

## **Building a Christian Democracy: George Drew, the Protestant Churches and the Origins of Religious Education in Ontario's Public Schools, 1944-1945<sup>1</sup>**

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In February of 1944, the first throne speech of George Drew's Tory government announced the introduction of religious education in all Ontario public schools. Because religious education had been exempt from the official programme of studies since 1844, the announcement caught many Ontarians by surprise. There was a vocal, but limited, protest during the 1944-1945 school year, but public criticism faded away after the Progressive Conservatives were re-elected in 1945. When the course once again became the centre of an intense controversy during the late 1950s and early 1960s, it was widely believed that the policy had been established by religious education advocates. An unpublished Doctor of Pedagogy thesis by W.D.E. Matthews, written in the 1940s, argued that the policy was the fruit of a "spontaneous movement" promoting religious education as a solution to the problems of modernization.<sup>2</sup> This view was echoed in *The Development of Education in Canada*, written by educator C.E. Phillips. Phillips, who later actively campaigned against the religious education program, wrote that "clergy and zealous laymen of the Protestant churches" had great success during World War II in introducing religion into the schools.<sup>3</sup>

A close look at this episode shows that the relations between church and state were quite complex. By tracing the unfolding policy, from its inception in early 1944 to the controversy of 1945, four key findings emerge. First, there were groups and individuals, especially amongst the Protestant clergy, who could be termed "religious education promoters"

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who were actively trying to introduce Bible study into the schools. Second, the change in policy, however, can be attributed almost entirely to the efforts of the Premier and Education Minister, George Drew. Drew was not directed by a strong and influential church, but rather, he gave to the public school those duties which he felt that the churches were no longer capable of fulfilling. Third, representatives of the major Protestant churches did not initiate change, but responded to it. They originally viewed Drew's plan as a threat, but later defended it. Fourth, both the government and the churches publically encouraged the mutually desirable illusion of a partnership between church and state on this matter.

### ***The Religious Education Promoters***

In the 1920s and 1930s, the term "religious education" meant Protestant instruction, normally implying Sunday school. Concern over a low attendance in the 1930s<sup>4</sup> coincided with the establishment of systematic training programs, religious education councils and expanded of programs such as "vacation religious education" and "weekday religious education" classes.<sup>5</sup> Warnings were raised about the large numbers of "unchurched children"<sup>6</sup> who were receiving no religious education. The churches were well aware that their own sustainability depended upon reaching this group but clergymen were just as likely to express their concerns in terms of the negative impact religious illiteracy would have on Canadian society. This reflected Ontario's nineteenth-century religious culture in which the needs of the Protestant churches and society as a whole seemed inseparable. Church and state had distinct roles, but the churches believed they were bound to society by both public duties and public privileges, even if it was sometimes challenging to negotiate these from what William Westfall has called "private sites."<sup>7</sup> Consequently, religious education was presented as necessary both for church membership and the good of society. Sometimes the social context was "juvenile delinquency," but religious education was also justified as a means of saving "democracy" and "civilization" from the threat of "paganism."

Many public figures, including clergymen, asserted that western democracy was based on Christianity, so religious education buttressed Christian democracy in the face of challenges from Soviet communism and German Nazism. A *Globe and Mail* editorial in 1942 praised the work of religious education promoters in North America. The editor noted that

“war brings home to the people--especially those who may have become slipshod in the discharge of religious duties--realization that . . . man needs the more permanent anchorage Christianity promises and provides.” The solution lay in “organized effort by zealous Christians” and requires “the support of all who treasure the principles being assailed by world paganism.”<sup>8</sup> One leader of the Christian Education Advance movement lamented that there were as many outside the Sunday schools as inside them. “Christian education can quicken the soul of our nation,” he claimed,

and build strong character and high purpose into the life of our Dominion. Teach a generation to worship blood and soil and you have a ruthless totalitarian State. Teach a generation of youth the Christian way of life and you can have a nation of free people, capable of making democracy succeed. Christian education takes the policeman off the street corner and puts him in the heart.<sup>9</sup>

Speakers at the United Church General Council in 1942 proclaimed that “democracy is Christianity’s gift to the world” and “the actions of Hitler in Germany should make us realize how important it is for religious education to be given to our boys and girls.”<sup>10</sup>

Many religious education promoters saw the public schools as the solution. Since 1844, religious instruction had been limited to after-school hours, except for opening exercises and daily Bible readings. In 1937 the Department of Education’s Programme of Studies was revised, stating that “the schools of Ontario exist for the purpose of preparing children to live in a democratic society which bases its way of life upon the Christian ideal,” but religious education remained an out-of-school activity. The Toronto Anglican Synod called for the “inclusion of Christian religious teaching in the curriculum of the public schools of Ontario” as early as the spring of 1936.<sup>11</sup> By 1941, the Synod was debating the hesitancy of some Toronto school officials to grant the clergy access to the schools. One speaker cited statistics showing that “there is a great discrepancy between the number of boys and girls who go to Sunday schools and those who go to public schools. We therefore must press and face the men in high places to give us the religious education in public schools that we desire.”<sup>12</sup> The same year, the United Church moderator Rev. A.S. Tuttle said that “democracy will be preserved by a strong church and a strong military” and after the war Canada would need religious education in the public schools.<sup>13</sup>

