

## **Preaching Premiers: The Political and Religious Errands of William Aberhart and Ernest Manning<sup>1</sup>**

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In July 1932 William Aberhart, principal of Crescent View High School in Calgary, arrived in Edmonton, as he did every July, to mark exams. At these annual grading sessions Aberhart regularly met with a chemistry teacher, Charles Morton Scarborough, of Edmonton. Scarborough was an avid reader of Major C.H. Douglas' social credit theories and, while grading exams, would extol the virtues of social credit, attempting in vain to attract Aberhart to his view. However, 1932 was different from other summers. That July Aberhart arrived in Edmonton in an unusually sullen mood as the economic depression and severe drought were seriously grinding on the Albertan economy. He watched helplessly as the graduates of his school could not find work. One graduating student even committed suicide that spring.<sup>2</sup>

Aberhart, like many others, saw his income slashed as the Canadian jobless rate hit 20% and Albertan incomes declined overall by 62% from 1928 to 1932, second only to Saskatchewan at 72%. Private Albertan debt climbed to the highest level in Canada.<sup>3</sup> Even military enlistment was affected as Albertan young men were allegedly rejected at an exaggerated rate on account of rickets caused by malnourishment.<sup>4</sup> Alberta was at the time a rural society, and as mortgage rates on farms and equipment rose, many could not make the interest payments. The cities were no better as 15% of Edmontonians and 13% of Calgarians lived on the relief rolls. Relief numbers would be higher but single men were not counted, being sent to work camps, and many central Europeans if not deported were

simply cut from the rolls.<sup>5</sup>

Aberhart was also very busy. In addition to being principal, he taught mathematics and grammar at Crescent View – Calgary’s newest and largest high school at the time. He also ran the Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute (CPBI) and he was a well-known radio preacher with his “Back to the Bible” weekly broadcasts. The ravages of the economic disaster cut deeply not only into his own income but into donations for CPBI and his radio ministry. His listeners, too, were overwhelmed by their own economic distress – though not too distracted to listen. There, at St. Stephan’s College at the University of Alberta, Aberhart converted to social credit, giving Scarborough what he wanted: a well-known, articulate, dynamic speaker with a radio audience. And Aberhart received what he wanted: a simple formula for all economic problems that he could easily understand and explain. A month after his conversion Aberhart began the work of establishing a social credit presence in Calgary and started to lay the foundation for a movement that would become a political dynamo running Alberta from 1935 to 1972.<sup>6</sup> Aberhart himself would be premier and minister of education until his death in 1943.

Though his politics were termed Social Credit, his religion was premillennial dispensationalist Christianity. At its most basic, dispensationalism is a view of scripture and history that divides all time into seven dispensations. Each dispensation of time (of varying lengths) has its own covenant with God and portions of divine promises and curses peculiar to it. The sixth dispensation is the Age of the Church, which is Aberhart’s (and our) present. It will end with the rapture (a dispensationalist innovation) when faithful Christians are taken from earth into the air to be with Christ. Then seven years of tribulation ensue when the Holy Spirit and the brake it provides on evil is removed. This period will see the rise of the Antichrist, the mark of the beast, and other manifestations of evil. After the seven years the battle of Armageddon takes place in which Christ defeats Satan, ushering in a millennium of peace, the seventh dispensation. Following the seventh dispensation comes the judgment of all the living and dead, the final resurrection, and the creation of a new heaven and earth. Premillennialism argues for a rapture before the tribulation, preceding the final millennium of peace. By contrast, post-millennialists argue for the return of Christ after a millennium of a Christianized society built upon Christian ethics.<sup>7</sup>

Having its roots in the Plymouth Brethren of Ireland, dispensationalism came to North America through the preaching of John Nelson Darby.

In America such evangelical luminaries as C.I. Scofield and Dwight L. Moody further spread dispensationalism through the creation of correspondence courses and Bible schools. As a young man Aberhart took such a course from Scofield and drank deeply from the dispensational well.<sup>8</sup> Later, much of Aberhart's material, both on the radio and at CPBI, was prophetic. David R. Elliott describes the religion of "Bible Bill" as "highly sectarian, separatist, apolitical, other-worldly, and eschatologically oriented." The eschatology Aberhart espoused was dispensationalism, which, according to Elliott, was a "pessimistic cyclical philosophy of history" that viewed "history to be on a downward course" and, as such, "efforts at ameliorating social conditions were seen as futile and, thus, dispensationalists had a reputation for lack of social concern."<sup>9</sup> The contradiction seemed obvious to many: how could a religious belief in the imminent return of Jesus, a highly supernatural and pessimistic view of society, meld with the here-and-now of depression-era politics?

