

# The Origins and Development of Wilfred Currier Keirstead's Social and Religious Thought

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*W.C. Keirstead était un éminent spécialiste des sciences sociales, philosophe et professeur à l'Université du Nouveau-Brunswick de 1908 à 1944. Cet article examine la formation de sa pensée sociale en vue d'éclairer le débat actuel parmi les historiens à savoir si oui ou non les spécialistes des sciences sociales du Canada anglais du début du 20<sup>e</sup> siècle ont adhéré à la pensée moderne aux dépens de leur vision chrétienne du monde, contribuant ainsi à accélérer la sécularisation. Ses écrits révèlent qu'il n'était pas un agent de la sécularisation, car bien que Keirstead ait souscrit à de nombreux aspects de la modernité, il continua à puiser dans la religion baptiste de sa jeunesse et conserva une perspective chrétienne tout au long de sa carrière.*

*W.C. Keirstead was a leading Maritime social scientist, philosopher, and professor at the University of New Brunswick from 1908 to 1944. This article examines the formation of his social thought in an attempt to address the current debate among historians about whether or not social scientists in early-20th-century English Canada embraced modern thought at the expense of their Christian worldview, thereby helping to accelerate secularization. His writings reveal that he was not an agent of secularization, for although Keirstead embraced many aspects of modernity he continued to draw upon the Baptist religion of his youth and maintained a Christian outlook throughout his career.*

THERE IS A PROBLEM WITH THE DEBATE among some historians of English Canada concerning the relationship between religion and the social sciences during the first three decades of the 20th century. On one side, historians such as Ramsay Cook, Marlene Shore, and Barry Ferguson have argued that Canadian social scientists were severing their ties with evangelical and social reform by the 1920s and embracing a more positivistic and secular approach imported from educational institutions south of the border such as the University of Chicago.<sup>1</sup> On the other side, historians such as Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau have countered this portrayal of a secularizing

1 Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985); Marlene Shore, *The Science of Social Redemption: McGill, the Chicago School, and the Origins of Social Research in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987); Barry Ferguson, *Remaking Liberalism: The Intellectual Legacy of Adam Shortt, O.D. Skelton, W.C. Clark and W.A. Mackintosh* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993).

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social science community in Canada by arguing that “until the late 1930s almost every facet of social investigation and social policymaking fell under the aegis of Christian leadership.”<sup>2</sup> While both schools interpret the history of social science in Canada differently, neither examines in any depth social philosophers or social scientists who worked in the Maritimes in the early-20th century. This is not surprising given the fact that the historiography of social science in the region is still in its early stages.<sup>3</sup> This article on Wilfred Keirstead is an attempt to bring the story of one Maritime social philosopher into the current discussion. It does not assess the influence of his economic and social thought, but it does attempt to piece together the formation of his worldview.<sup>4</sup> It also argues that while Keirstead was a social scientist and philosopher who worked for a public university and advised numerous provincial governments, his thought and motivation remained essentially religious in their orientation throughout his life. In fact, there is no evidence to suggest that he abandoned his Baptist faith for “secular social science” for he saw no contradiction between faith and social science. In this regard, Keirstead stands in striking contrast to Carl Dawson, another Maritime-Baptist-turned-social scientist, who according to Marlene Shore essentially jettisoned his religion around the time he established the school of social work at McGill University.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, although Keirstead consulted with church bodies, he functioned primarily as a university-based social scientist and philosopher and not as a minister – unlike church-based social scientists such as Hugh Dobson, the Methodist and later United Church clergyman described at length in Christie and Gauvreau’s *A Full-Orbed Christianity*.<sup>6</sup> Keirstead’s professional life demonstrates that it was possible for a decidedly Christian social scientist to work in a publicly funded university and to freely speak to a host of social issues from a perspective informed by religion during the first four decades of the 20th century.

Wilfred Currier Keirstead was one of the best-known social philosophers to live in the Maritimes during this period. He was born in Corn Hill, New Brunswick, in 1871. Ordained as a New Brunswick Free Christian Baptist minister in 1896, he studied at the New Brunswick Provincial Normal School in Fredericton and at the University of New Brunswick (UNB), where he received his bachelor’s degree in 1897 and his

2 Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada 1900-1940* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), xi.

3 The literature on Keirstead includes Clifford Williams, “The Political Philosophy of Two Canadians: John Watson and Wilfred Currier Keirstead” (master’s thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1952); Leslie Armour & Elizabeth Trott, *The Faces of Reason* (Waterloo, ON: University of Waterloo Press, 1981); Leslie Armour, “McCulloch, Lyall, Schurman and Keirstead: Four Philosophic Responses to Science, Religion and the Unity of Knowledge,” in Paul A. Bogaard, ed., *Profiles of Science and Society in the Maritimes Prior to 1914* (Fredericton, NB: Acadiensis Press and the Centre for Canadian Studies, Mount Allison University, 1990), 101-18.

4 It should be remembered that during the first third of the 20th century in Canada, many social scientists were also social philosophers. Keirstead and those of his generation carried out empirical social research and philosophical reflection believing these activities to be highly compatible and necessary in order to foster the “good life.” This interdisciplinary approach characterized Keirstead’s research, writing, and teaching until his death.

5 Shore, *Science of Social Redemption*, 70-1. For a critique of Shore’s contention that Dawson lost his faith see Christie and Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity*, 135-42.

6 Christie and Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity*, chs. 1-2.

masters degree in philosophy two years later.<sup>7</sup> In 1903 he earned a doctorate in religion and philosophy from the University of Chicago. In 1908 he became a professor of philosophy and economics (and later education) at UNB and remained there until his retirement in 1944. As a leading philosopher and educator in the Maritime Provinces, Keirstead was a pioneer in social causes motivated by a deep desire to institutionalize in policy and law what can be described as a mixture of Christian and socially conscious liberal democratic ideals. Not surprisingly, during his career he was administrator of the federal food board (1916-19), chair of the New Brunswick commissions on mothers' allowances and on minimum wage legislation, president of the Fredericton Children's Aid Society, a member of the social service board of the Maritime Baptist Convention through most the 1920s and 1930s, a faithful volunteer and member of George Street United Baptist Church, and he prepared studies for the provincial government on railway ventures and federal subsidies, taxation, and public finance.<sup>8</sup>

In order to understand the development of Keirstead's social thought it is essential to begin with the religion of his childhood and early adulthood. Keirstead's family was associated with the Free Christian Baptist Church in Corn Hill, a rural farming community in King's County, New Brunswick. His mother, Melvina Keirstead, became an active member of the church and its Women's Foreign Missionary Aid Society following a significant religious revival that had swept through the community in 1883 under the leadership of Rev. A.C. Thompson. Sixty-seven people were added to the church roll as a result.<sup>9</sup> It is inconceivable that the young Wilfred Keirstead would not have been deeply affected by the revivalist climate in which he grew up. However, the 1883 revival – which happened when he was 12 years old – was only one major expression of revivalism that he lived through and he did not experience the much-coveted evangelical conversion until his early twenties. Nevertheless, it is clear that his early religious culture was that of the Free Christian Baptists in New Brunswick. When he was 65 years of age, Keirstead recalled “the country home of my childhood and . . . the fathers who were leaders of the local church. They were crude simple men, strong of impulse and harsh in a sense because they were crude. But they had a tenderness, a spirit of forgiveness and a high standard of rectitude that came from their religious faith.”<sup>10</sup> If Keirstead admired the simple Christian witness of rural Free Baptist laity in Corn Hill, he also came to appreciate the vision of a powerful group of Free Baptist ministers in New Brunswick who attempted to transform the denomination during the last three decades of the 19th century.<sup>11</sup> These preachers

7 Frederick C. Burnett, *Biographical Directory of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick Free Baptist Ministers and Preachers* (Hantsport, NS: Lancelot Press, 1999), 119; *The Daily Telegraph* (Saint John), 9 September 1889.

8 This information was gleaned from a reading of the George St. United Baptist Church records at the Acadia University Archives in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, as well as an examination of the index of the Wilfrid Currier Keirstead fonds at the UNB Archives and Special Collections, Harriet Irving Library, UNB, Fredericton, NB.

9 Burnett, *Biographical Directory of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick Free Baptist Ministers*, 175.

