Radio Mind: Protestant Experimentalists on the Frontiers of Healing

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In conversation with recent scholarly approaches to the interrelationships of religion, media, and technology, this paper analyzes a neglected form of metaphysical religion within the rubric of Protestant experimentalism. The main sources are a group of early twentieth-century Anglican clerics with shared interests in telepathy, psychic research, psychology, and healing. The paper argues for attention to the “sensational forms” (or paths of transmission) through which these clerics understood divine–human communication to occur. Analyzing divine vibration, telepathy, and psychic energy as Protestant sensational forms has allowed me to set my analysis of experimentalist healing within intersecting historical contexts, including competing theological imaginations, new communication technologies, discourses of scientific authority, and cultural exchange on colonial frontiers.

In 1923–24, FREDERICK DU VERNET, Anglican Archbishop of the remote northern British Columbia Diocese of Caledonia, contributed a series of unusual articles to his church’s national newspaper in...
which he argued for the Christian virtues of telepathic healing via “the law of divine vibration.” Dubbing this telepathic process “radio mind,” Du Vernet (1925: 53) argued that it represented the ultimate blend of science and Christianity: “The law of psychic harmony pervades our whole religion. The vibrating Energy of God reaches its climax in the harmony of active Love.” Du Vernet advocated a kind of spiritual healing very different from that of the 1910s and 1920s revivalists who were provoking heated controversy among Protestants further south in Canada and the United States; he was a Protestant experimentalist who drew inspiration more from technological innovations than from scriptural accounts of Pentecostal gifts (Opp 2005; Curtis 2006). Part of a stream of combinative and technophilic spiritual healing largely neglected by scholars of Protestantism, Du Vernet’s experimentalism was a current of Anglican modernism. Influenced by the attempts of post-war spiritualism and psychic research to bring earthly and ethereal realms together, and shaped by the new maps of the soul drawn by emerging discourses of psychoanalysis, experimentalists also offered tentative critiques of the role of Christianity in imperial expansion. They were modernists experimenting at the juncture of spiritual, psychic, and colonial frontiers.¹

Protestant “experimentalists,” as defined by their contemporary, Episcopalian biblical scholar Kirsopp Lake, were modernists who chose to put Christian texts and practices, including prayer, to the test of experience with the help of such ostensibly scientific methods as historical text criticism, psychic research, or psychoanalysis. They confidently evaluated (or confirmed) the union of Christianity, technology, and telepathy through what they considered to be tools of science: impartial measures of an empirical reality that included the divine (Skrine 1917; Lake 1926: 64, 72).²

Other contemporaries voiced far bleaker views, for example, the philosopher R.G. Collingwood argued that the “mechanized art of the wireless and cinema” evoked only “crude emotional responses” that were merely a powerful “form of dope” (Collingwood 2005: 258; Dean 2006: 148). Similarly, critic Walter Benjamin tied the early twentieth-century

¹ My analysis has been shaped by a growing literature on the concept of the frontier and its uses for the study of religion, including Albanese (1997), Gilman (2003), Klein (1997), Van der Veer (2001), and Viswanathan (1998).

² Some Anglicans have rejected being categorized as Protestants, but experimentalists have been more ecumenical in their approach. Given their questioning of dogma and their embrace of experience these clerics would have also fit within the more common category of “modernists” as defined by Anglican Henry Major, who wrote the introduction to Frederick Du Vernet’s collected essays (Major 1927: 8; Du Vernet 1927).
fascination for psychic research and the occult among the educated classes to a decline in the quality of education and a simultaneous rise in consumer capitalism, lamenting the “subterranean interplay” between advertising (especially via the radio) and occult movements: “if one of them has mastered the art of transforming the commodity into an arcanum, the other is able to sell the arcanum as a commodity” (Benjamin 1999a: 543, 1999b: 656; Modern 2006). Protestant experimentalists, however, argued for the revitalizing possibilities of new technologies, perpetuating a tradition in which “mechanical mediation became instead a vehicle of presences, a salvific force alive with vibrational and telegraphic connections” (Schmidt 2000: 239; Noble 1997).

Drawing from Birgit Meyer’s (2006: 9) discussion of the “sensational forms” of religious experience—or the paths of transmission “through which religious practitioners are made to experience the presence and power of the transcendental”—this paper argues that sensational forms such as divine vibration and psychic energy need to be analyzed within multiple contexts including competing theological imaginations, new technologies, epistemologies of embodiment, and legacies of empire. My focus is a group of early twentieth-century Anglican clergy from England and Canada who embraced automatic writing, radio, and telepathy—all techniques putatively for communicating across distance—as metaphors for theological inquiry and usable tools for the practice of Christian healing. Three early twentieth-century Anglican clerics, Du Vernet (1860–1924), Percy Dearmer (1867–1936), and James Ward (1885–1958), were especially concerned with spiritual healing and the religious implications of new communication technologies, and they all ventured to both literal and figurative frontiers. Their shared commitments toward spiritual healing led them to psychic research and psychology, as well as toward abiding involvements with the newly coined notion of telepathy. I limit my attention to these Canadian and British Anglican experimentalists partly because they were particularly captivated by psychic phenomena and communication technologies, and partly because they were intimately familiar with the conflation of Church and empire in their work as missionaries and educators.³

Attending to how psychic interests and colonial encounters shaped their views of spiritual healing and divine–human communication allows me to situate their Christian experimentalism within a perspective

³ Due in part to their ties to the British empire, Anglicans had a much greater presence in missionary work in Western Canada than did American Episcopalians on the western frontier of the United States (Gaustad and Schmidt 2002: 279; Hayes 2004: 16).
of “contact and combination” (Albanese 1997) not often applied to the study of mainstream Protestant churchmen of high office.4

THE MIRACLE OF RADIO AS A SENSATIONAL FORM

In the early 1920s, when “the miracle of radio” (Fairbairn 1926: 4) was still a wonder of technology with uncharted possibilities, a variety of Christians—from legendary Pentecostal evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson to little known Anglican experimentalist Du Vernet—imagined the wireless as a spiritual realm of frequencies and waves that could communicate the Gospel and heal the sick (Du Vernet 1925; Blumhofer 1993: 194).5 Working within a theological and therapeutic tradition especially indebted to John Wesley, which thought of “electricity as an elemental form of power, derived from God” (Porterfield 2005: 164), radio-savvy Protestants considered “wireless telephony” to be a technology that not only transmitted sound across distance, but that also conveyed divine healing energy to the sick. Protestant experimentalists such as Du Vernet drew explanatory power from wider currents of harmonial religion—what historian Sydney Ahlstrom described as “forms of piety and belief in which spiritual composure, physical health, and even economic well-being are understood to flow from a person’s rapport with the cosmos” (Ahlstrom 2004: 1019). Although their strong critiques of the injustices of capitalism distinguished them from prophets of prosperity, experimentalists valued technology and Christianity as paths to spiritual composure and physical health in a manner that was neither metaphorical nor miraculous. They are perhaps better categorized within Catherine Albanese’s definition of metaphysical religion, in which the power of mind, including telepathic communication, new technologies, and theories of healing energy are predominant (Albanese 2006).