#### ***William Aberhart***

William Aberhart was born and raised in Huron County, Ontario, near Seaforth where he graduated high school. He completed Normal College in Hamilton and for two years taught near Wingham at Brantford Central School. In 1910 he moved to Calgary, Alberta, as a principal, eventually working at Crescent Heights. While growing up in southern Ontario, he attended the Bible Class at Knox Presbyterian Church where he became interested in a correspondence course taught by C.I. Scofield. Aberhart began preaching in 1905, as a layman, and in 1918 he began the Calgary Prophetic Bible Conference for intensive Bible study, "formed by a number of earnest men of different denominations" to contemplate the return of Jesus.<sup>10</sup> His conference lectures were very popular and in 1925 he began airing them on radio under a broadcast contract with the W.W. Grant Company. At its peak, Aberhart's radio audience numbered up to 350,000 listeners. He emphasized a literal reading of the Bible, the second coming of Jesus, and eventually brought social credit theory into the mix. At the same time, he raised \$60,000 to build the CPBI building, which was completed in 1927.<sup>11</sup>

As an educator Aberhart had an exceptional reputation and emphasized to his students the importance of hard work, vigor, and determination. Though the mixture of politics and religion in his broadcasts may have seemed idiosyncratic, his status as a respected educator

gave him much currency with his audience. As Gerald Friesen explained, “if he saw a way out of the economic morass and could associate this plan with biblical prophecy, then he offered hope to thousands who had little else left.”<sup>12</sup>

The Conference originally met at the public library, and then when they outgrew that they moved to Westbourne Baptist Church. In 1919, they met at the Paget Hall to study the Book of Revelation, and the numbers grew. The following year, 1920, he moved his ministry into the Grand Theatre, then again in 1923 to the larger Palace Theatre.<sup>13</sup>

Through CPBI Aberhart also ran a correspondence Bible study course that boasted 2400 students of childhood age by 1930, resulting in approximately 21,700 correspondence lessons mailed that season alone. Prizes were given to students who averaged 75% or more on nine or more lessons; they included copies of *Pilgrim’s Progress*, *Traveller’s Guides*, and *Illustrated Bible Story Books*. Students without a Bible in their home would also receive a free copy from CPBI. In 1930, 256 children made a commitment to Christ, while dozens others received personal correspondence “regarding their soul’s salvation.”<sup>14</sup>

Significant, in addition to the correspondence to so many children, and by extension their parents, was the geographical extent of his mail ministry. All provinces from BC to Quebec had families involved, with the vast majority from Alberta and Saskatchewan. However, in the United States, there were correspondents from seven states – the Dakotas, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, and California – with the majority from Washington and Montana.<sup>15</sup> Less than two years away from the start of his political career, Aberhart was broadcasting throughout western Canada, the upper mid-west and northern and western states, engaging families through his correspondence course, and developing a Bible institute.

The nerve centre of Aberhart’s religious operation was CPBI. He nicknamed it “The Great Prairie Monument to the Faith” and based it on fundamentalist principles. The doctrinal statement of CPBI not only summarized their belief, but also positioned them in the cultural battles of the day. The “Divine Verbal Inspiration” and “their absolute supremacy, infallibility and efficiency in all matters of faith and practice” led the dozen statements. Others included “the Immaculate Conception of the Lord Jesus Christ,” the creation of humanity “by the direct act of God, and not by an evolutionary process,” and the final resurrection at the conclusion of the coming millennium.<sup>16</sup>

The aims of CPBI were also grounded in the socio-religious conflicts of the day. While their primary purpose was to hold services for “winning souls for the Lord Jesus Christ,” it was also “to use every legitimate, Christian means of combating and resisting Modernism, Higher Criticism, Skepticism and Secretarianism in all its forms,” and ultimately to blunt the influence that the “Modernists, Evolutionists, and skeptics of every kind” had on the next generation.<sup>17</sup>

