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1. As quoted in J. Fingard, "Charles Inglis and his 'Primitive Bishoprick' in Nova Scotia", *Canadian Historical Review*, 49(1968), 251.
2. Brian Cuthbertson, *The Old Attorney General: A Biography of Richard John Uniacke* (Halifax, n.d.), 41.
3. J. Murray Beck, *Politics of Nova Scotia, vol. 1, 1710-1896* (Tantallon, 1985), 55.
4. The paper is based on an examination of the voting patterns of the identifiable Anglican members of the assembly from 1793 to 1808. Each of the 158 motions for which there was a recorded vote was placed on computer, along with the votes cast by individual members on each of these recorded motions. A biography of each member was created from the information in Fergusson's *Directory of the Members of the Legislative Assembly of Nova Scotia, The Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, obituaries, and references in the secondary literature. Because it was expected that many unforeseen questions would arise from answers to initial questions, flexibility was a very important criterion in selecting the means of handling the resulting data. That flexibility was met, and most of the correlation done, with the use of a relational database management program.
5. JHA March 25, April 11, 1795; March 13, April 10, 1800; June 17, 1801; July 25, 1803; July 20, July 25, 1804; Nov. 22, Dec. 16, 1806; Jan. 17, 1807; June 11, June 16, June 20, 1808.
6. JHA April 7, March 9, March 26, 1800; June 16, June 17, July 15, 1801; July 15, 1803; Dec. 23, 1806; Jan. 17, 1807; Jan. 8, 1808.
7. JHA June 23, 1797; July 2, 1803; Jan. 8, 1808.
8. JHA April 18, 1800; March 26, 1802; July 12, 1804.
9. JHA March 25, April 10, 1793; March 19, 1795.
10. JHA June 9, July 4, 1794; April 8, 1796; June 23, 1797; three votes on April 7, April 10, two votes on April 18, April 24, 1800; April 8, 1802; July 2, 1803; Dec. 12, 1806; Jan. 12, Dec. 31, 1807; Jan. 6, Jan. 8, Jan. 9, June 4, 1808.
11. JHA March 25, April 10, 1793.
12. JHA three votes on April 7, March 9, April 18, 1800; Dec. 12, 1806; Jan. 12, 1807; Jan. 8, Jan. 9, 1808.
13. J. Murray Beck, "Simon Bradstreet Robie", *DCB*, XIII: 755.

On the Trail of the Massinahican: Louis Riel's Encounter with Theosophy

A still obscure aspect of Louis Riel's life concerns the missing book which he drafted in Montana sometime during the years 1881 to 1884. We know that he planned to entitle this book the *Massinahican*, which is the Cree word for book in general, and the bible in particular.¹ Presumably it was to be the "bible" of Riel's new revelation. In May of 1884, he prayed to the Virgin Mary:

O Virgin Mary, Tower of Ivory, deign to accept everything I have written in good faith, in particular the *Massinahican*. Bless all my writings if it pleases you and if they are acceptable to God. Deign to plead with Jesus Christ that it may please Him to strike fear, dread and terror into the heart of Mgr Brondel,² of Mgr Taché,³ of all the French-Canadian bishops, of the whole Roman curia, and of the entire British royal court.

May [Pope] Leo XIII, under the effect of this fear and dread, grant me the religious organization of the entire Church of the New World; and may all the bishops and clergy of the New World throw themselves heart and soul into repentance, and may the court of [Queen] Victoria render justice to Manitoba and Lower Canada.⁴ Although Riel obviously saw the *Massinahican* as the sacred text of a sweeping religious reform, he was at this point still half-hoping to get the support of the Church. He wrote to his brother Joseph in early 1884:

Instead of publishing my book, as I told you, I thought it would be good for the Métis nation as well as others, and would also give great pleasure to Mgr Taché, if I came to Manitoba and said to him: "Monsieur, here is what I have written. I wanted to publish it without speaking to anyone, but I decided I would rather show it first to Your Grace." If Monsigneur doesn't want me to publish it, I will do as he wishes . . . but in paying him

such signs of deference and respect, I think that, generous and big-hearted as he is, he will do a lot for us.