10 “Religion and World Peace,” ca. 1939, RG 63, W.C. Keirstead fonds, series 3, no. 47, UNB Archives and Special Collections.

11 About one year after his conversion experience, Keirstead preached for the Free Baptist Church in Corn Hill, which is further evidence that he was attached to the church of his youth. See *Kings County Record*, 26 April 1895, which records that he preached both the morning and evening services.

distanced themselves from the excesses of their radically experiential past that was rooted in the second Great Awakening and adopted orderly denominational structures that paralleled other mainline Protestant groups. They also embraced a more formal worship style and developed a very positive posture toward modernity, with leaders such as Joseph and Ezekiel McLeod believing that their denomination's fortunes depended upon shaping their province's future – not by retreating from it. In order to accomplish this goal, an educated clergy and laity would be required so that their voices would be heard in the marketplace of ideas.<sup>12</sup> Keirstead was but one of several New Brunswick Free Christian Baptists of his generation who became important and influential scholars and educational leaders. Perhaps the best known of this cohort was Shirley Jackson Case from Hatfield's Point, New Brunswick, who became a leading New Testament scholar and liberal Protestant theologian in North America in the 1920s while teaching at the University of Chicago. In addition, Allan Hoben from Gibson, New Brunswick, became a leading and controversial New Testament theologian and pastoral theologian/sociologist at the University of Chicago who later became the president of Kalamazoo College, Michigan.<sup>13</sup>

If New Brunswick Free Baptists wanted to distance themselves from some of the excesses of their past, they tenaciously held to their Arminian theology that argued for the free moral agency of the individual in spiritual and temporal matters.<sup>14</sup> Believing that all individuals are made in the image of God, that they have enormous potential to choose redemption in Christ, and that they can make the world a better place through the social implications of the gospel, they proceeded to encourage a new generation of leaders to take up the challenge of bringing personal and social redemption to New Brunswick and the world. The Free Baptists of New Brunswick were also making gains on the region's Calvinistic Baptists, whose denomination had already become institutionalized and who had, as a consequence, powerful connections with governments and higher education much earlier than their "spiritual cousins." Furthermore, the Reformed theological tenets of the Calvinists waned during the second half of the 19th century to the point that, by the time Keirstead's generation of preachers emerged, there was precious little that distinguished the two Baptist groups in the region – although the Free Baptists would always stress their

12 One of the major characteristics of this revivalistic tradition was a suspicion of church structure and prescribed order in worship. It was believed by some that such changes in church life would compromise evangelical spirituality. For a discussion of this radical evangelicalism see G.A. Rawlyk, *Ravished By the Spirit: Religious Revivals, Baptists, and Henry Alline* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984). For the shift to a more formal evangelicalism see D.G. Bell, "The Allinite Tradition and the New Brunswick Free Christian Baptists 1830-1875," in Robert Wilson, ed., *An Abiding Conviction: Maritime Baptists and their World* (Hantsport, NS: Lancelot Press, 1988), 55-82, and Garth MacKay, "Entire Instantaneous Sanctification and New Brunswick Free Christian Baptists, 1832-1888" (master's thesis, Acadia University, 2007), ch. 4.

13 Keirstead discussed Case and Hoben along with a number of other Maritime Baptists in his "Canadians at Chicago," in *Maritime Baptist*, 20 September 1911.

14 Arminian theology was originally Jacob Arminius's response to the teachings of John Calvin, who maintained that humans are so morally corrupt that they could never choose God and that humans were either predestined to be saved or damned. Arminius argued that the eternity of humans was not predetermined but was the result of their choices.

commitment to “free will” with greater enthusiasm than the Calvinistic Baptists.<sup>15</sup> As Wilfred Keirstead became an important member of that new generation of leaders, he never strayed far from these essential points of Free Baptist theology.<sup>16</sup> At the end of his life, Keirstead’s minister captured his theological position well when he recalled: “To Dr. Keirstead, a finely developed theology was the background of his splendid liberalism. Arminian theology, with its confidence in human nature, opened the door for his broad sympathies, his humanitarian outlook, his compassionate concern for the welfare of his students, his generosity and private philanthropy.”<sup>17</sup>

Keirstead received his first post-secondary education at the Provincial Normal School in Fredericton in 1889 when he was in his late teens. This choice for education was not uncommon for men and some women from modest backgrounds who needed a stepping stone to the professions. The successful completion of the Normal School program yielded a teacher’s license and usually a job. Furthermore, graduates of the school that later attended UNB were sometimes given one year’s credit for their education and were taken into the second year of the Bachelor of Arts program, though this option was not pursued by Keirstead.<sup>18</sup> The available evidence suggests that Keirstead taught school until 1893, when he enrolled at the Union Baptist Seminary, located in St. Martins, New Brunswick, where he matriculated the following spring.<sup>19</sup>

The Union Baptist Seminary was an experiment in Christian higher education. Having been initially established in Fredericton in 1836 by New Brunswick’s Calvinistic Baptists, by 1884 the Free Baptists had become equal partners in the school. The seminary impacted Keirstead in two complementary ways. First, he was exposed to a variety of subjects in the humanities, the arts, and religion as well as a more systematic approach to understanding Christianity that would come to deeply inform his scholarship.<sup>20</sup> Second, the school was structured to inculcate evangelical Protestant faith in implicit and explicit ways. For example, faculty, staff, and most of the students lived, studied, and worshiped together in one large building. This daily routine was designed to impact the lives of students – intellectually, socially, and spiritually. In spite of the religiously motivated social control, the school promoted a

15 I elaborate on this ecclesiastical development further in Daniel C. Goodwin, “The Meaning of ‘Baptist Union’ in Maritime Canada, 1846-1906,” in Ian M. Randall, Toivo Pilli, and Anthony R. Cross, eds., *Baptist Identities: International Studies from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Centuries* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster Press, 2006), 153-74.

16 This is not to suggest that notions of free moral agency were to be found only among New Brunswick’s Free Christian Baptists. Indeed, the spread of this ideology could be found among other Protestant groups as well as some Roman Catholics and Reformed Jews.

17 *Maritime Baptist*, 22 November 1944.

18 Lorna J. Marr, “Women and the New Brunswick Normal School, 1890 to 1910: Society’s Untapped Resource?” (master’s thesis, University of New Brunswick, 2002), 30-1.

19 W.C. Keirstead, “Rural Taxation in the Province of New Brunswick,” *Journal of Political Economy* 34, no. 6 (December 1926): 685. Keirstead mentions that he taught public school from 1890 to 1892, though it is likely that he actually taught until 1893, the year he enrolled at the Union Baptist Seminary.

20 Keirstead’s graduating essay was entitled “Canadian Patriotism,” which suggests that even in his early years of formal education he was occupied with individual’s attachment to the emerging state. See *Religious Intelligencer*, 20 June 1894.

free environment of intellectual and religious inquiry. The calendar of the school stated: “The Seminary is not a sectarian but Christian School. No narrow or sectarian elements are present within its walls. Harmony and happiness are characteristic of its life, and no bigoted or false spirit has any place or standing. The faculty and students represent many shades and forms of religious belief, yet there is no prejudice and no bigotry. The name of Jesus Christ is known and honoured, and simple trust in a Divine Savior is considered the ground work of true religion, and essential of living faith.”<sup>21</sup>

Keirstead’s understanding of Christianity was forged at the Union Baptist Seminary and it continued to inform his non-dogmatic approach to questions of faith throughout his life. He came to regard an open spirit of inquiry as essential to authentic faith and the progress of civilization. The religious position of the school also promoted a generic Protestant vision for Canadian society that Keirstead would later try to realize in the public school system and economic relations. During Keirstead’s time of study, this broad-minded Christianity was powerfully modelled by the school’s young principal Austen K. DeBlois, a freshly minted PhD in philosophy from Brown University.<sup>22</sup>

On a more affective level, the school in St. Martins provided an engaging environment that led to Keirstead’s evangelical conversion experience that changed the direction of his life. Almost immediately, he set out to preach in a number of small rural churches in southern New Brunswick. He declared in a letter to the *Religious Intelligencer* – the denomination’s newspaper – that he wanted to serve God for the rest of his days.<sup>23</sup> Around the time of his conversion, he became involved in social causes such as the temperance movement,<sup>24</sup> the YMCA at Union Baptist Seminary (he became its first president),<sup>25</sup> and the Young People’s Union of his denomination.<sup>26</sup> Social causes informed by Christianity would preoccupy Keirstead for most of his career as a minister and professor. At this point in his life, not even Keirstead could have imagined that he would become an important Christian intellectual who would argue for the necessity of integrating Christian ideals in the growing social and economic systems in the region.

