelistic efforts in East London. Young Christians would gather by the entrances to Victorian London's notorious gin parlours imploring derelicts to "come to Christ."<sup>5</sup> Grenfell participated in this style of outreach. In the absence of any published writing from this period, the precise nature of his self-understanding when engaged in this evangelistic tactic cannot be ascertained.<sup>6</sup>

Both Wilfred Grenfell and D. L. Moody are appropriately labelled as Christocentric in theological perspective. But their "Christocentrism" was not of the same sort. Jesus was of ultimate concern for different, if complementary, reasons.

Although it could be argued that any Christian is, by definition, Christ-centred, H. Richard Niebuhr's typological classic Christ and Culture draws attention to the "variation among Christians in describing the authority Jesus Christ has over them."<sup>7</sup>

For Dwight L. Moody, Jesus was the Saviour of the world. The cruelty of Christ's undeserved suffering on the cross magnetically drew humankind to repentance and the forgiveness of sins. Moody's Christology was salvific in orientation. In contrast, Grenfell's Jesus was the

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<sup>5</sup>Lennox Kerr, Wilfred Grenfell: His Life and Work (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1959), 36.

<sup>6</sup>See p.54ff.

<sup>7</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1951), 13.

representative man. Christ made visible human life par excellence. Jesus was the "peerless knight of all ages,"<sup>8</sup> the Solon of scholars, the physician of the human race. He was everything Grenfell personally aspired to be. This Christology is less soteriological than anthropological in emphasis.

Moody's Christology is representative of much nineteenth-century evangelicalism. Revivalists at mid-century insisted upon the need to "preach Christ first, not subordinately."<sup>9</sup> They urged their congregations to accept a personal Saviour. The evangelical theological agenda concentrated upon the problem and the means of individual salvation, how one was made right with God. The centrality of Jesus in this style of preaching was of instrumental import. Jesus was the divine-human vehicle through whom human beings were reconciled to God. Potential converts had to be shown how God accomplished this end through the death of the Son.

D. L. Moody placed great emphasis upon the vicarious suffering of Jesus on the cross. "Because he died for me, I will serve him."<sup>10</sup> He was exceptionally adept at expressing soteriological concepts in a manner which engaged his hearers on an emotional level. It is a misrepresentation

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<sup>8</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, A Labrador Logbook (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1939), 362.

<sup>9</sup>Findlay, Dwight L. Moody, 230.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 232.



which portrays Moody as an orator of thundering power. His intonation was rural New England and he is described as exhibiting an almost understated style of sermon delivery.<sup>11</sup> The intensity he communicated had nothing to do with volume and everything to do with carefully-chosen content. This is evident in the following, typical quote:

Search for the man that drove that spear into my side, and tell him there is a nearer way to my heart than that. Tell him I forgive him freely and that he can be saved if he will accept salvation as a gift.<sup>12</sup>

A contemporary of Moody's, R. W. Dale, summed up the content of the American revivalist's preaching in an 1865 New York Observer article. "That Christ wants to save men, and can do it, is the substance of nearly all of his discourses."<sup>13</sup>

How closely Grenfell's early preaching efforts and theological perspective resembled that of the man whose influence was so formative is difficult to ascertain. Grenfell is said to have shared with Moody the capacity for making New Testament narratives vivid and relevant. Kerr describes his preaching on board the Thomas Grey in the North Sea.

He made Christ seem like one of themselves, referring to him as though he were standing among them, or was a fellow they were likely to meet any day--a Christ who would yarn as Grenfell yarned, who would

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid. See 218-226 for an extended description of Moody and Sankey's style of meeting leadership.

<sup>12</sup>W. R. Moody, The Life of Dwight L. Moody (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1900), 438.

<sup>13</sup>Findlay, Dwight L. Moody, 231.

grin and pass a joke even as he preached the gospel. It was an entirely new sort of preaching.<sup>14</sup>

Clearly, he shared the American revivalist's lack of religious affectation.

Much of the hagiographic literature, based as it is upon the memories of people who were acquainted with Grenfell and heard him preach, implies that Grenfell also shared Moody's preoccupation with the cross of Christ.

At noon, Grenfell stood and delivered a sermon on love for one's fellow man. He thrived on telling about the love that God had in sending His Son to die for the sins of mankind, and how we were put in the world to worship God.<sup>15</sup>

It is probable that this statement more accurately reflects the author's bias than the content of Grenfell's sermon.

The same source inaccurately writes of the Moody episode:

"That night he was converted. He became a Methodist and never changed his church affiliation."<sup>16</sup> In fact, Grenfell remained a communicant member of the Anglican church.

#### Broad Church Christology

In his autobiography, A Labrador Doctor, Wilfred Grenfell chose to delineate his spiritual pilgrimage into three periods. He describes himself as having a religiously indifferent youth, quite unaffected by his father's

<sup>14</sup>Kerr, Life and Work, 54.

<sup>15</sup>E. Pilgrim, The Price Paid for Charley (Roddickton, Newfoundland: Earl B. Pilgrim, 1989), 94.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 98.

vocation within the church.<sup>17</sup> He claims that his early years of mission work were characterized by dogmatism and sectarian impulses.

The evangelical to my mind had a monopoly on infallible truth. A Roman Catholic I regarded as a relic of medievalism; while almost a rigour went down my spine when a man told me that he was a 'Unitarian Christian'.<sup>18</sup>

This quote is revealing. A Labrador Doctor, Grenfell's first autobiography, was published in 1919. One can infer from this quote that he has abandoned his commitment to evangelical infallibility. His religious vision is expansive enough to see merit even in Unitarian thought. However, such retrospective comments, in the absence of documentary evidence from his youth, tell us much less about what he in fact believed during that period, than about what he, as a mature thinker, sought to distance himself from.

For Grenfell, this shift should be understood less as a conversion to theological liberalism than as a return to his own religious roots. Accounts of Grenfell's childhood are sprinkled with references to Charles Kingsley, clergyman, novelist, Christian socialist, and Grenfell relative; to Benjamin Jowett, then professor of Greek at Balliol College, Oxford; and to Thomas and Matthew Arnold. The older Arnold was a prominent Church of England clergyman and educational reformer. These were his father's

<sup>17</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, A Labrador Doctor: The Autobiography of Wilfred Thomason Grenfell (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1919), 424.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 427.

influences and friends. Associates of these men debated theology and social ethics in the Grenfell home. Wilfred recalled that one great uncle, who was a close friend of Jowett during his days of Chancellorship at Oxford, would become

so absorbed in his arguments, which he always delivered walking up and down, that on this occasion, coming to an old fashioned sofa, he stepped right up onto the seat, climbed over the back, and went on all the time with his remarks as though only punctuating them thereby.<sup>19</sup>

Educators and humanists, these men were associated with the expression of free theology and party within Anglicanism which came to be known as "Broad Church". The use of the appellation was apparently popularized by an article in the Edinburgh Review of 1853 in which the movement was called, "Moderate, Catholic, or Broad Church by its friends; latitudinarian or indifferent by its enemies."<sup>20</sup> But not all Broad Churchmen appreciated the designation. F. D. Maurice intensely disliked the manner in which his thought was considered akin with positions he found heterodox.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>20</sup>W. J. Conybeare, "Church Parties," The Edinburgh Review 98, no. 200 (1853): 330 .

<sup>21</sup>Norman Vance, The Sinews of the Spirit; the ideal of Christian manliness in Victorian literature and religious thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 42-43.

Broad-Church Christology was generally adoptionist in its orientation.<sup>22</sup> These thinkers were disinclined to engage in what they regarded as metaphysical speculation about the person and work of Jesus. They rejected substantive concepts of either the incarnation or the atonement. Instead, Broad-Churchmen stressed Jesus' "unique revelatory vocation." Jesus lived according to a universal moral order which was equated with the will of God.

#### Jesus and Ethical Vocation

This is very much the emphasis of Grenfell's writing about Jesus. He too inextricably connected Christology and ethics. Jesus was the perfect example of human fidelity to an ethical vocation. In obedience to the will of the Father, Jesus "did truth." Grenfell wrote, "Christ did not ask his immediate disciples to understand him. He said, 'Go out and preach the gospel. Do as I am doing.'"<sup>23</sup>

An inscription on the flyleaf of Grenfell's 1911 Harvard Lecture, "What can Jesus Christ Do with Me?" strongly suggests what constituted the core of his Christological understanding: "The supreme lesson which Christ came to teach was that no man liveth to himself: that

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<sup>22</sup>Adoptionism is a term commonly used to characterize theological understandings which emphasize divine activity upon or within the human Jesus, or his elevation by God into a relationship of perfect Sonship, rather than stressing his divine origin, and identity as second member of the Trinity.

<sup>23</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, A Man's Faith (Boston, New York and Chicago: Pilgrim Press, 1908), 12.

the strong ought to bear the burdens of the weak."<sup>24</sup> The strong son of God lived out, or witnessed before humankind, the ideals of the kingdom he inaugurated. Grenfell frequently alluded to the story of the young man who came to Jesus asking how to inherit the kingdom. Commenting on the text in Matthew 19, Grenfell noted,

It was the commonest question which they brought to the Master in his day: "What must I do?" It was a question which he always treated as of vital importance and as relating to everyday life.<sup>25</sup>

That religion was a force impelling men and women to "do things" was stressed again in the William Belden Noble Lectures which Grenfell published in 1912. "Religion ... is a daily endeavour to interpret his teachings by translating them into vital action."<sup>26</sup> Jesus was "the greatest worker ever known."<sup>27</sup> To aspire to live such a life, that is, to follow "the pathway pointed out by Christ"<sup>28</sup> was the most rational of possible human choices. Grenfell enumerated four reasons why he believed this to be the case. A life of loyalty to the Son is remunerative, affords a "sound basis for fighting, for loving and for hoping,"<sup>29</sup> is "most manly"

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<sup>24</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, What Can Jesus Christ Do With Me? (Boston, New York and Chicago: Pilgrim Press, 1912), flyleaf.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>26</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, The Adventure of Life. The William Belden Noble Lecture at Harvard University for 1911 (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1912), 81.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 41.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 39.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

and most fully respectful of the individual's right to choose.

Given Grenfell's avowed lack of interest in formal theology, it is unlikely that he had read Albrecht Ritschl. But in his manner of relating the religious and the ethical, it does seem that he somehow imbibed the spirit of this thinker "with whom one must reckon in seeking to understand the directions and paths of Protestant thought in the last third of the nineteenth century."<sup>30</sup>

Ritschl (1822-89), whose academic career at Bonn and Göttingen included lectureships in dogmatics, church history, and New Testament, wanted to integrate personal faith and ethical demands in a way that modern man could accept as intelligent and rational. One finds Grenfell's writing in his middle years in full agreement with this rather lengthy quote of Ritschl's:

All assertions about the Lordship of Christ are to be grounded in his historical life and in his own self end and sonship to God, that is, in his ethical vocation - his obedience and fidelity, his perfectly fulfilling the calling laid on him as the founder of the universal ethical fellowship of mankind, his bearing on moral lordship, his finding his end in God's end.<sup>31</sup>

The task for Christ's followers, according to Ritschl, involved nothing less than the "organization of humanity

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<sup>30</sup>Welch, Protestant Thought, vol. II, 1.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 13.

through actions inspired by love."<sup>32</sup> He further defined Christianity as:

the monotheistic, completely spiritual and ethical religion, which, based as it is on the life of its Author as Redeemer and Founder of the Kingdom of God, consists in the freedom of the children of God, involves the impulse to conduct from the motive of love, aims at the moral organization of mankind and grounds blessedness on the relationship of Sonship to God as well as on the Kingdom of God.<sup>33</sup>

There is a marked similarity between Grenfell's commendation of Christianity as "remunerative" and Ritschl's claim that it "grounds blessedness on the relationship of sonship to God," between Grenfell's "sound basis for fighting, loving and hoping" and Ritschl's "involves the impulse to conduct from the motive of love," between Grenfell's "fully respectful of the individual's right to choose" and the German theologian's "consists in the freedom of the children of God."<sup>34</sup>

#### The Christ Life Commended

It is worth restating that at no point did Grenfell engage in systematic reflection upon the person and work of Jesus. But the reasons he gives for advocating a life of commitment to Christ require elaboration. In his lecture, Christ and the Individual, Grenfell wrote, "I now propose to

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>See pp. 61-62 below.



try to indicate how this choice works out in men's lives whatever their temperament or activity."<sup>35</sup>

What does he mean by describing a life of obedience to Christ as "remunerative"? For Grenfell, any religion or faith worth having had to be life-affirming. He began his Harvard lecture series of 1911 by stating,

I am an intense believer in life as an asset of incomparable value. I cannot remember the day when I had not a passion for life--it seemed so full of adventure.<sup>36</sup>

Grenfell was unwilling to accept an interpretation of the Christ as a dreamy ascetic. "An incompetent other-worldly Christ has no attraction whatever for me."<sup>37</sup>

Christ, the greatest teacher of religion who ever lived, claimed that abundant life was what he came to give . . . religion created the reason for being alive at all. . . . The joy of creating a better than was world, an achievement in companionship with God, was life's justification.<sup>38</sup>

The active, adventurous life Christ offered was the kind of life which Grenfell found attractive. He disavowed any self-negating impulses, commenting in his Autobiography of 1919 on his decision to go to Labrador:

Some of my older friends have thought that my decision to go was made under strong religious excitement and in response to some deep-seated

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<sup>35</sup>Grenfell, The Adventure of Life, 39.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>37</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, "What Christ Means To Me", included in The Best of Grenfell, ed. William Pope, (Hantsport, Nova Scotia: Lancelot Press, 1990), 163.

<sup>38</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, Religion in Everyday Life (Chicago: American Library Association, 1926), 10.

conviction that material sacrifices or physical discomforts commended one to God. I must however disclaim all such lofty motives. I have always believed that the Good Samaritan went across the road to the wounded man just because he wanted to. I do not believe that he felt any sacrifice or fear in the matter. If he did, I know very well that I did not. On the contrary, there is everything about such a venture to attract my type of mind.<sup>39</sup>

He reiterates this sentiment in discussing his personal spiritual journey:

If there is one thing about which I never have any question it is that the decision and endeavour to follow the Christ does for man what nothing else on earth can. Without stultifying our reason, it develops all that makes men godlike.<sup>40</sup>

The "godlike" potentiality of man in Grenfell's writing is usually linked with the human capacity for creativity, as opposed to notions of Christian perfectionism. Labrador, untouched and austere, offered the visionary the chance to create. If creation ex nihilo was a divine prerogative, the individual who would "do things" in the region worked with only slightly less impossible materials. And this was precisely its appeal to the English doctor.

#### The Content of Christ's Proclamation

Jesus not only modelled life abundant, but was, according to Grenfell, "the greatest teacher of religion who ever lived." In what had become a nineteenth-century theological catchphrase, Grenfell summed up the content of

<sup>39</sup>Grenfell, A Labrador Doctor, 114.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 428.

Christ's instructional ministry: "God's Fatherhood, our Brotherhood."<sup>41</sup> He believed that a study of the gospel would indicate that the teaching ministry of Jesus was quite unlike the formal catechisms of too many churches. Jesus enunciated only general principles. He refrained from laying down dogmas. He was no antinomian:

he kept the sabbath, the feasts; he observed the Jewish ordinances. But he did not condemn the Samaritans or his disciples for eating corn on the Sabbath and he left no hard and fast rules for observing the first day of the week.<sup>42</sup>

The teachings he entrusted to his disciples were "all positive, all constructive."<sup>43</sup> It was left to the man of sincere intention and common sense to work out contemporary applications of first-century declarations. In a letter from St. Anthony in 1908 Grenfell described his own study practice:

I'm limiting my reading more and more to every word of the Master--till I shall know his words at least on every subject, and try to think his thought on the practical problems of this day.<sup>44</sup>

A devotion to Christ the teacher meant the day by day, action by action, determination to actualize his words.

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<sup>41</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, A Man's Helper (Boston, New York & Chicago: Pilgrim Press, 1910), 81.

<sup>42</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, A Man's Faith (Boston, New York and Chicago: Pilgrim Press, 1908), 44.

<sup>43</sup>Grenfell, What Can Jesus Christ Do With Me?, 23.

<sup>44</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, St. Anthony, to W. L. MacKenzie King, 1900, Correspondence, vol. 8. National Archives of Canada.

Wilfred Grenfell never felt comfortable with theological positions which insisted upon the necessity of doctrinal precision for a valid interpretation of the Christ life. In response to the question, "Who is a Christian?" Grenfell quotes Phillips Brooks, "There is no other test than this, the following of Jesus Christ."<sup>45</sup> For Grenfell, the criterion of admission to the kingdom was a generous one. "I feel the spirit of Christ dwells where no label is attached."<sup>46</sup> He frequently illustrated this principle by making reference to the sacrificial lives of non-Christians. Some of these he met on international sight-seeing tours taken in 1914, 1915, and 1924.<sup>47</sup> Others he had read about such as "the Mohammedan of the strictest type" who died attempting to save a drowning child. Grenfell claims to have seen in this man's notebook, "Jesus said, 'A man must lay down his life for others.'"<sup>48</sup> In this same work Grenfell describes Mahatma Gandhi as "truly a Christlike man."<sup>49</sup> This belief in the validity of what Karl Rahner, S. J., has called an "anonymous Christianity" is amplified in the 1926 edition of Religion in Everyday Life:

Were I called on to judge who deserves the now coveted title of 'real Christian' the only standard

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<sup>45</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, The Attractive Way (Boston, New York and Chicago: Pilgrim Press, 1913), 11.

<sup>46</sup>Grenfell, A Man's Faith, 76.

<sup>47</sup>See pp.85-86 below.

<sup>48</sup>Grenfell, A Man's Faith, 76.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 66.