Narratives of the lineage of Christian healers who drew from divine electricity and spiritual radio seem to have missed experimentalists as some of the most dedicated practitioners of this metaphysical technology, in their focus on radio healers with conservative dispositions. In

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4 Joanna Dean (2006) shows how bringing Anglican modernism with spiritual healing, psychology, and awareness of empire together had very different results for the celebrated yet marginalized woman writer, Lily Dougall—a Canadian who spent most of her adult life in Great Britain and worked with Nancy Dearmer in the Guild of Health.

5 Radio was widely considered “miraculous” and path breaking in 1920s North America (Vipond 1992: 22; Hangen 2002). Radio broadcasting began in Canada and in the United States in 1920 and became widely accessible (in terms of both numbers of radio stations and the affordability and availability of radio sets) by the late 1920s (Vipond 1992: 14–15, 37).
Amanda Porterfield’s (172) account, for example, the lines of transmission proceed straight from Wesley to anti-modernist Pentecostals such as McPherson (with detours to spiritualist and mesmeric-inflected versions of Christianity such as Christian Science), without noticing the “modernist” Protestants, such as Du Vernet, who also thought of radio as a sensational form for therapeutic divine communication. Although with less dramatic effects than better-known (and more consumer-driven) radio ministries (Hangen 2002), the theologies of electricity, radio, and divine communication developed by modernist Protestants are significant for what they reveal about the mutually constituting relations of religion and new technologies. As Protestants experimented with tapping into divine radio waves as sources of telepathic healing, channeled automatic writing from theologically inclined spirits of the dead, and combined telepathy, psychoanalysis, and meditation, they ventured to the frontiers of both technological and theological imaginations. Influenced by philosophers such as William James (1907) and Henri Bergson (1920), who themselves dabbled in psychic research and wrote about the vitality of energy, experimentalists’ versions of spiritual healing remained rather vague in terms of what illnesses could be cured through these means (Hollinger 2004). Although the pervasive “nervousness” and psychic disease of the 1920s was a common target of healing for both healing revivalists and experimentalists, the latter rarely claimed cures of “organic” diseases (e.g., cancer) alongside these “functional” ones (Opp 2005).

Radio theologies were not unique to Anglicans. While Du Vernet developed his theory of “radio mind,” at a less physical level, R. Edis Fairbairn, a minister of the newly formed United Church of Canada, also attempted radio theology. He argued that the same “polarity” underlying electricity and radio was also “a divine principle of the universe” that could turn disputes and contradictions among Christians into productive and complementary “contraries”—a process of resolution very much in keeping with the United Church’s foundational value of Christian unity in the midst of difference (Fairbairn 1926). Experimentalists were also active in the United States, where metaphysical imaginations had long flourished (Albanese 2006). When addressing an audience of women on a 1913 missionary tour of China (before the advent of radio broadcasting), Sherwood Eddy, the well-known American Protestant YMCA evangelist, shared not only the gospel, but

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6 While in this paper I will mostly focus on the ways that Anglicans developed theologies of healing with resort to new media, the work of Lisa Gitelman (1999) and Roger Luckhurst (2002) demonstrates the ways that developers of new media were themselves shaped by religious imaginaries.
also a demonstration of the possibilities of wireless telegraphy (Eddy 1913). By 1922, when radio stations were first on the air, Eddy compared prayer to a “vast electric railway system” and a “wireless apparatus,” asking: “if man can thus increasingly utilize natural laws and forces, why cannot God also, if it is his world?” (Eddy 1922: 123–124). Eddy later became an exponent of psychic healing (1954).7

As the technologies and possibilities of media transformed their daily lives, Anglo-Protestants in North America and Britain were also grappling with the ways that therapeutic epistemologies—including biomedicine, Christian Science, Pentecostalism, Catholic piety, and even the healing practices of non-Christians on the mission field—were reshaping their bodies and theologies (Mullin 1996; Hayward 2004; Opp 2005). Many Anglicans, Methodists, and other Protestants emphasized the alliance of Christianity and biomedicine by helping to usher in medicalization via religious networks and rhetorics: they established hospitals and medical and nursing schools, gave massive support to medical missions domestically and abroad, were themselves among the most respected and powerful of medical men and women, and were some of the harshest critics of non-biomedical approaches to healing. In this wave of Protestant medicalization, some liberal Protestants allied themselves with healing in a manner that was less “orthodox” in both Christian and medical senses.

ANGLICAN EXPERIMENTALISTS

Percy Dearmer, an Anglo-Catholic on his way to becoming a modernist, was an Oxford-trained Anglican priest based in London, a centre of Anglicanism and empire (and a centre of spiritualism and psychic research), who held a deep interest in Christian socialism, the relation of art, music, and liturgy, and the science of mind and body. He also served as a Red Cross chaplain at the front during World War I. In contrast, the Canadian-born Du Vernet graduated in the first class of a newly formed evangelical Anglican college in the colonial outpost of Toronto, and was eventually a missionary Archbishop living in the sparsely populated area of northern British Columbia. Where some of Dearmer’s deepest influences living in urban England included John Ruskin and the Arts and Crafts Movement, Du Vernet was profoundly shaped by his encounters with First Nations peoples and the mountainous forest wilderness of his

7 “Liberal evangelical” Episcopalian Carl Eckhardt Grammer also had psychic and telepathic interests which historian William Katerberg (2001) passingly refers to as “strange” by evangelical standards.
diocese, which he regularly traversed by foot or canoe. James Ward was shaped both by English Anglicanism and its Canadian version, as an Alberta-raised, and Oxford-educated priest of the parish of St. Stephen-in-the-Fields in Toronto. The Anglo-Catholic-leaning Ward is best known for having pioneered a religious radio program on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, but he was also a prolific writer of many works of published and unpublished fiction, non-fiction, drama, and poetry. Dearmer shared Ward’s interests in radio and religious drama, but my focus here is not on their more conventional uses of radio in the 1930s and beyond, but on the ways that radio as a new medium in the 1920s helped to shape their imagination of what spiritual communication could entail.