The most prominent advocate of religious education in the schools was the Inter-Church Committee on Weekday Religious Education (ICC), which actively developed curriculum and met with government officials and teachers' groups.<sup>14</sup> The ICC traced its origins to a 1922 conference at which church delegates designed a book of morning Bible readings for the Department of Education.<sup>15</sup> The committee was formally established at another ICC conference in 1936 to design curriculum for clergy giving after-school instruction.<sup>16</sup> The Rev. E.R. McLean served as the committee's long-time secretary. As their teaching work gained momentum,<sup>17</sup> they met in 1938 with Education Minister Duncan McArthur to inform him of their "desire to increase the religious element in public school education" and found him to be receptive to their message.<sup>18</sup>

A new avenue of action emerged when, in 1941, the ICC learned that the Fort William school board was giving religious instruction to all of its students. Because religious instruction was only permitted outside of school hours, the board had agreed to start the school day at 9:30 a.m. on Mondays and Fridays instead of 9:00 a.m. The students, who were not aware of this change, "came at the same hour on the specified day and were given religious instruction by a clergyman for the half-hour prior to the legal opening time," explained McLean, noting that since the school was technically not open yet, this procedure was still "in accordance with the Regulations."<sup>19</sup> This departure from the spirit of the regulations, if not from the letter, was taken without informing the parents. Board members and clergymen considered the program a success because there were "no objections from the Public."<sup>20</sup> The practice was soon copied in places such as Peterborough, Niagara Falls and many rural areas. Commonly, the Gideon Society provided Bibles for the students. The Fort William model, as it became known, was working so well that soon there were not enough clergy to meet the demand.

In the spring of 1943, McLean wrote to the Chief Inspector of Schools, Dr. V.K. Greer, asking that regulations be amended to allow church-approved laypeople to teach religion.<sup>21</sup> Although Mitch Hepburn's Liberal government fell to Drew's Progressive Conservatives that summer, Greer drew up new regulations in consultation with McLean<sup>22</sup> and sent them to Drew in the fall, explaining that they were "minor amendments" requested by "members of the Clergy."<sup>23</sup> Drew approved them and left for England. When Greer sent McLean a copy of the new Order in Council "making the changes asked for by" the ICC,<sup>24</sup> McLean had every reason

to believe he had an excellent relationship with the Department of Education.

***Col. George Drew***

Drew first rose to national prominence with two publications celebrating Canada's role in the Great War.<sup>25</sup> His subsequent public writings and speeches emphasized the importance of "the British connection," the dangers of socialism and communism and Canada's proud military heritage. In 1938 he claimed that "unless democracy survives in the British Empire, democracy will not survive in the world. The best way to preserve peace and democracy is to stand loyally under the British flag as one great people, believing in the preservation of Christian democracy."<sup>26</sup> The current war only highlighted the need, in Drew's mind, for an educational system that could instill the proper character needed to preserve western civilization.

Two and a half years before becoming Premier, in a speech called "Canada's Fate Depends on Youth," he asked the members of the Hamilton Kiwanis Club to consider the days ahead, beyond the war.

The fate of Canada and of our Empire depends on the education of our youth. They will be our rulers tomorrow. Let us teach them how to govern in the democratic way. Let us teach them that our system of democracy is simply Christian civilization interpreted in terms of practical government. While our young men are fighting to preserve democracy by force of arms on the field of battle we should be fighting to preserve Christian civilization at home by teaching in our homes, our churches, and our schools a militant faith in British democracy as a system of government.<sup>27</sup>

Drew did not, however, assume that religion was the sole responsibility of the churches. In another wartime speech he challenged his audience to:

... face this problem with courage and frankness. No layman should have any hesitation about discussing it. Religion is either the guide of conduct and supreme discipline of mankind or it is just another cultural subject to be grouped with literature, history, philosophy, or art. We either believe in the religious foundation of our democracy or we do not. If we do, then the teaching of religion should not be the duty of our churches alone, but should be a vigorous part of our

system of public education. I believe that the theory that religious instruction is something outside of the realm of ordinary education is a very dangerous fallacy indeed. I think the gulf between education and religion is largely responsible for the confusion which undoubtedly exists in the minds of many Canadians about the basic principles of democracy.<sup>28</sup>

Shortly after his election, George Drew told the people of his hometown in Guelph that

our civilization which is based upon the people's rule of themselves has a Christian basis, and must succeed or fail in the degree to which it recognizes the Christian principles which were the source of its laws. Those Christian principles are not reserved for our churches. They are part of our daily life.<sup>29</sup>

While Ryerson and Baldwin might have been content to keep religious instruction out of the schools, knowing that children would receive such an education elsewhere, Drew doubted parents and churches could adequately fulfill this role. He considered it necessary, especially under such times of national trial, for the state to assume such duties.