I know by which rightly to gauge any man's claim would be his fruits. If we judged by Christ's standard we should be less free with our self-satisfied superiority in our own attainment and less free with the term heathen as applied to others.<sup>50</sup>

When one compares Wilfred Grenfell's earlier and later published works, a difference can be demonstrated in the way he writes about Jesus. The later works are strewn with oddly unbiblical, impressionistic metaphors applied to the Christ. The historic Galilean is recast as the quint-essential English gentleman. Jesus becomes "the peerless knight of all ages," "the best sportsman," "the chief scout," the "bravest of the brave."<sup>51</sup> He was "the captain of the Team" and the "Solon of scholars."<sup>52</sup>

Several suggestions can be put forth to explain this shift. All of them were probably contributory. Grenfell may have had different audiences in mind. Several early published works such as The Adventure of Life, What will You Do With Jesus Christ?, What Can Jesus Christ Do For Me?, are the texts of lectures given at American universities. Presumably, the bulk of the audience would have been made up of students. These lectures were intentionally motivational. The language is clear and unpretentious.

Later works were published to keep the supporters of a now well-established philanthropic endeavour current and committed. They are devotional in aspect.

<sup>50</sup>Grenfell, Religion in Everyday Life, 14.

<sup>51</sup>Grenfell, A Labrador Logbook, 362.

<sup>52</sup>Grenfell, "What Christ Means To Me", 162.

This change in audience was accompanied by a change in primary authorship. On November 18, 1909 Grenfell married Anne Elizabeth Caldwell MacClanahan. Attractive, sophisticated, university educated, disciplined, the physician met her on board ship on a return voyage to North America from England and had proposed before they docked. Ronald Rompkey claims that Anne became extensively involved in the editing of Wilfred's writing. Rompkey notes that she was particularly pleased with her contribution to A Labrador Logbook, an anthology of daily devotional readings. Rompkey quotes Anne writing to Wilfred from the Grenfell papers:

As to the compilation which was too detailed and too fussy and too long drawn out and involved three years of hard work on my part, I don't think you could have done it as it would have been too nervously fatiguing and an unjustifiable strain.<sup>53</sup>

It is conceivable that what Rompkey describes as Anne's "self-consciously literary style"<sup>54</sup> has subtly altered the Christological characterization. But without analysis of the original drafts of these books, this must remain a most tentative suggestion.

But if Grenfell is appropriately typified as a Cultural-Protestant according to H. Richard Niebuhr's types, then habits of Christological modification are not surprising. Niebuhr observes that:

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<sup>53</sup>Ronald Rompkey, "Elements of Spiritual Autobiography in Sir Wilfred Grenfell's A Labrador Doctor", Newfoundland Studies, vol. I, no.1, 1985, 20.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 20.

Cultural Protestants find it strangely desirable to write apocryphal gospels and new lives of Jesus. They take some fragment of the complex New Testament story and interpretation, call this the essential characteristic of Jesus, elaborate upon it, and thus reconstruct their own mythical figure of the Lord.<sup>55</sup>

Jesus Christ as "chief scout" or "Captain of the team" is an unabashedly mythical characterization of the suffering Son. A statement could be little more Culture-Protestant than Grenfell's admission,

I have always pictured the Christ ... as captain of the football team, or stroke of the varsity boat, or one of the honour men, because these were what I wanted to be myself.<sup>56</sup>

And yet, like Moody, Grenfell ardently believed in the possibility of a vital personal relationship with Jesus Christ. His conception of faith did not call for the admiration of an icon but for loyalty to a living leader. He believed that Christians in general and he in particular had the responsibility to publicize to all who would listen the content of Christ's kingdom pronouncements.

How he believed an individual could come to know a relationship with the Father through Christ is the subject of the next chapter.

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<sup>55</sup>Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, 109.

<sup>56</sup>Grenfell, The Adventure of Life, 143.

## CHAPTER 3

## FAITH AND ITS FACILITATION

When fishermen with lined and windburned faces crowded into church on a Sunday evening to hear Dr. Grenfell speak, they neither expected nor received a systematic discourse on a topic of Christian theology. Nor were they kept there by pulpit-pounding evangelical rhetoric. Grenfell was not a conventionally accomplished public speaker. But there was something attractive in his informal, story-telling style. And there was a vital interconnectedness between what this doctor said and what he did. Here was a man putting his beliefs to work. Here was one "doing truth".

The relationship between faith and action is a theme at the centre of Grenfell's religious concern. The Christian is one who in the doing validates the truth of the Gospel. Faith is much less assent to a creed than enlistment in a cause.

The Experiment called Faith

Nowhere was Wilfred Grenfell, physician, more in evidence than in his methodological preamble to the discussion of faith and its facilitation. Doctors formulate treatment plans for the physical care of their patients. Those involved in spiritual care similarly plan for faith development. Grenfell was wary of dogmatism in either



endeavour. He wrote, "No human being can devise any one plan which is best to help every kind of man, since men differ so radically that what helps one hinders another."<sup>1</sup>

He noted that for a given medical disorder, a number of highly recommended treatment approaches could be used. The doctor's case management was influenced by several factors; where he was educated, his particular skills, the availability of resources, the literature recently perused. In medicine it was rarely assumed that only one course of action had validity. Theology, according to Grenfell, lacked a comparable charity. He wrote,

Fortunately in matters dealing with physical life, the exponents of methods have never been led to offer the abuse, inflict the injuries, and express contempt for those who differ from them which have so unworthily characterized many who claim pre-eminence of infallibility for their own method of restoring to moral and spiritual health the sick in heart and soul.<sup>2</sup>

In the life of the spirit, no less than in life on the sea, winds blow where they will. And forms of faith must be adjusted to harness spiritual energy. Grenfell wrote of the fear

that the saving faith which has outlived nineteen centuries without us needs us now to keep it in the old crystalized form in which it was when every single aspect of the life it came to save was different.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, The Attractive Way (Boston, New York and Chicago: Pilgrim Press, 1913), 7.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>3</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, The Adventure of Life. The William Belden Noble Lectures at Harvard University for 1911 (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1912), 100.

Grenfell urged the clergy to recognize that, as in medicine where remedies and treatment plans are reevaluated and updated, so too, "faith's active principle should be clothed and adapted to the idiosyncrasies, needs and capacities for assimilation of the patients of today."<sup>4</sup> Care plans must keep pace with culture.

Both medicine and religion require an openness to experimentation. Grenfell wrote, "It is considered unscientific and irrational for a man to do more than remain silent about a method he has not tried personally."<sup>5</sup> And if a doctor is required to form an opinion by observing another's reaction to a treatment, he wants to verify that the patient is receiving an unadulterated form of medication. No individual has the right to criticize what has not been tried. This is as true in religion as in medicine. But what is tried needs to be authentic. Grenfell wrote,

People are weary of the burden of theological doctrines and are asking for something permanent, something verifiable in experience which no criticism can touch and no progress in culture wither.<sup>6</sup>

Faith, risk and courage were inextricably intertwined in Wilfred Grenfell's thought. Any act of faith included all three. Faith could not be reduced to intellectual assent to a set of authoritative propositions. It was an

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 100.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 15.

activity. It involved a dynamic interplay between human vision, intellect and will. In one of Grenfell's favourite expressions, he described faith as "reason grown courageous."<sup>7</sup>

For Grenfell, the word "reason" seemed to include both visionary possibilities congruent with an ordered structure of reality and the awareness that most human activity proceeds on the basis of some elementary if ultimately unverifiable assumptions. These aspects need to be spelled out in more detail.

Grenfell frequently included "vision", here meaning being gripped by possibilities, in his descriptive statements about faith. He wrote, "Faith is the power by which human beings with limited capacities visualize the possibilities of what they hope for."<sup>8</sup> On another occasion, "Faith is the vision of God that lifts us through high moral purpose into greater moral power and freedom."<sup>9</sup>

In the first statement, Grenfell used vision to describe a commendable human disposition toward the world. The second speaks of a vision of God. Grenfell was something of an apologist and the movement between the statements is consistent with his way "into" theology. He liked to "yarn". Illustrations could reveal when

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<sup>7</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, A Man's Faith (Boston, New York and Chicago: Pilgrim Press, 1908), 11.

<sup>8</sup>Grenfell, A Man's Faith, 5.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 13.

propositional formulations failed. Faith? Why, faith was like Flagler, a land speculator in Florida, who anticipated the value of Miami plots for vacation homes.<sup>10</sup> Faith was demonstrated in Alexander Graham Bell's confidence that people would be able to converse across continents.<sup>11</sup> Faith was Orville Wright's dream of a flying machine.<sup>12</sup> Faith drove the stock market. Wrote Grenfell, "The whole secret of the earth is that it is run on a faith basis."<sup>13</sup> Faith is the vision of a possibility which begs experiential confirmation.

Faith is that which motivates action. It is not, he wrote, "belief in spite of evidence but life in scorn of consequences."<sup>14</sup> In the booklet, A Man's Faith, Wilfred Grenfell expanded upon what he understood to be the content of the aforementioned "vision of God."

God Almighty wants our help, so Christ tells us. Theoretically or mathematically this is unintelligible, that God should want human help. But that is the bottom of all Christ's teaching. The faith he asks for is not to understand him, but to follow him.<sup>15</sup>

Clearly, the staking of one's life upon a vision includes risk and therefore courage. Grenfell

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 1.

<sup>14</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, A Labrador Logbook (Boston: Little, Brown, 1938), 79.

<sup>15</sup>Grenfell, A Man's Faith, 11.

differentiated between faith and knowledge. Faith is a modest virtue. Faith is able to recognize the finiteness of human intellect. Only when this is grasped do "we come to faith as rational."<sup>16</sup>

In this same work Grenfell argued that,

The claim of priests and theologians and religious teachers of succeeding ages that their particular faith was knowledge and included absolute truth was as demonstrably false as it was immodest.<sup>17</sup>

The element of risk inherent in faith precluded the possibility of knowing that any ecclesiastically-sanctioned set of propositions were objectively true. Truth could not be directly known. An insistence upon assent to credal formulations bound people to the past rather than pointing them to the future.

If it is true that life is always lived on a faith basis, and this fact is self-evident to reasonable individuals, what is it that prevents people from embracing a faith in Christ? Grenfell believed lack of faith to mean more accurately disinclination of the will. Individuals cannot believe because they will not. He wrote,

Christ's appeal is not primarily to the emotions or to the intellect but to the will. It is not that men cannot accept the Christ nearly so much as that they will not.<sup>18</sup>

He was perpetually frustrated by the skepticism of his older brother, Algie. This brother was an educator. Wilfred

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<sup>16</sup>Grenfell, The Adventure of Life, 35.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 27.

believed that to teach was to exert moral influence. Algie "ought to have possessed a will to believe."<sup>19</sup>

While delivering the William Belden Noble lectures in 1911, Grenfell upbraided the students for what he perceived as a lack of realism about the state of man apart from God.

If I were to quote in this class . . . that the natural man does not want the things of the spirit, I should probably be hooted at or mildly ignored and yet it is perfectly obvious that this is really the case.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the fact that individuals are capable of discerning what constitutes the best life course, "we wish to walk the one that may not cost us anything in everyday life, rather than let reason sit master on our control."<sup>21</sup> Grenfell apparently agreed with Thomas Carlyle's assessment that within each individual resided a coward and hero. But the "appeal of religion . . . is directly to the hero in us."<sup>22</sup>

Grenfell consistently asserted his belief that the threat to the kingdom of God rarely came directly from any actively malevolent power. The devil's direct assault was unnecessary. The problem lay with the "slow, crushing glacier-like mass of thousands and thousands of indifferent nobodies."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Ronald Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 29.

<sup>20</sup>Grenfell, The Adventure of Life, 35.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 36.

<sup>22</sup>Grenfell, Religion in Everyday Life, 14.

<sup>23</sup>Grenfell, The Adventure of Life, 36.

### Christian Conversion

Although Wilfred Grenfell disavowed any one way of coming to faith, he frequently testified to his own conversion experience. To the young Grenfell, religion had appeared effeminate and dull. "Prejudiced for an adventurous world,"<sup>24</sup> most expressions of Christianity seemed staid. "Religion appeared to be a profession, exceedingly conventional and most unattractive."<sup>25</sup> He loathed any presentation of the gospel which held out faith as a kind of celestial insurance policy, writing "faith is not the cowardly motive that leads a criminal to squeal for mercy in the hope of escaping his just punishment."<sup>26</sup> Curiosity led him to attend a revival meeting conducted by Moody in 1883. He was impressed with Moody's ability to handle a crowd.

Clearly Grenfell the idealist responded to Moody's brand of American Evangelicalism, what H. Richard Niebuhr termed "the faith which is independent, which is aggressive rather than passive and which molds culture instead of being molded by it."<sup>27</sup> Moody's biographer wrote of the preacher's "over-powering impact of personality on all with whom he came in contact."<sup>28</sup> As much in Moody's public presence as

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>27</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, The Kingdom of God in America (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1937), x.

<sup>28</sup>W. R. Moody, The Life of Dwight L. Moody (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1900), 16.

through his words, the young doctor glimpsed "a fighter for the practical issues of a better and more cheerful life on earth."<sup>29</sup> This American, a "plain, common sense man, talking in a plain intelligent way"<sup>30</sup> was intensely attractive to the young physician. Grenfell wrote,

The new faith which there dawned on me for the first time was not the conviction that God would forgive me, but that he had already given me things of which I had not even known; not that he would save me, but that he would use me.<sup>31</sup>

Was this Grenfell's conversion? Assuredly it was a life-changing spiritual crisis. Two years later he attended another Moody rally, and this time heard the testimonies of J. R. and C. T. Studd, well-known English cricketers. When he got up to leave the tent meeting in 1885,

it was with a determination either to make religion a real effort to do as I thought Christ would do in my place as a doctor, or frankly abandon it.<sup>32</sup>

This determination led him to immediately start searching for a niche in which to "work out" his Christian service.

Wilfred Grenfell believed absolutely in the validity of sudden, radical conversion experiences. He wished that such conversions were more comprehensively documented. In The Adventure of Life, Grenfell related details of conversions in outport Newfoundland. He described a

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<sup>29</sup>Grenfell, The Adventure of Life, 7.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, A Labrador Doctor: The Autobiography of Wilfred Thomason Grenfell, M.D. (Oxon) C.M.G. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1919), 45.



particularly violent sailor, whose alcoholism had fractured his family relationships and was ruining his body. A sudden conversion experience meant immediate, total sobriety, the restoration of his family life and a disposition "so uniformly optimistic that his very face became transparent with happiness and I have never had a more delightful shipmate!"<sup>33</sup> Grenfell enjoyed reading personal testimonies, and attributed the relative scarcity of such narratives to the "reticence always on the part of all good workers to draw deductions from their own work prematurely."<sup>34</sup> It did seem to Grenfell that a correlation existed between the suddenness of conversion and the tendency to spiritual relapse. He wrote,

There can be no question of their occurrence . . . though my own experience shows me that the more emotionally susceptible men are most liable to temporary retrogression.<sup>35</sup>

The suddenness of a conversion also seemed to Grenfell to follow certain socio-economic or class patterns. He believed that among his own "class in life" the process of coming to faith was almost always gradual. He never elaborated upon this statement, but did argue that regeneration was most likely a longer process than the convert was directly conscious of. Most conversions could have been attributed to "many previous experiences."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Grenfell, The Adventure of Life, 20.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 21.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 22.

Once again Grenfell reveals his early religious roots. Gradualism was never disputed by Anglican Evangelicals. In fact it was considered normative.<sup>37</sup>

### Helps to Faith

Grenfell devoted a considerable portion of his written work to discussing where these influences or helps to faith might be found. The human will responded to inspiration. Vision was stirred through the activation of the imagination. Stories and biography could stimulate faith development. He explained:

Many will argue that small stories and allegories are inconsequential and appeal only to the emotions ... But religious development cannot be limited to enlarging mental conceptions. Religion in everyday life has to be apprehended rather than comprehended; and an appeal to the higher emotions to help us to a correct appreciation and decision is unavoidable.<sup>38</sup>

### Inspirational Literature

Grenfell believed that the soil of the human spirit could be made receptive to Christ through biography. Biography demonstrated that individuals matter to God. This literary genre graphically illustrated the fact that men and women alter the course of human history. Grenfell particularly recommended a collection known as the "Men of Action" series: lives of Lincoln, Cromwell, Kingsley,

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<sup>37</sup>D. W. Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 7-8.

<sup>38</sup>Grenfell, Religion in Everyday Life, 16.

General Gordon, Livingstone, which in Grenfell's estimation had "led many in England to nobler lives."<sup>39</sup> Life for Grenfell was "the race for perfect efficiency and perfect manhood"<sup>40</sup> and he believed that the systematic discipline of reading biography enabled the student "to converse with others who have themselves caught a glimpse of the mind of God."<sup>41</sup> Grenfell admitted that he rarely read books for their aesthetic value. He was after practical instruction and advice. This included his reading of the scripture. He stated, "I do not read my Bible for the English of it. All I care about is understanding it."<sup>42</sup>

### The Bible

He admitted to finding the Authorized Version of the Bible obscure in places. People with a rigid attachment to words, not understood, were guilty of relating to scripture as a kind of magical incantation or charm. This was superstition, not study. If one failed to understand what was read, he would be able to evade the obligation to obedience. So Grenfell was heartily in favour of putting it "in a form in which it interests the average man."<sup>43</sup> Churchmen had a

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 17-18.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 21.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, A Man's Helpers (Boston, New York and Chicago: Pilgrim Press, 1910), 22.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 23.

responsibility to take seriously "that it is constantly necessary to convert it into the vernacular." What is this but "trying to make every man to hear God's word speak in his own language"?<sup>44</sup>

Because Grenfell saw the life of faith as analogous to a ship's voyage along an uncharted coast, he compared the Bible to a navigation guide. Scripture was, he wrote, "a living up-to-date guide book,"<sup>45</sup> a "storehouse of practical truths."<sup>46</sup> It was "a book from cover to cover soaked with and exuding God's abounding love to us his creatures."<sup>47</sup>

Wilfred Grenfell recommended that would-be Bible students write in the margins of their text as they read. It was a way of emphasizing the dialogical nature of the Christian's encounter with the Word. In his simple, direct style, Grenfell wrote, "Writing in one's Bible feels like answering it. It seems to me to be keeping up a conversation."<sup>48</sup>

One cannot find in the body of Grenfell's work any formally articulated theory of revelation. He rejected any theory of the inspiration of the scripture which bypassed the human factor active in composition. God used people, but never as machines.

