Protestantism is today generally assumed to have little public voice in English-Canadian society. This assumption may be seen most forcefully with the rise of the Reform Party, and its rather wobbly successor, the Canadian Alliance. These parties are taken as aberrations of the Canadian political tradition, as imports from the United States, outgrowths of the moral majority. Social democrats fear, in particular, Stockwell Day’s social policies: the sacrosanctity of heterosexual marriage, the privileging of this institution as the proper sphere for sexual relations and child-rearing, along with his anti-abortion stance. Yet less than fifty years ago many of these ideals were taken for granted—not by a minority of practising Christians but most within the mainstream culture of English-Canada.

The inability of educated Canadians—the media or academics, for example—to recognize these religiously-based ideals as a particular form of Canadian political rhetoric should not come as a surprise to historians of religion who also teach Canadian history. The three basic textbooks used for university survey courses—J.L. Finlay and D.N. Sprague’s *The Structure of Canadian History*; Douglas Francis, Richard Jones, and Donald B. Smith’s *Destinies: Canadian History Since Confederation*; and Alvin Finkel and Margaret Conrad’s *History of the Canadian Peoples: 1867 to the Present*—deal with Protestantism in *twentieth-century* Canada in only a cursory
manner. Although these texts detail the more obvious religious events of the
twentieth-century – the social gospel movement, the creation of the United
Church of Canada, the rise of Social Credit, the religious resurgence of the
1950s and the decline of religious attendance in the 1960s – they either
compartmentalize religion, disconnecting it from the broader political and
cultural arena, or treat Christianity within the construct of secular society.\(^3\)
University students using these texts, or their instructors for that matter,
would have little sense of religion as a central component of twentieth-
century Canadian society.

Historians of religion have been more successful at placing their topics
at the center of women’s history. Discussions of women’s religious
organizations are fully incorporated into the survey textbook *Canadian
Women: A History*.\(^4\) Yet religion has had less play in the first general readers
on gender history.\(^5\) While students are often encouraged to grapple with the
analytical categories of race, class, gender and sexuality, religion is rarely of
central concern.\(^6\)

This current situation is due in part to the limited amount of research
being done in twentieth-century Canadian religious history – a situation
which should be rectified with time. Yet historians of religion have also had
to combat an orthodoxy which has developed among non-religious
historians who assume that secularization – or the loss of the cultural
authority of Christianity – is a feature of early-twentieth-century Canadian
society. Of course this assumption has been fed to some extent by the
secularization debate among historians of religion themselves.\(^7\) The result,
however, as indicated by Finkel and Conrad’s treatment of Protestantism
during the interwar years under the heading, “Religion in a Secular Society,”
is that it is the perspective of secularization which informs the historical
interpretation of twentieth-century English-Canada.

In this paper I want to direct the attention of historians beyond the
secularization debate, to the centrality of religion for an understanding of the
social and cultural fabric of Canadian society. I want to do so less through an
historiographical analysis of the state of the current literature – though this
will constitute a part of the paper – than by presenting three case studies from
my own work which are illustrative of the way in which Protestant values
and ideals, in particular, informed aspects of twentieth-century English-
Canadian history. The first case study traces the courtship of a working-class
Protestant Ontario woman in the 1930s. The second one focuses on
academic freedom at Victoria College during the depression. And the third
case study explores the phenomenon of the teach-in at the University of Toronto and at McMaster University thirty years later during the 1960s. Seemingly disparate topics, these case studies nevertheless connect working-class, family, and educational history through the connective tissue of Protestantism.

To start with the first case. I’m currently working on a paper based on a number of diaries left by my paternal grandmother, Kay Chetley, during the period from 1934 to 1944. The diaries, which contain a few lines each day detailing Kay’s activities, provide a rich resource to begin the process of unearthing the everyday life of a Protestant working-class woman in the first half of the twentieth century. Women’s and gender historians have made significant contributions in the past several decades to our knowledge of twentieth-century working-class women – to their paid work and more recently their role within the domestic economy. They have equally been involved in unearthing middle-class women’s religious activities – from women’s involvement in missionary activities, to their contribution to temperance organizations and their creation of, and involvement in, youth groups. However, little work has been done on the intersection of working-class women’s history and religious history. These diaries, then, offer a rare glimpse into the familial and religious life of a twentieth-century working-class woman.