While by no means universal, Drew's language did resonate with many Ontarians at the time. Religion in the schools was promoted by teacher's groups. Newspapers printed letters calling for religion in the schools to deal with the problem of "indifferent Protestants"<sup>30</sup> and inadequate Sunday schools.<sup>31</sup> Drew's policy, however, was directly inspired by educational reforms in Britain. Throughout the war he made regular flights to England to meet with Canadian troops and government officials. R.A. Butler, the President of the Board of Education in England, released a White Paper on Educational Reconstruction in July of 1943 that placed a strong emphasis on religious education. In December of that year, Drew met with Butler to discuss education reforms in Britain and Ontario,<sup>32</sup> and in hindsight, informed partisans on both sides of the controversy later conceded that Drew was probably influenced by Butler.<sup>33</sup> Drew later acknowledged this quite plainly in a 1965 letter to a religious education supporter.<sup>34</sup> As with so many other things, it appeared that Britain was Drew's educational exemplar.

*A New Policy for Ontario*

By early February, Drew had begun to draft his Throne Speech.<sup>35</sup> McLean and other members of the ICC met with him to express their gratitude for the recently approved Order in Council,<sup>36</sup> which would help the ICC expand its Fort William model. The ICC delegation was encouraged and “found the Premier entirely sympathetic with our purposes.”<sup>37</sup> Drew failed to tell them that he was preparing a more comprehensive strategy that would make the new regulations redundant. On 22 February 1944, the first paragraph of the new government’s Speech from the Throne announced the introduction of religious education in the public schools as one of several means to train citizens:

Increasing emphasis will be placed upon the development of character. Religious education will be offered in public and secondary schools. Cadet training under school control, will become part of the regular programmes. Physical and health education will be extended. The duties of citizenship and the significance of the Canadian institutions will be given a more important place in the school curriculum. Schools will be encouraged to establish types of internal organization calculated to develop a co-operative spirit and the habit of assuming responsibilities.<sup>38</sup>

McLean later wrote that “the policy of the Minister came as something of a surprise to the Inter-Church Committee and was received with something less than rejoicing.”<sup>39</sup> He immediately contacted the Department of Education and three days after the speech, an ICC delegation met with newly-appointed Chief Director of Education, J.G. Althouse to present a memorandum expressing their concerns. They claimed for “the Church” the responsibility “for the teaching of religion,” they insisted that “the Church must always have a voice” in the selection of curriculum, and they asked that all teachers of religion be “willing, competent and acceptable to the Church.”<sup>40</sup> They claimed the right to control religious education, but Althouse informed them that a course would be designed by the Department and taught by regular school teachers.<sup>41</sup> If the ICC was surprised by this turn of events, so were other Ontarians.

A *Toronto Star* editorial identified religious education as the most controversial part of the Throne Speech and claimed that “just the mention of such a thing has brought forth protests in some quarters.”<sup>42</sup> To the

*London Free Press* the topic was clearly a “hot potato.”<sup>43</sup> Letters to the editor expressed a range of views. Rev. Gordon Domm, a United Church minister and friend of Drew’s, wrote to tell him about a church panel discussion that drew over 200 people. He warned the Premier that while some participants had been concerned about the separation between church and state, most were worried about whose “brand of Protestantism is to be taught?” He suggested the teaching of ethics; “let us admit that really it isn’t religion we are teaching--but principles common to quite a number of religions, Protestant, R.C., Jewish, as well as any number of Protestant strands in our midst?”<sup>44</sup> Drew wrote to assure Domm that the course would teach only those things in which “there is complete agreement between the Protestant churches.”<sup>45</sup> When one individual suggested a course teaching about all religion, Drew wrote back saying that the course “could best be described as Bible Study, but the name Religious Education was used because this has been used regularly to apply to such a course and is the term used in the British Isles.”<sup>46</sup> A concerned letter from Rabbi Feinberg of Holy Blossom Temple prompted an internal memo between Drew and Althouse, which concluded that “this Government is committed to the support of Christianity.”<sup>47</sup> That the course was “frankly Christian in tone”<sup>48</sup> was not an oversight, an example of cultural blindness, but an intentional choice among several options.

The ICC was torn between a desire to support a government plan that had the potential of reaching all children, and the need to maintain control over religious education. In a detailed memorandum dated 4 April 1944, they gave their qualified approval, spelling out their preference for a Canadian-designed curriculum and church input into teacher approval. They asked the Minister to move with caution and to maintain the “worthy traditions and helpful co-operation, which now exist between the Church and the Public School.”<sup>49</sup> A similar reluctance was expressed in several quarters. The editor of the *United Church Observer* said that factual knowledge was not really a Christian education, but “half a loaf is better than no bread at all.” At the same time, he favoured church control over course materials and teacher training.<sup>50</sup> The two largest Lutheran Synods at first did not approve the ICC memorandum, but later consented, even though the government’s plan was not “an ideal and perfect solution.”<sup>51</sup> Rev. Canon R. A. Hiliz, told the Anglican London Synod in May that even if the details are “not just as we like it” it “is surely better to have the facts of Scripture known in our young people.” He claimed that “the Christian churches have been pounding for years at the doors of the Government to

have religion taught in the schools, and now some by their expressions of nervousness, seem to be getting cold feet.”<sup>52</sup> At the Toronto Synod, Archbishop Owen told Anglicans not be hasty to criticize the idea, but rather express “thankfulness that the Government is concerned with the religious aspects of education.”<sup>53</sup>