Despite their great differences in contexts, all three of these men cultivated interests in psychic phenomena and psychology as means to communicate with the Christian God, and developed similar hopeful embraces of the embodied psyche as a realm in which Christian faith could be tested and proven as a valid source of healing. Each of these experimentalists rose to prominent positions in the Anglican hierarchy though with uncertain trajectories, with Dearmer eventually becoming Canon of Westminster Abbey late in life, Du Vernet serving as Archbishop of Caledonia, and Ward acting as Canon of St. James Cathedral in Toronto. Dearmer co-founded the Guild of Health in 1904 and authored *Body and Soul* in 1909. In the wake of the deaths of both his son and wife in World War I, Dearmer, like many others in his situation after the war, consulted psychics to make contact with his loved ones (Dearmer 1941: 275). A few years later, he edited an “automatic script” in which his second wife channeled, via handwriting, a dead WWI soldier’s theological advice from the afterlife (Dearmer 1920a). Du Vernet, the author of many newspaper articles on social issues, psychology, and healing that were published in the *Canadian Churchman* and the *Montreal Daily Star*, was deeply committed to the transformative possibilities of telepathy (or radio mind) for human communication and divine healing. He summed up his work thus: “Perhaps this is the greatest contribution I have to make to the cause of Science. The supposed barrier of space between two minds can be effectually annihilated by the power of the imagination working through the fundamental union of all souls in the realm of the subconscious world” (Du Vernet 1925: 28). Ward, author of *The Commonwealth of the Soul: A Study of the Reason behind Spiritual Healing* (1921), drew on telepathy both as a handy plot device in his fiction and as a source of spiritual healing, but his greatest confidence lay in the possibilities for a “Christian conversion” of psychoanalysis (Ward 1925f; Roberts 2003).
Attending to the lives of these Christians opens up a largely forgotten realm, in which some Anglican clergymen grappled with energies, epistemologies, and spiritual exercises that cultivated a spirit of openness to other religions and worldviews, in the midst of strong claims of loyalty to their own histories.\(^8\) They did so as proud citizens of the British Empire with the masculinized authority of ecclesiastical hierarchy behind them, while seeking the legitimacy of the masculinized authority of modern science.

FRONTIERS OF HEALING AND COMMUNICATION

Scholarship on the intersection of new media and religious imaginings has flourished in the past decade, as scholars have paid increasing attention to the significance of a diversity of media, including books, telegraphy, radio, television, and the internet, to a variety of religious communities (e.g., Morgan 1999; Hangen 2002; Rosenthal 2006; Stolow forthcoming). Those who have examined the particular confluence of religion with telegraphy and psychic research have often focused on connections to spiritualism, especially in Britain and in the United States (Owen 1990; Gitelman 1999). While scholars have noted the presence of Christians among spiritualists and psychic researchers, they are most often tangential to the narrative, rightly considered lapsed (as in the case of Canadian doctor Maurice Bucke) or written in as opponents to psychic research, spirit communication, and telepathy (Moore 1977; Cerullo 1982; Cook 1985; Owen 1990; McMullin 2004).

While it was certainly the case that many Protestants were deeply uncomfortable with psychic research both for its theological and for its scientific claims, it was also the case that many early twentieth-century Protestants, especially Anglicans, were (and their heirs still are) deeply engaged in reconciling psychic phenomena, new media, and Christian theology, often for the practical purposes of healing (Kollar 2000; Pearce-Higgins and Whitby 1973). Many joined the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), an organization with British, the U.S., and Canadian branches that had many detractors, but which also boasted scientists and medical doctors willing to consider its claims to scientific legitimacy, including William James and Sigmund Freud.

Dearmer, Du Vernet, and Ward were all experimentalists who remained committed to the history and traditions of their church in the

\(^8\) The clearest example of this forgetfulness is the recent biography of Percy Dearmer, which makes only one brief comment regarding his interest in healing, and entirely ignores (or censors?) his book of automatic writing, co-authored with his second wife, Nancy (Gray 2000).
face of profound encounters with tragedies spawned by colonialism and war. Du Vernet and Ward, who both spent significant time in western Canada, and Dearmer, who served as a war chaplain and traveled and taught for two years in India, Burma, Japan, and the United States, encountered differences at frontiers that were both topographical and mystical—both “real” and “surreal” spaces manifested in the midst of the cultural and religious mixing that characterized the early twentieth-century British empire (including Canada).

Joining the long and widespread debate over the influential “frontier thesis” of American historian Frederick Jackson Turner, who in 1893 argued for the inevitable victory of American civilization over indigenous “savagery” (Turner 1993; Klein 1997), Sander Gilman has argued that “the notion of the frontier is that it seems to be inscribed on the land but is actually a narrative tradition superimposed on a landscape” (Gilman 2003: 28). For Dearmer, who encountered overwhelming violence and loss on the frontiers of war, frontiers of empire were rather more comfortable places, as he was able to find employment in the far reaches of Britain’s empire when the Church had no place for him at home. The biography written by his second wife describes their six months in Delhi in 1917 as an experience deeply oriented by what could be called imperial narrative traditions. Teaching at an Indian Christian college, Dearmer mixed with Indian Christians, British clergy, and colonial officials, and he had the opportunity to meet Gandhi (Dearmer 1941: 212). Dearmer’s writings, however, while decrying the injustices of capitalism, leave colonialism uninvestigated. In a 1933 essay positing Christianity as the solution to a range of international “crises,” he even argued that the British Commonwealth and its “free” Dominions, including Canada (but not India), were examples of the “ancient Christian principle” of “liberty combined with order” (Dearmer 1933: 11). Du Vernet and Ward, however, as long-time inhabitants of a colonial states, were clearly aware of the multiplicity and tragedies of power on the colonial frontier, and both used telepathy and radio to grapple with what they knew.

As Anglo-Protestants watched the British Empire reach its limits of geography and legitimacy in the early twentieth-century, some turned to spiritual frontiers of occult realms (Viswanathan 2000). The frontier of the unconscious—a newly minted and often titillating concept gaining popular acceptance—also provoked interest as a similarly wild and unpredictable domain. Narratives of these frontiers of mind, spirit, and empire—whether the Anglican remapping of First Nations lands as the “Diocese of Caledonia” or the Freudian remapping of the “soul” as
the id, ego, and superego—occurred at the intersection of spiritual imaginations and sensing, suffering bodies.

EXPERIENCE AND EXPERTISE AMONG ANGLICAN EXPERIMENTALISTS

Percy Dearmer, Vernet, and Ward all shared an intriguing mix of affinities and experiences: they were all highly educated Anglican priests who made their way up the ecclesiastical hierarchy; they all lived through World War I (at various levels of involvement); and most interesting for my purposes, they all wrote about and experimented with Christian healing with great candour and excitement. They engaged with the contested fields of biblical criticism and psychic research, integrated the insights of psychological theories and New Thought optimism into Christian self-scrutiny, and popularized the theory of the mind’s influence on the body. Via a range of genres including fiction, newspaper editorials, sermons, advice literature, and investigative prose that verged on the scholarly, these three experimentalists prolifically sought to bring their message to as wide an audience as possible.