Although he initially considered attending Acadia University for his first degree, Keirstead began his undergraduate program at UNB in 1896 while preaching in churches close to Fredericton.<sup>27</sup> That he would select UNB was not surprising, since

21 *Union Baptist Seminary Calendar 1893-94*, 23. This “mere Christianity” advocated by the Union Baptist Seminary was an expression of the “Evangelical Creed” that is explored in Michael Gauvreau, *The Evangelical Century: College and Creed in English Canada from the Great Revival to the Great Depression* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991), 6-7.

22 *The Daily Sun* (Saint John), 21 August 1894. DeBlois advocated a pan-Protestant learning community where denominational affiliation and a variety of theological commitments were tolerated. Those students who had not yet experienced conversion, such as Keirstead, were also allowed to attend.

23 See Keirstead’s letter in the *Religious Intelligencer*, 12 September 1894.

24 Keirstead was a member of his denomination’s temperance committee. See the *Religious Intelligencer* 20 October 1897.

25 Keirstead was involved in the founding of the YM/YWCA at the Union Baptist Seminary in 1893. See the school’s periodical *The Bema*, 9 December 1893, 104-5. He later joined the YMCA at UNB and represented the chapter at the Northfield Conference in Connecticut in 1897. See his letter in the *Religious Intelligencer*, 30 June 1897.

26 “Letter from the President,” *Religious Intelligencer*, 16 March 1898.

27 *Religious Intelligencer*, 17 June 1896.



it was held in high regard by his denomination's leadership.<sup>28</sup> The university at this time was small, boasting few more than 100 students.<sup>29</sup> Professors tended to be poorly paid and often taught for only a few years before moving on to more lucrative positions in other universities.<sup>30</sup> Three years before Keirstead started at UNB, John Davidson was hired to take up the chair of mental and moral philosophy and political economy. Educated at the universities of Edinburgh and Berlin, Davidson was committed to newer approaches to education that built not only on the classics but also stressed the social sciences as a way to understand and guide social life.<sup>31</sup> During his ten-year tenure, he helped UNB steer a middle course between traditional arts curriculum and the university's growing preoccupation with "applied" programs such as engineering.<sup>32</sup> Shortly before leaving UNB, Davidson wrote "I hope that the University will go on prospering and that the prosperity will be communicated to the Arts course [program] which is what I value most in a college."<sup>33</sup> Davidson's view of university curriculum was impressed upon Keirstead while he was an undergraduate and a master's student in philosophy.<sup>34</sup>

Davidson's tutelage was almost as influential as the New Brunswick Free Baptist religion in the formation of Keirstead's social philosophy. The Scottish academic tradition that Davidson represented was built upon an approach to political economy that easily accommodated insights from philosophy, history, sociology, geography, and psychology. In English Canada during the first half of the 20th century, this undifferentiated "social science" was committed to the unity of truth and resisted the compartmentalization of knowledge and academic disciplines. Ian M. Drummond makes this point implicitly in his study of political economy at the University of Toronto.<sup>35</sup> However, that the comparatively small UNB resisted overt specialization in the late-19th century was as much a testimony to its small size as it was to any particular philosophy of education. When Keirstead arrived on the scene he was ready to embrace an education that was academically challenging, interdisciplinary, and practical. As an educator coming from a denomination whose mission was to save the individual in part by saving society, a varied approach to studying the world was attractive to the 24-year-old. Although no account of

28 *Religious Intelligencer*, 11 June 1890.

29 J.R. P[etrie], "Obituary: Wilfred Currier Keirstead, 1871-1944," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 11, no. 1 (February 1945): 111.

30 Kenneth A. MacKirdy, "The Formation of the Modern University, 1859-1906," in A.G. Bailey, ed., *The University of New Brunswick Memorial Volume* (Fredericton, NB: University of New Brunswick, 1950), 42.

31 Francis C. Walker, "Davidson, John," *Standard Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: Trans-Canada Press, 1934), 142-3. See also Craufurd Goodwin, *Canadian Economic Thought: The Political Economy of a Developing Nation 1814-1914* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 179-83.

32 David Frank, "Davidson, John," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Vol. 13* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 241-2.

33 *The University Monthly*, 23 (June 1904): 255.

34 W.C. Keirstead, "The Light Which Self Consciousness Sheds upon the Existence of God" (master's thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1899). The actual master's degree was granted in May 1900. See *Calendar of the University of New Brunswick, 1902*, 100.

35 Ian M. Drummond, *Political Economy at the University of Toronto: A History of the Department, 1888-1982* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 108.

Keirstead's assessment of Davidson has survived, a comparison of their written works betrays the student's debt to the teacher.<sup>36</sup> The most obvious similarity is in their wide-ranging academic interests and their implicit rejection of specialization. For example, in addition to philosophy and economics, Davidson lectured on psychology, constitutional history, German, and political science. Similarly, at the end of his own career, Keirstead would be regarded as a one-man faculty of arts in the tradition of Davidson.<sup>37</sup> It should also be pointed out that a shortage of teachers due to fiscal restraint no doubt played an important role in them having to cover so many subjects. Desmond Pacey said of Keirstead that he was "a great liberal, a great humanitarian, a great teacher, occupied the chair of philosophy and related subjects (practically the field of the social sciences for a good part of the time) for over thirty years, and was beyond all doubt the dominant figure in the humanities at this university during the first half of the twentieth century."<sup>38</sup> Although UNB did develop more specialized academic departments during his career, Keirstead remained steadfast in his commitment to the unity and coherence of knowledge.

If Keirstead's basic interdisciplinary approach was inherited from Davidson, so too was his belief that knowledge was by definition useful for humanity. Upon his arrival in Fredericton, Davidson declared in his inaugural lecture that "Philosophy is practical . . . and the study of it is fitted to produce men and citizens able to play a strong hand in the game of life."<sup>39</sup> Keirstead did not find in Davidson's approach a secular alternative to his Christian commitment to progress, but rather he saw the broad contours of political economy as a way to achieve some of the social goals of his Baptist religion. Historian David Frank has noted that Davidson's "intellectual endeavours reflected the preoccupation of a generation of political economists who were trying to reconcile economic theory with empirical observation. His work addressed issues of public concern as well as academic interest and, like other economists of the historical school, he injected ethical and subjective elements into the analysis of economic problems."<sup>40</sup> Keirstead would spend his entire academic career drawing deeply from the well dug by Davidson, taking the findings of social science and interpreting them through a grid that betrayed Christian and liberal democratic ideals. Adopting an historical perspective on social problems and incorporating insights from the social justice tradition found in the New Testament gospels, Keirstead would preach countless sermons, make scores of presentations and public lectures, and write many academic journal and newspaper articles. Indeed, one of Keirstead's defining features is that his distinctively Christian approach informed implicitly and often explicitly the bulk of his writings, regardless of the intended audience.

36 B.S. Keirstead, W.C. Keirstead's son who later came to teach economics at UNB, reported in an unpublished paper that Davidson had a significant impact upon the educational trajectory of his father and UNB. See "John Davidson," UA RG 81, B.S. Keirstead fonds, ms 2.2.37, n.d., UNB Archives and Special Collections.

37 J.R. P[etrie], "Obituary," 112.

38 Desmond Pacey, "The Humanist Tradition," in Bailey, *The University of New Brunswick Memorial Volume*, 67.

39 *University Monthly* 12, no. 2 (November, 1892): 18 as cited in Darren S. Lingley, "John Davidson: Political Economist" (master's thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1990), 11-12.