But only one week after the ICC memorandum had been sent, Althouse publically revealed the details of the course that would consist of two thirty-minute periods a week taught by the regular teachers. He explained that exemptions would be available for boards, teachers or students who requested them and spoke in a general sense about the curriculum, which he said had been developed from the experiences of the other Canadian provinces, Great Britain and with “the cooperation of the clergy” who helped in the “shaping” of the course.<sup>54</sup> While Althouse praised the work of the ICC in public, committee members became increasingly concerned that they were being marginalised by Department officials. A letter was sent directly to Drew to state that the Church

should have some measure of control over what is taught in the name of religion in the public schools. If the State assumes full control over this department of life and looks to the Church only for passive acquiescence in its policies or hasty decisions, it may possibly in future introduce measures in religious education unacceptable to the Church. This would lead to friction. Thus it is important for the representatives of the Church to study carefully and to endorse the textbooks before the same are put into use; also to have the right to nominate or endorse the teachers of religion in the schools.<sup>55</sup>

The ICC did little to change Drew’s mind. He wanted the program implemented swiftly, “otherwise opposition might develop.”<sup>56</sup> Over the summer, a departmental committee chose a British syllabus and mailed copies out to clergymen for their approval while Althouse prepared a new Order in Council to revise the regulations.

As it became obvious to the ICC that the government was proceeding with its plan, regardless of the “requirements” and “recommendations” laid out in various memoranda, the committee adjusted to the changing political realities and assumed new roles. All summer, Matthews reported, members “gave unsparingly of their time in correcting and revising” the teacher’s guide books.<sup>57</sup> Some books were ready for that September, but selected clergy were sent new packages every month until the grade six

book had been published in 1945. Despite these labours, the final revisions were done by Mr. Rivers from the Department, and some questioned whether much had been changed at all, save the replacement of words like “greengrocer” and “lift” with Canadian equivalents.<sup>58</sup> Nonetheless, the books were published with a prefatory note that gave the impression that the church was instrumental in the design of the curriculum.<sup>59</sup>

### *A Public Controversy*

The imported British guide books were primarily chosen because they could be used immediately and when school began in the fall of 1944, they generated immediate criticism. One critic later said the guide books were “sentimental mush-mush written by maudlin women.”<sup>60</sup> A group of Presbyterian elders reported that the stories were full of “imaginative embellishment,” dialogue with “no scriptural foundation,” “fabricated stories about Jesus,” “fairy stories,” and “unscriptural and unevangelical religious and moral principles.”<sup>61</sup> One of the first public critics was the Rev. Dr. A.C. Cochrane, a Presbyterian Minister from Port Credit. The *Toronto Star* printed the text of his sermon decrying the “State-imposed synthetic religion” outlined in the guidebooks as “a weird mixture of idealism, humanism, naturalism and pietism . . . Whatever it is, it is certainly not Christianity, but a mass of false doctrine which the government is going to propagate at the taxpayers’ expense by means of teachers of any faith or no faith at all.” Cochrane said that it was “bad enough when the government invades the realm of religion, but infinitely worse when the religion that the government proposes to teach is grossly un-Christian and un-Scriptural.” The course, he concluded “violates religious liberty.”<sup>62</sup>

The fears of an expanding state were also articulated by Rev. Crawford Jamieson, who first drafted a letter to the Premier on 8 May 1944, on behalf of the Dresden Ministerial Association. The letter, with the signature of sixteen clergymen, claimed that Drew’s policy was “contrary to the Word of God and to the subordinate Standards of our Churches,” and “its effect would be to make religious instruction a function of the State.”<sup>63</sup> Jamieson claimed Drew was exceeding “the duties authorized by God for the civil authorities.” He enclosed a list of Bible references and quotations from the confessional statements of the United, Anglican, Pentecostal, Baptist and Presbyterian Churches that delineated separate roles of the clergy and the civil magistrates. Throughout the summer and fall, Jamieson’s letter circulated in rural districts and signed copies were

mailed to Drew's office. Althouse instructed a Department official to write to Jamieson and assure him that the department was not trying "to supplant the clergy," but only "to do whatever can be done in school situations which the clergy have not been able to meet because of the large numbers of schools and children concerned" [sic].<sup>64</sup> Jamieson continued to criticize the Drew plan, in a pamphlet called *Religious Education in the Public Schools*<sup>65</sup> and other publications.<sup>66</sup>

At the United Church of Canada's General Council in September, 1944, the church's Board of Christian Education presented a report that was highly critical of the government's plan, calling it "a very radical proposal bordering closely on state control of religion" and infringing upon "the rights and responsibilities of the Church as the teacher of religion." But in the discussions that followed the report, "the opinion was voiced that this was no time to discourage civil authorities after the church had been trying for some time to get religious education in secular schools" and the board was instructed to reword its report.<sup>67</sup> The Council closed commending the Ontario government for its "willingness to take responsibility in the field of religious education," but suggesting that in the future collaboration between the churches and Department of Education "should extend to the preparation of curricula and textbooks and training of teachers."<sup>68</sup> An article in the *United Church Observer* described this revised report as favouring "a co-operative method whereby teachers and clergy would each have a part."<sup>69</sup>