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 27.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 19.

Where two men give different accounts of the same thing, Parson, I believe it is in the thing but not in the accounts. I don't credit the authors with evil motives, only with being human beings.<sup>49</sup>

It is almost as an aside that he wrote one of his most perceptive statements. In A Man's Helpers he wrote of his hesitancy to be seen reading his Bible in public for fear of being considered pretentious. And after facetiously suggesting that the matter could be solved through the publication of an incognito edition "on India paper and in a yellow cover" he made the following comment: "I presume the reason that the same passages start new trains of thought on returning to them is because it is a new man they are talking to."<sup>50</sup> This statement conveys an understanding of revelation as a dynamic interactive event.

He disavowed any interest in the finer points of Biblical interpretation, writing, "these matters do not worry me one iota, however my cock sure critics often try to do so."<sup>51</sup> But he did summarize his own position:

Though I personally believe the New Testament to be the Word of God, still I am doubtful if Christ ever intended us to pin our faith on the New Testament or any other book solely, to say nothing of verbal inspiration. I think he would have written a book himself, and made sure of guaranteeing its authenticity for all time ... We have no record of Jesus' words written down at his request.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Grenfell, The Attractive Way, 52-53.

<sup>50</sup>Grenfell, A Man's Helpers, 21.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 30.

<sup>52</sup>Grenfell, A Man's Faith, 64.

Prayer

It is difficult to imagine a man as restive as Wilfred Grenfell with a natural inclination to periods of extended prayer. He bluntly stated that he "never considered it as important as reading the Bible and trying to catch its meaning for the day ..."<sup>53</sup>

In Grenfell's estimation proper prayer was simple and direct. Petition was appropriate only when one had tried himself to accomplish an end, and failed. "I never expect Him to do my share"<sup>54</sup> was the doctor's way of expressing it. He was sharply critical of teaching on prayer which disparaged hard human work, attitudes

that almost make it a virtue to despise our Father's generous sharing of his powers and wisdom with us ... incredulous and often conceited and self-centered vacuity, considering themselves superior for the very fact that we neglect our own chances and capacities, while we pretend to be more loving children of his.<sup>55</sup>

The ability to "do things", to create, was for Grenfell a uniquely human satisfaction. The ability to achieve by using one's strength and wits should be celebrated, not disparaged! He did supply a definition of prayer.

Prayer to me means speaking to my Father in Heaven who yet somehow lives on earth enough to hear me, and not only knows what I want, but also what I really need or what is best for me and, moreover, who is sure to give it to me.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Grenfell, A Man's Helpers, 38.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 50.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 35.

Many of Grenfell's statements about prayer are fully appreciated only against the background of the lengthy, emotive prayer meetings of evangelical fellowships in many Newfoundland outports, then and now. Grenfell seemed to need to disavow any essential correlation between the length of time spent in prayer and spirituality. In contrast to locally prevalent prayer practice, Grenfell wrote, "It seems to me that the more keenly I want a thing, the briefer my form of petition and the more directly I come to the point."<sup>57</sup>

Grenfell nevertheless respected the prayer life of the fishermen among whom he worked. He lacked a temperamental affinity with the sing-song style which increased in volume and escalated in pitch as emotion moved the petitioners, but did not criticize their experience. He described the habit of outport Christians of praying aloud with a total absence of self-consciousness, even in their private devotions. Grenfell's medical colleagues, exposed for the first time to this natural, intensely earnest expression of prayer, were often

so moved by these simple men's conversations with a very obviously personally present God, that unbidden tears have flown over unaccustomed cheeks and the attitude permanently altered towards the meaning of prayer.<sup>58</sup>

He relates with gentle humour the story of a Dr. Worcester who was travelling in Northern Newfoundland with a

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 52.

burly woods guide. The men shared no previous acquaintance. In the night, Worcester was startled by the stealthy footsteps of his companion near his tent. His alarm heightened when he heard the guide begin to speak. Grenfell relates,

There was no time to be lost. Seizing his revolver he crept out to watch what would develop. Almost immediately the figure of the guide loomed into view against the light of the last embers of the camp fire. He was kneeling on the ground, his hands lifted up in petition to God, to whom he was pouring out his soul in prayer, exactly as if carrying on a conversation with a friend alongside him.<sup>59</sup>

Grenfell was not about to scorn the prayer practices of men whom he admired for their rugged capacity for hard work. But he was scathing in his reaction to expressions of Christianity which could be characterized as mystical. He lacked any sense of value for contemplative faith communities.

That a life should be entirely devoted to talking and repetition of words while capacities for practical usefulness are sinfully wasted is to me more than unspeakably sad, such a life as that seems to me most undeniably lost.<sup>60</sup>

This attitude carried over to his stand on Lord's Day observance. Grenfell had trouble with the almost complete cessation of work which conventional outport piety demanded. In a milieu where the use of scissors could be considered a violation of Sunday rest, and where a fisherman would sacrifice a net rather than row out on a Sunday to retrieve

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 53.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 45.



it, Grenfell's approach would have given pause. He confessed,

I very soon abandoned attending two services on Sunday. There is a selfishness in singing hymns and prayers that God may do things for us and others while we do nothing but the singing.<sup>61</sup>

Perhaps he was taking his cue from his spiritual mentor, D. L. Moody, who had said, "Once to take in on Sunday is enough for the Christian man. He would be a stronger man if he used the rest of his time giving out."<sup>62</sup>

#### A Sense of the Holy

Most of Wilfred Grenfell's written observations in the experiment called faith utilized the religious laboratory of Newfoundland and Labrador. In 1924 he, for the second time, broadened his observational horizons, although not entirely voluntarily.<sup>63</sup> The International Grenfell Society felt that he was in need of a sabbatical. Rompkey writes,

Curtis later claimed they wanted to get him abroad while they built the new hospital uninterrupted. They proposed that he should give up all lecturing and medical work and take time off to travel through the East ...<sup>64</sup>

Grenfell, ever a compulsive worker, justified the trip which included stops in Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, India,

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<sup>61</sup>Grenfell, A Man's Faith, 44.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 80.

<sup>63</sup>See p.64 above.

<sup>64</sup>Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador, 224.

Malaya, China, Korea and Japan, by approaching it as a further faith experiment.

All quests are better for an objective. Ours therefore should be to try and see everywhere we journeyed the results of the efforts of other human beings to meet the challenge of life ... the expression of their faith and hope, the ways they seek for courage.<sup>65</sup>

Unlike his contemporary, Rudolf Otto,<sup>66</sup> Wilfred Grenfell seems to have remained religiously unmoved by this exposure to non-Christian forms of faith. The phenomenological methodology which Otto used in his work in the East noted the profound manner in which religious architecture, rites and ritual drew forth the human religious response; the one-of-a-kind emotion of a creature submerged and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to what is supreme above all creatures. Grenfell's reaction was very different. He kept voluminous notes about ancient religious practices, folk medicines, agricultural methods - even sketching the iconography on the walls of religious sites, but he gives no evidence of allowing the trip to deepen his own sense of awareness of the holy. Grenfell

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<sup>65</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, "Global Travel: Labrador Looks at the Orient" included in The Best of Wilfred Grenfell, ed. William Pope, (Hantsport, Nova Scotia: Lancelot Press, 1990), 137.

<sup>66</sup>Rudolf Otto, Professor of Systematic Theology at Breslau, 1914-1917, and Professor of Systematics at Marburg from 1917 until his death, travelled extensively in Egypt, Greece, and Palestine in 1895, and to India and the Far East fifteen years later. Through phenomenological description, he identified what he believed to be an observable commonality to authentic, spirit-enlivened religious experience. See Otto's resulting analysis, The Idea of the Holy (London: Oxford University Press, 1923)

could not move sufficiently beyond his ethnocentricity to appreciate diverse expressions of spirituality.

But hiking in the wilderness of Labrador, or on a sea dwarfed by towering icebergs or under soft green undulating northern lights, Grenfell sensed the numinous. He wrote, "dim religious light and sonorous sounds do not waken me to a keener sense of the call of God to be up and doing. That just makes me sleepy."<sup>67</sup> But worship in the open air "absolutely forces you to feel insignificant and anxious that the great Creator should condescend to care about a mosquito like you."<sup>68</sup> The experiment called faith was validated in the worshipping heart of the believing subject.

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<sup>67</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, What the Church Means To Me: A Frank Confession and a Friendly Estimate by an Insider (Boston, New York and Chicago: Pilgrim Press, 1911), 22.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 22.

## CHAPTER 4

## THE CONTENT OF THE FAITH

Although Wilfred Grenfell lectured on religious themes, he did not attempt to systematically document his views on Christian doctrine. This does not mean that he had no interest in theology. The theological enterprise is unavoidable by any thoughtful, or for that matter curious, Christian. But Grenfell's speculative interests were primarily vocationally determined. As a doctor he encountered suffering and death. As a Christian doctor, he interpreted these realities through the lens of faith. Grenfell's writing indicates considerable interest in the subject of immortality.

This chapter will consider both Grenfell's disenchantment over the doctrinal divisiveness brewing within early twentieth-century Evangelicalism and the manner in which he set forth his own beliefs about death and immortality, about sin and grace.

By the end of his first decade of work as a medical missionary, Wilfred Grenfell was consciously distancing himself from the revivalism which had contributed to his personal faith development. It is vital to stress that this "change" was less in Grenfell than in Evangelicalism.<sup>1</sup> His theological assumptions or "dogmatics" remained remarkably

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<sup>1</sup>See pp. 89-95 below.

congruent throughout his life. He did grow impatient with the revivalist style. But he was far more estranged by its growing penchant for theological hairsplitting.

Adopting as his literary genre a type of open letter to the clergy, Grenfell wrote,

Why, parson, do you know that from a series of most carefully selected statistics over a large area, it has been found that with the decline of the revival camp meeting type of religion, there has been a proportional rise in the morality of the people who have substituted greater dignity, a more reasonable service, and have lost none of the zeal for Christ and his kingdom when they got rid of the emotionalism which was stultifying them and their view of religion.<sup>2</sup>

Grenfell does not cite the source of the "carefully selected statistics" to which he refers. He does not explain what he means by a "proportional rise in morality" in conjunction with the decline of revivalism. What he seems to be rejecting with this remark is the emotionalism which was inclined to accompany revival religion. Grenfell had no time for a faith which was sentimental and other-worldly.

A quote from A Man's Faith, 1909, demonstrates that Grenfell's objections went deeper than a concern with the style of religious expression. He felt no affinity with the doctrinal controversies which occupied the successors of such a man as D. L. Moody.

What did eternal punishment, eternal reward, eternal personal identity, the time the last day should arrive, predestination, post-millennialism, the meaning of the horned beast, the scarlet woman, the

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<sup>2</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, The Attractive Way (Boston, New York and Chicago: Pilgrim Press, 1913), 52.

authenticity of St. John, the science of Genesis, the authorship of the Pentateuch, the puzzle about Cain's wife, infant baptism ... matter to me?<sup>3</sup>

In his study, Modern Revivalism, William McLoughlin argues that many who had responded favourably to the work of Moody in the 1870's and 1880's were deeply disillusioned with the direction of the movement by the turn of the century. The theological cords holding up the tent of evangelical revivalism were being tightened. Evangelicals were reacting, both negatively and strongly, to the theological agenda of an emerging Liberalism. This reaction most strikingly included a diminution of Evangelical commitment to social action. What church historians call the "Great Reversal" was a period from about 1900 to 1930 "when all progressive, social concern, whether political or private, became suspect among revivalist evangelicals and was relegated to a very minor role."<sup>4</sup> Evangelicals feared that social involvement, which they deemed necessary, but secondary to the proclamation of the gospel, was assuming theological ascendancy. They perceived their concern as having to do with the respective roles of Christ and culture in the theological enterprise. It seemed that culture was becoming more theologically determinative than "The Word". For Evangelicals, the revelation of God through scripture was the only eternally valid standard according to which

<sup>3</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, A Man's Faith (Boston, New York and Chicago: Pilgrim Press, 1908), 61.

<sup>4</sup>George M. Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 86.

societal behaviour could be mandated. They felt constrained to emphasize the importance of correct doctrine. They considered the new theology, particularly that which came to be known as "Social Gospel," to be methodologically flawed and infected with the destructive reductionism of Biblical criticism. They argued that the authority of the Bible was being subjected to a cultural critique, rather than being allowed to function in its role as a prophetic reminder of the flawed nature of all human culture and intellectual endeavour.

By the time period under discussion, premillennialist eschatology<sup>5</sup> dominated the Moody organization. This was also the most widely held view among British Anglican Evangelicals.<sup>6</sup> This made them particularly resistant to any equating of the kingdom of God with a realizable earthly social possibility.

Many Social Gospellers would have disputed the accusation that they were more committed to progressive presuppositions than to Biblical authority. They saw themselves as reanimating the radical ethical spirit and behaviour of the earliest New Testament communities. For example, Shailer Mathews defined the Social Gospel as

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<sup>5</sup>Premillennialism refers to the eschatological expectation that the second advent of Christ and the bodily resurrection of the saints would precede a 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth. Not the leavening influence of the church, but only a personal, decisive intervention of Christ could inaugurate this coming kingdom.

<sup>6</sup>D. W. Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 216.

the application of the teaching of Jesus and the total message of the Christian salvation to society, the economic life and social institutions.<sup>7</sup>

But Social Gospel thought characteristically down-played dogmatic formulations. Revelation was not understood to be confined to an authoritative textual tradition. Rather, it was a dynamic unfolding of the mind of God in direct continuity with reason and experience.<sup>8</sup>

In 1908, the year that Wilfred Grenfell published A Man's Faith stating his personal disinterest in matters of doctrine and Biblical interpretation, a close friend of D. L. Moody's, the Reverend Amzi Clarence Dixon, was in the process of editing a collection of books called The Fundamentals which, according to William McLoughlin, "launched the fundamentalist movement in earnest against both modernism and the social gospel."<sup>9</sup> Dixon, in an

<sup>7</sup>Charles Howard Hopkins, The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865-1915 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 3.

<sup>8</sup>See also Robert T. Handy's introduction to The Social Gospel in America 1870-1920 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 3-16.

<sup>9</sup>William G. McLoughlin, Modern Revivalism (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1959), 352. See however: George Marsden, The Fundamentals, A Testimony to Truth vol. I (New York & London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1988), preface. Marsden argues that while Lyman Stewart, the Presbyterian philanthropist who funded the publication of the compilation of essays, believed that the priority of evangelism as the mission task was seriously undercut by modernism and higher criticism, one is struck by the moderate tone of the articles. The Fundamentals are more representative of an intention to challenge orthodox Protestants of all denominations to the reaffirmation of central Christian doctrines, than of emphasis on premillennial eschatology, or an attack on the social gospel.



extreme overstatement of the conservative position, rigorously rejected any approach to evangelism which "insists upon intellectual training, moral culture, and humanitarian activity."<sup>10</sup> What Dixon rejected were central emphases for a man such as Wilfred Grenfell.

The revivalism Wilfred Grenfell had identified with was of a different sort. Mid-century revivalists had subordinated divisive doctrinal debates to common ethical concerns. Timothy Smith writes,

Lay-centred, tolerant of minor sectarian differences, ethically vital, and democratically Arminian, it was a creed of practical piety and of compassion which went beyond fine intentions. Though still centred in Christian views of man and God and salvation through Christ, it was actively devoted to making the world a place where men might readily choose the good path.<sup>11</sup>

Grenfell deplored doctrinal divisiveness, as had D. L. Moody. Moody's undeniably conservative theology had been combined with a warm catholicity of spirit. Moody, like Grenfell, was prepared to work alongside people who did not share his theology. He always believed that dogmatic error was better fought by positive proclamation than by heated debate.<sup>12</sup> Moody's biographer, Stanly Gundry, demonstrates, primarily from the texts of Moody's sermons, that he was far from indifferent to doctrinal distinctives. However, he

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Timothy Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform (New York, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957), 94.

<sup>12</sup>Stanly Norman Gundry, Love Them In: The Life and Theology of D. L. Moody (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1982), 212-218.

"was opposed to the divisions that resulted from credal dispute. He was opposed to doctrinal correctness that was devoid of Christian compassion."<sup>13</sup> Like Grenfell, Moody felt that the common bond among workers with a personal faith in Christ "transcended the party spirit that tended to rise out of credalism."<sup>14</sup>

Grenfell believed that his own priorities were better expressed by 1900 in the ministries of men like Lyman Abbott, than in revivalism. Abbott, who pastored the Plymouth Congregational Church, Brooklyn, and edited Outlook magazine from 1881-1922, was one of a group of American preachers who furthered the theological agenda of Horace Bushnell (1802-1876).<sup>15</sup> Bushnell, like Grenfell, had renewed his faith during his student days at Yale through the influence of an evangelical revival. Bushnell's mature theological thought endeavoured to interact seriously with nineteenth-century Biblical criticism. He responded to Darwin by propounding views on theistic evolution. He stressed the role of insight in the apprehension of religious truth. He was associated with an atonement theory which emphasized the moral influence of Christ's death.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 67.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ronald Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador: A Biography (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 109.

<sup>16</sup>K. S. Latourette, A History of Christianity (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), 1262-1263.

This was the kind of theology Grenfell identified with, if of necessity, on the level of an informed layman.

Wilfred Grenfell claimed that he was simply too busy for any kind of theological speculation. His writing on subjects formally included in Christian Dogmatics did not remain acceptable to missionaries and clergy associated with the Moody organization. In a 1926 editorial for *Moody Bible Institute Monthly*, the writer expressed dismay with the unorthodox views expressed in Grenfell's new edition of A Man's Faith.<sup>17</sup> Grenfell's approach was entirely pragmatic.

I determined that if intellectual difficulties arose, I would await until, like Henry Drummond's unanswered letters, they answered themselves. And if they never did, well, I would wait until the mystery of life itself was solved. As a rule, I found on that principle that in a week or two, I forgot all about them. The fact was I had a lot of medical work to do.<sup>18</sup>

His only interest in theology was as it related to the day-to-day life situations encountered by any thoughtful doctor.