In any case, however, I will leave copies of my book in good hands here. And if anyone harms me in Manitoba, they will be free to publish my writings.⁵

We know that Riel left some of his papers in Montana; perhaps the *Massinahican* was among them.⁶ Unfortunately, however, no complete copy of it has come to light, so we are uncertain of its contents. One brief text, entitled "Partie du Massinahican," sketches a grandiose scheme for organizing the nations and religious denominations of the New World. National councils of various types will meet at intervals of five, seven, ten and thirty years. There will also be a new religious order to integrate all the New World churches: "The Catholics of Mount Royal,⁷ the Episcopalian Catholics, the Methodist Catholics, the Lutheran Catholics, the Universalist Catholics, etc.— all according to their own faith will belong to that religious order that I envision."⁸

It is also virtually certain that the *Massinahican* was meant to include the material found in a series of drafts that the editors of Riel's *Collected Writings* entitled "Philosophico-theological System." These are a set of eleven texts consisting of numbered paragraphs, the lowest number being 31 and the highest 68, plus some unnumbered paragraphs that deal with related topics in a similar style.⁹ In their current state, the texts cannot be consolidated into a single version; they obviously constitute overlapping partial drafts of a much grander project, as confirmed by Riel's own words: "My mission also includes explaining the existence of God and creation, and even the plan of creation"¹⁰ God, he wrote, had "given him a genius much greater than that of Mohammed,"¹¹ so that he could produce a total philosophical system to "introduce necessary changes into religion, science, politics and letters."¹²

From the admittedly sparse manuscripts, we can reconstruct the gist of Riel's system. It begins with a combination of metaphysics and natural science. The universe consists of timeless "essences," which are both "active" and "passive." These essences are composed of "monads," material in character but so subtle that they are imperceptible to the human senses. The monads come in pairs, male and female, which are attracted to each other because the male monads are positive electrical charges and the female monads are negative electrical charges. The precise configuration of the monads determines the perceived properties

of all material entities.¹³

The active essences are divine. Although human nature consists of passive essences, God endowed Adam and Eve with active essences at the time of creation, but original sin gravely weakened their force. Although God continues to supply the active essences to man, his continued sinfulness weakens their effect still further. Man is sunk in an unhappy state of moral wickedness and physical degeneration leading to weakness, sickness and death.¹⁴ "In his isolation from the active essences, man languishes, degenerates and suffers."¹⁵ In desperation, man turns to false gods that he even sets above the true God—"the absolute reign of superstition."¹⁶

True religion, in contrast, means "to tie together (*religare*) the human and divine essences."¹⁷ In the past, God has come to the rescue twice with the revelations of Moses and Jesus:

54. However, I think that Rome and the Roman Church have in their turn become incapable of fulfilling the divine mission and that it is my obligation to declare myself against the Roman organization of religion.

55. In order to assure the success of the revelation of Moses and the doctrine of Jesus Christ, which are one, I suggest that Ville Marie in Lower Canada take the place of Rome; that New France replace the Papal States as the sacred country [*pays sacerdotal*]; and that Bishop Ignace Bourget be regarded as the Sovereign Pontiff of the New World.¹⁸

If we ever recover the entire missing book, we will also probably find that it contained a substantial amount of cosmology. Riel became interested in this subject around the time he started to use the title *Massinahican*. In June 1881 he set down a list of topics that he would have to cover:

The spots of the sun

What is the Satellite of the earth.

The spots of the sun again

The explanation of the first chapter of the old testament

The solar system.

The comets

The deluge

By what human kind was our planet first of all inhabited.¹⁹
That same month, at Fort Assiniboine, Montana Territory, he printed up a handbill entitled "The spots of the Sun" and made some notes on his

second topic, "What is the Satellite of the earth."²⁰ In prison after the North-West Rebellion, he returned to this list once more with a long and detailed revelation on the Deluge. God revealed to him that before the Flood only the Old World continents of Europe, Asia and Africa had existed. The emergence of the Americas from the centre of the earth was part of the same cataclysm that caused the Deluge.²¹

Previous research on Riel has not been able to make much sense of these metaphysical, scientific and cosmological texts produced during the 1880s, except to point out the obvious continuities with his revelations of the 1870s, above all his insistence on establishing a new religion for the New World. From this perspective, one can make sense of at least part of his revelation on the Deluge: the emergence of the American continents at the time of Noah reinforces their significance as the new hope for a sinful mankind. But this still begs the question of why Riel in his middle age should suddenly have wanted to start writing on topics such as monads, electricity, and sunspots. His education at the College of Montreal was much more literary and historical than scientific,²² his public life was devoted to politics and journalism, and his private writings were dominated by poetry. Nothing in this tableau suggests any particular knowledge of, or interest in, abstract questions of science and metaphysics.