Aberhart’s correspondence course, “Systematic Theology,” had a strong dispensational component to it, modeled clearly on the example of Scofield with the course tag, borrowing from Scofield’s claim, of “rightly dividing the word.” Aberhart wrote of “dispensational distinctions,” “dividing the Word dispensationally,” and of people possessing “dispensational knowledge” in an effort to show how the Bible does not contain contradictions, but rather differences for different eras, explaining, for example, dietary injunctions from the vegetarian state of Eden to the fully-stocked meat-filled final banquet on the day of judgment.<sup>18</sup>

If premillennialism was a fundamentalist utopianism, Social Credit was a clear expression of political utopianism in western Canada.<sup>19</sup> It promised prosperity and ease in the near future, if it only were followed. It was a technocratic philosophy premised upon two pillars: technology would rescue humanity from toil and drudgery; and experts would solve society’s problems in a technocratic bureaucracy. Prosperity would be perpetual.<sup>20</sup> It was even the essence of democracy:

The form of society, which is designed to enable its individual members to gain what they desire from their association, is termed “democracy” . . . You will observe that because individuals are induced to association most effectively by the belief that thereby they can get what they want, and because democracy is a form of social organization designed to enable them to realize this belief, therefore democracy is the natural form of society. Again, the basis of democracy must be “social credit” or the inherent belief that its individual members in association can get what they want.<sup>21</sup>

In its basic form, social credit was the brainchild of English engineer Major C. H. Douglas. Aberhart took Douglas’ ideas and recast them for Alberta. He proposed that without interfering with the structures of private enterprise, ownership, and responsibility, adjustments could be made to monetary policy that would necessitate the distribution of a society’s “cultural heritage” to ensure a baseline of purchasing power. Cultural

heritage was the value of the society and its resources and, due to rapacious bankers and a corrupt financial sector based in eastern Canada, Albertans were missing out on their share of abundance. There was even a most effective rallying cry, "Poverty amongst Plenty," that explained it. Douglas developed the "A + B Theorem," readily adopted by Aberhart to explain the solution.<sup>22</sup>

The theorem is explained this way: "A" is the costs paid to individuals (wages, etc.) and "B" is the cost paid to organizations (raw materials, fees, service charges, etc.). Thus, A + B is the cost of goods and it guarantees that individuals will never reach their purchasing potential for cost will always be greater than "A." The solution is to find a way for individuals to have purchasing power higher than A + B. For Aberhart, the solution was a \$25 per month (approximately \$450 in 2014 dollars) dividend paid in Albertan issued script to every bona fide adult citizen of Alberta – coming from the province's "cultural heritage" or its "social credit." This was to place every Albertan's spending power above A + B and, as costs went up, the dividend produced by the value of Alberta's resources would increase, thus everyone would have greater purchasing power than the cost of goods – ensuring perpetual prosperity. In effect, the government would subsidize citizens' purchasing power with government controlled credit (not currency, but cheques as he said in numerous sermons) so stockpiled goods could be bought up and economic recovery would result. Within this framework maximum incomes would be instituted and "just prices" established for the regulation of profits. The program had everything for Aberhart: it was moral in creating a just society, it weakened the eastern financial grip on Alberta, it shared the inherent wealth of the province with its citizens, and it was easily expressed in Christian terms.<sup>23</sup>

Social Credit rallies took on the trappings of evangelical revival meetings. Often opening with the hymn "Our God in Ages Past," these "monster meetings" had singing, speakers, and enthusiasm. Combined with Sunday picnics, these rallies were complemented by a growing network of study groups that gathered weekly throughout the province, numbering over 1400, reading and discussing social credit material. Attempts by Aberhart to enact parts of the Social Credit platform (though famously never the \$25 dividend program) to reform the banking industry, assert monetary policy for Alberta, and oversee newspaper coverage of Social Credit government were all struck down by Ottawa – either by parliament or the courts. Significantly, most of his policy rebukes were the

result of being completely outside the BNA Act. These defeats did little to dim people's view of Aberhart as it played into the same political message as the campaign: big eastern powers are against Alberta, be they courts, government, or banks.<sup>24</sup>