#### Death and Immortality

Wilfred Grenfell grounded his discussion of death and immortality in his own love of life and his vocational familiarity with death. Immortality, 1913, is Grenfell's most speculative published work. The book commenced with

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<sup>17</sup>Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador, 230-231.

<sup>18</sup>Grenfell, A Man's Faith, 61.

the statement, "From earliest childhood I have been endowed with the keenest love of life."<sup>19</sup> He continued,

I am familiar with death. A man cannot be a surgeon without recognizing that there comes a time to every human body, sometimes after only a few years of tenancy, when it becomes impossible as desirable habitation any longer.<sup>20</sup>

Grenfell's reasons for believing in a continued existence of the human spirit were primarily intuitive. He trusted this as a way to knowledge. "I believe that intuition brings us into most direct and most reliable relationship with what is viable and true."<sup>21</sup> He associated this kind of knowledge or "sensing" with the poetic sensibility. Grenfell took comfort from the fact that his eschatological expectation was "an acknowledged bond of kinship with the great poets, to whose company I have no other earthly claim."<sup>22</sup> He associated his own development in the capacity for an apprehension of the eternal with the feminine and quite concretely with his mother. How did an individual learn that it is better to be

unselfish than selfish, to be pure rather than impure? I was taught it was true at my mother's knee, and there I learned of immortality.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, Immortality (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1913), 3.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

Later in this tract Grenfell articulated a standard nineteenth-century perception of women's spirituality. He wrote, "It has been said that women do not think, they feel; and then they guess. Most women believe in our immortality."<sup>24</sup> There is a humorous irony in Grenfell including such a value judgment in his discussion. Anne Grenfell was unquestionably the logical, well-organized, methodical partner in the Grenfell marriage. She possessed business acumen far beyond that of her husband. It was Grenfell who habitually made impulsive, even irrational decisions. For example, Dr. Little expressed his frustrations with Grenfell's financial management of the hospital in St. Anthony in 1914.

The directors have a good deal to learn and they are in a hard position as he is the originator of the whole thing, is the money getter and yet has been so spoiled and is so childish that he wants to stick his fingers into everything and gets pettish if he is checked in any way. He is so remarkable and likeable in so many ways and such an inspirer of youth, and age for that matter, and seems to be able to present religion in such an acceptable shape, and is such a worker and with such a fresh outlook that it is a shame to see his faults hinder his work and crop out in his life.<sup>25</sup>

The ability to sense what cannot be seen was compared by Grenfell to a small boy holding the end of an out-of-vision kite. When the child was asked how he knew the kite was on the line, he responded, "Why, I feel it tugging." He comments, "Even if it is feminine, I want to go out into the

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador, 182.

beyond holding up two fingers for scissors."<sup>26</sup> This poetic consciousness, or womanly intuition, was not the sole prerogative of artists and females. It was not a special sense. It may be

only intuition, of course; but it is also the voice of the mass of the people, and that is generally looked upon as being as near to the vox Dei as any current judgment of human philosophers or scientists either of the first century or the twentieth.<sup>27</sup>

Most ordinary people believe that life extends beyond the parameters of earthly existence. Such believers are not giving evidence of a special sense, but rather of common sense, meaning by this that it is not arising "from uncommon perception in uncommon people or in those whose experiences are uncommon."<sup>28</sup> Wilfred Grenfell believed that the yearnings of men and women expressed in an endless variety of religious and philosophical forms were "all tributaries of the great natural stream of love which flows toward God."<sup>29</sup> The natural order suggested God's immanent involvement. In a manner which remains unspecified in Grenfell's writing, grace permeated human consciousness and human intuitive capacity.

The study of medicine in no manner negated Grenfell's intuitive expectation of continued personal existence. If

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<sup>26</sup>Grenfell, Immortality, 17.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

anything, it intensified it. He described his attitude as a young medical student,

the dissecting room was never for a moment more to me than a deserted village, where we students were pulling down the walls of abandoned houses to enable us better, later on, to keep occupied ones in repair.<sup>30</sup>

Years of medical experience and personal involvement with dying patients did not alter Grenfell's perspective, or diminish his hope. Rather, he grew increasingly convinced of the indestructibility of the human spirit.<sup>31</sup> His position was uncompromising. "I have given my time to the study of mortality. I have accepted immortality as axiomatic."<sup>32</sup> Grenfell was always frustrated by the fact that his faith assumptions were not shared by most of his medical colleagues. A belief in immortality did not seem to characterize the medical profession. Conversely, he commented,

it is no great profession to make that the history of our relationship to sickness and death all through the ages should at least humble us to hope more for, and show more interest in, immortality than as a profession we are wont to do. Of some members it has been said that it should surely be their chief solace.<sup>33</sup>

Grenfell did engage in apologetics, although he recognized that the persuasive appeal of such was limited.

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>31</sup>see Wilfred Grenfell, A Labrador Doctor: The Autobiography of Wilfred Thomson Grenfell, M.D. (Oxon), C.M.G. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1919), 430.

<sup>32</sup>Grenfell, Immortality, 15.

<sup>33</sup>Grenfell, Immortality, 18.

He followed the line of argument which a later apologist, C. S. Lewis, would express with such cogency: a longing suggests and logically requires an appropriate satisfaction. Because I get hungry, I assume that food exists to fill that hunger. Human beings yearn out of their needs.<sup>34</sup> So, writes Grenfell, "Eternal life is the complement of all my unsatisfied longings and ideals. It fits in so well."<sup>35</sup>

Intuitive arguments were not the only ones Grenfell put forth in his discussion of immortality. Or perhaps, more correctly, Grenfell attempted to illustrate, by means of analogy, that intuition was a constituent part of a rational world view. Empirical observation offered confirmation of intuitive presentiments. He wrote,

My experience of the world leads me to suppose that it is a reasonable world, a world full of causes and results. . . . I fully expect it to go on reasonably and end reasonably--not in a stultifying catastrophe.<sup>36</sup>

He did not cite illustrations from his observation of the world under any illusion that such could argue a person into a belief in the immortality of the soul. He stated, "I do not expect to make knowledge absolute, or to convince anyone else by logic."<sup>37</sup> He was enough of a scientist to recognize that when one employs empiricism as a way to knowledge about

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<sup>34</sup>C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity (Great Britain: William Collins Sons and Co Ltd, 1942), 118.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 7.



immortality, a conclusion has to remain open-ended. Man's ultimate destiny cannot be empirically known. Faith must wait for a time when "all the apparent paradoxes of our human life shall be solved or silenced by our last friend or grim enemy."<sup>38</sup>

If fundamentalists were inclined to flee from late nineteenth-century scientific theory, Wilfred Grenfell willingly embraced it. He was infatuated with the possibilities presented by scientific method. He had an almost unbounded belief in science's ability to clarify spiritual truth. Here again, however sketchily articulated, we can detect in Grenfell's attitude his intellectual roots. Claude Welch refers to a correspondence between F. D. Maurice and Charles Kingsley dealing with the response of theology to scientific discovery. Maurice, maintaining that "every genuine scientific discovery, insofar as it is true, is a revelation from God," received a letter from Kingsley in 1863:

Darwin is conquering everywhere and rushing in like a flood, by the mere force of truth and fact. The one or two who hold out are forced by all sorts of subterfuges as to fact, or else by invoking the odium theologicum. . . . But they find that now they have got rid of an interfering God--a master magician, as I call it, they have to choose between the absolute empire of accident, and a living, imminent, everworking God.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Grenfell, A Man's Faith, 78.

<sup>39</sup>Claude Welch, Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century vol. II (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972), 201-202.

Grenfell frequently quoted the popular American preacher, Henry Ward Beecher. Beecher had published a response to the evolutionary controversy in 1885, Evolution and Religion, and summarized his position in the pithy remark, "Design by wholesale is grander than design by retail."<sup>40</sup>

H. Richard Niebuhr's assessment of Culture-Protestantism's understanding of revelation deserves note. For this theological perspective, revelation

is either fabulous clothing in which intelligible truth presents itself to people who have a low I.Q. or it is the religious name for that process which is essentially the growth of reason in history.<sup>41</sup>

Grenfell's writing expresses both of these ideas about revelation, as will be demonstrated.

In his discussion of immortality, he alluded to theories bandied about in then current popular science. He was quick to imply that these theories synthesized with the Biblical world view. For example, pertaining to the debate about the constituency of matter:

Some men say that everything consists of, or results from matter, whatever that is. . . . Some are beginning to say it louder than ever in these days of new knowledge that there is no such thing as matter.<sup>42</sup>

Modern chemists tell us that the elements are interconvertible, that one does turn into the other.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 207.

<sup>41</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), 11.

<sup>42</sup>Grenfell, Immortality, 8.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

Sodium can be made from copper. Rubies can be manufactured in the laboratory. In an analogous manner, bodies sown in corruption can be raised in incorruption!

Grenfell implied that the miraculous was the not yet scientifically explained. He quite expected that scientific method would eventually prove capable of validating resurrection life. In both The Fishermen's Saint, the text of a lecture in 1929 at St. Andrew's University, Scotland, and in What Christ Means to Me, he expressed his conviction that X-ray technology was pointing to a "scientific explanation for Christ's body of glorification."<sup>44</sup> He wrote, "Revelation I take it, is a temporary bridge across a gap which instinct and intellect are at the time unable to compass."<sup>45</sup> Much of the miraculous was "rapidly passing into knowledge."<sup>46</sup> He was more explicit in What Christ Means to Me:

Faith was essential for that conviction fifty years ago. Today with telephones and radios and X-ray, and our knowledge of matter as only energy, there is not the slightest difficulty in seeing how reasonable that faith is. The body of his glorification passed through closed doors, so the Apostle said--well, why should I be able to see it any more than I can see an ultra-violet or an ultra-red ray or molecule, an atom, an electron, or a proton?<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, The Fishermen's Saint. Rectorial address, St. Andrews University, 1929 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930), 36.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, "What Christ Means To Me" in The Best of Wilfred Grenfell, ed. William Pope (Hantsport, Nova Scotia: Lancelot Press, 1990), 165.

In this same lecture, Grenfell wrote of the resurrection, "it satisfies my brain to think of it simply as relaxation or the freeing of my etheric body, which exists now, from the material liaison machine."<sup>48</sup>

Like countless other English gentlemen, Grenfell was a keen amateur naturalist. He frequently used arguments for immortality drawn from observations of the natural world: the caddis worm in the water which would emerge from a chrysalis to inhabit an environment lethal in the untransformed state. If countless species undergo metamorphosis, why not humans?

Grenfell also used a rather obscure existential argument for the probability of continued personal existence. He observed, rightly, the inability of individuals to conceptualize their own annihilation. This sense of self, this "I" will "not take 'no' from my brain."<sup>49</sup> "It is so dominant and at last so far able to demonstrate itself that I cannot deny it if I would."<sup>50</sup> This sense of self is morally affronted by the idea that "though a parrot or a tree or a crag should outlast my body, it should also 'outlast me'."<sup>51</sup> Grenfell illustrated by describing his reaction to his own child. He wanted to say that this child was uniquely individual; that while of

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<sup>48</sup>Grenfell, The Fishermen's Saint, 29.

<sup>49</sup>Grenfell, Immortality, 13.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

course there were other babies of the same age, and at a similar developmental stage, there was no child the same. But the sentence is curiously jarring. "I have only got one baby, but I believe that it is personal and endowed with individuality." The argument would have been more convincing had he at least identified the child's sex! He concluded this segment with the statement, "After that, I believe in immortality, for if I am an individual, I am immortal."<sup>52</sup>

Grenfell supported his belief in immortality by an appeal to intuition, by analogy with popular science, and by reference to the individuality of selfhood. He considered such arguments to be more apologetically potent than an appeal to a textual tradition:

to me it is a sign of feebleness when a preacher of our immortality searches through dusty tomes for the confirmation of a lifelong intuitive faith.<sup>53</sup>

For example, he did not exegete I Corinthians 15, St. Paul's most extensive exposition of the resurrection of Christ, and explore its implications for a general resurrection of the dead, and the nature of the resurrection body. His primary Biblical focus was narrative: the Transfiguration appearances suggest that people will be recognizable in their glorified appearance. Jesus' resurrection appearances were probably prototypical. He did quote St. Paul, "Thou fool, except a grain of wheat die, it

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 25.

cannot live."<sup>54</sup> Our bodies shall return to the dust of which they were made, but our souls shall return to God, who gave them. He detected a type in the stories of the Israelites' entry into the Promised Land. Not all believed a conquest to be possible. Consequently, many never experienced Canaan. Similarly, not everyone will accept the promised offer of eternal life, and therefore not everyone will know it.

Grenfell believed that the expectation of immortality affected one's attitude to present existence in two important ways. The first had to do with endurance, the second with motivation. As a doctor, he had observed the way belief could create courage. An immortal hope set a limit on suffering. He wrote,

I have found that faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God makes men do that which nothing else will, and bear and suffer with equanimity that which nothing else would. I have seen walk into the anesthetizing room and lie down on the table with a bright smile on her face, a delicate girl who was to undergo a severe operation that meant life or death to her.<sup>55</sup>

Secondly, he asserted that a belief in immortality acted as a powerful motivator for an ethically responsible life.

"The belief that he is destined to go on living elsewhere makes a vast difference to one's estimate of values."<sup>56</sup> For Grenfell, present life was a school. Skills and character

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>55</sup>Grenfell, A Man's Faith, 76.

<sup>56</sup>Grenfell, A Labrador Doctor, 99.

were developed on earth for further, even future, usefulness. He wrote,

When we have trained in a world of faith and finality, and found out a few things, we shall be ready to go into another world with a larger scope of knowledge, and larger opportunities for chivalry, and knighthood, and achievement.<sup>57</sup>

Here again, Grenfell's thought thoroughly conforms to H. Richard Niebuhr's Culture-Protestant model. Niebuhr wrote,

Though their fundamental interest may be this-worldly, they do not reject other-worldliness; but seek to understand the transcendent realm as continuous in time or character with the present life. Hence, the great work of Christ may be conceived as the training of men in their present social existence for the better life to come.<sup>58</sup>

#### Sin and Grace

Grenfell's written work did not indicate that he was a particularly introspective man. It was rarely confessional in tone. He did not document personal struggles, either intellectual or moral. Once again, Grenfell aptly illustrates Niebuhr's Christ of Culture company of the "once born, or healthy-minded . . . non-revolutionaries who find no need for positing cracks in time--fall and incarnation, and judgement and resurrection."<sup>59</sup> Only a very few remarks indicated a less than total comfort with his interior life. Grenfell did allow that "the process of knowing oneself is a

<sup>57</sup>Grenfell, A Man's Faith, 2-3.

<sup>58</sup>Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, 84.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

painful one."<sup>60</sup> He included a quotation from Harry Emerson Fosdick in his devotional anthology, A Labrador Logbook, where Fosdick claimed, "The hardest thing a man can ever say is, 'I have sinned.' We do not often use the word about ourselves."<sup>61</sup> He does not, at any point, convey a personal sense of radical estrangement from God. He does not conceive of humankind as engaged in radical rebellion against God and Christ.

James Orr, in The Ritschlian Theology and the Evangelical Faith, contrasts an Evangelical and a Liberal understanding of sin. In the former, "sin and guilt are terrible realities which call forth the judgment of God against them."<sup>62</sup> For thinkers like Ritschl,

sin loses the catastrophic character with which the Bible invests it; it appears as a natural and unavoidable development; as due to ignorance, as it is readily pardonable.<sup>63</sup>

Of particular significance for this thesis is the fact that Orr uses Charles Kingsley's Pelagia to illustrate this view.

So also is Hypatia, the Athenian dancing girl and courtesan--frivolous, pleasure-loving, and childish, undeveloped and soulless, because untaught, unconsciously sinful, because brought up to sin, but still endowed with some original elements of God, and therefore redeemable, and in the end, redeemed.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Grenfell, "What Christ Means To Me", 172.

<sup>61</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, A Labrador Logbook (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1939), 67.

<sup>62</sup>James Orr, The Ritschlian Theology and the Evangelical Faith (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1898), 267.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 266.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.



Sins were "defects in the human mechanism."<sup>65</sup> The only defect or besetting sin which Grenfell explicitly owned was that of intellectual conceit or dogmatism. And it was this posture in others, particularly in members of the clergy, which he most vigorously detested and denounced. Autobiographically, he referred to the work of God in "rounding off the corners of my conceit."<sup>66</sup>

A colleague of Grenfell as admiring as Canon J. T. Richards, the Anglican priest at Flowers Cove from 1904-1945, alludes, in his retrospective of their relationship, to the intensity of Grenfell's anger when opposed.

I have seen him very angry because a man, whom he wanted to help, failed to respond and do his part in the doctor's plan. He could not see the validity of the man's reasons for not responding.<sup>67</sup>

Because salvation is experienced through the unselfish assumption of responsibility to the human family, sin is the selfishness which would block altruism. Essentially, for Grenfell, sin was self-absorption. He often equated it with an unwillingness to live chivalrously. That he held this conception is born out by the frequent use he made of a case history of particular poignancy. The patient's name was Suzanne, and in his autobiography,<sup>68</sup> in the lecture, "The

<sup>65</sup>Grenfell, "What Christ Means To Me", 159.

<sup>66</sup>Grenfell, A Labrador Doctor, 428.

<sup>67</sup>J. T. Richards, Snapshots of Grenfell (St. John's Newfoundland: Creative Publishers, 1989), 79.

<sup>68</sup>Grenfell, A Labrador Doctor, 106-107.

Fishermen's Saint",<sup>69</sup> and in an article for the Atlantic Monthly, he used her story to address the topic of human sinfulness.

Suzanne was an eighteen-year-old girl onboard a Newfoundland vessel in the capacity of cook and housekeeper. She became pregnant, and Grenfell was summoned to deal with complications of an unattended premature delivery. Grenfell found the girl beautiful. He writes, "I shall never forget her face, the contrast of her blanched white skin, against her dark eyes, and curly raven hair."<sup>70</sup> Grenfell took Suzanne to the Moravian mission for convalescent care, but the girl had lost all will to live. And so, despite the fact that she was medically stable, she died. She had confided to Grenfell that she could never face the disgrace of a return to her outport.