As middle-class Christian men with the intellectual and social capital to consider themselves valid commentators and researchers into the relationship of mind, body, and soul, these men sought to nurture a Christianity that could attend to suffering bodies while being open to scientific and even spiritualist “energies” that crowded the first quarter of the century. Less organized than Pentecostal or conservative Protestant divine healing in the 1920s, experimentalist clergy did not cultivate large, live audiences in hockey arenas as did Pentecostal healers, nor did they attract throngs to cathedrals as did the globe-trotting Anglican lay healer, James Moore Hickson (Cunningham 1970; Opp 2005). Less practically oriented than the largely female healers who founded evangelical Faith homes or New Thought healing practices, experimentalist clergy did not gain authority through telling stories of their own healing at the hands of God (Opp 2005; Curtis 2006). Instead, they wrote as experts, conducting experiments according to what they asserted was scientific method, innovating with liturgy, and joining discussion and study groups of like-minded people (such as the SPR). They sought new sensational forms that merged prayer, telepathy, radio waves, and automatic writing in order to bring the living, the dead, and the divine into shared, intimate perception that they thought could lead to healing.
PSYCHIC SACRAMENTALISM: PERCY DEARMER’S MEDIATION OF BODY AND SOUL

Percy Dearmer’s exploration of the possibilities of Christian healing was rooted both in sacramentalism and in his commitment to Christian Socialism as a program to improve the living conditions of those exploited and oppressed under capitalism. Co-founding the Guild of Health with the goal of studying the relationship of mind, spirit, and body in matters of health, Dearmer also hoped to cultivate personal and societal health through reviving older traditions of healing via anointing, laying on of hands, and prayer, along with medical means (Dearmer 1909). Reviving unction for the sick also became a particular goal of American clergy, who sought a powerful ritual tool to combat the rising popularity of Christian Science. While critical of Christian Science and other forms of mind cure, Dearmer, nevertheless, remained open to the general principle that the mind or soul could effect changes in the body. Consequently, in his widely cited Body and Soul, he argued that a renewed Anglican liturgy of spiritual healing could be quite compatible with medical science, since God worked through the laws of nature, sometimes even effecting cures when medicine failed (Dearmer 1909: 90).

Already established as a popularizer of the English liturgical heritage through his enormously successful Parson’s Handbook, Dearmer’s (1903) revival of older rituals of healing was in conversation with the latest in medicine, psychology, and new religious movements, while rooted in Anglican tradition. In 1912, for example, Annie Besant praised him for inviting a Theosophist to speak to his congregation about the possibilities of eastern-influenced meditation in the Anglican Church (Besant 1912).

Dearmer was also a member of the SPR, and turned to psychic practices on several occasions. Mourning his son, a soldier killed in World War I, and his first wife Mabel, who died of enteric fever while serving together with him at a Serbian field hospital during the war, Dearmer consulted psychic mediums in an attempt to contact their spirits (Dearmer 1941: 275). In 1920, returning home after two years working in India and in the United States, he further developed his interest in psychic research, editing The Fellowship of the Picture, a book for which his second wife, Nancy, was the “automatist” or scribe for a dead World War I soldier. The phenomenon of automatic writing was enjoying a resurgence at the time—just three years earlier, George Yeats, newlywed wife of the poet W. B. Yeats, had discovered the gift of being able to channel messages from a variety of spirits of the dead. The spirits would answer questions put to them by W. B Yeats by
causing the hand of George to scrawl out answers (Harper 2002). While George’s automatic writing channeled the voices of many spirits, and at times focused on the sexual life and reproductive goals of the couple, Nancy Dearmer’s automatic writing was the voice of one spirit, and was much more prosaic, pious, and optimistic, focusing on ways that the reader could learn how to play his or her appropriate role in the fellowship of God’s picture—God’s larger divine plan. As the spirit put it: “when he [God] arranges life, it becomes enormously interesting and really very comfy, you know” (Dearmer 1920a: 5).

The Dearmers’ experience was in keeping with broader trends in spiritualism and automatic writing, in which women were considered the most appropriately passive recipients of spirit messages. Nancy’s spirit friend frankly commended her natural passivity and insisted that it was a necessary condition for both the automatic writing process and the doing of God’s will: “Passive folk are needed badly, and you know how to be passive: that is why I can use you for my book. God can use you for many things, if you are passive” (Dearmer 1920a: 10). Percy’s roles as witness to the moments of inscription and as editor of the text placed him in an appropriately active and masculine role; his introduction to the text ensured the reader that he consulted the SPR as soon as the automatic script began so that he could vouch for the authenticity of the spirit message within the terms of science. Showing the text to the secretary of the SPR, however, did not guarantee a credulous review in the *Journal of the Society of Psychical Research (JSPR)*: “I am told by those who know Mrs. Dearmer that there is ample reason for believing her subliminal to be quite capable of all that we have here. There is not a scrap of positive evidence for spirit intervention” (Bayfield 1921).9 Ironically, given the suggestion in this review that Nancy, or at least her subliminal, actually wrote the book, Nancy displays little subjectivity in the published work—although the spirit friend addressed her directly when expounding his mediation of God’s will, the editor, Percy, decided to edit out all but a few personal messages that were also part of the text. Nancy excised her own subjectivity further, by not even mentioning the automatic script in her 1941 biography of her husband, an occlusion repeated by Percy Dearmer’s most recent biographer (Gray 2000).

In 1920, Percy Dearmer also wrote a letter to the *JSPR* warning his fellow researchers that public credibility would be elusive unless “we get

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9 A more scathing review complained that “the unconscious of so many automatic writers seems to be singularly barren of content … modern automatic writing seems to produce nothing more worthy of notice than these exhortations in the style of the new theology” (n.a. 1921).
rid of bogey-words and adopt scientific terminology” (Dearmer 1920b).
Regardless of how scientific he claimed them to be, it seems that
Dearmer did pay some price for his psychic interests. Already accused
of dilettantism for his diverse interests, and disparaged for his penchant
for fine garments and his passion for transforming the aesthetic
elements of church decoration, Dearmer was judged by some within the
Anglican hierarchy to be “a difficult square peg for which they only had
conventional round holes” (Gray 2000: 196). This judgment must have
been incited by his interests in psychic research as well as his uncon-
ventional views regarding women’s ordination and Christian socialism,
all of which played a role in his being repeatedly passed over for church
appointments in the 1920s.