For the sake of brevity I want to focus on my grandparents’ courtship. Historians contend that while nineteenth-century courtship occurred within supervised settings under the watchful eye of the family and broader community, in the twentieth century, and in particular after the First World War, courtship became a more private affair. This was due in particular, they argue, to the growth of urban spaces which allowed youth greater anonymity and freedom. In my grandparents’ case, however, these two patterns of courtship overlapped.

Kay and Harry met in the 1930s in the industrial town of Welland where they both lived. They spent much of their courtship strolling about town, window shopping, going to the library, the movies, or, on special occasions, going to Eaton’s for a soda. They also took the occasional day trip out of town – to a local beach, for example, or to Niagara Falls. Such outings afforded the couple at least a degree of freedom from familial supervision. Yet courtship also continued to occur under the watchful eye of their church community. Both Kay and Harry were raised Baptist. Kay’s mother was a pillar of the Baptist Church in Welland, hosting Ladies’ Aid
The Baptist Youth also provided social opportunities. Through the group young Baptists organized Valentine’s Day parties, Christmas pageants, picnics and wiener roasts. These were often held at local picnic spots such as Grimsby Beach, Nickel Plant Beach, and the Niagara Glen.

Moreover, Welland Baptist Youth frequently met with other Baptist groups in the Niagara area. In February 1935, for example, the Welland group attended a skating party at Grimsby followed by a lunch hosted by the local Baptist Youth. In May, the Welland Baptist Youth returned the invitation hosting the Grimsby youth group for the evening. Such meetings provided young Baptist men and women with a chance to socialize in a supervised environment and to meet future partners.

In the 1930s Baptist community of Welland, then, leisure, courtship, and religion were intertwined. Historians have noted that until the 1960s the only respectable form of sexual activity occurred within marriage. Yet they have generally left unstudied the way in which Protestant beliefs shaped courtship or family life more generally in the twentieth century. Within the Baptist community of Welland, courtship continued to draw on nineteenth-century patterns of community surveillance. The Baptist community provided opportunities for courtship, while at the same time ensuring, if not dictating, proper standards of conduct for youth.

Working-class family life was not the only place of influence for Protestantism in the 1930s. During this period some of the most serious trials for academic freedom within Canadian universities occurred among academics who saw in social Christianity a radical means of reform. Historians have examined, on the one hand, the relationship between Christian socialists and the Church and, on the other hand, the role of
radicals in the history of academic freedom.\textsuperscript{16} Yet such cases, as we’ll see, also tell us about the underlying religious and moral assumptions within the university and society more generally.

I want to focus on one particular incident at Victoria College involving Eric Havelock, a classics professor. In 1932 Havelock gave a public address on “Why I am a Socialist” in which he stated, “among other things, that governments are the puppets of capitalism.” In response to inquiries by a reporter with the \textit{Daily Star}, President H.J. Cody of the University of Toronto, and the Premier of Ontario, George S. Henry, stated that they supported the professor’s right to voice publicly his personal opinions.\textsuperscript{17} Their private comments, however, indicate they were less than enamoured with Havelock’s public pronouncements. Writing to E.W. Wallace, President of Victoria College, Cody disclosed his fear that Havelock’s support of socialism would contribute to social unrest.\textsuperscript{18} Premier Henry censured Havelock for talking “drivel” and for failing to uphold his position of moral authority. The college, Henry contended, should take disciplinary action.\textsuperscript{19}

Henry also decided to keep a watchful eye on the professor. In 1933 Henry again wrote to Wallace, this time condemning Havelock for being present at a convention of the League for Social Reconstruction at which participants echoed the platform of the CCF.\textsuperscript{20} At this point, Wallace came to the defense of both Havelock and the CCF. In a reply to the Premier, Wallace argued that the crisis of the times was not simply economic but also “moral and spiritual.” He continued, “We desire to seek for a deeper commitment of ourselves and of the peoples of the world to the Christian life as the power that will enable men and women to find salvation for themselves and to work out a salvation for society.”\textsuperscript{21} The Premier, not surprisingly, was none too pleased with this response, believing that churches should be fostering stability and confidence in government. In his reply to Wallace, Henry argued that concern about the radicalism emanating from Victoria College extended to the highest echelons of political office. The Prime Minister himself, Henry stated, “is concerned as a member of the United Church, with the damage that is being done in . . . misleading the people when there should be an attempt of creating confidence, assurance and faith in their country.”\textsuperscript{22}