40 David Frank, "Davidson, John," 242.



That Keirstead found Davidson's analysis of political economy relevant is not surprising since a wave of industrialization, spawned by John A. Macdonald's National Policy, was transforming many communities in Maritime Canada. Manufacturing grew dramatically in the 1880s with investments in textile mills, iron and steel plants, and a host of spin-off industries that powerfully reshaped social life and created an identifiable working class. Increased urbanization, out-migration, and a general economic instability in the region also meant that industrial developments were at best a mixed blessing.<sup>41</sup> Davidson was one of the first scholars to draw on empirical sources to systematically diagnose the economic history and fortunes of the region.<sup>42</sup> In fact, he took the classroom to the industrial city of Saint John and to sites closer to Fredericton such as the Gibson Cotton Mill in Marysville, not far from the church where Keirstead preached as a university student.<sup>43</sup> Such field trips were often accompanied by lectures on business and politics. During his time at UNB, Davidson endeavoured to impress upon his students that they, as educated people, had a responsibility to serve and improve society.<sup>44</sup> Later in Keirstead's career, the methodology and moral sensibility learned from Davidson would give him the necessary model and courage to challenge university students and to encourage governments and industries to foster business and social environments that would promote the positive formation of individuals in all aspects of their lives.<sup>45</sup>

If Keirstead grew in his understanding of political economy and the transformation of Maritime society during the late-19th century while a student at UNB, he also grew as a philosopher and theologian. These developments are best seen in his master's thesis, which was supervised by Davidson and partially written while he studied theology at Cobb Divinity School in Lewiston, Maine, during the 1898-99 academic year. This first serious scholarly endeavour, entitled "The Light which Self Consciousness sheds upon the Existence of God," reflects his abiding concern for philosophical anthropology inherited from his Arminian Baptist religion (which emphasized the capacity of humans to choose their own destiny). In this study he examined the materialist and deistic views of humanity and found them wanting. He

41 Larry McCann, "The 1890s: Fragmentation and the New Social Order," in E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muise, eds., *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993).

42 In his *The Bargain Theory of Wages* (New York & London: G.P. Putnam, 1898) John Davidson used statistical data to compare economic trends in the region to those in selected parts of the United States and Great Britain.

43 While Keirstead became known primarily as an educator and scholar, he was an effective minister. In 1897, for example, Keirstead's church in Gibson grew by 31 members, 10 of whom he baptized. See *Religious Intelligencer*, 13 October 1897.

44 Lingley, "John Davidson," 16.

45 In terms of challenging university students, see the newspaper article that reported on Keirstead's address to Acadia University's graduating class: "Says Wealth Should not be Higher Aim: Rev. W.C. Keirstead Special Acadia Speaker," *The Halifax Chronicle*, 26 May 1930; the full text of the address, an untitled sermon based on Mark 10:21, can be found in W.C. Keirstead fonds, UA RG 63, box 9, file 4, item 45, UNB Archives and Special Collections. See also W.C. Keirstead, "The University of New Brunswick Past and Present," *Dalhousie Review* 22, no. 1 (1942): 33-42. In terms of encouraging governments and industries, see, for example, W.C. Keirstead, "The Report of the White Commission," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 1, no. 3 (August 1935): 368-78 and W.C. Keirstead, "Ideals in Dictatorships and Democracies," *Dalhousie Review* 19, no. 1 (April 1939): 41-8.

did not find evolutionary science to be at odds with his own view of humanity, however, for he argued that science discovered raw data about the universe but could not provide explanations for its ultimate meaning.<sup>46</sup> His progressive worldview, which grew out of the Social Gospel of that era, saw in evolutionary science a description of how God had created all things and how humans were the crowning glory of that divinely directed achievement. During Keirstead's student days at UNB, Professor Loring Woart Bailey and others kept students abreast of developments in evolutionary thought, as evidenced by Keirstead's thesis.<sup>47</sup> As Jerry Pitman has shown in his study of religious periodicals in the Maritimes during the last 40 years of the 19th century, newspaper editors and many readers "believed reconciliation [between evolution and Christianity] was possible" and that "they did not think evolution forced Christians to abandon special creation or secularize their faith."<sup>48</sup> Consequently, it is not surprising that Keirstead never saw any conflict between his religion and his belief in evolution.<sup>49</sup> In fact, evolution became a permanent feature of his thought and something that he utilized to explain how God had created the world and humanity.<sup>50</sup> Upon the emergence of humans from the evolutionary process, Keirstead argued, they were given free moral agency and a unique personality. He wrote in his thesis: "Personality to me is the most real, the canon of reality. Why then should I think of the final reality other than in analogy with my own personality, and believe him to be 'Ever active moral reason and purpose at the root of a divine sustained physical order'?" Although Keirstead the philosopher would rely upon the Kantian notion of the moral necessity and a modified Hegelianism that often seems to be little more than theistic evolution in order to argue for God's existence, Keirstead the social gospel preacher would conclude his thesis by stating that "God is Creative Reason, conscious will revealing himself progressively in space and time. God is Infinite Love discipling and developing man, whom He has made in His own image, till he shall become perfected in him."<sup>51</sup>

At the completion of his studies at UNB in 1899, Keirstead knew how to frame philosophical arguments to support his optimistic view of humanity and had grasped the tools of the social scientist from Davidson. These would enable him to try to craft the right environment for the material, social, and spiritual progress of the individual. In short, Keirstead believed he had been empowered through education to advance the Kingdom of God. As a Christian personalist, the starting point for Keirstead's thought would always be the individual. His formal theological studies at Cobb Divinity

46 Keirstead, "The Light Which Self Consciousness Sheds," 1. Keirstead seems to have adopted a dynamic humanism rooted in the transformation of the Victorian understanding of the classics. For a discussion of this intellectual development see Richard Jenkyns, *Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 17, 74-6.

47 Francis J. Toole, "The Scientific Tradition," in Bailey, *The University of New Brunswick Memorial Volume*, 71.

48 Jerry N. Pittman, "Darwinism and Evolution: Three Nova Scotia Newspapers Respond, 1860-1900," *Acadiensis* XXII, no. 2 (Spring 1993): 43.

49 Keirstead, "The Light which Self Consciousness Sheds," 17.

50 For a brief summary of Keirstead's view of science see Leslie Armour, "McCulloch, Lyall, Schurman and Keirstead: Four Philosophic Responses to Science, Religion and the Unity of Knowledge," in Bogaard, *Profiles of Science and Society in the Maritimes Prior to 1914*, 113-15.

51 Keirstead, "The Light which Self Consciousness Sheds," 17, 64 (underlining in original).

School and at the University of Chicago buttressed his liberalism at that point. In a revealing letter to the *Religious Intelligencer* in 1899, he wrote “religion is not mere acceptance of doctrine. God is not found at the end of a syllogism, so that if the logic be shown defective, God is taken away. Religion is one’s experience of God coming, in Jesus Christ, in personal contact with one. Doctrine is but an attempt to interpret that experience. Life is first, and the views of it afterward. The outer form may change . . . but the inner life abides.”<sup>52</sup> While this view of Christianity reflected liberal Protestant influences, it also resonated with Keirstead’s Free Baptist religion, which stressed personal religious experience as essential to authentic Christianity. Religion that was mere cognitive assent was little more than an ideal yet to be realized personally. In short, all truth by definition is personal, a point he made repeatedly in his master’s thesis.<sup>53</sup>

Keirstead’s two semesters at Cobb Divinity School in 1898-99 formed a preparatory period for his doctoral studies.<sup>54</sup> UNB did not offer theology courses per se, and since the mid-19th century it had not been in the business of preparing any candidates for church ministry. While Keirstead benefited greatly from a broad range of courses at UNB, he still had not studied theology formally even though he had been ordained in 1896 and had pastoral experience. Cobb Divinity School was a logical choice for Keirstead as New Brunswick Free Baptists regarded the Free Will Baptists in New England as a sister denomination.<sup>55</sup> The school was founded in 1840 by the Free Will Baptists in Maine and in 1870 the divinity school became the de facto department of theology at Bates College.<sup>56</sup> New Brunswick Free Baptists regularly sent their young aspiring ministers to receive theological training in Lewiston with the view to producing a more cultured and better educated leadership who would increase the denomination’s influence in society.<sup>57</sup>

When Keirstead began his doctoral studies at the University of Chicago in the fall of 1899, he was motivated in part by the close relationship that Bates College and Cobb Divinity School had with the University of Chicago; professors and former students often went to Chicago to teach and study. Shailer Mathews was perhaps the best known example of this connection since he was both an alum and former professor of Bates College before he accepted a position in New Testament and later that of dean of theology at the University of Chicago.<sup>58</sup> The new university, bankrolled by John D. Rockefeller, was an exciting environment for the 28-year-old

52 *Religious Intelligencer*, 22 November 1899.