Although a radical in terms of his socialist politics, his support of
women’s ordination, and his exploration of psychic phenomena, in his
book Body and Soul Dearmer saw himself as a mediator between sup-
porters of medical and spiritual healing, informing his reader that “our
job is, through observation and with fair minds and friendly hearts, to
enlarge the area of agreement [between doctors and faith healers] and
to seek after the truth” (Dearmer 1909). With an openness to the
mixture of medicine, psychology, and religion similar to Elwood
Worcester, American Episcopalian and founder of the Emmanuel
Movement, a version of Christian psychotherapy (similarly to Worcester,
Dearmer supported the use of suggestion and even hypnosis to “cure
disease and awaken moral nature”), Dearmer’s sacramentalism distin-
guished him from Worcester’s more clinical techniques (Mullin 1996).
His established authority as a liturgical expert perhaps helped to keep
him credible enough within Anglicanism that he did not entirely pass
from experimentalism over into heterodox occultism, and that he could
finally be appointed Canon of Westminster Cathedral a few years before
his death.

ARCHBISHOP DU VERNET’S TELEPATHIC TESTIMONIES

Whereas Dearmer ventured to the spiritual frontiers of the “other
world” after returning from the British Empire’s peripheries to live at
its centre, Du Vernet inhabited a place where the superimposition of
narratives about the expansion of Christian and scientific frontiers was
vividly contested. On a missionary tour to northwestern Ontario in
1898, escorted by a part-Cree missionary, William Johnston, Du Vernet
kept a diary in which he detailed his encounters with several First
Nations communities. Du Vernet voiced what could be called a com-
passionate condemnation of the First Nations peoples’ “medicine tents,”
at times feeling compelled to respect their power: “It was most interest-
ing but very sad, this propitiation offered in ignorance to a higher
power. Even tho it was all such a fraud—the 3 medicine men getting
the spoils—I stood with uncovered head with a feeling of reverence”
(Du Vernet 1898: n.p.). He also narrated many encounters with “medi-
cine men” and several older First Nations women, in which he
described them as people with reasonable arguments against
Christianity and white settlement, and he appreciated what he saw as
their valiant but doomed attempts to stop the advancement of Christian
missionaries. Although he expressed a desire that First Nations people
convert to Christianity, Du Vernet showed throughout his career that
he also realized that First Nations traditions had both powerful suppor-
ters and a degree of integrity of vision (Hayes 2004: 31). In opposition
to native residential schooling, he lobbied both church and government
for day schools by quoting the mother of a native child in residential
school: “my child might as well be dead” (Miller 1996: 345).

Twenty-some years after his missionary tour, in a series of Canadian
Churchman newspaper articles posthumously published as Spiritual
Radio (1925), Du Vernet developed his notion of “radio mind,” with
considerably less commitment to conventional Christianity. Fostered in
part by his encounters with Northwest Coast practices of shamanic
healing, themselves dependent on convictions of spiritually traveling
energies, radio mind was a Christian adaptation of currents of psychic
energy, including telepathy and the power of suggestion (Du Vernet
1987, 1925). In the foreword to Spiritual Radio, Episcopalian cleric
Gaynor Banks (who also wrote the forward to the U.S. edition of
Dearmer’s Body and Soul, and went on to co-found the healing-based
Order of St. Luke), praised Du Vernet’s uses of radio over that of Aimee
Semple McPherson’s “colossal radio equipment for carrying the healing
message far and wide” (Banks in Du Vernet 1925: 3).

Du Vernet’s theories were developed in a context remote from
urban life, but where he nevertheless witnessed the transformative
powers of energy and new technologies in a vivid way. As the railway
steadily extended through the British Columbia interior bringing
increasing white settlement in its wake, the First Nations communities
in his Diocese were also transformed by their adoption of electricity
and telephones (Du Vernet 1987). With the communication challenges
posed by the great distances between the parishes in his diocese, and
the expanse between Du Vernet and his friends and colleagues
in Eastern Canada, radio mind was a techno-theology directed to a
real need. While contending that “real religion” was exemplified in
the “lonely prospector among the mountains, thrilled with the
consciousness that he is one in spirit with God and one in spirit with his fellow-men” (Du Vernet 1927: 30), Du Vernet was also committed to the survival of the organized church. Arguing that “conventional religion” focused on doctrinal orthodoxy at the expense of Jesus’s emphasis on “spiritual energy,” he charged the church with adapting to modern realities of psychology and communication technologies.

To explicate radio mind, Du Vernet posited that four types of interrelated energy allowed for telepathic communication among human minds, as well as between God and humans. Du Vernet claimed that all healings was “divine” in that it worked through the God-created “chain of life” in which mind energy worked on vital energy, which influenced nerve energy, which regulated muscular energy. The first link in the chain was the subconscious mind, “the storage battery of latent energy” where the “finite and the infinite meet and mingle” (Du Vernet 1922, 1927: 30). For Du Vernet, the subconscious mind was a spiritual entity through which God could heal the body, but it was also a deep reserve that could be shaped by human actors, whether through oral or visual suggestion, auto-suggestion, or “collective telepathic suggestion,” also known as radio mind (Du Vernet 1923a, 1923b).

Du Vernet considered himself a psychologist engaged in scientifically rigorous experiments that drew on “telepathic testimonies,” including those of Protestant clergy who received telepathic messages from their wives to phone home or pick up groceries (Du Vernet 1923b, 1925: 26). The law of vibration that underwrote telepathy was particularly applicable, however, in cases of illness or death within families: “a sleeping mother three thousand miles away can easily be awakened by a rhythmic wave of thought and feeling from her suffering son” (Du Vernet 1925: 45). Du Vernet’s self-declared “scientific experiments” were conducted with his daughter as the “passive” recipient of his telepathic communication via a homemade Chevreul’s Pendulum—a pencil attached to a wire and held by his daughter—which would point to particular letters that he sent her via “mental radiation” (Du Vernet 1925: 24–26). In another example of the powers of family connection, Du Vernet vouched for the efficacy of absent treatment, a healing technique of long-distance prayer usually associated with Christian Science, by recounting an occasion when his thoughts from afar “healed” his adult son from an unspecified illness as he lay near death many miles away:

As I prayed I knew with scientific certainty that, regardless of distance, my mind energy was penetrating his subconscious mind as he lay in the hospital very weak and susceptible to mental influence.... there suddenly flashed into his mind this thought, ’I must live for the sake
of my wife and children.’ This auto-suggestion, stimulated from afar, dropped into his subconscious mind, and there revived the latent energy of his soul (Du Vernet 1925: 50).

Latent energy, according to Du Vernet, needed to be cultivated via a practice of “resting in the Lord” akin to “meditation” that allowed the subconscious mind to rest. Although rarely clarifying what cures his method could effect, Du Vernet considered his eclectic mix of theory and practice to be scientific, Christian, and indispensable: “only by combining the help of both psychology and religion can we hope to offset the killing pace of this rushing age” (Du Vernet 1923a, 1924).