Cochrane's attacks on religious "Drewism"<sup>70</sup> intensified when, together with a Mrs. Helen Infeld, he helped to form a group called the Association for Religious Liberty (ARL), made up of clergymen, academics, Jewish leaders and laypeople who advocated the separation of church and state.<sup>71</sup> Almost immediately they were tagged by Drew as "communist-inspired."<sup>72</sup> At their first public meeting, a spokesperson criticized the course, which "far from helping the church, is a great enemy to the church and to Christianity." One man who attended told a reporter the Drew plan contained "the first seeds of fascism" and thought "the people of Ontario have been too docile in accepting this."<sup>73</sup> In response, Drew made public statements defending the course. He denied that teachers were abusing their new duties and he assured the public that the course guides "closely follow textbooks in use in England for some time" and were approved "by representatives of the church bodies, which have for some years been interested in this subject."<sup>74</sup> Cochrane was swift to reply, criticizing the Minister's "usual colonial instinct," in considering all

things from England to be “manna from heaven.” He challenged Drew’s assertions that the public was “generally satisfied” and even if it was, said Cochrane, a mere majority opinion did not justify the Minister’s “excursions into the realms of priestcraft,” transgressing “doctrinal standards” of the Bible and “trampling upon the religious liberties of minorities.” The ARL, he said, would “renew the battle for the principles of religious equality and of non-sectarian schools so hardly won a century ago by men like George Brown, William Lyon Mackenzie and Egerton Ryerson.”<sup>75</sup>

If the ARL was the most vocal government critic in this “heated controversy,”<sup>76</sup> then the most consistent and respected critic was Rabbi Abraham Feinberg. The role Feinberg and the Jewish community played in the unfolding of the religious education controversies is beyond the scope of this paper, but his perspective on the state and the Protestant churches is worth noting. He considered the Drew plan an imbalance between church and state that resulted from an attitude of weakness, “defeatism and desperation” on the part of the churches who “welcome the partnership of the State, which will discharge part of their work.” In such an “alliance between a mighty political unit and a church magnifying its own weakness” the state would “absorb” and “dominate” the church, “especially in an historic period which has seen the rise of political centralization over all the earth.”<sup>77</sup> He rejected the frequent references to pagan Germany, saying that religious education existed in schools there before the war, it did little to tame future S.S. members and when Hitler came to power, he converted institutionalized religious education classes to Nazi pagan classes.<sup>78</sup>

In response to such “efforts apparently being made to marshal organized opposition”<sup>79</sup> various Anglican and United Church bodies published proclamations and resolutions supportive of the government.<sup>80</sup> An editorial in *Canadian Churchman* said that “Premier Drew has faced this subject as no other Premier” in the country and those who appreciate “this gesture” should voice their support: “The Sunday School of today does not attract all the children. They are required by law to attend the Day School. Premier Drew is to be congratulated on his attempt to solve the problem. I would be sorry if, by contentious argument, we should chill his effort.”<sup>81</sup> But this plea to avoid contention came just as the controversy was about to take on a partisan dimension. On 7 March 1945 Liberal leader Mitch Hepburn introduced the following sub-amendment to a CCF non-confidence motion before the legislature:

This House further regrets that the government has reversed our traditional policy of non-sectarian public schools by introducing a program of religious education which has caused disunity among large sections of our people, and has thereby violated the cherished democratic right of each to worship according to his conscience, free from interference by the state.<sup>82</sup>

The very next day, the ARL published a quarter-page advertisement in the Toronto newspapers entitled, "Religious Freedom at Stake." It endorsed Hepburn's sub-amendment and called upon "all citizens who cherish freedom of religious conscience" to ask their MPPs to preserve "the basic rights of democratic citizenship."<sup>83</sup> The text was also delivered to the desks of all members of the legislature. After an all-night emergency meeting, the ICC produced a response entitled "Religious Liberty Upheld," which was sent the next day to all members of the legislature and every ministerial association in the province. It appeared in Toronto newspapers on 12 March. In the face of a challenge from Hepburn, the ARL and others, the ICC stepped forward as activists and apologists for a course they had once resisted.

In the days leading up to the non-confidence motion, the debate intensified with more ads and letters in the newspapers. In mid-March, it was the sermon topic of choice across Toronto.<sup>84</sup> The campaign against religious education in the schools "fills one with deep concern for the future of democracy," wrote Rev. F. H. Wilkinson in an opinion piece rich with the language of Anglo-Saxon Christian democracy. It would be tragic, said Wilkinson, if Canadians, having finally "emerged from the stalemate of sectarian difference," should be misdirected by "a vocal minority" with complaints about "theoretical freedom" based on an "antiquated theological controversy" of church-state separation.<sup>85</sup> In this charged atmosphere, the ARL had a tense meeting with Drew, who accused them of plotting with Hepburn to defeat his government. He dismissed all the arguments Cochrane put forward and challenged Infeld's right to "take a public stand" because she was a recent immigrant from the United States. Religion was a "flammable material," Drew warned them, and "people who get hot on this subject reach for every weapon they can pick off the mantelpiece."<sup>86</sup>