Although no new biographical evidence is available, one can make a plausible case that Riel's new interests are best explained by an encounter with theosophy. Theosophy here means the occult tradition of Western thought including streams of gnosticism, cabbalism, alchemy, spiritualism and other esoteric doctrines. Representative thinkers in this tradition are the Renaissance German physician Agrippa von Nettesheim, better known as Paracelsus; the Swedish writer Emmanuel Swedenborg; Madame H. P. Blavatsky, who established the Theosophical Society in 1875; and Rudolf Steiner, founder of the rival but related school of "Anthroposophy," which now runs "Waldorf Schools" in a number of countries including Canada. Representative theosophical ideas are

- the triune human soul including a divine spark whose destiny is to be reunited to the godhead;
- cycles of reincarnation as well as the existence of other worlds;
- the ultimate salvation of all men;
- the existence of a subtle, imperceptible form of matter that accounts for spiritualistic phenomena such as visions, telepathy, prophetic dreams, and psychokinesis;

- the underlying electrical nature of reality;
- the existence of esoteric bodies of wisdom in all religious traditions, Oriental as well as Judeo-Christian.

It is possible that Riel became aware of theosophy during the years 1874-1878, when Madame Blavatsky lived in New York City. She and the Theosophical Society, which she founded in a series of meetings in October and November of 1875, were often reported in the New York press. Her main book of that period, the sprawling two volumes of *Isis Unveiled*, was published with considerable fanfare in New York City on September 29, 1877, and sold out within ten days. In another public event, Madame Blavatsky was naturalized as an American citizen on July 8, 1878.²³

During these years Riel spent a great deal of time as a guest of Father Fabien Barnabé, the parish priest at Keeseville, New York.²⁴ Keeseville was Riel's main base during most of 1875, but he also travelled frequently up and down the eastern seaboard. He was brought to Canada on January 29, 1876, and committed to the insane asylum in Longue Pointe, Quebec, on March 6 of that year; then he returned to Keeseville after he was released from medical care on January 21, 1878. He was again based there for most of the year, although he did make other trips, including an extended visit to New York City in the fall to look for work. In late November 1878, he returned permanently to the west.²⁵

Although there is no reason to think that Riel met Madame Blavatsky or any other leading theosophists, he must have been aware of them. It is obvious from his writings that he kept up with current events and read newspapers with dedication. He must have been struck by the fact that the founding of the Theosophical Society coincided almost exactly in time with the inauguration of his own prophetic mission, which he generally dated to December 8, 1875.²⁶

Be that as it may, there are some intriguing similarities between the theosophical teaching of *Isis Unveiled* and the contents of Riel's later speculations. One important point of contact is the electrical nature of all reality. "Both animal and vegetable life," wrote Blavatsky, "are differently modified electromagnetic phenomena, as yet unknown in their fundamental principles."²⁷ There are two kinds of electricity, the normal kind studied by scientists, and the "intelligent and clairvoyant" kind manifested in occult phenomena.²⁸ "This soul-electricity, this spiritual and universal ether which is the ambient, middle nature of the

metaphysical universe, or rather of the incorporeal universe, has to be studied before it is admitted by science."²⁹ In this belief, Blavatsky stood in the tradition of Franz Anton Mesmer and his "animal magnetism."³⁰ Before electricity and magnetism were fully understood in terms of modern science, they were frequently posited as the cause of otherwise inexplicable psychic phenomena.

Blavatsky also employed the concept of "monad" in her occult teaching, depicting the monads as divine sparks cast off into matter and struggling to return to their divine source.³¹ Again, behind Blavatsky was a long tradition of occult usage. Most readers will think of the philosopher Leibniz, but the term monad goes back to the number mysticism of the Pythagoreans and played a role in gnosticism, neoplatonism, and various esoteric schools of thought in the Renaissance, including writers such as Giordano Bruno, Paracelsus and Henry More.³²

If Riel encountered theosophy through the writings of Blavatsky or others of her school, they must have served him only as a source of inspiration and terminology, and not of doctrine *per se*. There is no hint in Riel of typical theosophical teachings such as reincarnation, spiritualism, and the importance of occult Eastern traditions. It is not that Riel became a theosophist or even accepted significant portions of theosophy, but that theosophy is the most likely source of certain features of his later thought which are otherwise extremely puzzling.

Another likely source for Riel is the treatise *Le Livre des esprits* (1857), by the French spiritualist Léon-Hippolyte-Denizart Rivail, who called himself Allan Kardec after an ancient Celtic bard supposed to speak through him.³³ Unlike the massive, rambling, almost unintelligible works of Blavatsky, *Le Livre des esprits* is clearly and concisely written in logical order using numbered paragraphs.³⁴ This is the most intriguing similarity with the drafts of the *Massinahican*. Riel almost always wrote clear and logical French, but the only time in his life that he resorted to numbering his paragraphs was to write about the theosophical topics of essences, monads, and electricity. It seems unlikely that Kardec's use of a similar format was purely accidental.