Du Vernet was an experimentalist who pushed the bounds of orthodoxy—and pushed at the notion of orthodoxy itself—while remaining an Anglican of high office who was committed to Christianity and science. Even when addressing the contentious issue of the union of Protestant churches (a cause he supported), he turned to the history of electricity—the discovery that currents and waves could run through air as well as wire—to argue both for continuity with traditions such as apostolic succession and for innovation for the sake of “Christian fellowship” (Du Vernet 1927: 114). Described by Anglican historians as an evangelical who often played mediating roles among competing factions, Du Vernet’s experimental forays have received little attention (Connell in Du Vernet 1927: v; Carrington 1963: 231). Less attracted to the scripted particulars of Anglican sacramentalism that Dearmer loved, Du Vernet shared Dearmer’s interest in what the study of psychic phenomena could offer to Christianity in a scientific era, and both men became increasingly experimentalist with age. Their shared interests suggest that distinctions between evangelical and Anglo-Catholic men drawn along the lines of ritual observance can divert attention from less obvious commonalities.10

THE OCCULTATION OF PROTESTANT EXPERIMENTALISM

Perhaps because of the excision of things “questionably” psychical from the biographical and historical accounts of clerics such as these,
their “mainstream” version of Protestant experimentalism has also been downplayed in narratives that explicitly consider the relationship of Christianity and psychic research (Moore 1977). Two of the most careful of such narratives help to situate this Christian encounter with psychic explanations, and also give some weight to my argument about its occultation. In *Fits, Trances, and Visions*, Ann Taves (1999) argues that at the turn of the twentieth century, the “subconscious” was a “mediating concept” between science and religion, developed and relied upon a number of writers, including and other members of the SPR. Taves shows how the subconscious was particularly useful for James’s empirical study of religion, since it could make space for both involuntary religious experience and psychopathology, without imparting a value judgment or origin to either. Drawing from SPR founder Frederick Myers, James thought of the subconscious as the subliminal, “multiplex” aspect of personality and as “consciousness beyond the margins” of the rational self (Taves 2004: 280). This view of the subconscious was particularly important for thinking about religious experience because it allowed for “incursions” into consciousness from sources that the conscious mind could not always pin down—whether from repressed memories or distant spirits with a message (James 1907: 280; Taves 2004).

Myers, in addition to pioneering notions such as the subliminal and the multiplex personality, also coined the term “telepathy,” defined as “the communication of any impressions of any kind from one mind to another, independently of the recognized channels of sense” (Luckhurst 2002: 113). He saw telepathy as potentially leading to a “cosmic law … that of the Interpenetration of Worlds;—some statement in terms as scientific as may be possible of the ancient belief in a spiritual universe, co-existing with, and manifesting itself through, the material universe which we know” (Myers in Luckhurst 2002: 111). Roger Luckhurst’s *The Invention of Telepathy* intricately frames the emergence of the notion of telepathy, and reaches similar conclusions to those of Taves about the relationship between religious epistemologies of spiritual communication and the many volatile, emerging scientific epistemologies of the nature of communication between human beings, or even between human beings and “spiritual” forces or energies.

Both Taves and Luckhurst argue that this delicate intermingling of spiritual epistemologies, psychological experimentation, and developing technology was fleeting and ultimately rejected by mainstream psychology and mainstream Protestants as secret “theological yearning” (Luckhurst 2002: 111) or misguided “psychic theology” (Taves 2004: 309). However, such dismissals do not fit with the self-presentation of
researchers such as Myers and Oliver Lodge, who openly stated what they saw as the theological (or perhaps spiritual) implications of their work. Their examples encouraged clerics such as Dearmer, Du Vernet, and Ward, who sought fluidity between spiritual and scientific epistemologies of bodily experience and mental perception and who explored this fluidity in explicitly scientific and theological terms when discussing spiritual healing.

SUPPRESSED ENERGY: JAMES WARD AND THE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES OF PSYCHOANALYSIS AND TELEPATHY

Given seemingly free range in the pages of the *Canadian Churchman*, Du Vernet’s notion of radio mind inspired a fellow clergyman to call for a “League for the Direction of Purer Thought” (n.a. 1926). Du Vernet’s experiments were even profiled in the secular Canadian newsmagazine *Macleans*. Du Vernet espoused his scientific and spiritual achievements with confidence and excitement—and without any sense that his embrace of mindreading tinged with spiritualism might compromise his ecclesial or masculine authority. By comparison, his junior colleague, Ward, was somewhat more ambivalent in his advocacy of spiritual healing. He was less taken with the therapeutic possibilities of new technologies for healing, and more influenced by a combination of New Thought discourses and psychoanalytic explanations of the self.

An Anglo-Catholic, Ward moved in an experimental direction less modeled on the laboratory and more focused on the sanctuary. Largely based on his books, *The Commonwealth of the Soul* (1921) and *The Window of Life* (Ward 1925a) (an eight-week series of bible studies and New Thought-style affirmations and meditations), Ward wrote a series on the psychological aspects of religion in the *Canadian Churchman*. In this series, he popularized Freudian theory without mentioning Freud (but he did give a nod to Jung). Arguing for the cultivation of “mental dietetics” that would recognize the power of the subconscious, especially when unwisely repressed, Ward (1925b) thought that the “law” of suggestion should be applied to liturgies, prayer, hymns, and the visitation of the sick. By this, he meant that presenting positive images to the mind in liturgical settings, and then cultivating the will to believe, could allow suggestion to channel human instincts to the benefit of both spirit and body: “in healing, in music, in art, in education, in religion, the aim is to get past a stress upon technique to the great joy of an ability to perform without effort” (Ward 1925e). Such effortlessness required discipline, which Ward, directly citing Du Vernet, suggested
could come through meditative prayer in which one “woo[ed] the mind into the Great Mystery of the larger self,” or what he also called the Christ-self. He also recommended psychoanalysis over confession, since instead of tabulating sins, psychoanalysis allowed “free play for expression to suppressed energy” (Ward 1925g). Although remarkably receptive to psychoanalysis, Ward was still in line with its liberal Christian critics, in that he argued that psychoanalysis must have a higher, Christian goal—a “modern and scientific” kind of conversion that allowed an “opening of the soul to health,” in which “the mental clots within the soul must be cleared and self-converted” (Ward 1925g; Roberts 2003).

Noted in the Canadian Churchman as a man with “considerable experience” in spiritual healing, Ward’s sacramentalist psychology shared its ritual basis with Dearmer. He was less interested in psychic phenomena, however, and more interested in the psyche. Reminding his readers that “the psychic is just the Greek for soul,” Ward sought to popularize psychoanalysis as a ritual tool of healing in both liturgical and private settings (Ward 1925e; cf. Du Vernet 1925: 44). Although on one hand he warned that psychoanalysis was the task of an expert, he also encouraged his readers to will themselves to “educate” their emotions through suggestion, by retreating to a quite place and repeating slowly, “I am within the Infinite” (Ward 1925d, 1925g, 1925a: 13). Echoing Christian Science and the Emmanuel Movement in their focus on idealism and suggestion, Ward’s psychological sacramentalism differed from these movements in his explicit adoption of psychoanalysis—he espoused the virtues of a science of the mind and soul that intended to challenge both “prudish social convention” and “prejudicial religious convictions” (Ward 1925e).