Historians of education assume the interconnectedness of religion and higher education in the nineteenth century. However, the influence of religion on campus is generally considered to have waned after the First
World War as the research ideal took hold. Yet, as was the case in the nineteenth century, during the 1930s at least some political and educational leaders continued to understand the role of the university professor as one of moral exemplar – it was the professor, after all, who was helping to mould the future leaders of the nation. As the Havelock case indicates, the concept of moral responsibility or Christian duty was not uniform. For Havelock it involved the transformation of society along more cooperative lines of conduct. In his advocacy of socialism, even in the guise of Christianity, Havelock ignited fears among the Canadian political and social elite that he was helping to overturn not only a democratic, but also a Christian, society. But despite diverse points of view about the meaning of Christian responsibility, what also emerges from this case is the continuing existence of belief among members of the elite in the 1930s in Canada as a Christian society and in the important function the university played in shaping that society.

These two cases illustrate two different ways in which religion influenced people’s lives in the decade of the 1930s. John Webster Grant has noted that the Second World War and immediate post-war years brought a religious resurgence, but one which was short-lived, and which had begun to dissipate by the 1960s. Changes in the influence of religion may certainly be seen by following up on the case studies just presented. For Kay and Harry, for example, courtship led to marriage and marriage to children. By 1958 they were ready to send their firstborn son to university, and they chose McMaster. Kay and Harry were familiar with this institution not simply because it was Baptist, but also because McMaster’s professors periodically led services in their church.

However, the year 1958, when their son began to attend McMaster, also marked the first anniversary of the university’s official re-organization as a secular institution. Secularization was not immediately apparent. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, President George P. Gilmour continued to teach Religious Knowledge, a compulsory subject for all first-year students. Traditional Protestant moral imperatives also remained in force. Drinking, for example, was prohibited on campus. Yet by 1962, the year Kay and Harry’s son graduated, Religious Knowledge had become optional. Four years later restrictions on drinking in residence had been lifted.

The year 1958 also marked what is now considered to be a turning point for academic freedom in Canadian universities. In that year the Board of Regents of United College, Winnipeg, fired Henry Crowe, a professor of history. As Ken McNaught, a colleague of Crowe’s who became embroiled
in the affair, recounts in his memoirs, Crowe was dismissed after the President of the College, Wilfred Lockhart, intercepted a letter from Crowe to another colleague. The letter vaguely impugned the character of the president and, more importantly, condemned Christianity as a “corrosive force.” After much political intrigue Crowe was eventually reinstated as a member of the staff of the College. However, the affair raises an important issue beyond that of academic freedom. Although in the 1930s, Havelock, Wallace, Cody and Henry held competing visions of the relationship between Christianity and education, they also held in common the assumption that this relationship was important. In contrast, by 1958, academics at denominational colleges were beginning to chafe under the traditional prerogatives of a Christian university administration which seemed increasingly out of date for a modern university.

The late 1950s, then, marks a turning point in the relationship between religion and education. The Crowe Case and the reorganization of McMaster signified the gradual process of secularization which had been occurring within the universities since the late-nineteenth century. Yet two issues are important to note. First, the very fact that these two events occurred so far into the twentieth century should push historians to examine further the place of religion within Canadian universities during the past century. Interrelated with this first point is a second: despite the pressures of secularization, it is important not to overlook the ways in which Christianity continued to inform campus culture well into the twentieth century.

It is this latter point to which I now want to turn, by briefly examining several of the teach-ins at Toronto and McMaster universities in the mid-1960s. American historians have illustrated the influence of religion in the events of the early sixties, particularly the civil rights movement. Canadian studies point to similar involvement. Concerned Christians participated in particular in the peace movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s which in Canada gave rise to the New Left. Yet we know little about the role of religion in the events of the middle-to-late 1960s.

While churches may have been an easy target for attack by radical students opposed to all establishments, at least some students and faculty continued to be interested in religious issues, which were indeed a feature of 1960s teach-ins. Toronto’s first teach-in, held in October 1965 on “Revolution and Response”, explored the relation of the major powers to revolutionary changes in underdeveloped countries. The topic of central concern was Vietnam. Ken McNaught, a member of the organizing committee, remem-
bered the teach-in as an exciting event, drawing nearly 6,000 students. Although there was nothing particularly religious about the teach-in itself, the organizing committee approached the Sir Robert Falconer Association, an informal organization of campus chaplains, to sponsor a religious service during the event.