Significantly, as early Social Credit held anti-large-scale economic views, a central feature of dispensationalism is the belief that big finance, big banks, and centralized state power are the bedrock of a satanic system. That Aberhart sought redemption for Alberta through an economic system that guaranteed social justice and prosperity – without recourse to big corrupt banks and financiers – melded seamlessly with his theology. Though his style was often described as dictatorial, even totalitarian, and the power of the provincial government was to be extended throughout the economy, he continually asserted that he was only out to create the base of egalitarianism predicated upon the individual living in association with others, assuring the principle of private property and enterprise. This helped deflect criticism that his social-democracy was promoting socialism.<sup>25</sup>

Aberhart typically explained his social credit vision as a binary between the people and the rapacious “50 big shots who are exploiting the country.”<sup>26</sup> In his broadcasts, after addressing questions from listeners about Social Credit, he typically went into a sermon, which was rarely far from politics. As was the case on 24 March 1935, when he preached “What would you think of a man who would praise and defend and support one guilty of fornication or graft . . . and at the same time could criticize and find fault with an effort to help Society and your fellow men to live decently and respectably.”<sup>27</sup> Then tying this to the question “Why did Christ die?” he described the story of Moses who was met with tricksters in Pharaoh's court, “agents of the devil,” who reproached him for his “plan” as they did not want him liberating people, “just as these men [his opponents] of corrupt mind did . . . Talk about blood money! This is worse – to accept money to work for a system that is destroying the youth of our land; putting them into camps where they have no chance to live as they should.”<sup>28</sup>

Even Easter was a Social Credit message. Aberhart expounded on the resurrection of Jesus: “I think the movement which we represent is in perfect accord with the spirit of Easter.” After asserting that the conditions in 1935 Alberta were as “distorted, dull, discouraging, and hopeless” as in early first century Judea, he proclaimed, “The Easter message is a message of hope. There is deliverance. There is salvation. God can, and will work

even a miracle to bring his people into the place of joy and prosperity. Is that not a message for all believers in Social Credit?"<sup>29</sup> Later in the same address, he answered a question about the nature of Social Credit philosophy: "It is so fair and just; so civilized and Christian; it is based wholly and solely on the Golden Rule; it teaches us to live and let live; it drives off the vultures that feast on humanity through its economic helplessness."<sup>30</sup> Those vultures for Aberhart were always "big interests," for they "will ever strive to prevent the emancipation of the common people. International finance that ever lives on the blood of the unfortunate men, helpless women and hungry undernourished children is determined to maintain its group."<sup>31</sup>

Early on, in 1936, economist and lawyer H.F. Angus saw in the Social Credit victory of 1935 a warning to be heeded. Describing Aberhart's radio program and Bible institute as "propaganda," Angus went further, noting that Aberhart's enthusiastic, prayerfully emotional followers easily dismissed the critics of Social Credit as "the economic devil." Ultimately the lesson of the Alberta election of 1935 for Canada was the ease with which someone could master radio for propaganda's sake. Canada was lucky this time for "Aberhart cannot be exported." This was an "infection" in society that, due to its religious nature, no amount of education could eradicate.<sup>32</sup> Recently, too, some historians see in Aberhart little more than egoism, unguarded ambition, and easily dismissed religious convictions in face of political hunger and social reality.<sup>33</sup> In contrast, other scholars, such as Thomas Flanagan, argue that the millennialism of Aberhart's Christianity merged seamlessly with the chiliastic qualities of Social Credit – where both religious and political systems pursued "cosmic renewal."<sup>34</sup>

Thus, it appears, as Elliott concedes, "From a wide survey of literature on dispensationalism . . . that Aberhart may have been its first active adherent to have fostered a political movement with a positive social character."<sup>35</sup>

Aberhart was an exceptionally strong personality – even dictatorial to some – as a teacher and principal in the public school system, at his own CPBI, and as party leader. Within two years of winning a commanding victory in 1935, for example, he endured a significant backbench revolt in his party, escaped recall through retroactive legislation, and had his agricultural minister resign and leave the province. A man sure of his convictions, known to have his bald-head, atop his large heavy body, turn crimson in the face of disagreement, Aberhart possessed an eclectic



Christianity informed strongly by premillennial dispensationalism, Pentecostalism, and elements of the occult towards the end of his life, notably an interest in palmistry and horoscopes. He preached a mixed gospel of dispensationalism and social credit and he explained these tensions away as, according to dispensationalism, there is a seventh dispensation coming – the millennium ruled by Christ, prior to the final judgment. Therefore, there was still at least a thousand years to go. Thus, he never abandoned his dispensationalism and it did not contradict his political work.<sup>36</sup>

### ***Ernest Manning***

Ernest Manning came to Calgary from Saskatchewan to attend CPBI. Listening to Aberhart's sermons on the family radio, he decided to learn from him personally and enrolled as the first student at CPBI. Eventually he became Aberhart's right hand man in both the religious and political arenas – taking over both upon Aberhart's death in 1943. Manning toned down the prophecy, but nonetheless it was part of his cosmology.