The crew of the hospital ship buried Suzanne on a "rocky and lonely headland, looking out over the great Atlantic," and erected a cross with the inscription,

Suzanne

"Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn thee.'"

He wrote, and the retelling of the story throughout his own work would confirm it to be so,

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<sup>69</sup>Grenfell, The Fishermen's Saint, 25-26.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 26.

The pathos of the scene as we rowed the poor child's body ashore for interment . . . will never be forgotten by any of us . . . the silent, but unanswerable reproach on man's utter selfishness.<sup>71</sup>

By "man's utter selfishness," it is unlikely that he meant anything like humanity's total depravity. The action of the father of Suzanne's child deeply offended Grenfell's sense of valour and manliness. A Christian man, that is, a gentleman, while naturally responsive to beauty, would be able to harness his sexuality. He would be capable of self mastery.<sup>72</sup> One suspects that Grenfell would have considered it in poor taste to personalize any discussion of temptation of the sort his sailor friends wrestled with in his writing for publication.

He did personalize his own awareness of a need for a redemption or cure for this primal selfishness, simultaneously refusing to be identified with any particular theory of the atonement. "No, I don't know what redemption means, but knowing myself, I cannot avoid realizing the necessity for it."<sup>73</sup> Christ's atonement remained a mystery both incomprehensible and inexpressible.<sup>74</sup> He emphatically rejected any penal or propitiatory view. "Do not think of him as the angry fury, incensed by us, and needing

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<sup>71</sup>Grenfell, A Labrador Doctor, 167.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 101.

<sup>73</sup>Grenfell, "What Christ Means To Me", 174.

<sup>74</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, The Adventure of Life. The William Belden Noble Lectures at Harvard University for 1911. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin), 152.

propitiation."<sup>75</sup> He admitted to being quite incapable of conceptualizing a loving God sending "fallen women or Judas to Hell for their sins, or a Christ who would threaten his weakest follower."<sup>76</sup> Rather, seeing the perpetual human dialectic between selfishness and love, he

can understand a plan of redemption which calls for any sacrifice of love, which for want of a better way of expressing it in human language, we call the sacrifice of God's only son.<sup>77</sup>

In the language of moral influence theory Grenfell expressed his conviction that Jesus set the highest possible ethical standards in himself. He challenged others to look at Him. He dared others to follow. "This is what Christ has done for me a thousand times."<sup>78</sup>

Grenfell could well believe that humankind would be held eternally accountable for its unwillingness to properly steward the gifts of God.

I can understand a righteous judge summing up a closed life judicially by saying, 'You did nothing to help anyone; neither the naked, the hungry, the sick, the down and outs, not even the children. Go to the place prepared for the devil. Such living is a negation of life.'<sup>79</sup>

For Grenfell, the fact that human beings ever respond unselfishly to human need was an indication that grace is actively operative. "Humanity responds to SOS calls when it

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 98.

<sup>76</sup>Grenfell, "What Christ Means To Me", 173.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 174.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 173.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 174.

hears them. There is something in man besides original sin."<sup>80</sup> Grenfell agreed with Lyman Abbott whom he quoted in A Labrador Logbook that this something more, with all its energizing power, was

spiritual forces in man himself ... and everyone who is trying to make this a better world, has God's time and unrecognized spiritual forces ... working with him.<sup>81</sup>

Grenfell argued that the inclusivism of his view was not the sentiment of a renegade liberal, but had significant historical precedent in that branch of the church which celebrated intuition as a way to knowledge. He wrote,

George Fox taught that 'Every hunger of the heart, every dissatisfaction with self, every shortcoming, shows that the soul is not unvisited by the divine Spirit. To want God at all implies some acquaintance with Him.'<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 158.

<sup>81</sup>Grenfell, A Labrador Logbook, 4.

<sup>82</sup>Grenfell, The Adventure of Life, 141.

## CHAPTER 5

THE CHURCH IS DEAD -- LONG LIVE THE CHURCH<sup>1</sup>

Some of Wilfred Grenfell's harshest criticism came from the established churches of Newfoundland. Influential churchmen resented the way he minimized their endeavours. They suspected his non-denominationalism. He was an outsider drawing premature conclusions and creating unfavourable impressions abroad. It is therefore fair to say that Grenfell's was an ecclesiology definitively shaped by personal experience. The church he grew up in, the para-church revivalism which motivated his life commitment, the intensely sectarian denominationalism of colonial Newfoundland, all contributed to the alterations in perspective which "new environments and new experiences make in the same individual."<sup>2</sup>

As a child and an adolescent, he considered the church to be both tedious and irrelevant. With Grenfell's decision to "follow Christ" came a highly idealistic vision of what the church should be, and a rather arrogant disenchantment with his previous religious experience. The writing of Grenfell in his senior years indicates a sense of renewed

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<sup>1</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, The Adventure of Life, The William Belden Noble Lectures at Harvard University for 1911 (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin), 90.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 150.

comfort in the order and stability of an historically tried liturgical communion. This process or dynamic - indifference leading to idealism, leading to resolution - was complicated by the profound culture-shock Grenfell faced when required to interact with the churches of Newfoundland. If he perceived the British church of his boyhood to be irrelevant and powerless, he regarded the churches of Newfoundland as organizations exercising and clinging to a largely unauthorized power. If ecclesiastical authority had eroded in Britain, it had been corrupted in Newfoundland. Although Grenfell was quick to acknowledge a deep love and loyalty to the church as the body of Christ, he wrote in response to all of these factors. Much of this writing is polemical and scathing.<sup>3</sup>

#### The Church Defined

Grenfell's described ideal was a church almost exclusively focused on mission. It existed solely to

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<sup>3</sup>Grenfell formalized much of his criticism in a 1911 booklet, What The Church Means To Me. His subtitle is important; the book is "A Frank Confession and a Friendly Estimate by an Insider." He explained: "When I first assayed to write on this subject, I several times tore up the manuscript, feeling that I had written that which was calculated to rend her at whose breast my own spirit had first found life-giving sustenance, and afterwards wisdom, encouragement, and aid" (What the Church Means To Me, 16). He compared his love for the church to the affection one knows for family (What the Church Means To Me, 34). He believed that the church fulfilled a salvific role. "Through the church, the salvation of the world must come. I have no use whatever for the critic whose heart is set on her destruction, or who mudrakes it for a revenue." (What the Church Means To Me, 8).

accomplish a task in the world. In the book, What The Church Means To Me, Grenfell described his work.

In our Labrador work, we form no church. Our fellow workers pray and worship in every denomination as the bias of their mind and temperament leads them to find peace and comfort and strength best. Yet we are a definite body associated together for certain purposes. These we believe are translations into action of our interpretation of our debt to God and to our neighbour. In that sense are we not a true ecclesia?<sup>4</sup>

The nature of a true "ecclesia" was something Grenfell attempted in many contexts to redefine. "What is a church," he wrote, "but a body of live men and women united so as better to relive Christ's life?"<sup>5</sup> It is a coming together of "fellow workers and not identical thinkers."<sup>6</sup> Even more liberally, Grenfell included in the concept of ecclesia "all who consciously or unconsciously are forwarding God's kingdom on earth." He quoted approvingly Philip Brooks' definition of the church as "a kingdom of good hearts united in love."<sup>7</sup> It could be argued that such a definition could define a community service club with equal adequacy.

Grenfell held a horizontal conception of the church; horizontal in that its primary function was to create community on earth. This could be contrasted with a

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<sup>4</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, What The Church Means To Me: A Frank Confession and a Friendly Estimate by an Insider (Boston, New York and Chicago: Pilgrim Press, 1911), 30.

<sup>5</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, The Attractive Way (Boston, New York and Chicago: Pilgrim Press, 1913), 44.

<sup>6</sup>Grenfell, What the Church Means to Me, 31.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 33.



vertical conception of the church which would stress human response to a divine imperative to offer worship and praise. His writing rarely concerned the latter. Canon Richards, the Anglican clergyman at Flowers Cove, Newfoundland, and a long-time associate of Grenfell, implies that the physician was delighted when it was suggested that he celebrate his fiftieth birthday by a commemoration of the Holy Eucharist. "February 28, 1915, Grenfell of Labrador celebrated his 50th birthday by making closer contact with the Master he loved to serve in the holy sacrament of the Lord's Supper."<sup>8</sup> But the articulation of a theology of the sacraments was outside the sphere of Grenfell's critical concern.

Grenfell found high liturgical forms and vestments mildly embarrassing, especially in the milieu of outport Newfoundland. In a letter to his mother he described his participation in a consecration service presided over by a young minister looking "for all the world like an ambulatory Christmas tree."<sup>9</sup> But in this correspondence from 1916 he admitted that while in earlier years he had gravitated towards the more informal Methodist meeting, he was increasingly comfortable in the denomination of his boyhood. Methodists had enthusiasm, but little else....

Kindly, generous, inoffensive on the whole, pious, churchgoing and as far as possible law abiding, but

<sup>8</sup>J. T. Richards, Snapshots of Grenfell (St. John's, Nfld: Creative Publishers, 1989), 29.

<sup>9</sup>Ronald Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador: A Biography (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 192.

not to be counted on, not fighters and sticklers for righteousness, squashy and timid and inefficient in public service except so far as it relates to making converts to Methodism.<sup>10</sup>

A horizontal perspective which could be construed as an imbalance in Grenfell's ecclesiology can also be interpreted as his attempt at a corrective to a corresponding imbalance of emphases. The churches where he worshipped on an itinerant basis seemed consistently unable to translate their heavenly passion into earthly endeavour. What he wanted to see was

a sort of back to the land movement, and a remorseless tearing up of the weeds of superstition, tradition, fanaticism, conservatism, and of well-meaning mental instability.<sup>11</sup>

At various times he spoke to all of these faults.

#### The Colonial Church

If the church existed for mission, the established church in Newfoundland seemed calculated to impede its outreach. His primary argument against religious practice as he saw it was that it accomplished little by way of practical betterment of the lives of outport people. It was useless. Grenfell castigated the Newfoundland church for what he considered its intrinsic irrelevance in the modern period. He did not confine his indictment to what he perceived as her dismal failure in social action. The form too, had lost its attraction.

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Grenfell, The Attractive Way, 34.

She cannot compete as a popular entertainer; only the proof of her unselfish love in matters of everyday life can save her from becoming a useless hulk, stranded on the beach of time.<sup>12</sup>

It is more valid to say that the form had lost its attraction for Grenfell. Actually, the church competed rather well in the outport as a popular entertainer. Until very recent history, community churches would be packed with the singing, testifying faithful! Some of these worshippers were quite likely in attendance for what could be loosely called entertainment.

Grenfell believed that the church had abandoned its historic competence in assisting the sick and the suffering.

The church, he maintained, is

entirely abandoning the valuable aid it can give the physician when he has found that no organic cause accounts for the symptoms of his patient.<sup>13</sup>

He found the church's lack of sensitivity to aesthetics or environmental concerns incredible. In The Attractive Way he entitled a segment "Applying Religion to Forestry." Here he cited a case in which some community citizens of an outport village with a failing fishery proposed a ban on cutting trees within a certain radius of the harbour. The measure was intended to capitalize on the region's natural beauty, and possibly boost tourism. One of the opponents of such conservationism was the leader of revival services being held in the harbour. The revivalist

<sup>12</sup>Grenfell, What the Church Means to Me, 10-11.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 26.

argued that "the fishermen were not out for beauty but for comfort."<sup>14</sup> Grenfell comments,

He thought a man should do as he liked for his comfort. Business being over, he could now go back to religion for the evening. Even these trifling instances suggest how such parodies of Christ's way have made it seem contemptible in the minds of thinking men.<sup>15</sup>

The prevalent religious consciousness neatly divided life into categories of sacred and secular activity and concern.

A rather lengthy passage from The Adventure of Life summarizes:

In Labrador it was religious to conduct public worship, to lead a prayer meeting, to marry, to baptize, to bury, to take up collections, to foster guilds. It was secular to do medical, legal, commercial, or any kind of work by which men can earn a living. It was religious to visit and console with the hungry. It was very distinctly secular to set up a cooperative store and feed them. It was religious to pray on Wednesday night that God would give the people a good fishery. It was secular on Thursday to make twine cheap, to build a bait freezer, and to introduce motor dories.<sup>16</sup>

Most critically, Wilfred Grenfell accused the church of neglecting the social need on its doorstep. The Attractive Way, published in 1913, structures much of its criticism of organized religion around a "dialogue" between a minister and a physician. In this dialogue the doctor confronts the clergy with the fact that a woman who had just delivered a child was returning to her home without food or clothing. This woman lived within 250 yards of the church

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<sup>14</sup>Grenfell, The Attractive Way, 14.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Grenfell, The Adventure of Life, 144.

in a tiny village. The minister, who throughout the booklet is portrayed as insipid and blundering, admits his lack of awareness of the situation, but disowns any responsibility with "the Orange Lodge looks after its members, and Jim is an Orangeman."<sup>17</sup> The doctor rejoins with,

That may be true, but the whole family is starving, and your people are doing nothing except to talk about feeding the hungry. Don't you recognize a definite need for organization of Christ's followers just for this purpose and others similar to it?<sup>18</sup>

Grenfell laid the blame for the church's social inattentiveness on three factors. Each of these deeply permeated Newfoundland ecclesiastical life. They were sectarianism, legalism, and what Grenfell called traditionalism.

As early as Wilfred Grenfell's first voyage to Newfoundland, he had commented on the rivalry between the churches.<sup>19</sup> It was a perpetual irritation to the physician. "Religious people find it impossible to believe that others do not care one iota whether a man is labeled a Methodist or an Episcopalian."<sup>20</sup> Grenfell could not comprehend the unwillingness of one religious body to endorse and support the effective work of another group.

There was no rejoicing, that I could see, that the sole purpose for which their own organization avowedly existed was being accomplished, but

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<sup>17</sup>Grenfell, The Attractive Way, 39.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 40.

<sup>19</sup>See p.40 above.

<sup>20</sup>Grenfell, What the Church Means to Me, 18.

recrimination that it was not being accomplished in their way.<sup>21</sup>

His writing on the subject of sectarianism is so extensive and forthright that it must be seen as emerging out of concrete situations. Grenfell's relationship with the established churches was uneasy and at times conflictual. Lennox Kerr maintains that "leading churchmen disliked intensely Grenfell's criticism of sectarianism, and his preaching of evangelistic Protestantism."<sup>22</sup> The Roman Catholic Archbishop of St. John's went so far as to publish a letter in the St. John's News condemning Grenfell's work, and suggesting that he establish a field of operation closer to home. "Grenfell is not needed on that shore, and his work is not only useless, but worse than useless. It is demoralizing, pauperizing, and degrading."<sup>23</sup> The arguments advanced in Howley's letter indicate that the Archbishop resented more than the popularizing of Protestant religion. Howley, a Newfoundlander and a nationalist, abhorred the manner in which Grenfell depicted the poverty and deprivation of the region on his deputation tours. Howley did not deny the problem of poverty in Newfoundland and Labrador. But he claimed that Grenfell exaggerated. Reports were sensationalized. Howley suggested that

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<sup>21</sup>Grenfell, The Adventure of Life, 19.

<sup>22</sup>Lennox Kerr, Wilfred Grenfell: His Life and Work (London, Toronto, Wellington, Sydney: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1959), 167.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 168.

Grenfell's mission would be less culturally disruptive if he'd stay at home and endeavour to reform the East End of London! In Grenfell's defense, other public policy pronouncements by this Archbishop indicate his close identification with the merchant establishment in St. John's. Howley actively opposed the emergence of the Fishermen's Protective Union at the turn of the century.<sup>24</sup>

Pragmatically, Grenfell disliked the way sectarianism prevented organizations which he highly regarded, such as Boy's Brigades, Boy Scouts, or the YMCA, from working in Newfoundland. Grenfell claimed,

No undenominational work is carried on practically in the whole country. Religion is tied up in bundles and its energies used to divide rather than to unite men.<sup>25</sup>

The churches disliked Grenfell for the manner in which his non-denominationalism threatened the colony's school system. Newfoundland schools were publicly funded, but ecclesiastically administrated. Ronald Rompkey notes that as a result of this system, "the public institutions emphasized the religious and ethnic differences and sustained them."<sup>26</sup> Grenfell emphatically believed that education was compromised through its association with the church. The duplication of services resulting from the need to guarantee the politically correct mix of small sectarian

<sup>24</sup>Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador, 121-24.

<sup>25</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, A Labrador Doctor: The Autobiography of Wilfred Thomason Grenfell, M.D. (Oxon), C.M.G. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1919), 353.

<sup>26</sup>Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador, 53.

schools in outport communities depleted the funds which could have been used to equip libraries, recreational facilities, or provide vocational training. Grenfell did not entirely negate the role played by early clergy, who had conducted classes in reading and writing as a necessary part of pioneering parish duties. But he argued,

At the bar of public opinion she was found guilty of prostituting that sacred office for purely party purposes and so she has forfeited her right to the performance of that most vital function.<sup>27</sup>

Autobiographically, Grenfell claimed that he never altered his position on denominational schooling. He saw denominational schools as existing to bolster special ecclesiastical bodies.<sup>28</sup> Words written in an early letter to his wife stated his passionate conviction; "ignorance is the worst cause of suffering on our coast, and our religion is fostering it."<sup>29</sup> He lambasted church leaders for their emphasis on "arts and creeds"<sup>30</sup> - a curriculum which only succeeded in making children tired.

Grenfell found more humour, if no less frustration, with the legalism which precisely regulated religious behaviour in many outports. He saw himself as the champion of common sense in a tussle with convention. For example, it was unthinkable that a much needed Boy's Club would

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<sup>27</sup>Grenfell, The Adventure of Life, 191.

<sup>28</sup>Grenfell, A Labrador Doctor, 269.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.



receive endorsement from a local congregation because it stayed open on prayer meeting night. The fact that none of the boys showing up for Club would ever consider attending prayer meeting did not matter. Grenfell warned that "religious people will have to answer to a rational tribunal."<sup>31</sup>

The church strictly prohibited dancing and the censorship was extended to ludicrous extremes. One of the funniest passages in Grenfell's autobiography tells of the day church vigilantes visited the fledgling and hugely suspect non-denominational kindergarten. Rumour had it that the foreign teachers, whose "laxity on this article of the creed"<sup>32</sup> was proverbial, were teaching dancing. Grenfell relates the manner in which the inspecting group observed the entirely innocuous first game.