Ward walked his talk by sharing a remarkably intimate and elaborate symbolic reading of one of his own complexes within the pages of the Canadian Churchman. According to Ward, this complex manifested itself in an obsessive dislike for the color red and an inability to write sufficiently appreciative reviews of the work of his mentor, the English Bishop Charles Gore (also a mentor to Dearmer). Ward traced these two issues to twin subconscious aversions to blood and the word “gore,” which were prompted by a trip to a slaughterhouse as a young boy: “I was reacting to the impression (still active in my soul) of the slimy blood of the slaughterhouse floor and the fear that the maddened bullock would break loose and gore me.” A few paragraphs later, after mentioning an “unpleasant experience” at Goring-on-Thames, Ward continued his self-analysis: “In the fear of the bullock, we were back at the instinct of self-preservation. The cow and the calf line of association would probably have borne on to the sex instinct. The Goring[-on-Thames]
incident had such a connotation. Even the good Bishop in an association running back through another line of analysis was connected with the sex instinct...that is, sex used as Jung used the term, not necessarily with any sordid accompaniment of thought, but as the general urge by which life finds expression and even its very being” (Ward 1925e). Citing Jung as a means to legitimate his reference to the sex instinct in connection to Bishop Gore, Ward—a lifelong bachelor—implied a heterosexual frame in the next paragraph by revealing that he had read his article aloud to a blonde- (and not red) haired friend who “with something of a twinkle in her eye” asked, “Are you any more comfortable on a red cushion now?” (Ward 1925e).

Ward ventured beyond flirtation in his unpublished sonnets, short stories, and one novel, as he repeatedly hinged his narratives on transgressive love—sometimes communicated telepathically—and, for his day, on transgressive heterosexuality. His literary imaginings of the ways that subconscious drives and telepathic communion could transform human relationships took Du Vernet’s family-based, Christian-rooted telepathic intimacy into much more unstable and erotic territory (see also Stubbs 2003). One short story described an encounter between two strangers in a café—all ready a risqué beginning for a clergyman. Don, the man whose point of view the reader shares, inadvertently thinks out loud and associates red strawberries with red lips, to which the woman, Peggy, responds, “I think you are a psychologist sir,” she ventured in smiling banter... ‘A specialist in complexes, and trains of thought, and suggestions, and perhaps telepathy...who knows.’” Moments later, Don lays out his palm and Peggy grasps it. ‘Quick,’ he said, ‘You spoke of telepathy...can you tell me what I am thinking of?’ She laughed at his ruse, but there was nothing unmanly in the pressure of his hands” (Ward n.d.a: n.p.).11 Despite his toying with the feminized tropes of mindreading and palm-reading, Don ends up being invited back to Peggy’s “dingy attic.” After a complicated revelation of identities, the story ends not by Don reading Peggy’s mind, but by the more conventional approach of him asking her to reveal what she was thinking. Peggy replies: “I was thinking again how many beautiful things there are in life which are frowned on by society, yet which society longs to do...and I was thinking of a rather dingy attic.”

The notion of telepathy in the service of challenging society’s unhealthy conventions took a very different shape in Ward’s

11 These manuscripts are undated. Based on addresses on the title pages, they were probably written in the early 1920s.
unpublished novel, *Pilgrim Haven*. Set in the early twentieth-century foothills of Alberta and Montana, the novel is also filled with coincidental meetings and revelations of mistaken identity, this time against the backdrop of the frontier clash of Europeans and First Nations peoples. At one point in the novel, Dudley, a white woman rancher, earlier likened to a “guiding priestess of the soul,” watches from a hill as women, men, and children of the Blood Nation mow the fields to prepare them for white farmers coming to the region: “She saw in vision the great westward march of empire, the inevitable, inexorable grip of the binding of the free lands to a harder husbandry, the passing of that class to which she herself belonged. And, as the vision came to her, there stood silently beside her one whom, in all his saturnine gravity, she had learned to revere.” At her side, she found her friend Hawkeye, of the Peigan First Nation, who tells her that he refuses to fence in the land and thus to contribute to white expansion. Dudley then thinks to herself, “This thing called western civilization—was it less barbarous, less crude, more Christian than that life which it had supplanted. Did the great Spirit All Father take such great cognizance of color? Would her race not have to answer for their heritage? Could they answer in any equitable way?” (Ward n.d.b: n.p.). Somehow, “by some telepathic force”, the narrator tells us, Hawkeye reads Dudley’s mind, and replies by telling her that he plans to leave for the hills to maintain his freedom. The telepathic connection between Hawkeye and Dudley allows them to share their disgust for the advancing frontiers of empire, while adding to Dudley’s developing characterization as priestess of the soul. Whether using the active metaphor of mindreading or the passive one of telepathic thought transference, Ward’s characters tap into telepathy to convey important messages about challenging prudery and condemning imperial expansion.

Ward wrote these unpublished stories, his articles on psychology, and his books on spiritual healing before assuming his position as the priest of St. Stephen’s-in-the-Fields in 1926, and before his eventual appointment as a Canon of St. Paul’s Cathedral. As with Dearmer, his career trajectory was not simple, and was disrupted by World War I. In the words of the lawyer who interviewed him on behalf of the Bishop of Toronto in preparation for his St. Stephen’s appointment: “The case is a peculiar one owing to the number of fields in which he appears to have worked and the temporary and non-parochial character of his engagements” (Worrell 1926). Credited with being a homesteader in Alberta, an Oxford student, a military chaplain in World War I, a dramatist, and a poet—all before being a parish priest—Ward translated this diversity of experience into
published and unpublished prose that unsettled Christian orthodoxies and colonial assumptions.

Once in a more formal role in the church hierarchy, however, Ward seems to have toned down his critiques of social convention. Although not having spiritualized technology with the same excitement and naiveté as Du Vernet (perhaps because of their generational differences), Ward had embraced psychoanalysis as a Christian therapeutic technique that in some ways enabled everyone to know “telepathically” about the inner lives and desires of others. Elaborated via a Christology that tapped into the subconscious to cultivate the Christian who would be “a Christ-man with a Christ-mind” (Ward 1925c), Ward’s critique of empire and prudery seems to have not survived his change of ecclesiastical status. He turned his energies to writing and producing church plays in collaboration with professional actors such as Dora Mavor Moore and Earle Grey, as well as utilizing the new technology of radio not for telepathic or psychoanalytic healing but for broadcasts of his sermons and plays. Seemingly leaving behind his critique of imperial expansion, but maintaining an interest in social and political criticism, Ward (1948) also turned his pen to writing odes to England and, eventually, to the new Queen on her coronation. He joined the Society of St. George, a club entirely dedicated to glorifying England and her empire, and when his casket was carried out of St. Stephen’s in 1958, one of his honorary pallbearers was the Society’s president.