Manning wrote for the monthly magazine, *The Prophetic Voice*, published by CPBI, that usually highlighted his broadcasts. Most of his sermons were exegetical lessons on prophetic biblical texts, with political commentary at times. Christians, he argued:

are to stay the corrupting tendencies and exercise a purifying and preserving influence in all contacts of life. They have an obligation to seek the application of Christian principles in community and national life . . . How far short we have fallen!! . . . We wrack our brains to provide more formidable laws to curb crime and crookedness and we strain our purses to provide more police to enforce the laws. We tax our energies and our resources to create outer restraints upon humanity but we are not willing to exert ourselves to bring our fellow man to Jesus Christ, the only One Who can provide him with the inner restraint necessary to help him overcome evil with good . . . [then] we be able to check the sinking of the moral foundations of our nation.<sup>37</sup>

Where Aberhart had unbridled corporate capitalism and big eastern finance as his villains, Manning had communism or totalitarianism. As he preached, "The totalitarian nations openly renounce all allegiance to the

God of Heaven, and are pursuing with a vengeance their avowed intention of obliterating Christianity from earth. But hear me; the Christian democratic nations are turning their backs upon God in just as positive a manner.” On this point Manning implored his listeners to stop calling Canada a “Christian nation,” for Canada had long rejected Christ as its sovereign – it was no Christian nation. Finally, he called Canada to return to its heritage “under God,” as Abraham Lincoln had called upon Americans to do the previous century.<sup>38</sup> In so doing, Manning preached a “born again” gospel where Aberhart had been more preoccupied with details of prophecy.

According to Manning, early on in Social Credit’s history, in the fall of 1932, it was simply an educational exploration to understand better the Great Depression, “to see what possible application Douglas’ Social Credit theories would have to the situation, and the method that we followed was to organize study groups,” which Manning and Aberhart visited throughout the province during holiday breaks from school. Their message was simple: “Now look, there are things that can be done, and the thing for you, as the people, to do is bring pressure to bear on your elected representatives.”<sup>39</sup>

Manning acknowledged that monetary reform was never a real possibility for constitutional reasons. However, there was more to Social Credit: “as I say, all this other business of trying to establish a free and open society where you encourage private initiative and enterprise and create an atmosphere where people can see their own enterprise and initiative get the results they want in their society, well, this is a bigger part of the Social Credit philosophy that we embrace as the monetary reform part.”<sup>40</sup> He added, “The end was to create a free society in which people would be able to get the results they individually wanted from their affairs.”<sup>41</sup>

Manning also worked at modernizing Social Credit in the 1940s. He publicly denounced anti-Semitism and purged Social Credit of the “little faction of Douglasities” after his Albertan Human Rights Bill failed in court. The Rights Bill was the final attempt to create a genuine Social Credit society in Alberta. Manning promised to provide the necessities of life – food, clothing, education, for example – for those under nineteen and a retirement pension for those over sixty. Albertans between nineteen and sixty were provided with work opportunities and all of this was to be financed through reforms to the monetary system along Social Credit lines. Manning submitted it to court for testing and the entire bill died – easily

lampooned by opponents who mocked his going to court before taking it to the people. He continued to advocate for monetary reform at the federal level, but provincially he changed course.<sup>42</sup>

At the provincial level Manning ran a conservative party, jettisoning Aberhart's social democratic legacy, emphasizing the individual, rejecting redistribution, supporting with lavish spending social programs that promoted egalitarianism – education, health, transportation. He had welfare means tested and healthcare co-pays instituted. As Thomas Flanagan and Martha Lee argue, by the end of the 1940s Manning had “de-eschatologized [social credit] into social conservatism,” where social conservatism meant that humanitarian concerns of an “awakened” conscience were combined with freedom of the individual and “enlightened” private enterprise.<sup>43</sup> It was to be individualism-based humanitarianism that was neither noninterventionist nor noncollectivist on the part of the government.<sup>44</sup>