On the 23 March 1945, Drew welcomed the non-confidence motion. If the government fell, it would be on the main CCF motion and he was eager to face the electorate again. If the Liberal sub-amendment against

religious education also passed, and his opponents were on record as being “against religion,” all the better. Over the course of the year, Drew had found it useful to deflect criticisms to the ICC, saying the books were prepared “with the co-operation of the Inter-Church Committee”<sup>87</sup> and he began his remarks in the legislature by again mentioning that the ICC had amended and approved the curriculum and was now “asking that it be maintained.”<sup>88</sup> Religious education, he said, was “part of the training of character of the citizens of tomorrow.” He quoted Winston Churchill, saying that “religion has been a rock in the life of the British people on which they have placed their cares. This fundamental element must never be taken from our schools . . . As long as I am Prime Minister it will remain.”<sup>89</sup> In the end the Liberal sub-amendment condemning religious education failed because the CCF caucus split their vote.<sup>90</sup> But the government fell on the main motion and an election date was set for June.

During the election campaign, there were appeals from both supporters<sup>91</sup> and opponents<sup>92</sup> to avoid politicizing the debate, although both sides continued to voice their opinions on the matter.<sup>93</sup> Most mainstream Protestant churches affirmed their support of the policy,<sup>94</sup> although some Presbyterian and Baptist churches remained opposed<sup>95</sup> and the ARL continued to hold public meetings.<sup>96</sup> But religious education did not become a “political football”<sup>97</sup> during the campaign and Drew was returned to office with a strong majority. After the election, the issue fell off the public agenda.<sup>98</sup> The ARL faded away, the Canadian Jewish Congress was the only group resisting the program and the ICC changed its name to the Inter-Church Committee on Religious Education in the Schools. When the Hope Royal Commission on Education published its report in 1950, it concluded that Drew’s course “has met with general acceptance”<sup>99</sup> and that the current regulations “seem to be eminently satisfactory.”<sup>100</sup> Because Ontario was “based upon Christianity,” the report explained, “the ideal society and the ideal citizen are portrayed in the teachings and life of Jesus.” It challenged the churches to help homes and the schools “in the common task of educating our youth for citizenship in a Christian democracy.”<sup>101</sup>

As the protests faded, so too did the Department of Education’s concerns with the program. Promised curriculum revisions and teacher training were never provided, and the course took on a variety of shapes throughout the province. After more than a decade of such uneven implementation and apparent consensus (or indifference), the program came under scrutiny once again in the late 1950s. While the nature of the

debate was quite different, the impression persisted that the policy of 1944 was in some way the result of influential churches.

### ***Conclusion***

With this outline of the main events of the 1944-1945 controversy, four major findings emerge. First, it can be said that there was a “movement” or an emergent discourse among religious education promoters. Clergymen of this type, like many in the nineteenth century, assumed that the Protestant churches had both duties and privileges as the moral stewards of Ontario society. In the inter-war period, they articulated the need for increased religious education to preserve “our Christian democracy.” Their language expressed the anxieties many churchmen felt about their roles in a rapidly changing world. These religious education promoters were ecumenical in spirit, hopeful that inter-church cooperation would allow for great progress in this area. This “movement” helped provide a fertile ground for the religious education course.

Second, years before George Drew encountered the ICC, he had expressed the opinion that Protestant Christianity should be taught in the public schools. The religious education policy did not come about because of a spontaneous social movement or an influential church lobby, but rather because Premier Drew took the initiative to compensate for a perceived weakness in the churches and their Sunday schools. Like the clerical religious education promoters, Drew was reacting to changes in society which he identified as threats to democracy. Christianity was part of the British cultural fabric he wished to conserve and religious education was one of several means to build proper citizens. For these reasons Drew expanded the traditional sphere of public schools and emulated British reforms to compensate for weak Ontario churches.

Third, the Inter-Church Committee did not play a role in shaping the religious education course, but rather did their best to try to respond to Drew’s actions. Before Drew was Premier, the Inter-Church Committee had moved confidently from a Bible reading list, to a syllabus for visiting clergy, to the expanding Fort William model. When the Drew policy superseded the nascent activities of the churches in this field, the ICC quietly protested in meetings and memoranda, to no avail. Faced with the choice between accepting and rejecting what they considered an imperfect initiative, they were deferential and pragmatic, settling for half a loaf. The ICC was bound on one side by these political realities, and on the other

side by a public persona loathe to admit that Protestantism was a private religion, off-limits to the state. If Protestantism had a privileged place in Ontario's public culture, how could they criticize its teaching in the public schools?

Fourth, although all policy initiative rested with the government, both sides presented the public with an illusion of partnership. While the power to enact regulations lay with the state, the cultural authority that came with an ICC endorsement legitimized government innovation. For their part, why did the churches publically defend what they had once resisted? The churches did not wish to acknowledge their limited influence. Their talk of partnership represented a cherished ideal which was based more on a faded hope than a recent experience.

While this episode may appear to reflect a resurgence of church influence in Ontario, it is better seen as a realignment of public roles in a period of cultural transition. As Ontario's Victorian era came to an end in the 1940s, Drew tried to buttress it with religious education, prompting church fears of state encroachment. Both the ARL and the ICC expressed such concerns, using different means. By clinging to the old ideals of church-state partnership, was mainstream Protestantism, to quote Rabbi Feinberg, a "church magnifying its own weakness?" To what extent did Protestantism still maintain a privileged position in the culture? These were difficult questions, raised but not directly addressed, in the religious education controversy of 1944 and 1945.