CONCLUSION

Early twentieth-century experiments with the spiritual, therapeutic, and political effects of new communication technologies were a global phenomenon that attracted considerable interest and debate. In Germany, “critical occultists” turned to nascent discourses of psychopathology to discredit the communicative claims of mediums and spiritualists (Wolfram 2006), in India occultism and the messages it conveyed became a channel for reconstituting social relations between colonizers and the colonized (Viswanathan 2000), and in the Dutch East Indies radio technology and the “spectral mail” of spiritualism contributed to new forms of late-colonial national identity (Mrazek 1997). In North America, where radio was boldly heralded as a medium that could create Canadians and Americans by fostering the intangible phenomenon of nationalism (Vipond 1992: 23), an experimentalist such as Du Vernet went further to proclaim that radio also transmitted healing energy that acted on bodies, and he seems to have done so with little resistance to his message. Although not necessarily numerous,
experimentalists on the frontiers of healing and the mind were profoundly optimistic and prolific. In retrospect, their embrace of technology is perhaps less compelling for our information-saturated times than the critical perspectives of Collingwood and Walter Benjamin. However, their liberal blend of Christianity, medicine, psychology, and the paranormal deserves attention both for what it can tell us about the past, and how it can unsettle our taken-for-granted technological present.

The shared interests of these men in new technology, psychic phenomena, and spiritual healing are evidence of a current in the Protestant mainstream that has been largely ignored by their own chroniclers, and by historians telling the story of Protestant encounters with science and technology (Gray 2000).12 Their pairing of experimentalism with commitment to the traditions and structures of their Church has also fallen below the radar of exemplary accounts of Protestant liberalism (Hutchison 1976; Gauvreau and Christie 1996; Phillips 1996; Schmidt 2005). Perhaps similar to a gap that Alex Owen (2004) describes in her discussion of the historiography of late Victorian magic and magicians, the “psychic” side of mainstream Christian healing may have remained unexplored by scholars of Christianity in part because of its uncanny nature, tainted by feminization and eclectic spiritual epistemologies, whether those of spiritualism or First Nations healing.13 The common portrayal of mainstream Protestants as Christians who cultivated a body-denying religion (Miller 1997: 8) may also have enabled the scholarly neglect of a Protestant experimentalism that merged the physicality of healing with theories of psychology and new communication technologies. Depictions of Protestant interactions with science tend to further this neglect, by narrating these encounters as conflicts over particular theories or theorists, without considering the ritual or somatic aspects of fusions and tensions among religion, science, and technology (e.g., Proudfoot 1989).

As Leigh Eric Schmidt has shown for an earlier era, the relations among Protestantism, science, and technology are not simply questions of belief that separate the science-friendly modernists from the anti-evolution fundamentalists. These relations have also nurtured sensational forms of “technological sacramentalism” (Schmidt 2000: 241) by which experimentalists (and others) thought new technologies could

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12 An exception is Sylvia DuVernet, the wife of Frederick Du Vernet’s grandson, who collected many of Du Vernet’s writings and commented on his “theosophical orientation” in later life—she had never met the elder Du Vernet (DuVernet 1987: 284).

13 Hilmes (2002: 5) makes a parallel case for the “historiographical erasure” of the medium of radio, which has only recently been somewhat corrected.
mediate God’s power and grace as effectively as the more traditional media of the eucharistic bread and wine.

Protestant experimentalists combined distinct paths to healing—such as biomedicine, psychic communication, Christian sacramentalism, and psychology—in ways that would have been problematic, if not anathema, for many followers of each of these paths. Inheritors of an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century “radical mysticism” that Peter Van der Veer has described as “anti-Christian” (61), and proponents of what Rick Ostrander (2000) has called a “sane mysticism” that “grasped at straws” (134) of psychic research, these liberal Protestants tried to appeal to both traditional Christians and modern skeptics. They saw themselves, however, neither as anti-Christian mystics nor as desperate pseudoscientists, but as Christians optimistically (if naively) harnessing the powers of technology and divinity in a postwar and almost postcolonial world.

Considering these versions of Christian healing within their religious, political, and cultural contexts demonstrates that even Anglo-Protestant men with ecclesiastical clout were willing to experiment with new ways of imagining Christian souls and bodies. Radio mind and other versions of telepathy were newly “scientific” names using scientific strategies of proof that drew upon the innovations of communication technologies as both metaphor and explanation. The idea of telepathy brought these Christians to think across frontiers of difference based on gender, racialization, religion, science, and empire, and, as Ward’s novel demonstrated, to begin to realize the way their own traditions were built on the injustices perpetrated at and by these frontiers. Telepathy allowed for the expression of critical views of empire and sexual conventions—even if these views remained unpublished. Simultaneously, however, experimentalists rooted their psychic turns within tradition: telepathy, as Dearmer (1909: 170) suggested, was akin to prayer, “a power which we Christians have always believed in and have universally used.” In the 1920s, telepathy had the added benefit of being a form of communication with both religious and scientific explanations.

Christians such as Du Vernet, Dearmer, and Ward, who sought justification for spiritual and psychic healing in the paradigm of the scientific experiment or the newly scientific discourse of psychology, were ultimately caught between two different kinds of skepticism. They embraced the modern, while binding themselves to biblical texts and Christian rituals. Both scientific and biblical epistemologies share skepticism, if not condemnation, of “energies” and “spirits” not within the bounds of their narratives, whether those be energy theories such as radio mind or channels for the spirits of the dead via automatic
writing. Nevertheless, these clerics countered skepticism armed with authority drawn from gendered and imperial allocations of rationality and ecclesiastical privilege: as educated men of the church who accepted telepathy as a legitimate current of divine and human communication, they both challenged and endorsed conventions of gender and citizenship which posited women and colonized others as particularly potent receivers of spiritual energies. As men, they were able to inhabit positions of ecclesiastical authority while cultivating an experimentalism blended with Christian traditions and blessed by an aura of (if only fleeting) scientific legitimacy. Paying attention to these experiments with telepathy, technology, and healing disrupts conventional categories and narratives of (gendered) religious identity, allowing psychic phenomena to cross into narratives of mainstream Protestantism. As ways for Protestant experimentalists to participate in the adaptation and familiarization of technological innovation, these techno-theologies operated in the service and critique of human (and divine) communication, imperial expansion, and scientific authority.

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