Also, *Le Livre des esprits* is similar to what must have been the overall conception of the *Massinahican*. That is, Kardec's work, like Riel's, embodies a total system. Beginning with metaphysical questions of God and His attributes, it quickly moves into cosmology, geology, biology and the history of the human race. It also has a long discussion

of the moral law — a sort of revised Ten Commandments — plus an overview of heaven, hell and purgatory in the life to come.

Riel would have been moved by Kardec's apocalyptic tone: "The spirits announce that the times chosen by Providence for a universal manifestation have arrived, and that, being the ministers of God and the agents of his will, their mission is to instruct and enlighten men while opening a new era for the regeneration of mankind."³⁵ Without accepting Kardec's revelations *en bloc*, Riel could have seen them as "signs of the times," more evidence that orthodox Catholicism was about to be replaced by a new age of spirituality. There are also smaller but still significant bits of evidence that Riel was reading Kardec while he was in Montana:

•On the nights of May 15-18, 1884, Riel suffered a terrifying series of dreams about the pains of purgatory. While he was asleep, a voice also brought him a message from God, which Riel remembered as follows: "My God, it is You who are waiting for me. It is not my role to wait for You."³⁶ Riel's writings contain numerous other references to revelatory experiences, but this is the only reference to a prophetic dream. Interestingly, *Le Livre des esprits* teaches that sleep temporarily releases the soul from the body so that it can join the company of other disembodied spirits and communicate with them.³⁷ Kardec's book also contains a section on the pains of purgatory.³⁸

•When Riel unveiled his religious reform to the Métis at Batoche, it included not only some of the original elements of his thinking — the Church of the New World, the papacy of Mgr Bourget, the Saturday Sabbath — but also some new ideas, most notably the universalist position that in the end all men will be saved. He even had his provisional government, the so-called Exovedate, pass a formal motion to that effect.³⁹ It is noteworthy that universalism is a standard tenet of theosophy and that Kardec affirmed this position in a series of revelations attributed to the spirit of Saint Louis, Riel's namesake and one of his most frequently cited heavenly patrons.⁴⁰

•Kardec's book discusses the relationship between physical health and asceticism, articulating the view that voluntary privation should not be pushed so far as to damage one's health, and that in any case it is more important to work positively for the welfare of others.⁴¹ The same complex of themes recurs over and over in Riel's later years. His private writings show him almost obsessively worried about his health, his poverty, his sinfulness, his need for penitence, and his obligation to

work for the benefit of others, as in these diary entries from May 1884:

At my table, I will only have what is strictly necessary--water or milk to drink, no dessert, no syrup.

I do not even want to sit comfortably. I want to punish myself, mortify myself in everything.

I have to work for the welfare of the souls of others! But I am afraid that this work might distract me, and through my weakness

I might expose myself to the prisons of purgatory⁴²

To be sure, these are conventional themes of Christian piety, and there could have been many sources of Riel's meditations on them; but the congruence between Riel's thinking and the topics of Kardec's book is difficult to ignore. Of course, as with Blavatsky, if Riel did read Kardec's work, he did not appropriate some of the most important ideas, such as reincarnation. To repeat, the thesis is not that Riel became a theosophist, but that an encounter with theosophy is the only plausible explanation for certain aspects of his later thinking.

In itself, this finding would be a minor contribution to the study of Riel's life, but there is also a larger context. A growing body of historical writing has shown that the occult tradition of Western thought, of which theosophy is a part, has exercised a powerful influence on many revolutionary activists. James H. Billington has described the influence of occultism on revolutionary nationalism and socialism in the early nineteenth century.⁴³ A more recent example is the namesake of the Nicaraguan *Sandinistas*, Augusto "César" Sandino, who first encountered theosophy in Mexico in 1929-30 and then joined the Magnetic-Spiritualist School of the Universal Commune, founded by the Argentinian writer Joaquín Trincado.⁴⁴ Knowing that Riel drank from the same well of ideas helps to situate him in a long tradition of politico-religious revolutionaries.

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Notes

1. George Stanley et al., *The Collected Writings of / Les Ecrits complets de Louis Riel* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1985), 2-076, 2-077. Hereafter cited as Riel, CW.