53 Keirstead, “The Light Which Self Consciousness Sheds,” 1, 7-9, 12, 16-18, 26-8.

54 Although personal information about Keirstead is wanting for especially this period of his life, the records at the Cobb Divinity School indicate that by 1898, both of his parents were dead. See “Faculty Meeting Minutes,” 16 September 1898, Cobb Divinity School Records, CA 02.80, Edmund S. Muskie Archives and Special Collections, Bates College, Lewiston, ME.

55 For an historical survey of Cobb Divinity School and Bates College, written by a New Testament professor admired by Keirstead, see Alfred Williams Anthony, *Bates College and its Background: A Review of Origins and Causes* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1936), 188-205.

56 *Cobb Divinity School Catalogue, 1898-99*, 4.

57 Free Baptists from New Brunswick and Nova Scotia attended Bates College and Cobb Divinity School. See, for example, “Commencement at Bates,” *Religious Intelligencer*, 10 July 1895.

58 E. Glenn Hinson, “Baptist Contributions to Liberalism,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 35, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 46.

New Brunswicker. The university's ethos appealed to Keirstead as it had been shaped by the compelling vision of its president William Rainey Harper, who believed that "Protestant Christianity was commissioned by God to transform the world through democratic institutions and veneration of the individual."<sup>59</sup> In addition, the university was broadly Baptist in its orientation with almost its entire divinity faculty leading Baptist scholars.<sup>60</sup> According to theologian Victor Anderson, these scholars were "intellectually intoxicated by the march of human creative intelligence conceptually moving from its reliance on a metaphysical chain of being grounded on the apriority of absolute Mind. They wanted a theology that would contribute to the advancement of learning, guiding human intelligence creatively, spiritually, and ethically through the age of positive science."<sup>61</sup> While Keirstead never fully embraced his mentors' modification of metaphysics, he was shaped by their conservative progressivism which sponsored a "gospel of improvement" rather than one of "sweeping reconstruction."<sup>62</sup> Indeed, Keirstead's thought would seldom be regarded as counseling radical solutions. Social advancement was incremental rather than revolutionary.

A number of New Brunswick Baptists were already students when Keirstead arrived and over 30 students were involved in a "club" for Canadians at Chicago.<sup>63</sup> While doctoral students had to declare their major area of study, there was a great deal of freedom to take courses in other departments. This appealed to Keirstead's commitment to the unity of knowledge and his dual interest in theology and social science. He registered for the doctoral program in systematic theology and took courses in biblical and theological studies from leading liberal Protestant scholars such as George Burman Foster and Ernest De Witt Burton as well as social science and ethics courses from John Dewey whose fame was growing at that time.<sup>64</sup> From the theology faculty at Chicago – commonly referred to as the "Chicago School" – Keirstead developed a more sophisticated approach to the historical and literary study of the Bible, as he came to believe that biblical criticism could determine more fully the "original meaning" of the text. As well, the scholars under whom he studied also

59 Conrad Cherry, *Hurrying Toward Zion: Universities, Divinity Schools, and American Protestantism* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 2.

60 See Hinson, "Baptist Contributions to Liberalism," 39, 40, 45-7. He suggests in his article that the Baptist faith was especially compatible with the rise of liberal theology that stressed, among other things, free moral agency, personalism, the centrality of Jesus Christ, and the use of reason in accommodating Christianity to the explosion of knowledge at the end of the 19th century. W.C. Keirstead clearly held to these points by the time he completed his master's thesis at UNB. Nevertheless, he still held to the need for personal faith and conversion throughout his life, a testament to his New Brunswick Free Baptist roots.

61 Victor Anderson, "Pragmatic Theology and the Natural Sciences at the Intersection of Human Interests," *Zygon* 37, no. 1 (March 2002): 162.

62 Cherry, *Hurrying Toward Zion*, 11. These mentors, for instance, became less sure about the capacity of humans to gain knowledge about transcendence and about classic theological formulations about Christ.

63 *Religious Intelligencer*, 25 September 1901.

64 See *Religious Intelligencer*, 3 April 1901 and Keirstead's typed notes taken from a course he took at the University of Chicago: John Dewey, "The Sociology of Ethics," University of Chicago, 1902-03, UNB Archives and Special Collections. Keirstead had been introduced to Dewey's thought while at UNB as it was a regular part of the Bachelor of Arts program in the mid-1890s. See *University of New Brunswick Calendar, 1896-97*, 45-6.

stressed the transformative value of critical Bible study for lay people.<sup>65</sup> This approach resonated with Keirstead's belief in the democratization of biblical knowledge and its relation to individual formation and societal progress.<sup>66</sup> Since he held that all knowledge is useful, it must be pressed into the service for the benefit of the masses.<sup>67</sup> It is not surprising, then, that he would continue to teach and preach the Bible as a "layman" throughout his life.<sup>68</sup>

Keirstead's doctoral dissertation focused on the work of Albrecht Ritschl, the German Protestant theologian who stressed that the "object of God's love is the organic community, the church" and that "human faith was not passive but expressed actively: toward God in humility, patience, and prayer and toward others in love – in an ethical vocation aimed at the Kingdom of God."<sup>69</sup> That he should choose to work on Ritschl was not a temporary change of direction in Keirstead's intellectual concerns, as Armour and Trott suggest in their study on Canadian philosophers.<sup>70</sup> In fact, Keirstead was following a predictable path of scholarly inquiry. As Richard Allen has argued: "Ritschl's thought, usually unsystematically appropriated, provided the implicit theological foundations of much of the social gospel" in Canada.<sup>71</sup> A fair reading of Keirstead's corpus would suggest that he drew implicitly on Ritschl's notion of Christian community as the Kingdom of God, though he did reject the German theologian's suspicion of individual religious experience – something that went against Keirstead's Christian personalism. From his studies with Dewey, Keirstead came to understand more fully how social institutions in a democracy, such as governments, public education, the church, and the economy, could be fashioned so that individuals would achieve their social, moral, and spiritual potential. While Clifford Williams, whose master's thesis is the only sustained study of Keirstead's

65 This influence can be seen in a letter Keirstead wrote to his New Brunswick Free Baptist constituency extolling the value of the historical-critical method of Bible study for churches. See *Religious Intelligencer*, 14 November 1900.

66 See Keirstead's sermon "The Importance of Bible Study to [the] Individual," ca. 1899, UNB Archives, UA RG 63, box 5, item 1. This address seems to have been given to fellow students at Bates College, Maine. See also, in *Religious Intelligencer*, 17 August 1904, comments on a sermon preached by Keirstead in Saint John during the summer of 1904 that stressed the need for laypeople to study the Bible in the light of new scholarship.

67 For a helpful discussion of this theme consult Robert Lee Carter, "The 'Message of the Higher Criticism': The Bible Renaissance and Popular Education in America, 1880-1925," (PhD diss. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1995), 5-68. Keirstead continued to teach and preach the Bible as a "layman" at the George Street United Baptist Church throughout his time at UNB.

68 He remained an ordained minister in good standing with Maritime Baptists throughout his life. See the many entries related to Keirstead's Christian volunteer service in the Church Records, George Street United Baptist Church, 1908-1944, Acadia University Archives.

69 See the two articles that were published from his dissertation research: Wilfred Currier Keirstead, "Theological Presuppositions of Ritschl," *The American Journal of Theology* 10, no. 3 (July, 1906): 423-51 and "Metaphysical Presuppositions of Ritschl," *The American Journal of Theology* 10, no. 3 (July, 1906): 677-718. In terms of Ritschl himself, see Darrell Jodock, "Ritschl, Albrecht Benjamin," in P.W. Carey & J.T. Lienhard, eds., *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Theologians* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 437.