Every child was sitting on the floor. We were next successfully piloted clear of condemnation through a game entitled 'Piggy Wig and Piggy Wee'. Our circulation was just beginning to operate once more in its normal fashion when we were told that the whole company would now join hands and move around in a circle to music. The entire jury sensed that the crucial moment had come. We say boys and girls alternating, hand held in hand - and all to the undeniable secular libretto of 'Looby-Loo'. It saw, moreover, noted with inward pain, that many of the little feet actually left the ground.<sup>33</sup>

In this instance, common sense did prevail. A vote unanimously rejected interference, and "from the pulpit the

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<sup>31</sup>Grenfell, The Attractive Way, 41.

<sup>32</sup>Grenfell, A Labrador Doctor, 261.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 262.

following Sunday the clergy gave to the kindergarten the official sanction of the church."<sup>34</sup> While Grenfell frequently poked fun, his objections were more than a cultured, urbane Englishman's reaction to legalistic silliness. Grenfell ardently believed that such scrupulosity stood in radical contrast to the Spirit of Christ. Expressed theologically, he was maintaining that Gospel as proclaimed by Christ superseded law. A moral, responsible freedom was demanded of followers of Jesus. Expressed psychologically, Grenfell believed that the act of forbidding practices only succeeded in enhancing their attraction. Legalism neither demonstrated nor created righteousness. Rather it "fixes in the mind a desire for the forbidden things."<sup>35</sup> "The fact is, the less you say 'Don't', the nearer you get to Christ's teaching. The 'Thou shalt nots' were all said by Moses."<sup>36</sup>

Legalism was the outward sign of a more fatal ecclesiastical propensity. He wrote,

The offense of the visible churches that tells most against them today is not worldliness or unfaithfulness; it is their inability to shake off their untenable position as judges of others.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Grenfell, The Adventure of Life, 107.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid. Philosophically, this statement reveals again Grenfell's belief in the progressive nature of religious development. Moses' prohibitions are considered a less mature expression of spirituality than are the positive proclamations of the New Testament Christ.

<sup>37</sup>Grenfell, What the Church Means to Me, 8.

The manner in which the church could legislate over the most trivial aspects of social life was a veiled way of exercising and consolidating power. Legalism arrogates to itself a role properly ascribed to God. Grenfell did not find it commendable that "Many are still satisfied to its external authority instead of their individual vision."<sup>38</sup> It resulted in the situation where the church, designed to foster and safeguard God's kingdom, actually deprived men of personal freedom.<sup>39</sup> Grenfell did concede that the church had a role to play in shaping and transmitting social values. And he acknowledged that this could create tension between ecclesiastical functions. "It is no easy task to be a prophet and conservative custodian at the same time."<sup>40</sup>

Wilfred Grenfell rejected traditionalism, not in the original sense of the word, as those with a commitment to live life in obedience to the textual tradition or Scripture. What he could not accept was a Christian traditionalism that ensured the preservation of the status quo. Too many Christian inferences contributed to an immobilizing fatalism, a view which Grenfell argued a thoughtful working man could no longer accept. He wrote of churches stressing "too much of the be content where you are

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<sup>38</sup>Grenfell, The Adventure of Life, 132.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 131.

<sup>40</sup>Grenfell, What the Church Means to Me, 23.

sentiment."<sup>41</sup> Too often, such maxims were used to excuse the church's lack of vision. He writes,

The tradition of a long past suggests to me the inefficiency of a dotage, quite as much as the stimulating aroma of potency, which, as in the case of some wines, can only be acquired by the lapse of time.<sup>42</sup>

Always, ever, the church for Grenfell was validated by her efficiency in accomplishing a task. A true church achieved things of "practical value,"<sup>43</sup> and "men go to church only if it has something to give them."<sup>44</sup> Grenfell did not believe that people could be attracted to the church on the basis of altered modes of worship, or variations of church polity. Most attempts to popularize the church had failed. Grenfell commented on Church Growth strategies in Britain, which focused on providing more comfortable buildings, and additional social gatherings. "In spite of all this, the pews are not one whit more crowded than when I went there twenty years ago."<sup>45</sup> He did acknowledge a sense of sadness that there were still communities in Labrador without church buildings. "I feel so certain that buildings set aside for public worship are essential in every place, that when none exists, I feel wretched."<sup>46</sup> But an over-

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 21.

<sup>43</sup>Grenfell, The Adventure of Life, 93.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 94.

<sup>46</sup>Grenfell, What the Church Means to Me, 21.

emphasis on smartening up exteriors generally did little to elevate the religious climate of a community.

The church's task and her only attraction lay in her willingness to act as an agent for social change. The church must believe, and manage to communicate her confidence, that "it has a contribution for this as well as every other social trouble, and that there is a remedy, and that it is the church's business to find it."<sup>47</sup> It must

show the world that Christ needs a labour party, and then to show the members how to work and act as a whip for the party is the role which the church must play if it is not to atrophy out of existence.<sup>48</sup>

#### The Clergy

An effective clergyman was one capable of creating among men of the local parish "the camaraderie of a fighting force." He should be "the tactician of the army," or "the navigating lieutenant" of the church ship.<sup>49</sup> In order to do this, the clergy needed to possess a kind of moral worldliness. "The man who is going to advance the kingdom of God in the world in any way must be in the world enough to understand it."<sup>50</sup>

Wilfred Grenfell seems too ingenuous a character to have his writing described as cynical. But when his topic

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<sup>47</sup>Grenfell, The Adventure of Life, 97.

<sup>48</sup>Grenfell, The Attractive Way, 35.

<sup>49</sup>Grenfell, What the Church Means to Me, 26.

<sup>50</sup>Grenfell, The Adventure of Life, 92.

is the clergy, one senses an element of disdain or frustration which he finds difficult to temper. He could imagine few things more futile than a life given over to the retelling of a story which everyone already knows.

My dear Parson, do you honestly think you have given us one single piece of information since you came on this shore that we did not know already? ... Will your successor, as did your predecessor, confine all his God-given gifts to telling us the same story, the same maxims, and the same illustrations which we have heard a hundred times?<sup>51</sup>

He could not resist contrasting men "called to ministry" with "men of achievement."<sup>52</sup> Men of achievement do things. Men of achievement have earned status and power through concrete accomplishment. Men of achievement possess intellectual humility. Conversely, wrote Grenfell,

we all know today men of inferior attainment and lives who not only know themselves to be infallible, but haven't the grace to leave even such men alone, and who have interpreted their call to the ministry as simply a mandate to set everyone else intellectually right.<sup>53</sup>

Grenfell's remarks are so passionate that one suspects the reaction is related to some very specific contexts. He is discrete enough not to mention names or congregations. He does say of his own church experience, "It is almost too personal to illustrate this from my own somewhat sad experience in my early days."<sup>54</sup> Archbishop Howley accused

<sup>51</sup>Grenfell, The Attractive Way, 44-45.

<sup>52</sup>Grenfell, What the Church Means to Me, 9.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 23.

Grenfell of not adequately crediting the clergy who faithfully endeavoured to minister in a holistic fashion in northern Newfoundland and Labrador.<sup>55</sup> To read the admittedly sketchy records of service in Labrador in the nineteenth century is to be struck by the fact that although social services were not formally administered by the churches, clergy in the region were doing much more than preaching. Early missionaries of all denominations to Labrador volunteered for the task, and they present a composite picture of rugged individualism and the propensity for adventure. For example, John Newman, who commenced the permanent mission in Hamilton Inlet in 1884, was described as having

dropped the seeds of eternal life wherever he went, and attended to the people's bodies and souls. The simple folk came to him with all kinds of troubles, with their physical afflictions, their love affairs, and their souls' needs.<sup>56</sup>

Albert Holmes, the first Newfoundlander to serve in Labrador, traveled by komatik with a colleague, John Groves, and managed to organize and centralize the Labrador Mission of the Methodists. Of Jebez G. Moore of Carbonear, who arrived in Indian Harbour, 1889, it is claimed that

shortly after arriving on the coast, he began agitating for a day school teacher from Newfoundland, on the ground that the Newfoundland

<sup>55</sup>See pp.122-123 above.

<sup>56</sup>Arminius Young, One Hundred Years of Mission Work in the Wilds of Labrador (London: Arthur H. Stockwell, Ltd., n.d.), 62.

system of taxation gives the people of Labrador a claim on school monies.<sup>57</sup>

Moore's lobby of Dr. Milligan, then Superintendent of Methodist education in Newfoundland, resulted in the hiring of Hamilton Inlet's first public school teacher. Mission accounts also document Moore making parish rounds during an outbreak of diphtheria, "leaving patent medicines and giving whatever advice Mr. Moore could give under the conditions."<sup>58</sup> In A Labrador Doctor Grenfell did acknowledge

clergymen of the Church of England and Methodist denominations ... devoted and self-sacrificing men who had done most unselfish work ... but their visits had of necessity been infrequent.<sup>59</sup>

The Moravian Church had commenced its work on the Labrador Coast in the 1700s. Grenfell admired the comprehensiveness of the Moravians' work with the Labrador Inuit. They had achieved a high rate of literacy. They had translated the Scripture and considerable edificatory literature into the indigenous language. They knew and used the language of the people. Grenfell wrote,

In the past 26 years I have made many voyages to one and the other of the stations of the brethren, and have learned to love them all very sincerely as individuals, though their mission policies are their own and not mine.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 71.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 75.

<sup>59</sup>Grenfell, A Labrador Doctor, 146.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 132.



The Moravians, for their part, generally welcomed the work of Grenfell and his medical associates. They did resent his tendency to grandstand, writing to their headquarters in 1930 after almost four decades of association,

In his lectures and reports Dr. Grenfell has been in the habit of intentionally avoiding mentioning the existence of the Moravians on the coast. While we do not ask Dr. Paddon to proclaim for us the merits of our mission, we ask to be treated as cooperators if he wants our cooperation.<sup>61</sup>

#### Modern Missions

Grenfell believed that the concept of mission and the term "missionary" stood in need of linguistic rehabilitation. He wrote,

A year spent in visiting modern mission stations right around the world has made me wonder how the prejudice against missions can justify the ignorance which there is of the marvels that are being done in Christ's name - in Egypt, in Palestine, in Kashmir, in a hundred different ways, by the preacher, by the teacher, by the healer, by the social worker.<sup>62</sup>

He noted the persistent devaluation of efforts pertaining to social and economic reform in mission thinking. Priority still seemed to be given to the inculcating of doctrine, with curative medical services ranking second place in importance. When Grenfell recorded his observations, he maintained that there was still far too

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<sup>61</sup>Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador, 248.

<sup>62</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, A Man's Faith (Boston, New York and Chicago: Pilgrim Press, 1908), 67.

little emphasis placed in public health and preventative medicine in mission work.<sup>63</sup>

He was not convinced that the church should play the primary role in the provision of such services indefinitely, but rather that she should speak prophetically to such realities, thereby prompting the action of other agencies. Ideally, the church's role in mission was not permanent.

If anything will stimulate to better methods, it is example, not precept, and perhaps the best work of this and all missions will be their reflex influences on governments through the governed.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, A Labrador Logbook (Boston: Little, Brown, 1938), 38.

<sup>64</sup>Grenfell, A Labrador Doctor, 414.

## CHAPTER 6

## DOING TRUTH -- THE PRIORITY OF ETHICS

For Wilfred Grenfell, ethics was not a component of theological reflection, but its culmination. Moral action, born of faith, was his ultimate concern. He was convinced that it was also God's central concern; that the criteria of judgment meted out to humankind would "be ethical, not theological."<sup>1</sup> Motivating others to assume their ethical responsibility was the *raison d'être* for much of Grenfell's writing, and it is in the ethical perspectives expressed that his Culture-Protestantism is most clearly demonstrated.

Like other Liberal Protestants, Grenfell conceived of the ethical task as "life in the service in the kingdom of God according to the law of love of one's neighbour."<sup>2</sup> And like other Christ of Culture thinkers, Grenfell's kingdom ethics placed little formal emphasis on establishing through exegesis the content of Jesus' kingdom proclamation. When Grenfell wrote about the kingdom he was not announcing a new life under the rule of God which exposes and judges all earthly kingdoms. Kingdom law was not a counter-culture manifesto pointing to an eschatological reign of grace.

<sup>1</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, What the Church Means to Me: A Frank Confession and a Friendly Estimate by an Insider (Boston, New York and Chicago: Pilgrim Press, 1911), 35.

<sup>2</sup>James Orr, The Ritschlian Theology and the Evangelical Faith (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1898), 178.

When Grenfell anticipated the kingdom of God, he meant a new period of human history to be ushered in when humankind had evolved to a high enough level of rationality. Grenfell wrote, "Why isn't his service already universal? Why hasn't his kingdom yet come? Why? Why? Why? ... It is because the world is not run on lines of reason yet."<sup>3</sup>

Yet! This supreme confidence in the reformatory kingdom power of an evolving human rationality was fed in nineteenth-century thought by quite different, yet converging, intellectual streams. Certainly it had a source in enlightenment rationalism with its emphasis on humankind's intrinsic dignity and worth. The ascendancy of science and expectations of scientific method were seen as diminishing the value of the biblicism of earlier theologies. Late nineteenth-century fascination with Darwinian insights led one contemporary of Grenfell's, the psychologist William James, to comment on the manner in which belief in a universal evolution altered conventional Christian thinking about the kingdom.

We find evolutionism interpreted thus optimistically and embraced ... by a multitude of our contemporaries who have either trained scientifically or been fond of reading popular science, and who had already begun to be inwardly dissatisfied with what seemed to them the harshness and irrationality of the orthodox Christian scheme.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, The Prize of Life (Boston, New York and Chicago: Pilgrim Press, 1914), 18-19.

<sup>4</sup>William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (New York, London: Collier MacMillan Publishers, 1961), 88.

Peter Berger, the contemporary sociologist of religion, argues that the harshness of orthodoxy had in fact been "melted down"<sup>5</sup> by the nineteenth century through various pietistic streams of Christian thought. As a result of pietism's emphasis on personal experience and its devaluation of dogmatic formulations, Biblical content was radically relativized. Such theological relativism paved the way for an ethical climate in which, as H. Richard Niebuhr put it, "a God without wrath brought man without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross."<sup>6</sup> This ethical kingdom could be made. It did not have to be passively, prayerfully awaited. What Culture-Protestants meant by kingdom ethics ultimately reduced to "the synthesis of the great values esteemed by democratic culture; the freedom and intrinsic worth of individuals, social cooperation, and universal peace."<sup>7</sup>

Wilfred Grenfell's ethical thinking can be considered in its relationship to these esteemed values. He placed great emphasis on the importance of the individual life, lived well. He was constantly interested in the effects of environmental pressures and deficits in stimulating or

<sup>5</sup>Peter Berger, The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1969), 157.

<sup>6</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, The Kingdom of God in America (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1937), 193. Also see pp.103-105 above.

<sup>7</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1951), 99.

inhibiting individual growth or achievement. He believed that social cooperation could maximize human potential. He believed it to be possible for an educated humanity to inaugurate a period of universal peace.

### The Constituents of the Kingdom

Wilfred Grenfell's writing indicates a preoccupation with the individualism which so characterized his age. The subtitle to his devotional anthology, A Labrador Logbook, hints at this. "Sir Wilfred Grenfell's logbook for that voyage of adventure called human life which everyone must navigate alone."<sup>8</sup> Each person is entrusted with the responsibility for concrete choices. Decisions are made alone. Neither divine influences, nor collective social impulses, can negate this freedom for decisiveness.

Grenfell bluntly illustrated how far he believed ethical freedom could be extended in medical decision-making. He documented several patient cases where only "social convention" held him back from practising active euthanasia. One involved a horribly burned woman admitted to the London hospital during his student days. "... only the conventions of society kept us from giving the poor creature the relief of euthanasia."<sup>9</sup> In Immortality he

<sup>8</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, A Labrador Logbook (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1939), flyleaf.

<sup>9</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, A Labrador Doctor: The Autobiography of Wilfred Thomason Grenfell, M.D. (Oxon), C.M.G. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1919), 77.

similarly described a patient with cancer of the larynx and commented: "More than once I would have hastened what is called death out of pure charity had I dared..."<sup>10</sup> He believed that the correctness of an action would be intuitively perceived by a person with the intention to remain responsive to the voice of God.

Wilfred Grenfell was intrigued by the complexity of the game of chess. He used chess as an image for life, and noted the various ways the arts attached meaning to the game as a symbol. Grenfell discerned in Lewis Carroll's fantasy, Alice in Wonderland, an image of the non-coercive nature of the Divine interest in the choices of rational men and women. Alice in Wonderland provided a reassuring parable.

The sinister picture of God and the Devil moving the pawns about without their being consulted almost ruined it for me. But when Alice in her wonderland wandered across my pathway, and I saw that the pieces moved themselves, the game became again to me a helpful parable.<sup>11</sup>

Grenfell also liked the fact that in chess, "every pawn may win a crown."<sup>12</sup>

Grenfell believed as ardently as any later logotherapist<sup>13</sup> that the fundamental human drive was the need to construct meaning out of life's events and choices.

<sup>10</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, Immortality (London: James Nisbet, 1913), 4.

<sup>11</sup>Grenfell, A Labrador Logbook, 177.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Victor Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959).

And meaning was created when a task deemed important was accomplished.

Man is fit to have some higher *raison d'être* than simply to be happy, even with the most refined sense of happiness. There must be something for him to do, something for him to suffer, something for him to sacrifice himself for, if he is to attain to his fullest development.<sup>14</sup>

Grenfell supported this belief with a parallel statement from Thomas Carlyle.