The teach-in held two years later, in 1967, addressed religious issues more explicitly through its focus on “Religion and International Affairs.” Michael Ignatieff and Paul Rose, the two students who suggested the topic, considered it important because, they argued, the current struggles in the world were of a moral and religious nature. Several weeks after the 1967 Toronto teach-in, McMaster, now a secular institution, held one on a similar topic, “The Religious Dilemma of Man in a Technological Society,” sponsored by the University Christian Council with the support of the university.

That religion would be included in teach-ins, the very symbol of anti-establishment activity during the 1960s, is striking. What it means requires further study. Religious leaders at McMaster acknowledged that students were challenging “the morals and faith of the past.” But they also seized the opportunity of the teach-ins to present, as they put it, “how some contemporary leaders give answers to these questions appropriate for our day.” The presence of religion at these teach-ins suggests the need to probe further the nature and role of religion as a moral force on campus in the 1960s.

These cases provide three snapshots of the place of religion in twentieth-century Canadian society. In some respects, at least on the surface, they reinforce views regarding the increasing secularization of that society. Despite Kay and Harry’s attempt to create a strong Baptist environment at home, their son’s spiritual journey followed that of many young people who, growing up in the 1950s and 1960s, rarely ventured into a church as adults. Yet this linear trajectory also ignores the complexity of lives lived. Kay and Harry courted, married, and had children during a period, from the 1930s to the 1950s, in which religion maintained a strong presence in their community. The religious revival of the 1950s brought new members into the mainline Churches. Ken McNaught, only a few years younger than Kay and Harry, was not raised in the church but became a confirmed member of the Anglican Church in 1954. The social conscience which saw McNaught support Harry Crow at United College and choose J.S. Woodsworth as a dissertation topic also led him, in the mid-1960s, to help organize and
participate in teach-ins that, while not overtly religious, were at times informed by religious concerns.

If religion and social democratic ideals led McNaught and those of his generation to participate in the moderate radicalism of the sixties, the ideals and values of that generation may also be said to have influenced student protest in the 1960s. During the 1940s and 1950s parents such as Kay and Harry transmitted values and ideals such as the uplifting power of Scripture and of the Protestant heritage more generally, the importance of critical enquiry, and a concept of service. Such ideals were articulated in the university during the 1930s by administrators such as E.W. Wallace and during the 1940s and 1950s by leaders like G.P. Gilmour. And they were reappropriated by the student protest leaders of the 1960s: in their demands for a liberal education and in their assertion that knowledge should serve social justice.

The argument here is not that secularization did not occur – nor that it is not an important phenomenon of twentieth-century Canadian history. Indeed it is. But the secularization thesis has also come to overshadow the presence of a Protestant moral voice in Canadian society and culture. When we look at religious history through the prism of social history rather than intellectual or ecclesiastical history, we see the persistence of a moral dimension within the university and Canadian society more generally, shaped by community life, ideas about character formation, and in a public discourse, the roots of which lie in the nineteenth century. This Protestant morality, largely overlooked by historians, continued to shape Canadian society well into the twentieth century. Moreover, if the prism of social history problematizes the secularization debate, so too should the issues emerging from religious history complicate our understanding of Canadian society. Twentieth-century Canadian social and cultural history cannot be understood without religious history. In many communities issues of class, gender, race, and sexuality were interwoven with religious identity. This is not to argue that mainstream Protestantism dominated everything, for it did not. But in the first three quarters of the twentieth century, it did “tint” much of the social and cultural fabric of English-Canadian society.

Endnotes

1. I would like to thank Michael Dawson, R.D. Gidney, W.P.J. Millar, and Marguerite Van Die for their comments on earlier versions of this address.

3. Finlay and Sprague’s text, which focuses on political and economic history, barely mentions religion. *Destinies* tends to compartmentalize religion apart from politics or cultural ideas. *History of the Canadian Peoples* generally integrates the religious ideals of the nineteenth century into the social, cultural and political events of that period. However, in the period after the Great War, Christianity suddenly appears under the heading, “Religion in a Secular Society” (J.L. Finlay and D.N. Sprague, *The Structure of Canadian History*, 6th ed. [Scarborough, ON: Prentice-Hall, 2000]; R. Douglas Francis, Richard Jones and Donald B. Smith, *Destinies: Canadian History Since Confederation*, 4th ed. [Toronto: Harcourt, 2000]; Alvin Finkel and Margaret Conrad, *History of the Canadian Peoples: 1867 to the Present*, 2nd ed. [Toronto: Copp Clark, 1998]).