70 Leslie Armour and Elizabeth Trott, *The Faces of Reason* (Waterloo, ON: University of Waterloo Press, 1981), 394.

71 Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada 1914-28* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 4.

thought to date, states that the New Brunswick philosopher never maintained a consistent metaphysical position, it may be argued that unity can nevertheless be found in his thought.<sup>72</sup> It simply turns on his Arminian Baptist view of humanity and his belief that structures must continually be adapted to ensure the progress of humanity. To expect a tightly crafted and consistent philosophy from Wilfred Keirstead is to misunderstand the passion that drove much of his thinking, writing, and speaking. He was committed to clear forms of thinking that could be pressed into action and transform the individual and society – not in fashioning an overarching philosophical system in the Kantian or Hegelian tradition. In fact, the Chicago School impacted Keirstead’s overall method of inquiry far more than any particular aspect of his theological beliefs. This is not surprising in light of recent developments in the historiography of North American Protestant liberalism. Kathryn Lofton has compellingly argued that modernist theologians, such as those under whom Keirstead studied, advanced an “aggressive, demanding process of cross-examination and inquiry, a process that transformed the terming of biblical narrative and Christian faith within universities, Protestant churches, and American culture.” For these scholars, Lofton suggests, the “*process* of believing is emphasized over and above the definitive dogma. How you believe, for the modernists, was your belief.”<sup>73</sup>

From 1903 to 1906, Keirstead was the minister at First Baptist Church in Rockford, Illinois, during which time the church achieved numerical growth, much-needed repairs to its buildings, and financial stability.<sup>74</sup> Keirstead also became a popular lecturer in the city, giving a series of talks on topics such as temperance.<sup>75</sup> Even though brief, his pastorate indicates that Keirstead took seriously the notion of the educated and professional clergyman as social reformer and public educator that was being advanced at the University of Chicago Divinity School. Growing the Kingdom of God required that the laity be educated on a host of topics informed by the latest scholarship. Although Keirstead was much loved as a pastor by the Rockford church and was praised in the church records for bringing “vigor and enthusiasm” to the position, frequent letters and visits to the Maritimes during his sojourn in Illinois suggest that he had a particular attachment to the place of his birth and his early formation as a Christian and scholar.<sup>76</sup> Consequently, it is not surprising that he not only resigned his very successful position at First Baptist Church, Rockford, but that he also declined an offer of a teaching position at the University of Chicago in order to become the Baptist minister in Woodstock, New Brunswick.<sup>77</sup> There were many highly educated Baptist preachers and educators in the greater Chicago area, but there were relatively fewer educated Baptists in the Maritimes. In fact, Baptist preachers

72 Clifford Williams, “The Political Philosophy of Two Canadians: John Watson and Wilfred Currier Keirstead” (master’s thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1952), 66-107.

73 Kathryn Lofton, “The Methodology of the Modernists: Process in American Protestantism,” *Church History* 75, no. 2 (June 2006): 378.

74 Keirstead was the pastor of First Baptist Church, Rockport, Illinois, from October 1903 to November 1906. See Church Records, First Baptist Church Rockford, IL, 1903-1906 (copies). I am grateful to Shirley Smith, church secretary at First Baptist Church for sending me copies of relevant material from the minute books pertaining to Keirstead’s pastorate.

75 *The Rockford Republic*, 28 January 1905.

76 Church Records, First Baptist Church Rockford, IL, 4 November 1906.

77 Church Records, Woodstock United Baptist Church, 1907-08, Acadia University Archives.



who left the region for graduate theological education in the United States tended not to return to the Maritimes.<sup>78</sup> It should be pointed out as well that Keirstead did not have any immediate family living in the Maritimes by this time. His parents were both dead by 1898 and his brother was a minister in New England. Consequently, W.C. Keirstead's attachment to the Maritimes should be seen, in part, as an expression of his commitment to fostering "Christian progress" within his geographical and spiritual home.

Keirstead's notions of progress meshed well with the church union movement that was sweeping Maritime Baptists in the late-19th and early-20th centuries. In 1905, the Calvinistic Baptists of the Maritimes and New Brunswick's Free Christian Baptists merged to create the United Baptist Convention of the Maritime Provinces. The following year, Nova Scotia's Free Christian Baptists joined the union. During the critical meetings among the Calvinistic Baptists during the summer of 1904, Keirstead was invited to speak to the issue of Baptist union while on vacation from Rockford. The Free Christian Baptist newspaper reported with pride that he "made a deep impression. We heard it spoken of on every hand as a strong and clear presentation of the truth."<sup>79</sup> Ecumenical cooperation and denominational mergers had become commonplace in late-Victorian Canada with a series of Methodist and Presbyterian unions that culminated in the formation of the United Church of Canada in 1925.<sup>80</sup> Keirstead and Maritime Baptists more generally shared the national reformist impulse that swept progressive Protestants throughout Canada. Wilfrid Laurier had said that the 20th century was to be Canada's century and, in the minds of many Protestants, denominational mergers would contribute toward this vision by providing a more united voice and coordinated efforts in making Canada "His Dominion."<sup>81</sup> Keirstead believed that Baptists were especially well positioned to contribute toward Christianizing society because they were among the most democratic and non-creedal denominations that celebrated the freedom and unlimited potential of individual personality. In his view, and that of the Baptist scholars of the Chicago School, they did not carry the burden of tradition, complex doctrinal systems, and hierarchical authority structures that frequently played havoc with adapting to modernity.

Not surprisingly, the prospect of becoming the Baptist minister in Woodstock was attractive to Keirstead because he would become the first pastor of a congregation comprised of former members of the Main Street Free Christian Baptist Church and the Albert Street [Calvinistic] Baptist Church. He began his official duties in December of 1906 and, although he resigned his position within 20 months to teach at UNB, he continued to take a keen interest in the church and was often a guest preacher.<sup>82</sup> During

78 See the editorial in *Religious Intelligencer*, 31 December 1902.

79 *Religious Intelligencer*, 31 August 1904.

80 See Daniel C. Goodwin, "Maritime Baptist Union and the Power of Regionalism," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 41, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 125-46; see also James Cameron, "The Garden Distressed: Church Union and Dissent on Prince Edward Island, 1925," *Acadiensis* XXI, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 108-31.

81 Burkhard Kiesekamp, "Presbyterian and Methodist Divines: Their Case for a National Church in Canada, 1875-1900," *Studies in Religion* 2 (1973): 280-302.

82 See Keirstead's "Church Dedication," which he presented 24 May 1908, in Church Records, Woodstock United Baptist Church, 1908, Acadia University Archives as well as "History of the United Baptist Church of Woodstock, NB," n.d., 2, Acadia University Archives.

this short ministry in Woodstock, Keirstead continued to be a community educator and social reformer. Shortly after his arrival, he declared in a sermon that was published in the local newspaper that “the enemies of religion are not education and investigation. Religion has nothing to fear from intellectual freedom and nothing to gain from intolerance and bigotry and prejudice. But the spirit of commercialism and self seeking; the mad rush for material wealth; the desires for pleasure which has [*sic*] intoxicated us and the sensuality of our nation are the deadly foes of the religious values.”<sup>83</sup> As a Christian thinker committed to modern forms of thought and organization, Keirstead’s sermon reflected not only the “Chicago School” that resisted the compartmentalization of religion but also John Davidson’s commitment to the unity of knowledge. That Keirstead’s approach to theological questions seemed to be different from previous generations of preachers did not go unnoticed. Two months after he resigned his position, the Woodstock church held a congregational meeting to discuss obtaining a new minister. A motion was made “that this church refuse to call as pastor any minister who was known to hold doctrinal views commonly known as ‘the new theology’.”<sup>84</sup> Although the motion was soundly defeated with only two voting in its favour, it does suggest that there was awareness among the congregants that Keirstead approached the faith in a new way.<sup>85</sup> Yet for Keirstead himself, the essential nature of the Maritime Baptist faith of his childhood remained intact. At the formal dedication of the new Baptist church building in Woodstock on 24 May 1908, Keirstead prayed that “saints may be edified, sinners converted, and little children instructed in the Word and brought into the fold.”<sup>86</sup> It would have been difficult for anyone in a church meeting to argue that such a prayer commitment did not reflect the experiential faith of the previous century, the “new theology” notwithstanding.