As Aberhart threaded the needle between religious belief and responsibilities as premier, Manning also had to manage the expectations of his radio listeners. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, as Alberta's liquor laws were being liberalized to expand licenses for liquor stores and drinking establishments, to end gender segregation laws, and to amend the separation of food and drink in hotels/restaurants, his audience was perplexed. Though he preached against intoxicants and agreed that alcoholism was a serious issue, he wrote a longer than usual response to Mrs. Harriet Lane of Spring Coulee, a fan of his radio ministry. Manning wrote that it was a concern of his that no solution had yet been discovered for alcoholism: “I am convinced it is useless to try to legislate people into a state of temperance. No law, however well meaning, is possible of enforcement unless it carries the endorsement of at least a majority of the people affected by it and certainly this is not the case in respect to laws frequently proposed for the curbing of the manufacture or sale of liquor.”<sup>45</sup>

Manning explained that the government received more demands for easing laws than tightening them on alcohol: “I cannot quite agree that the fact the Government does control the distribution of beer and liquor has given the liquor business a status of decency that it otherwise would not enjoy. Certainly so called ‘social’ drinking is equally as prevalent in those countries and states where the Governments do not exercise such control.” He disagreed that the province should create special alcoholic hospitals; instead he considered education a better vehicle for preventing alcoholism and he had the Department of Education work on temperance education.<sup>46</sup>

Of special concern to Lane was how Manning justified his actions as premier as an evangelical Christian. Manning replied:

Perhaps I might be permitted to refer particularly to your comments regarding my efforts to lead people into the Christian way of life being, in your opinion, inconsistent with the Government not imposing even greater restrictions on the sale and distribution of liquor. My concept of democratic government is government that carries out the expressed will of the people whom it serves rather than imposing on them its own viewpoint no matter how idealistic that viewpoint might be. Furthermore, the reason I give every minute of time that I can to the promulgation of Christianity is because I am convinced that there is no other solution to the liquor problem or any other problem that stems from the debased appetites of men other than the transformation of life that is brought about through the spiritual regeneration of the individual.<sup>47</sup>

Going further, he continued:

If I thought for one moment that the evils of the liquor business could be eliminated or even curbed by preaching temperance sermons, I would preach one every Sunday but I am convinced while such a course would be popular with some people it would not be effective in solving the problem with which we are faced. On the other had, if men and women are led to embrace true Christianity and experience genuine personal regeneration there is no more liquor problem as far as they are concerned.<sup>48</sup>

### ***Conclusions***

Premillennial dispensationalism is considered by many to be pessimistic and socially apathetic. That people like Aberhart and Manning chose political careers and were spectacularly successful at them, while holding to a premillennial cosmology seems contradictory.<sup>49</sup> While the temper, language, charts, diagrams, and otherworldliness of dispensationalism strikes many outsiders as conspiratorial and bizarrely subjective in its biblical interpretations and readings of history, it is important to understand that dispensationalism was considered by its adherents to be both supernatural and scientific. These two seeming

opposites worked together for the dispensationalist scholar who, believing the scriptures to be the inerrant word of God protected by the Holy Spirit, set about ascertaining the solid facts contained within to understand the world, cosmos, and future. Leading dispensationalists, such as C.I. Scofield, from whom Aberhart took correspondence courses, understood their method of reading the Bible as scientific and stated it as such, as “rightly dividing the word.” It was common sense, some equating their method with the inductive reasoning of Bacon’s scientific method.<sup>50</sup>

Scofield was also connected to Keswick holiness, which emphasized practical holiness and Christian service, illustrating that premillennialists needed not be so otherworldly to forget they lived on Earth. The practical side of Christianity, or social concern, while secondary to saving souls, nonetheless was essential.<sup>51</sup> Later in life, Manning would say that Aberhart did have a concern for others predicated on the biblical injunction to be “thy brother’s keeper.”<sup>52</sup>