It is not to taste sweet things, but to do noble and true things, and to vindicate oneself under God's heaven as a God-made man, that the poorest son of Adam dimly longs for.<sup>15</sup>

In order for significant tasks or noble true things to be done, Grenfell conceived of "work" as a central ethical imperative. His discussion of "honest labour" attaches an almost soteriological significance to industry. "If you want to save a man from temptation, self and despair, find him some work to do."<sup>16</sup> He believed that the term "Christian" needed "only again to become synonymous with unselfish aims and solid work."<sup>17</sup> The church had a responsibility to stress the necessity of work for kingdom building. "The church which does not lay the supreme emphasis on work must inevitably, in the expressive language of Scripture, be vomited out of the mouth."<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Grenfell, A Labrador Logbook, 21.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, The Attractive Way (Boston, New York and Chicago: Pilgrim Press, 1913), 35.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 38.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 36.



In Grenfell's elevation of work to the status of an ideal and a virtue,<sup>19</sup> a major emphasis of the revivalist message of one such as D. L. Moody re-emerges. Mid-century American evangelicalism quite uncritically synthesized secular and religious concepts in its use of the term "work". Moody's biographer, James Findlay, documents his subject's position.

There is no hope for a man's reformation who does not go to work. Laziness belongs to the old creation. I don't know what to do, and I don't see what God can do, with a lazy man.<sup>20</sup>

On another occasion, Moody said,

I want to say that I never knew a lazy man to become a Christian. I have known gamblers, drunkards, and saloon-keepers to be converted, but never a lazy man.<sup>21</sup>

This re-identification of Grenfell's and Moody's thought illustrates H. Richard Niebuhr's assertion that a Christ of Culture or Culture-Protestant orientation can be found across the range of theological positions; in those theologies labeled "right" or conservative as well as in Liberalism where it is expected.<sup>22</sup> For Evangelical

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<sup>19</sup>Ronald Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador: A Biography (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 65, refers to a service Dr. Grenfell conducted in Hopedale, Labrador, on September 6, 1893. "His subject: sleep as the urging of the devil."

<sup>20</sup>J. Findlay, Dwight L. Moody, American Evangelist 1837-1899 (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), 84.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, 101-103. Niebuhr, in this passage, calls attention to fundamentalist attacks on liberalism despite the fact that "the mores they associate

Protestants, as for any other diligent and lucky entrepreneurs, hard work had a way of generating money. Liberals of Grenfell's social background were born to wealth. Both readily rationalized their financial position through an emphasis on stewardship. Both groups believed that they held their finances in sacred trust. Money brought with it not only privilege, but accountability. "There is no snobbery in recognizing that money has a religious value, and, like time, should be put to a religious use."<sup>23</sup> In The Attractive Way Grenfell restated his position.

Christ obviously leaves us freedom to use common sense, natural sense, sense the direct gift of the creator of the human brain, in dealing with property and business. We know of only one rich man whom he told to give away what was ruining his character.<sup>24</sup>

But if Moody's audiences were composed of newly thriving capitalists, riding the wave of the Industrial Revolution, Wilfred Grenfell's day-to-day medical practice brought him in contact with people for whom hard work guaranteed little. Families were hungry, work was scarce, and education out of reach for most. The individual's capacity for achievement was limited by an environment both physically and structurally hostile.

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with Christ have at least as little relation to the New Testament and as much connection with social custom as have those of their opponents."

<sup>23</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, The Adventure of Life. The William Belden Noble Lectures at Harvard University for 1911 (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1912), 116.

<sup>24</sup>Grenfell, The Attractive Way, 24.

The Defective Environment

Grenfell was immensely challenged by a sense of existential conflict of man with nature. The environment needed to be comprehensibly modified for the flourishing of healthy men and women. Again, Grenfell's Culture-Protestantism is well illustrated. "Man, the moral being, the intellectual spirit, confronts impersonal natural forces, mostly outside himself, but partly within him."<sup>25</sup>

Environment exerted a strong enough role to significantly hamper an individual's ability to heed a moral imperative such as the admonition to work hard. For example, Grenfell defended the people of the outports against the charge of laziness.

I still believe that the people are honest, and that the laziness of indolence, from the stigma of which it is often impossible to clear them, is due to despair and inability to work properly owing to imperfect nourishment.<sup>26</sup>

Emphasis on the supreme value of the created individual was not lost with the recognition of the role of environmental factors. Samuel Hayes, in The Response to Industrialism, argues that social change was still primarily seen as "the work of reformed individuals acting as individuals - more specifically in terms of education and governmental action."<sup>27</sup> But the affinity of Grenfell's thought with what

<sup>25</sup>Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, 101.

<sup>26</sup>Grenfell, A Labrador Doctor, 218.

<sup>27</sup>Samuel Hayes, The Response to Industrialism 1885-1914 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 75.

is now called the Social Gospel must be noted. Hayes writes,

The social gospel, as the new emphasis became known, completely reversed the traditional view that poverty and vice resulted from inward depravity to argue that those very social conditions caused unchristian character.<sup>28</sup>

Grenfell used the term "environment" in an inclusive sense. The physical environment, with its threat to public health, could limit human potential. The moral environment was susceptible to corruption through access to alcohol, and to transient living situations which contributed to family instability. The intellectual environment was as compromised by lack of vision as by lack of resources. A corrupt, or indifferent, political environment, which allowed exploitation or fostered inefficiency, constricted human possibilities, thereby contributing to "unchristian character."

Wilfred Grenfell came to the Labrador coast as a missionary doctor. In the earliest years his most immediate concern was with the physical environment. He wanted to ensure minimal medical services for the population. He claimed that the magnitude of need forced upon him a type of utilitarian ethic.

As a surgeon my life has been spent with people so close to the bread line that I have had to consider first of all in every case, what is the actual value of any course of action? Will it repay the outlay?<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, The Fishermen's Saint. Rectorial address, St. Andrews University, 1929 (London: Hodder &

Grenfell was always convinced that medical ethics required that priority be given to preventive public health. This was the utilitarian way. It was much more efficient to prevent than to cure. A fiery passage from The Attractive Way identifies some of the particular public health instruction needed in the outports at the turn of the century.

What do you think Christ would be doing if he came here and saw folks suffering the curse of the damned from scurvy, just from want of knowing how to lay out the value of their fish? If he saw them with beri-beri because they couldn't cook decently, and wouldn't use the whole-wheat flour and beans to prevent it; and miserable children, crooked legged and narrow chested because one cannot feed cows in this country unless one is well off - can't you see him giving cooking lessons? Can't you see him smashing window panes to let in fresh air to consumptive houses, so as to let people know by experience what can save them?<sup>30</sup>

Autobiographically, Grenfell described his personal despair when asked to treat one young father with tuberculosis, living in a sod hovel with his wife and six hungry children.

The thought of our attractive little hospital on board at once rose to my mind; but how could one sail away with this husband and father, probably never to bring him back. Advice, medicine, a few packages of food, were only temporizing.<sup>31</sup>

To practice temporizing medicine negated Grenfell's central ethical imperative; working hard and working well. To spend time on treatment was to do a half job. To do the

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Stoughton, 1930), 5. Note: He is more explicit in The Adventure of Life, 23 - "I do not believe in labels, but I must accept that of Utilitarian."

<sup>30</sup>Grenfell, The Attractive Way, 42-43.

<sup>31</sup>Grenfell, A Labrador Doctor, 121.

job well necessitated work in prevention. Furthermore, "love is dangerously near to sentimentality when we actually prefer remedial to prophylactic charity."<sup>32</sup> But prevention was only possible with broad scale structural intervention. By 1895, three years after Grenfell's initial investigative visit to the Labrador coast, he was convinced of this fact. Virtually every family on the coast between Blanc Sablon and the end of Hamilton Inlet had been visited by health workers from the hospital ship. Detailed case records were kept, providing the first ever health profile of the Labrador population. Grenfell realized that there was little point in teaching nutrition in communities without food! Families were starving. Children were freezing. Had there been a cash flow, in tiny villages like West St. Modeste, there were no clothes, fabrics or fishing supplies to be bought. The abject destitution in the community of Englee, Newfoundland in the summer of 1896 convinced Grenfell that more was needed than medical treatment and emergency relief. The entire economic system needed reformation. The previous summer he had introduced a small cooperative store in West St. Modeste. In 1896 a second was organized in Red Bay, under local control. From this point on, health and economics were inextricably intertwined in Wilfred Grenfell's mission strategy. To do the job well required economic intervention.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 235.

<sup>33</sup>See Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador, 85-91 for a description of the development of these cooperatives.

Liquor and the Moral Environment

Grenfell passionately believed that alcohol exerted a lethal influence upon the moral environment of a given culture. He refers to an international convention held during his period of ministry in the North Sea, the consensus of which

favoured and enforced the most severe laws against selling any liquors on the high seas, on the sole ground that if their environment was improved, the lives of the people would also be improved.<sup>34</sup>

Grenfell described the liquor trade as "a form of selfishness which I have always heartily hated."<sup>35</sup> He was convinced that "alcohol is without doubt the greatest curse of civilization,"<sup>36</sup> and he claimed that philanthropists had concluded that alcohol was "in mental and bodily suffering the most expensive modern agent."<sup>37</sup> Both his medical practice and his social milieu demonstrated to Grenfell that "education, family, rank, and intelligence are no safeguards against this danger."<sup>38</sup> No element of society was immune from its potential for personal and social disruption.

Grenfell also believed that alcoholism was a peculiarly spiritual disease. Liquor offered a false but seductive satisfaction to deeply felt human needs. He

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<sup>34</sup>Grenfell, The Adventure of Life, 68.

<sup>35</sup>Grenfell, A Labrador Doctor, 209.

<sup>36</sup>Grenfell, The Adventure of Life, 109.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 110.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

includes in A Labrador Logbook Elwood Worcester's evaluation of the psychological factors presenting in alcoholism. Alcohol was used in the quest for peace, as an escape from conscience, and for the "dissolving of our inhibitions, our fears, and our sense of inferiority."<sup>39</sup> Grenfell asserted that moral responsibility in the kingdom of the brotherhood of man meant the willingness of followers of Christ to live as life-long abstainers. He grounded his prohibitory sentiments in the context of Christian freedom. He used the language of permission to radically underscore his belief that ethical life consists in rational decisions.

Christ's way commits me to be a life-long abstainer. He permits me to condemn alcohol as a beverage, but not the man who takes it.<sup>40</sup>

Grenfell did not waste time trying to convince anyone that alcohol was not a desirable beverage, or could not function as a social lubricant. He admits, "We do like it, but we will not touch it, because of the stumbling block it is to others."<sup>41</sup> Only through the disciplined use of one's personal freedom would it be possible to do no harm.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Grenfell, A Labrador Logbook, 37.

<sup>40</sup>Grenfell, The Attractive Way, 32.

<sup>41</sup>Grenfell, The Adventure of Life, 111.

<sup>42</sup>Grenfell biography is colourful with stories of his energetic and at times audacious attempts to eradicate the sale of liquor from the coast. See A Labrador Doctor, 209-214. His rationale for a fisherman's residence in St. John's is documented in his autobiography, 349-356, and in Lennox Kerr, 165-169.



A Defective Environment and the Legal System

Grenfell maintained that lawyers, no less than physicians, had to reckon with environmental factors which precipitated human dysfunctionalism. Admitting his own remedial, rather than retributive, bias, he argued that "a man in the full flesh of health and in good surroundings is less likely to become a criminal than a weakling in a bad environment."<sup>43</sup> He challenged those involved in the justice system to recognize that the work of the Christian lawyer is "to help improve the environment of the tempted classes."<sup>44</sup> Grenfell celebrated the insights emerging from the young discipline of criminology, as well as the convergence of medical and theological perspectives in what would come to be known as Family Systems Theory, that is, considering "causally and remedially the family and the immediate home surroundings of those they are endeavouring to help."<sup>45</sup>

Grenfell attributed criminal behaviour to frustration at not being able to master one's environment. Criminals were created when people lacked the encouragement or skills to achieve tasks deemed worthwhile. He urged jurists to study the experiments being made in prison reform: Massachusetts Reformatory, where

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<sup>43</sup>Grenfell, The Adventure of Life, 67.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 70.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 75.

interesting and remunerative industries are taught, and work is demanded - good, solid work, a temptation many criminals never get outside... more important, good work is made remunerative.<sup>46</sup>

Wilfred Grenfell's ideal was reasserted. For a judge to explore opportunities for actual remediation of those who stood before the bench was another example of one in authority doing good work. The action of a courtroom lawyer could be "good" insofar as he protected the moral environment by defending only just causes. Grenfell believed that Abraham Lincoln had exemplified this ideal. The American lawyer refused to defend a cause he believed to be wrong. "To connive at the defeat of justice is to prostitute a holy duty."<sup>47</sup>

#### The Educational Environment

A further threat to the full, free development of individuals resulted from an impoverished educational environment. In the kind of language which typified Grenfell's ambivalent relationship with the colonial authorities, Grenfell wrote,

The solution of the problem of inducing the peace of God and the kingdom of God into our parish is most likely to be solved by wise and persevering work among the children ... Their true condition and upbringing to fit them for wise citizenship have been cruelly neglected in this outpost of [the] empire.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 72.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 78.

<sup>48</sup>Grenfell, A Labrador Doctor, 252.

He claimed that his own school had been making headway in turning out young men and women "better fitted to cope with the difficult problems of this environment."<sup>49</sup>

Grenfell's opposition to denominational education has already been noted. He was also opposed to educational sexism. He considered the lack of education encouragement given to Newfoundland women to be

a menace to the future welfare of the coast ... without an educated and enlightened womanhood, no country, no matter how favoured by material prosperity, can hope to take its place as a factor in the progress of the world.<sup>50 51</sup>

#### Racism and the Moral Environment

It is not easy either to understand or to excuse the moral blind spot to the sinfulness of racism among

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 253.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 252.

<sup>51</sup>While Grenfell was advocating an education technically adapted to the environment of Newfoundland and Labrador, but one which also would provide "the breadth of view which contact with a more progressive civilization alone can give them" (A Labrador Doctor, 264), Anne Grenfell had personally assumed responsibility for the education of their three children, Wilfred Jr., Pascoe, and Rosamond. The environment she idealized was that of the British upper middle class and it was for participation in this society that she structured her children's education. J. Lennox Kerr claims that she did not allow her children to interact socially with the children of St. Anthony. She insisted that French be spoken at home. Kerr further claims that Grenfell's constant promotional travel meant that he saw little of his children, hardly noticing "that their training was not the same as his had been, and that they could not, as he had done, make friends with all or develop themselves in adventurous games. They had to remember they were the children of their famous father." [J. Lennox Kerr, Wilfred Grenfell: His Life and Work (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1959), 218].

Christians of Grenfell's period. The presupposition of white cultural superiority went unquestioned. "Like a race of children"<sup>52</sup> was Grenfell's assessment of the indigenous peoples of Labrador. He frankly documents his sense of surprise when an Inuit man fainted while holding the light for an emergency surgery. Grenfell commented, "I had previously had no idea that their sensibilities were so akin to ours."<sup>53</sup>

Anne Grenfell was unapologetically anti-Jewish. She refused to rent the Grenfell cottage to a Jew, preferring to sustain a significant financial loss.<sup>54</sup> Wilfred Grenfell seems to have considered his wife's position somewhat extreme. He would have rented the cottage! He was similarly surprised by the Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen's unwillingness to include a rabbi's name on their list of patrons in 1926.<sup>55</sup> But Ronald Rompkey notes that in the letters he wrote to his wife he made frequent racial slurs - referring to his travelling companions on American trains as "Poles, Jews and general heretics."<sup>56</sup> It is probably unfair to scrutinize these lonely love letters for theological import. They were written on an arduous deputation tour through Pennsylvania. All around him, Grenfell saw the

<sup>52</sup>Grenfell, A Labrador Doctor, 131.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 156.

<sup>54</sup>Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador, 155.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 229.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 218.

signs and heard the voices of a rapidly changing America. Unfamiliar languages and customs seem to have created in Grenfell a sense of the cultural displacement which Marsden claims was being experienced by Protestants in the early years of the twentieth century. "On each side of the ocean, Bible-affirming Evangelicals found that the value of their group had come to appear quaint and almost foreign."<sup>57</sup> Grenfell's comment concerning "Poles, Jews and general heretics" probably expressed his own longing for the comfortable and the familiar. But that such a phrase would be used, even privately, indicates that these attitudes were both common and tolerated. Both Anne and Wilfred Grenfell died before they could have fully known how catastrophic the consequences of racism could be.

#### The Political Environment

Over the course of Grenfell's ministry his political ideology seems to have vacillated between two poles, one informed by a Christian anthropology sentimentally optimistic, and the other rather cynically pessimistic about human potential. In both instances the underlying ethic was utilitarian, with the achievement of a political end justifying the means. As a young man, Grenfell believed that a liberal education would inevitably lead to dissatisfaction with the political and economic realities of

<sup>57</sup>George M. Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture, 223.

Newfoundland and Labrador. He attributed the willingness to accept poverty as one's lot in life to

still living in a period of a hundred years ago. Our labouring classes have not yet acquired the advantages of an education ... they have only just begun to discover that if the workers go hungry and naked, while the thinkers live in superfluous luxury, there must be something wrong.<sup>58</sup>

In The Kingdom of God in America, H. Richard Niebuhr contends that nineteenth-century liberal ethics

reconciled the interests of the individual with those of society by means of faith in a natural identity of interests, or in the benevolent, altruistic character of man.<sup>59</sup>

Wilfred Grenfell preached and pleaded for this natural identity of interests. He believed that people were far better motivated by an appeal to their capacity for Christlike altruism than by guilt. At the same time, he claimed to be a thorough-going empiricist. Thus a tension can be discerned in Grenfell's writing between his idealism and the realism born of the struggle for change. For example, Grenfell placed most of the blame for failed cooperatives on insufficient business acumen, but he also faulted "the lack of courage and unity which everywhere characterizes mankind."<sup>60</sup>

Years of watching the struggle for effective government in Newfoundland and Labrador somewhat modified Grenfell's confidence in the benevolent, altruistic

<sup>58</sup>Grenfell, The Adventure of Life, 95.

<sup>59</sup>Niebuhr, The Kingdom of God in America, 191.

<sup>60</sup>Grenfell, A Labrador Doctor, 225.

character of the common man. He came to wonder if there could be times when authoritarianism might be politically expedient. Newfoundland, for example, "needed either a dictator or a small commission of experts. Confederation will be too slow an evolutionary method in the present crisis."<sup>61</sup> He expressed his conviction that the best governments were benevolent autocracies.