Exactly how far Keirstead would have developed his thought in the direction of the Chicago School’s new theology is uncertain; after his appointment to UNB in 1908 he concentrated almost exclusively on injecting Christian ethics and theological insights into social policy and criticism in order to promote his version of progress that was first fleshed out in his master’s thesis.<sup>87</sup> While his Chicago mentors were committed to accommodating Christianity to modern sensibilities – something Keirstead himself applauded – the minister-turned-professor was more interested in

83 *Carleton Sentinel* (Woodstock), December, 1906. This sermon may have been his inaugural address to the newly united congregation. Similar themes can be found in his baccalaureate sermon. See *Carleton Sentinel*, 16 August 1907.

84 Church Records. Woodstock United Baptist Church, 7 September 1908, Acadia University Archives.

85 For explicit examples of the “new theology” at work in Keirstead’s sermons delivered in Woodstock, see *Carleton Sentinel* for 4 January 1907; 1 March 1907; 18 October 1907; 25 October 1907; and 24 April 1908. Other sermons clearly reflect Keirstead’s ongoing commitment to the Evangelical Baptist religion of his youth; see *Carleton Sentinel* for 27 December 1907; 8 January 1908; and 24 April 1908. I am indebted to Professor David Bell of the UNB Law School for copies of these extraordinary sermons.

86 Church Records. Woodstock United Baptist Church; “Church Dedication,” Church Records, Woodstock United Baptist Church, 1908, Acadia University Archives.

87 According to theologian Creighton Peden, scholars of the Chicago School became so enamoured with accommodating Christianity to modern thought that they came to deny transcendence itself. See his *The Chicago School: Voices in Liberal Religious Thought* (Bristol, IN: Wyndham Press, 1987), chs. 1-3. See also William Dean, *American Religious Empiricism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1986), 19-40.

Keirstead himself applauded – the minister-turned-professor was more interested in embedding Christian thought in the economic and social order. Appointing Keirstead to a professorship at UNB was a natural choice for President Cecil C. Jones as both men had studied for their bachelor’s and master’s degrees together at the provincial university and had also studied at the University of Chicago at the same time. According to Keirstead, this shared background allowed them to form “an intimate friendship” during their student years. Consequently, Jones would have understood implicitly the strong religious orientation of his friend’s thought as well as Keirstead’s belief in the unity of knowledge and Christian personalism. That President Jones pursued someone such as Keirstead to fill such an influential position at UNB may reveal why Keirstead felt so free to inform his teaching and scholarship with his faith.<sup>88</sup>

While the intersection of Keirstead’s Christian worldview with his scholarship can be easily seen in his writing from 1908 to 1944, it was particularly important in terms of his thought in the fields of economics and education, two areas that engaged him from his early days at UNB until his retirement.<sup>89</sup> Keirstead continued to publish in religious periodicals until the late 1920s; however, his efforts became increasingly taken up with the social order. In 1912 he wrote an article entitled “Some Essential Facts of Social Progress” that captured the tension between the individual and society – a tension that can be seen throughout his corpus. He argued that individuals have always existed in groups with prescribed social habits. Change or “social progress means the modification or reconstruction of the existing customs, institutions, or beliefs through the originative, inventive intelligence of the individual.” The engine of progress, according to Keirstead, was the individual – a position consistent with his Christian personalism, which regarded human personality as the image of the Divine. Societies become enlightened when they realize that freedom for individuals is necessary to unleash the creative potential of humans. Moreover, while the individual has been shaped by custom and tradition, he maintained that progress would only occur when individuals challenged the very tradition that had shaped them and brought stability to their society. Freedom, then, was an essential ingredient in his recipe for progress. In an almost Hegelian style, Keirstead declared: “The conservative and radical, the priest and the prophet, the orthodox and the heretic, the legalist and the anarchist, the capitalist and the socialist, the persecutor and the reformer – each is impotent without the other, and each, checked by the other, may make a contribution toward genuine social welfare.”<sup>90</sup>

Keirstead’s thought was permeated by the assumption that progress was incremental and that “reconstruction” of every period required that the ideals be applied to all aspects of life so as to become the new “custom.” If these traditions are to be realized, society “must give a higher appreciation to the function and worth of the individual. For the pivot of progress is the soul of man.”<sup>91</sup> He argued that since the

88 See Keirstead’s memorial reflections on Jones in *Daily Gleaner*, 15 August 1943.

89 A full exposition of the Keirstead corpus would require a much longer treatment than is needed for the purposes of this article.

90 W.C. Keirstead, “Some Essential Facts of Social Progress,” *Biblical World* 39 (1912): 38-46 (especially 39-40).

91 W.C. Keirstead, “Some Essential Facts,” 43.

dynamics of progress were now known, it was possible to guide the process through the deliberate refashioning of societal institutions. He regarded the process of “modernization” through state formation, urbanization, and industrialization as an opportunity to expand the Kingdom of God. Christian principles were needed to negotiate the new paradigm.<sup>92</sup> The ideals that were essential to progress were to be found in the Western tradition, in the “arts, the sciences, the literature, the hymns and psalms and prayers, the social institutions of our race.” For Keirstead this understanding of progress did not imply a journeying away from Christianity, but was rather the result of “the living spirit of God which binds humanity into a unity and conditions the development of today . . . enabling us to carry forward the onward march of the Kingdom of God.”<sup>93</sup> Modernization was not an evil to be resisted by the social scientist/philosopher, but rather a divinely appointed opportunity to be taken.<sup>94</sup> This had been the position of the Free Christian Baptist leaders of his youth as well as the sophisticated scholars with whom he had studied at the University of Chicago.

In a sermon delivered in 1910, Keirstead confidently affirmed that the public sphere of business and politics “can be changed and must be changed. Don’t mistake this fact, they can be made Christian and that is our task as Christian men and women. The ethics of the profession must be rationalized and widened into the ethics of the Christian life. The ethic of statesmanship must be the ethics of the Christian man. There is only one standard and it is the task of the Christian man to uphold and stand for this standard in public and social life.”<sup>95</sup> Keirstead’s scholarship in economics and business exemplified his desire to bring “the Golden Rule” into the public sphere. Rejecting Adam Smith’s notion that the laws of supply and demand would prove to be universally beneficial, he argued for state regulation of business activities to keep “injustice and social injury” in check. Even those who benefited from unrestrained capitalism were in danger of injuring their own “moral character.” Drawing on his background in political economy that he gained from John Davidson, he believed that proper scientific evaluation of the economy would provide a course of action that would promote the ethic of the “Golden Rule.” For him, this biblical principle stood for “the Christian valuation of personality and requires of industrial enterprises as of other institutions such organization and functioning as shall enrich personal life and promote the common happiness and progress.” Far from advocating the revolutionary dismantling of capitalism, which he identified with the Soviet Union’s form of communism, Keirstead argued predictably for an evolutionary approach that gradually and “scientifically” regulated the industrial order. This was an approach that

92 For a stimulating discussion of the “Liberal Order” that Keirstead regarded as highly compatible with Christianity, consult Ian McKay, “The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History,” *Canadian Historical Review* 81, no. 4 (December 2000): 617-45.

93 W.C. Keirstead, “Some Essential Facts,” 46.

94 Michael Gauvreau and Olivier Hubert note that the tendency in Canadian religious historiography to see the liberalism of the modern world as incompatible with Christianity speaks more to the historians’ own meta-narratives than it does to actual historical reality. See Michael Gauvreau and Olivier Hubert, eds., “Introduction,” *The Churches and Social Order in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Canada* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006), 3-45.