2. Jean-Baptiste Brondel, 1842-1904. First bishop of Helena, Montana, 1883-1904.
3. Alexandre-Antonin Taché, O.M.I., 1823-1894. Bishop of St. Boniface, 1853-1871, Archbishop of St. Boniface, 1871-1894. Taché assisted the young Riel to study in Quebec, but their relations later became very strained.
4. Riel, CW, 2-140. See also 2-145 for a similar prayer.
5. Riel, CW, 2-133.
6. Gilles Martel, *Le Messianisme de Louis Riel* (Paris: Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Thèse de doctorat en sociologie, 1976), p. 652.
7. In Riel's vocabulary, this refers to Catholics of the New World who accept his revelation that the papacy has moved from Rome to Montreal.
8. Riel, CW, 2-077.
9. Riel, CW, 2-169 through 2-179. Texts 2-180, 3-179 and 3-180 are not in the same numbered format but deal with the same material.
10. Riel, CW, 3-179.
11. Riel, CW, 2-176.
12. Riel, CW, 2-178.
13. Riel, CW, 3-179.
14. Riel, CW, 2-169, 2-170.
15. Riel, CW, 2-173.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Riel, CW, 2-175.
18. Riel, CW, 2-176.
19. Riel, CW, 2-080.
20. Riel, CW, 2-081, 2-082.
21. Riel, CW, 3-181.
22. Thomas Flanagan, *Louis 'David' Riel: 'Prophet of the New World'* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 7.
23. H. P. Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Press, 1966), "Chronological Survey," I: liii-lxiii.
24. Fabien Martin dit Barnabé, 1838-1883. Born in L'Assomption, Québec, Barnabé was ordained at Montreal in 1861 and served as pastor of Keeseville, New York, from 1868 until his death.
25. See the "Chronology" in Riel, CW, 5: 84-85.
26. Flanagan, *Louis 'David' Riel*, 50.

27. H. P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled* (1877), in *Collected Writings* (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1972), 1: 137.
28. *Ibid.*, 188.
29. *Ibid.*, 322.
30. Thomas Szasz, *The Myth of Psychotherapy* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1978), 43-66.
31. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, 1: 303.
32. "Monade, Monas," *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (Basel: Schwabe & Co., 1984), 6: 114-116.
33. "Spiritisme," *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1941), 14: 2514-2515.
34. Allan Kardec, *Le livre des esprits*. Montréal: Presses Sélect, 1979.
35. *Ibid.*, xxxiii.
36. Riel, CW, 2-139, 2-151.
37. Kardec, *Le livre des esprits*, 191.
38. *Ibid.*, 470.
39. Flanagan, *Louis 'David' Riel*, 144.
40. Kardec, *Le livre des esprits*, 459.
41. Kardec, *Le livre des esprits*, 324.
42. Riel, CW, 2-151, cited in Flanagan, *Louis 'David' Riel*, 118-119.
43. James H. Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men: Origins of the Revolutionary Faith* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 86-123.
44. Marco Aurelio Navarro-Génie, *Augusto "César" Sandino: A Modern Millenarian Leader* (University of Calgary, MA thesis in political science, 1993). This thesis, of which I was the supervisor, first drew my attention to theosophy as a possible source of Riel's thinking. I am pleased to acknowledge my indebtedness to the author. See also David C. Hodges, *Sandino's Communism: Spiritual Politics for the Twenty-First Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992); Hodges, *Intellectual Foundations of the Nicaraguan Revolution* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986).

Cornwallis Covenanter: The Reverend William Sommerville

On 14 July 1847, Reformed Presbyterian (or Covenanter) minister Rev. William Sommerville of the West Cornwallis congregation in Grafton, Nova Scotia, wrote a letter to the secretary of the Home and Foreign Missionary Society of the parent Irish Synod. Sommerville's last paragraph says, in part:

There is at hand another time of trial to me, and ... my people, - a general election. The excitement is fearful. Contending parties are straining every nerve. It is a contest for existence as parties ... Remember the 5th of August [election day], and pray for us ... Your affectionate friend and brother, Wm. Sommerville.¹

The 5 August 1847 election was a very important one: the movement for responsible government had been under way in Nova Scotia for a decade, largely under the leadership of Joseph Howe. The Halifax oligarchy, the Council of Twelve, was the body opposing the reforming principles of Howe and his colleagues. It might have been possible to remain untouched by other elections; but this one, where great issues were at stake, put relentless pressure on those eligible to vote to decide one way or the other: 'the excitement was fearful.'

The burden on the Reformed Presbyterian preacher and his congregation was particularly onerous. For Covenanters did not vote in elections. That was one of their convictions, one of the chief factors that identified and made distinctive Covenanter witness, one of the ways in which Reformed Presbyterians differed from other Presbyterians, and most other Christian denominations. For purposes of this essay, the two fundamental convictions were, firstly, Christ is head of church and state and secondly, in public worship, the psalms only are to be sung, organs and other musical instruments are forbidden.² To make sense of Covenanter convictions - particularly the first - we dip briefly into Scottish Presbyterian history.