Even in the New World doubts are arising as to whether autocratic power may not have some advantages if tempered by a Christian spirit, if exercised under wise advisers and if administered with courage.<sup>62</sup>

#### A Universal Peace?

The same dialectic which moderated Wilfred Grenfell's expectations of full social cooperation seems to have influenced his thinking about war and peace. His writing holds in tension his idealism, and a non-dogmatic commitment to wrestle with the facts of human experience as he encounters them.

Whether there will ever be millennial peace on earth, or whether the waxing and waning warfare is essential for the evolution of our soul's welfare, may be open to question.<sup>63</sup>

Although Grenfell frequently used military generals and brave patriots as examples of manly Christianity, he cannot fairly be called a hawk. Rather he wrote that at

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<sup>61</sup>Rompkey, Grenfell of Labrador, 263.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 269.

<sup>63</sup>Grenfell, The Adventure of Life, 130.

times when oppressive forces have threatened, war has often "seemed to such men the only means available for advancing the kingdom of God."<sup>64</sup> In The Prize of Life, 1914, Grenfell describes a conversation he shared with a United States Supreme Court judge: looking at the statues of soldiers in the square in Washington, they considered

that war and bloodshed and the armour of armed men should be the symbol of glory and greatness we recognize as belonging to the period of the soul's infancy.<sup>65</sup>

Nevertheless, Grenfell supported the war effort in 1914 and used his American deputation tours as opportunities to appeal for United States intervention in the European conflict. He volunteered his vacation for three months' service at the northern front, commencing work with the Harvard Surgical Unit in January 1916. Appalled by the physical misery which resulted from exposure in the cold, wet trenches, Grenfell immediately became involved in designing and promoting a more weather-appropriate combat uniform. "The problem of light, warm, waterproof, suitable, economic clothing interests me."<sup>66</sup>

Wilfred Grenfell had hoped for some fruitful evangelical work among the troops. He was saddened by their indifference. Rompkey contends,

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 137.

<sup>65</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, The Prize of Life (Boston, New York, Chicago: Pilgrim Press, 1914), 29.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 187.



The war was changing men's attitudes to heroism and religion. The business of war was suddenly less chivalric than before and the experience revealed something to him. The men in their loneliness did not feel inclined to talk of following Christ and the experience made him uncomfortable.<sup>67</sup>

Throughout his life Wilfred Grenfell remained immensely attracted to the preaching and prolific writing of Harry Emerson Fosdick. The American preacher whose life, according to his biographer "may be viewed as a rebellion against credal sectarianism"<sup>68</sup> published an enormously well-received case for American intervention in World War Two in 1917. Fosdick shared Grenfell's espousal of manly Christianity. He stressed the need for intelligent Christian participation in civil life. Fosdick's book was far from pro-war rhetoric. He deplored war, but believed that Christian realism necessitated involvement for the preservation of Western civilization.

In later years Fosdick would describe The Challenge of the Present Crisis as "the only book he wished he had not written ... I was never more sincere in my life than when I wrote it, but I was wrong."<sup>69</sup> In the aftermath of the war and for the rest of his life Fosdick defended an uncompromising pacifist position. Evaluated by one historian of the inter-war peace movement as "the man who more than any

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 188.

<sup>68</sup>Robert Miller, Harry Emerson Fosdick: Preacher, Pastor, Prophet (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 9.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 80.

other epitomized the acceptance of Christian duty to forsake war,"<sup>70</sup> Fosdick is said to have made direct reference to the war in every sermon he preached in the year after his return from Europe.<sup>71</sup>

Grenfell's writing did not display a similar pre-occupation. He never exhaustively documented his personal revulsion with what he had seen. The most obvious explanation for this does not attribute it to any callousness in Grenfell. He was simply consumed with the task of preserving the Labrador mission through such important transitional stages as the departure of Dr. Little for a practice in Boston. He lacked the time, and had never demonstrated the inclination for comprehensive ethical reflection.

Grenfell did include in A Labrador Logbook an indictment of nationalism. He believed it to be a kind of patriotism which lies at the root of war ... Exclusive nationalism has little to say for itself; fear and selfishness talk loudly but have nothing unanswerable to say.<sup>72</sup>

In international politics, no less than in medicine, prevention was the operative concept.

It is when men spend as much money and energy on peace as on war that Mars will have to look to his laurels. Peace does not grow of itself like Topsy. Peace is a period for the active use of intelligence.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 491.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 88.

<sup>72</sup>Grenfell, A Labrador Logbook, 185.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

To prevent was to avoid temporizing solutions. To prevent was to do good work.

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EPILOGUE

The integrity of the church and her clergy is not assumed in Newfoundland and Labrador in the 1990's. A decade of soul-souring revelations of breaches of trust by people with ecclesiastical power has engendered considerable cynicism. Religious motivations are suspect. In such a context it is appropriate to re-evaluate the religious writing of a man who idealized integrity between word and deed, thought and life.

But Wilfred Grenfell was a missionary. And in contemporary assessment, this vocational choice is as suspect as the pastor compromised with a parishioner. The term "missionary" has come to suggest an individual with power, thrusting an alien agenda upon a culture too powerless to consider withholding consent. John Webster Grant is correct when he contends that in current critique of the church's historical role in cross-cultural endeavour, "it is the missionary who has become the puzzle."<sup>1</sup> It is rightly recognized that this now enigmatic breed of Christian crusader must be evaluated within a broader cultural and political context than that provided by earlier, frequently propagandistic denominational or organizational histories. This has been ably achieved by Ronald Rompkey. But in the evaluation of a subject with an

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<sup>1</sup>John Webster Grant, Moon of Wintertime (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 215.

intensely religious self-understanding, what cannot legitimately be minimized or "bracketed out" is the content of the peculiarly religious vision. Missionary consciousness can be illuminated by drawing attention to the complex interplay of social, literary, and religious themes operative in "Christian" discourse. But to ignore Grenfell's theology or regard it as of minimal importance because it is not systematically developed is to overlook motivational impulses deeply rooted in the Christian tradition, if always personally and culturally appropriated. To downplay Grenfell's role as "missionary" is to demonstrate too circumscribed a concept of the term during a period of history when missionary endeavour was broadly and comprehensively expressed.<sup>2</sup>

It is not surprising that dogmatic distinctives are subordinated to the identification of cultural presuppositions in the study of churchworkers in the late nineteenth century. In the formative years of Wilfred Grenfell's faith development, the agenda of Christianity and Western civilization were inextricably intertwined. Grenfell's writing demonstrates this mingling of Christ and culture themes.

Was Wilfred Grenfell a cultural imperialist? Of course. This is most in evidence in Labrador Looks at the Orient: Notes of Travel in the Near and the Far East, a

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<sup>2</sup>see David B. Marshall, Secularizing the Faith (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 103-104.

distasteful, condescending travelogue published in 1928. Throughout this work which can be included in the author's religious writing because of the way he habitually interrupted the narrative to comment upon Christianity's contribution to civilization, Grenfell unquestioningly equated British rule with good government and civilizing influence. For example, he wrote of England having "accepted a mandate for Mesopotamia," and evaluated the intervention thus:

Ignorant, fanatical, wild human beings, who do not understand Western civilization and do not want it naturally, men whose attitude to life is still that of the westerner of centuries ago, were already beginning to understand the value of impartial justice and security of life and of property.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, after touring India, and meeting with Mr. Gandhi whom he admired but considered naive, Grenfell argued that India was not adequately developed for self-government. "The fact is that at certain stages of evolution good government is much more important than self-government."<sup>4</sup> But the Britishness and overt colonialism was muted in most of Grenfell's religious publications, intended as they were for distribution among his American supporters.

John Webster Grant argues that what is frequently overlooked in mission studies is the fact that a missionary imperialism was often concurrently at work with a cultural idealism. By this he means that missionaries sought the

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<sup>3</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, Labrador Looks at the Orient (London: Jarrolds Publishers, 1928), 118.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 141.

establishment of European society, not as it was, but as they believed it should be. Theirs was an idealized social vision. Hence they were inclined to advocate policies of moral reform unachievable in the older societies which they considered more degenerate. Prohibitionary programs are an example of this type of missionary imperialism. Such schemes frequently embroiled their perpetrators in conflict with secular authorities or the merchant community. This was certainly the case with Grenfell.<sup>5</sup>

Does Wilfred Grenfell's writing evidence him promoting cultural intervention? Unabashedly. His goal was moral reform and social justice. Public health strategies, economic initiatives, educational opportunities were all seen as necessary to "fit the people of Newfoundland and Labrador for wise citizenship."<sup>6</sup> Grenfell claimed that the people of the coast were in need of "the breadth of view which contact with a more progressive civilization alone can give them."<sup>7</sup> By implication, the indigenous culture was perceived as narrow and non-progressive.

This cultural meddling made him enemies. Significantly, resentment against Grenfell seems to have seethed primarily among the colonial authorities who evaluated his work from a distance. It cannot be assumed that this accurately reflects the reaction of Labradorians.

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<sup>5</sup>p.147-148 above.

<sup>6</sup>p.150 above.

<sup>7</sup>p.151 above (note 51).

Perhaps insufficient attention has been paid by historians to the subject of an abiding dissonance between native Labradorians, and the power base on what is now referred to as the island portion of the province.<sup>8</sup> Colonial authorities hated the manner in which Grenfell popularized and, in their view, sensationalized conditions in Labrador at the turn of the century. But for Labradorians, Wilfred Grenfell was seen as "on-side," a powerful ally in the struggle against regional neglect.

Any evaluation which seeks to take seriously Grenfell's religious motivations is abetted by the thesis advanced in David Marshall's Secularizing the Faith. Marshall argues that throughout the years 1850-1940 Protestant clergy and missionaries were driven by a quest for relevance, or a "preachable gospel."<sup>9</sup> Christians, increasingly uneasy about the premises upon which they had sought to establish theological certainty, struggled to articulate the essential and abiding features of the missionary enterprise. This is clearly evident in Grenfell's writing on ecclesiology. He sensed the danger of the church "becoming a useless hulk on the beach of time."<sup>10</sup> He feared a church consigned to societal impotence. He was also perceptive enough to recognize that accommodation to

<sup>8</sup>see David W. Zimmerly, Cain's Land Revisited: Cultural Change in Central Labrador, 1775-1972 (St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1975), 315.

<sup>9</sup>David B. Marshall, Secularizing the Faith, 4.

<sup>10</sup>p.119 above.



the consumer, comfort-driven culture along the lines of more comfortable churches, or more entertaining services, was not effective. More people were not being drawn to the church.<sup>11</sup> What he does not seem to have perceived was the manner in which attitudes like his personal disdain for more mystical dimensions of faith experience, or his distaste for the sacred/secular distinctions still powerful in outpost piety, inadvertently contributed to the secularization process.

Secularization contributed significantly to the re-evaluation of the role of medicine in evangelization. In the first half of the nineteenth-century, doctors were rarely recruited. Generally, a physician was tolerated in a support staff role, attending to the health of the missionaries engaged in the "real" work of evangelism. With gradual secularization, and the ascendancy of what this thesis, following Niebuhr, terms Christ of Culture thinking, the compulsion to save the perishing heathen was replaced by the desire to spend a useful life improving the lot of fellow humanity. This was a task for which the doctor was eminently suited. Writes Peter Williams,

this was the consensus of a society which was as increasingly convinced that it should alleviate physical suffering as it was doubtful it possessed any eternal truths. The doctor was a better and more accurate symbol of the superior civilization than the clergyman.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>p.119 above.

<sup>12</sup>C. Peter Williams, "Healing and Evangelism: The Place of Medicine in Later Victorian Protestant Missionary

The course of secularization was most predictable for those Christians who integrated their religious and cultural perspectives in the culture-accommodating manner of Niebuhr's Christ of Culture type.

Positively, Niebuhr stresses that the acculturation of faith has contributed enormously to the credibility and expansion of Christianity in the world. The ability to discern harmony between Christian religious insight and the great moral philosophies of western civilization has carried convincing apologetic force. Christ of Culture thinkers' obsession with relevance has stimulated the presentation of the gospel in language intelligible to the non-believer. They have recognized that an enduring task of theology is the reinterpretation and linguistic rehabilitation of religious symbols for a new historical period and an ever-changing intellectual climate. Because of this willingness to engage the world on its terms, Culture-Protestants have been welcome in society's drawing rooms, in scientific laboratories, in university debating clubs. Writes Niebuhr, "They are missionaries to the aristocracy and middle class, or to the groups rising to power in civilizations."<sup>13</sup> This was obviously true of Grenfell. He possessed an almost legendary capacity to draw crowds on university campuses on

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Thinking," included in The Church and Healing, ed. W. J. Sheils (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 285.

<sup>13</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), 104.

both sides of the Atlantic, and to motivate his hearers toward philanthropic endeavour.

Secondly, Culture-Protestantism does not abandon the world. It focuses upon the willingness of Jesus of Nazareth to live according to the conventions of his society without withdrawal or restraint from social critique. Anticipation of a futuristic kingdom did not blunt the Christ of Culture's capacity to work for social change. Grenfell similarly believed that ethical behaviour could inaugurate kingdom life in the present. This is a hopeful, pragmatic, goal-oriented world view.

To understand Wilfred Grenfell, it is essential to recognize that the Christology of the Culture Protestant thinker possesses a powerful inner dynamic toward the establishment of a certain kind of Christian mission. Whenever an emulation Christology predominates, the approach to missions is predictable. To personally aspire to emulate the Christ, and to call upon others to do the same, is to concentrate upon mission tasks which can humanly be achieved. One cannot emulate Christ in forgiving sins. One can work to restore sick bodies, feed hungry populations, oppose extortionists, and preach the Fatherhood of God. This is a broadly inclusive criterion for the fellowship of workers in a common cause. However, because these tasks can be done by any man or woman of goodwill, a Christology confined to this emphasis harbours the seeds of its own secularization.

One might have expected this kind of medical mission, with its concern for wholism, to have led the way in the twentieth century movement in institutionalized pastoral care. This has not been the case. This is because of Culture-Protestantism's areas of symbolic neglect. By largely ignoring Christian symbols of divine-human estrangement and alienation, it has proven unable to utilize traditional Christian insights in a depth manner.<sup>14</sup>

Culture-Protestantism is rarely introspective. It has proven unable to identify with what Kant called "the radical evil that corrupts the intention."<sup>15</sup> Sin, understood as immaturity or weakness only, cannot account for the barbarous turns of human history. Perhaps there were reasons deeper than mission over-commitments to explain Grenfell's reticence to record his impressions of war. He was left floundering before the failure of reason to secure peace, and the perversion of science for the production of more sophisticated weaponry. Culture-Protestantism is harder to sustain when one is no longer sure what Christian culture looks like. Grenfell's religious thought was formulated in a historical period when the idea of Europe and America as Christian civilizations seemed defensible. Ideological assault took the form of a European world war.

<sup>14</sup>This is evident in other denominations which have minimized the importance of theological reflection. In 1993, The Salvation Army operates a network of eleven hospitals in Canada, but to date is without a single Pastoral Clinical Supervisor.

<sup>15</sup>Niebuhr, 113.

Historical dynamism was thereafter less readily identified with progress. There is the merest hint that Grenfell came to recognize Liberalism's potential for pretension. When he revised his autobiography for the 1933 publication, Forty Years for Labrador, he re-entitled the chapter dealing with his brief war experience, "Light and Shade." Was an older Grenfell more conscious of the dark side of human experience? The chapter concludes with a question,

Is it possible that we, even we have ears that hear not, eyes that see not and hearts that do not understand? If we have, what is the emotion which keeps us from admitting it?<sup>16</sup>

In both its Christology and its evaluation of human nature, Grenfell's religious writing was in radical tension with mainstream Evangelicalism. But he was profoundly in sympathy with Evangelicalism's passion and what I would term its personalism. He challenged others to emulate a character he earnestly believed he knew. Henry Gordon's assessment is correct:

a deep personal devotion to Jesus Christ. . . . That was Grenfell's secret, and unless one realizes it, it is impossible to get him into any true perspective.<sup>17</sup>

For such a relational apprehension of the Gospel, the anachronistic chivalry of Grenfell's language is oddly fitting. It is a language of love, loyalty and fidelity.

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<sup>16</sup>Wilfred Grenfell, Forty Years for Labrador (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1933), 235.

<sup>17</sup>p.49 above.

However catalyzing the effects of Evangelicalism, and however influenced Wilfred Grenfell was by popular trends in turn of the century theology, to best place Grenfell theologically necessitates a return to the parlour of his boyhood. It was there that his essential religious temperament was shaped. A careful read of an 1853 summation of Broad Churchmanship indicates that this liberal, mediating stance within the Church of England was less a theological position than a religious disposition: its distinctive character, a "desire of comprehension."<sup>18</sup> With the Evangelicals, Broad Churchmen affirmed that scripture functioned as the only rule of faith. Unlike Evangelicals, they deduced that "all who believe the Scripture are members of the household of faith." They were willing that "the wide portals of the church should be flung as widely open as the gates of Heaven."<sup>19</sup> Refusing to hold "wide general views" and rejecting speculative tendencies,

The parochial clergy of this school look upon their essential function to be not merely "to preach the gospel" or "to set forth the ordinances of the Church," but to promote the highest good of every person under their charge. With this object before them they consider their labours in the pulpit as but a small part of their office.<sup>20</sup>

Wilfred Grenfell believed that he was promoting the "highest good" of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

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<sup>18</sup>W. J. Conybeare, "Church Parties," The Edinburgh Review 98, no. 200 (October, 1853): 273-342.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 331.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 332.

Through a formidable capacity for hard work, combined with creativity and love of life, the English physician profoundly affected life in the region. In forty years of commitment to the coastal mission, Grenfell established a network which included six hospitals and seven nursing stations, four boarding schools, industrial training centres, and a cooperative lumber mill. Through a demanding public speaking schedule, he was directly involved in the solicitation of much of the capital required for the projects. The Grenfell charisma worked its motivational magic on hundreds of men and women who contributed their skills to furthering the work of the mission. They were Christians some, humanitarians all.

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