### ***Endnotes***

1. This paper is based on both my "Faith in Pluralism: A History of the Religious Education Controversy in Ontario's Public Schools, 1944-1969" (M.A. Thesis, Carleton University, 2001), and additional research.
2. W.D.E. Matthews, "History of the Religious Factor in Ontario Elementary Education" (Doctor of Pedagogy Thesis, University of Toronto, 1950), 215.
3. C.E. Phillips, *The Development of Education in Canada* (Toronto: Gage, 1957), 328.
4. *Globe and Mail*, 7 May 1941; 10 September 1942.
5. *Globe and Mail*, 3 April 1937, 10.
6. *Globe and Mail*, 24 May 1945, 6.

7. William Westfall "Constructing Public Religions at Private Sites: The Anglican Church in the Shadow of Disestablishment," in *Religion and Public Life in Canada : Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Marguerite Van Die (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 2001), 23-49.
8. *Globe and Mail*, 21 February 1942, 6.
9. *Globe and Mail*, 10 September 1942, 7.
10. *Globe and Mail*, 14 September 1942, 8.
11. Matthews, "History of the Religious Factor in Ontario Elementary Education," 175.
12. *Globe and Mail*, 7 May 1941, 5.
13. *Globe and Mail*, 6 June 1941, 9
14. The ICC worked closely with the Ontario Education Association.
15. E.R. McLean, *Religion in Ontario Schools: Based on the Minutes of the Inter-Church Committee on Religious Education in Schools, 1922-1965* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1965)
16. McLean, *Religion in Ontario Schools*, 13.
17. Matthews, "History of the Religious Factor in Ontario Elementary Education," 175.
18. Matthews, "History of the Religious Factor in Ontario Elementary Education," 176.
19. McLean, *Religion in Ontario Schools*, 15.
20. Matthews, "History of the Religious Factor in Ontario Elementary Education," 178. Phillips says these "devious arrangements . . . were made with a minimum of publicity" (*The Development of Education in Canada*, 330).
21. McLean to Greer, 31 March 1943, 25, 2.726, Box 262, RG 2-43 2-935, Provincial Archives of Ontario (hereafter PAO)
22. Regulations annotated by Greer, 7 October 1943, 23-24, 2.726, Box 262, RG 2-43 2-935, POA.
23. Greer to Major Cowles, 8 December 1943, 22. 2.726, Box 262, RG 2-43 2-935, POA.
24. Greer to Drew, 5 February 1944, 15-17, 2.726, Box 262, RG 2-43 2-935, POA.

25. George Drew, *Canada in the Great War* (Toronto: Maclean's, 1928); and George Drew, *The Truth about the War* (Toronto: Maclean's, 1928).
26. *Globe Magazine* 13 July 1957, 3.
27. Canada's Fate Depends on Youth, MG 32 C3 300.78, National Archives of Canada (hereafter NAC).
28. Collected Speeches, MG 32 C3 301.96, NAC.
29. October speeches, MG 32 3b 304 147, NAC.
30. *Globe and Mail*, 1 September 1942, 6.
31. *Globe and Mail*, 25 May 1942, 12.
32. England Trip, MG 32 C3 304.156; CBC Radio 7 January 1944, MG 32 3b 304.156, NAC; and *Canadian Register*, 15 January 1944.
33. In 1957 Phillips speculated that Drew "was moved by strong attachment to Great Britain to graft on the Ontario school system the religious instruction required by legislation of 1944 in England" (*The Development of Education in Canada*, 330). McLean ventured that it would be "probably correct to conclude" Drew was influenced by the Butler Act (*Religion in Ontario Schools*, 22).
34. Drew to Ross, 7 September 1965, Education 1929 1962-69, MG 32 C3 409, NAC.
35. Miss Saunderson File, MG 32 C3 177.31, NAC.
36. Order in Council, RG 2-43 2-935, 262, 2.726, PAO.
37. Matthews, "History of the Religious Factor in Ontario Elementary Education," 186.
38. *Newspaper Hansard*, 23 Feb 1944.
39. McLean, *Religion in Ontario Schools*, 23.
40. McLean 3 April 1944, RG 2-43 DM-3 259 3.23, PAO.
41. Matthews, "History of the Religious Factor in Ontario Elementary Education," 188.
42. *Toronto Star*, 26 February 1944, 6.
43. *London Free Press*, 7 March 1944, 1.
44. Domm to Drew (undated), MG 32 C3 176.7, NAC.