Aberhart, while a premillennialist, was also a religious entrepreneur. He was at the forefront of religious radio broadcasting in Canada, a teacher, principal, self-educated in religious terms, of Presbyterian background – which, coming from a non-religious home, he came to on his own. Thus it is reasonable that, within Aberhart, was an amalgam of entrepreneurialism, concern for youth/society born of both religious training and his educational career, and premillennial urgency conjoined with the “scientific” dispensationalism that would likely appeal to his mathematical, grammatical, and fundamentalist mind. Premillennial apocalypticism certainly trades in utopianism, and Social Credit provided a scientific, common sense explanation for the disaster of the 1930s with a readymade devil – big banks and big finance located in eastern Canada – and a simple solution that would produce perpetual abundance and prosperity. Aberhart continuously explained his view of the end of days as at a minimum a thousand years in the future. Thus, while adhering to premillennial discourse, Aberhart saw no barrier to saving society from the Great Depression. It provided motivation and resources for him to believe in the rescue of the individual and society from decrepitude.<sup>53</sup>

This exploration of Aberhart and Manning’s religio-political cosmologies, focused on prophecy and social issues such as temperance, illustrates that more than dissonance, contradictions, and egos were at work. Sidestepping these particular religiosities, or concluding that their religion and politics were simply contradictory or merely expedient, misses an important aspect of the evolving nature of social reform in

1930s and 1940s western Canada that became a precursor for modern Canadian conservatism.

In 1974, forty-seven years after the CPBI building was constructed, and a quarter-century after the institute closed its doors having merged with another Bible institute, the building that had headquartered the Social Credit Party until 1966, when it sat empty, except for a brief time when it served as a dance hall, demolition equipment brought the structure down. Making room for commercial development in downtown Calgary, what was arguably the birthplace of the Social Credit movement in Alberta and centre of premillennial radio broadcasting in Canada, ceased to exist. Two years later a historical plaque was affixed to the new building reminding pedestrians and shoppers that hymnals and Bibles once rested where shoes and handbags now gleam.<sup>54</sup>

### Endnotes

1. A Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada (SSHRC) grant and a Canadian Mennonite Faculty Research Grant funded research for this essay.
2. Bob Gilmour, "Unsung Teacher Changed the History of Alberta," *Edmonton Journal* 9 (January 1995): <http://www.aberhartfoundation.ca/PDF%20Documents/Premier%20PDF%27s/Charles%20Scarborough.pdf>
3. Gilmour, "Unsung Teacher;" David Laycock, *Populism and Democratic Thought in the Canadian Prairies, 1910 to 1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 204; Dave Gower, "A note on Canadian unemployment since 1921," *Perspectives* 4, no. 3 (Autumn 1992): article number 3, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/studies-etudes/75-001/archive/e-pdf/87-eng.pdf>; and Noah M. Meltz, *Historical Statistics of Canada (11-516-X)*, "Section E: Wages and Working Conditions," "Table E1-13: Wages, salaries and supplementary labour income, by province, 1926 to 1975." <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-516-x/sectione/4147438-eng.htm#1>.
4. Joe Clark, "A Desperate People Turn to Social Credit," *The Albertan*, 21 August 1965, 7. <http://www.aberhartfoundation.ca/PDF%20Documents/Premier%20PDF%27s/Desperate%20People%20-Albertan%201965.pdf>
5. Alvin Finkel, *The Social Credit Phenomenon in Alberta* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 14-17.
6. Gilmour, "Unsung Teacher;" Laycock, *Populism and Democratic Thought in the Canadian Prairies*, 204.

7. Standard studies in dispensationalism include Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism, 1875-1982* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2008); and Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).
8. David R. Elliott, "The Devil and William Aberhart: The Nature and Function of His Eschatology," *Studies in Religion* 9, no. 3 (September 1980): 325.
9. David R. Elliott, "Antithetical Elements in William Aberhart's Theology and Political Ideology," *Canadian Historical Review* 59, no. 1 (1978): 39-40.
10. "William Aberhart, B.A., Our President, Dean and Lecturer," *Radio News* (Calgary: Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute, [1930]), 4, Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute fonds, M1357 File 7: Radio Sunday School. - ca. 1930-1969, Glenbow Library and Archives, Calgary, Alberta (GLA). Quote from "The Building of the Institute," *Bulletin of the Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute*, 7, Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute fonds M1357 File: 1 CPBI, GLA.
11. "William Aberhart, B.A., Our President, Dean and Lecturer," 4; "The Building of the Institute," *Bulletin of the Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute*, 7, Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute fonds, M1357 File: 1 CPBI, GLA; Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 411-12; and Laycock, *Populism and Democratic Thought in the Canadian Prairies*, 216.
12. Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 412.
13. "The Building of the Institute," 7.
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