95 W.C. Keirstead, untitled sermon, c.1915, UA RG 63, series 3, box 5, item 27, UNB Archives and Special Collections.

was always gradually changing.<sup>96</sup> Even in the 1930s, when notable Maritime Baptist ministers were calling for the dismantling of the capitalistic system, Keirstead maintained his “evolutionary” position.<sup>97</sup> However, his more moderate position on the economic crisis did not prevent him from crafting a two-part article published by *Maclean’s* in 1934 entitled “The Claims of the Maritimes” in which he argued on the basis of the British North America Act that the “equality [of the provinces] aimed at was real equality of benefits and burdens within a bigger organic union.” Furthermore, because of the changing socio-economic conditions, he declared that “a radical reconstruction of the relations between the Dominion, provincial and municipal governments” was warranted and that the Maritimes had a claim for increased federal monies.<sup>98</sup> In the end, however, while Keirstead agonized over the social consequences of economic decline, his Christian personalism prevailed. Those involved in business and politics needed to take up their responsibility to act ethically for the sake of society as well as their own spiritual well-being and to try to foster equitable social relations. The grand socializing institutions properly constituted on Christian principles, such as the family, local churches, and schools, were needed to balance any tendency to compete for selfish gain in the individual. Indeed, influenced by John Dewey on this point, Keirstead believed that competition was not innate in humans and that proper socialization and education could reduce or remove it, even from a nation such as Canada.<sup>99</sup>

So central was public education to Keirstead’s vision for a modern and Christian New Brunswick that his important study on rural taxation in his beloved province focused primarily on how the collection of public revenues impacted the funding of schools. Published in the *Journal of Political Economy* in 1926, Keirstead showed how unjust, inefficient, and outdated the taxation system was in New Brunswick’s rural parishes. Modernization of the taxation system was not the enemy but the way out of the “evils and inequalities of parish underassessment.” A fully coordinated, province-wide approach to collecting revenues at the municipal and parish levels in line with modern bureaucratic models would promote biblical justice. With passionate frankness, he stated that when “the administration of a general property tax is in the hands of an untrained, arbitrary, and autocratic official, ignorant of modern methods of taxation and lacking any high sense of justice, citizens may be robbed of the equality of treatment which is regarded a birthright in modern society.”<sup>100</sup> Those being “robbed” were children and families in rural areas that had inadequate funding for

96 W.C. Keirstead, “The Golden Rule in Business,” *Journal of Religion* 3, no. 2 (March 1923): 142, 147, 149.

97 Eric Crouse, “Capitalism Under Fire: Voices of Baptist Social Protest in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia During the Great Depression,” *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society* 43, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 39-56. In spite of the fact that Keirstead would have been a well-known “Baptist economist” in the region, he failed to enter the debate over capitalism that raged in the *Maritime Baptist* in the 1930s. Instead, he busied himself with less contentious activities such as serving as a judge in Acadia University’s essay competition on Maritime economics, which awarded S.A. Saunders \$1000 for his essay *The Economic Welfare of the Maritime Provinces*. See Saunders, *The Economic Welfare of the Maritime Provinces* (Wolfville, NS: Acadia University, 1932), 3.

98 W.C. Keirstead, “The Claims of the Maritimes,” *Maclean’s*, 15 February 1934, 42.

99 W.C. Keirstead, “The Golden Rule in Business,” 154.

100 W.C. Keirstead, “Rural Taxation in the Province of New Brunswick,” 682, 677.

“robbed” were children and families in rural areas that had inadequate funding for schools. Consequently, individuals and rural communities were disadvantaged in realizing their full potential, an affront to his Christian personalism. “Modern” methods of taxation had the potential to usher in greater justice and progress. Having grown up and been educated in rural Kings County, New Brunswick, Keirstead would have naturally empathized with rural folk trying to secure an education from an inadequately funded school system.

As professor of philosophy and education from 1932 to 1944, Keirstead became involved in a number of committees that made recommendations for changes to New Brunswick’s public education system. An undated document, probably from 1937 and entitled “Introduction: Educational Aims,” contains a variety of ideas and statements that reflected Keirstead’s sentiments even if they were not actually written by him. For example, the committee refused to present society in a dualistic fashion that posited the secular over the sacred, but rather saw it as an organic whole where public education combined with “home, the church, [and] the community at large” to produce a “good citizenship.”<sup>101</sup> Thirty years earlier, Keirstead had made the same point in a two-part article published in the *Maritime Baptist*.<sup>102</sup> For Keirstead and the committee, education was fundamentally a moral exercise. The committee declared: “We must supply experiences and direct activities in such a way that the children will grow up with a social and moral consciousness. The spirit of Christianity should be ever present in the school – not the teaching of a particular religious dogma, but rather the exemplifying of those beliefs and the practice of those virtues which are the common heritage of the Christian world.”<sup>103</sup> It should be remembered that Keirstead’s experience at the Union Baptist Seminary in the mid-1890s exposed him to a non-dogmatic and generically “Christian” approach to education, where the goal was the moral and spiritual formation of the individual regardless of denominational affiliation. That these notions showed up in a document designed to provide general principles for the public education system in New Brunswick is not surprising given the presence of UNB’s professor of education and the widely held notion that society was essentially Christian in its outlook – a view likely shared by many on the committee. As an “expert” Keirstead was responsible for “setting up the background” of the committee’s report, which was logical since he had carried out an extensive study of provincial systems of education throughout the nation and had studied with John Dewey, one of the architects of public education in the United States.<sup>104</sup> Yet although there are similarities between the thought of Dewey and Keirstead, it would

101 “Introduction; Educational Aims,” W.C. Keirstead fonds, UA RG 63, series 1, no. 12, UNB Archives and Special Collections.

102 W.C. Keirstead, “The Baptists and Public Schools,” *Maritime Baptist* for 3 December 1906 and 10 December 1906.

103 “Introduction: Educational Aims,” W.C. Keirstead fonds, UA RG 63, series 1, no. 12, UNB Archives and Special Collections.

104 Glimpses of Keirstead’s involvement on this committee can be seen in “Curriculum Committee Meeting, 29 July 1937,” W.C. Keirstead fonds, UA RG 63, series 1, no. 1, UNB Archives and Special Collections. For his studies on the state of Canadian public education, see the collection of his more than 25 newspaper articles published in 1937 in W.C. Keirstead fonds, UA RG 63, series 5, item 9, UNB Archives and Special Collections. Similar themes are also developed in his unpublished address “Religious Education in the Public Schools,” ca. 1911, UA RG 63, series 3, item 42, UNB Archives and Special Collections.



be a mistake to assume that the latter adopted the program of the former. It is more accurate to say that Keirstead found great compatibility between his New Brunswick Baptist view of public education and that of the famous American philosopher because he regarded the modern liberal program as the best medium through which to propagate the Christian religion in the 20th century. So tireless was Keirstead in promoting educational reform that one of his colleagues declared that "no man of his time has exerted a greater influence in New Brunswick's educational circles, and that influence has spread beyond provincial boundaries."<sup>105</sup>

While the degree to which Keirstead influenced economic or educational policy in New Brunswick is difficult to ascertain and outside the parameters of this article, it is evident that this Maritime intellectual does not fit the influential historiographical school that sees social scientists and philosophers as agents of Canadian secularization during the first three decades of the 20th century. If anything, Keirstead's intellectual formation and life suggest that religious ideas such as those originating in New Brunswick's Free Christian Baptist community in the late-19th century actually survived and thrived, for a time, in the emerging liberal order. Incorporating insights from John Davidson's teaching on political economy and socially conscious liberal Protestantism as well as Dewey's social philosophy at the University of Chicago, Keirstead negotiated the contemporary scene of state formation with relative ease and without apology, never feeling it necessary to modify his essentially religious convictions. While it is clear that not all intellectuals sustained a Christian worldview during this critical period in Canada's history, there is evidence to suggest that religious categories of thought continued to inform social philosophy until at least the end of the Second World War. Michael Gauvreau's important revisionist study on Harold Innis, for example, indicates that this well-known Canadian intellectual continued to draw on his Baptist religion long after it was thought he had abandoned the Christian faith.<sup>106</sup> It could be that historians of ideas in Canada need to piece together with greater care the intellectual formation and development of our nation's social scientists and philosophers during this critical period. That many of them, such as Wilfred Currier Keirstead, adopted the language and some of the central ideas of modernity should not be regarded as a jettisoning of religious conviction or a de facto expression of secularization. Indeed, sweeping generalizations such as Doug Owsram's "As the twentieth century began . . . the academic in his ivory tower and the clergyman preaching on esoteric points of doctrine were increasingly irrelevant in a society faced with new and dangerous social and economic divisions" may well have to be reconsidered. Keirstead, and no doubt others like him, was neither stuck in an "ivory tower" nor a parson answering ethereal questions no one was asking.<sup>107</sup>

105 J.R. P[etrie], "Obituary," 111.

106 Michael Gauvreau, "Baptist Religion and the Social Science of Harold Innis," *Canadian Historical Review* 86, no. 2 (1995): 161-204.

107 Doug Owsram, *The Government Generation: Canadian Intellectuals and the State 1900-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), x.