45. Drew to Domm, 9 March 1944, MG 32 C3 176.7, NAC.
46. Drew to Plewman, 11 February 1946, MG 32 C3 177.24, NAC.
47. Althouse to Drew, 9 August 1944, RG 2-43 M-1 259 1.1, PAO.
48. Althouse to Drew, 16 March 1945, MG 32 C3 176.2, 16 March 1945.
49. McLean 3 April 1944, RG 2-43 DM-3 259 3.23, POA.
50. *United Church Observer*, 1 May 1944.
51. Matthews, "History of the Religious Factor in Ontario Elementary Education," 208-209.
52. *Globe and Mail*, 17 May 1944, 22.
53. *Globe and Mail*, 31 May 1944, 4.
54. *Globe and Mail*, 11 April 1944, 1.
55. McLean to Drew, 7 July 1944, RG 2-43 CD-2 259 2.10, PAO.
56. Matthews, "History of the Religious Factor in Ontario Elementary Education," 192.
57. Matthews, "History of the Religious Factor in Ontario Elementary Education," 192-193.
58. McLean, *Religion in Ontario Schools*, 30. Drew conceded this point in private correspondence, saying the books were adapted "to make them suitable to some of our own particular colloquialisms, but on the whole there is no fundamental change" (Drew to Plewman, 11 February 1946, MG 32 C3 177.24, NAC).
59. Each book contained a prefatory note saying "Revised by the Religious Education Committee of the Department of Education of Ontario, and reviewed by the Inter-Church Committee on Week Day Religious Education." Originally, the government had intended to say that the books were "Revised by a Canadian interdenominational Editorial Board, assisted by an advisory committee of practical teachers, for use in the schools of the Province of Ontario," but McLean insisted that it be changed (McLean to Rivers, 12 October 1944, RG 2-43 CD-2 259 2.08, PAO).
60. *Globe and Mail*, 12 June 1946, 5.
61. Cited in *A Brief on Religious Education in the Schools* (Toronto: Association for Religious Liberty, 1945).

62. *Toronto Star*, 11 September 1944, 8.
63. Jamieson to Drew, 8 May 1944, RG 2-43 3-195 265 1.79, PAO.
64. Rivers to Jamieson, 27 November 1944, RG 2-43 3-195 265 1.79, PAO.
65. Matthews, "History of the Religious Factor in Ontario Elementary Education," 207.
66. McLean, *Religion in Ontario Schools*, 42.
67. *Globe and Mail*, 11 September 1944, 8.
68. *Globe and Mail*, 15 September 1944, 18.
69. *United Church Observer*, 1 October 1944, 16.
70. *Toronto Star*, 17 February 1945, 6.
71. *Toronto Star*, 19 January 1945, 16.
72. Abraham L. Feinberg, *Storm the Gates of Jericho* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1964), 298. See also his sermon of 18 February 1945, *Religious Instruction in the Public Schools! The Ontario Plan—Good or Bad?* (Toronto: Association for Religious Liberty, 1945).
73. *Toronto Star*, 6 February 1945.
74. *Globe and Mail*, 7 February 1945, 4.
75. *Globe and Mail*, 10 February 1945, 6.
76. *Globe and Mail*, 24 February 1945, 8.
77. Abraham L. Feinberg, "Religious Instruction in the Public Schools," *Canadian School Journal* (June 1945). Item found in MG 31 F9 2.13, NAC.
78. Feinberg, *Religious Instruction in the Public Schools*, 7.
79. *Canadian Churchman*, 5 April 1945, 219.
80. *Canadian Churchman*, 22 March 1945, 137.
81. *Canadian Churchman*, 15 March 1945, 152.
82. *Globe and Mail*, 8 March 1945, 2.
83. McLean, *Religion in Ontario Schools*, 33.
84. *Globe and Mail*, 12 March 1945, 4.

85. *Globe and Mail*, 12 March 1945, 6.
86. Minutes of Meeting with ARL, 17 March 1945, MG 32 C3 177.27, NAC.
87. Althouse to Drew, 16 March 1945, MG 32 C3 176.2, NAC.
88. *Globe and Mail*, 23 March 1945, 1-2.
89. *Toronto Star*, 23 March 1945, 1, 4.
90. Feinberg said that the CCF split was intentional, having “decided in caucus to effect a neat straddle” to avoid being embroiled in this issue during the upcoming campaign (*Storm the Gates of Jericho*, 298).
91. *Canadian Churchman*, 5 April 1945, 219.
92. *Toronto Star*, 12 April 1945, B1; and *Globe and Mail*, 5 May 1945, 4.
93. *Globe and Mail*, 18 May 1945, 4; 24 May 1945, 6; and 1 June 1945, 6.
94. *Globe and Mail*, 23 April 1945, 19; *Canadian Churchman*, 10 May 1945, 301; and *Canadian Churchman*, 24 May 1945, 323.
95. Matthews, “History of the Religious Factor in Ontario Elementary Education,” 206-208.
96. *Globe and Mail*, 5 May 1945, 4.
97. *Toronto Star*, 23 March 1945, 4; and 5 May 1945, 29.
98. Matthews later told the Mackay Committee that when he began his research into the debate in 1943 “it was a burning question” but by the time he had completed the thesis in 1949, “there was such little interest that it was not worth publishing the work” (Committee Minutes 27 January 1967, RG 2-170 vol. 8, PAO).
99. Royal Commission on Education in Ontario, Hon. Justice J.A. Hope, Chairman, *Report of the Royal Commission on Education in Ontario* (Toronto: Baptist Johnston, 1950), 125.
100. Hope, *Report of the Royal Commission on Education in Ontario*, 126.
101. Hope, *Report of the Royal Commission on Education in Ontario*, 163.