6. A few historians have begun to apply these categories of analysis to their work. For the importance of these categories to an understanding of Protestant culture in the nineteenth century see Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure, and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); and Marguerite Van Die, “‘The Marks of a Genuine Revival’: Religion, Social Change, Gender and Community in Mid-Victorian Brantford, Ontario,” in *Canadian Historical Review* 79, No. 3 (September 1998): 524-63. For the interconnection of sexuality and religion in the twentieth-century see Catherine Gidney, “Under the President’s Gaze: Sexuality and Morality at a Canadian University during the Second World War,” *Canadian Historical Review* 82, No. 1 (March 2001): 36-54; Tina Block,


10. One notable exception is Marks, Revivals and Roller Rinks. Morton briefly points to the centrality of Christianity to concepts of respectability for working-class families in Halifax in the 1920s (Ideal Surroundings, 35-36).


13. In September 1934, for example, Mrs. Chetley hosted a meeting of both groups so that they could express their appreciation for the work of Mrs Norton, wife of the pastor of Rosedale Mission (see Canadian Baptist, 23 October 1934, 9).

14. 18 February 1935 to 6 July 1936, Chetley Diaries.

15. 28 February 1935 and 20 May 1935. Many other examples of such visits exist in the diaries. For example, the B.Y. of First Baptist, Welland, visited the B.Y. group in Wainfleet on 17 April 1935 and Port Colborne B.Y. on 7 March 1938. Port Colborne B.Y. visited the Welland B.Y. on 11 May 1936 followed by Dunville B.Y. on 1 March 1937 (see Chetley Diaries).

16. For the relationship between Christian Socialists and the Church, see N.K. Clifford, “Religion in the Thirties: Some Aspects of the Canadian Experience,” in The Dirty Thirties in Prairie Canada, ed. D. Francis and H. Ganzervoort (Vancouver: Tantalus Research Ltd., 1980), 125-140. Michiel Horn uses this case to illustrate the history of academic freedom. He does not examine the way in which Christian values underpinned administrators’ expectations of conduct. Rather, he attributes administrators’ concerns about conduct primarily to their fears that private and public financial support might be withdrawn from the university (Academic Freedom in Canada: A History [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999], 111-12).

17. 27 October 1932, Daily Star, Clipping, File 4, Box 53, 89.130v, Records of President’s Office, United Church of Canada/Victoria University Archives (hereafter UCC/VUA).

18. 27 October 1932, H.J. Cody to E.W. Wallace, File 4, Box 53, 89.130v, Records of President’s Office, UCC/VUA.

19. 28 October 1932, George S. Henry to E.W. Wallace, File 4, Box 53, 89.130v, Records of President’s Office, UCC/VUA.
20. 6 February 1933, George S. Henry to E.W. Wallace, File 4, Box 53, 89.130v, Records of President’s Office, UCC/VUA.

21. 8 February 1933, E.W. Wallace to George S. Henry, File 4, Box 53, 89.130v, Records of President’s Office, UCC/VUA.

22. 13 February 1933, George S. Henry to E.W. Wallace, File 4, Box 53, 89.130v, Records of President’s Office, UCC/VUA.


25. In the mid- to late 1930s, for example, Professors Orchard, G. P. Gilmour, and R.J. McCracken, along with the McMaster Volunteer Band, all led services at First Church, Welland (see Chetley Diaries, 20 January 1935, 8 December 1935, and 17 November 1935; and *Canadian Baptist*, 24 January 1935, 2 March 1939, and 6 December 1934).

26. By 1962 Bible courses were no longer mandatory (see Charles M. Johnston and John C. Weaver, *Student Days: An Illustrated History of Student Life at McMaster University from the 1890s to the 1980s* [Hamilton: McMaster University Alumni Association, 1986]: 95-97).

27. For a full account of the Crowe case see Kenneth McNaught, *Conscience and History: A Memoir* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), chapters 9-10; and Horn, *Academic Freedom in Canada*, chapter 9.


29. “International Teach-In, University of Toronto, October 8-10 1965, Revolution and Response,” File: Sir Robert Falconer Association, Box 9, B79-0059, SCM Records, University of Toronto Archives. At Toronto the International Teach-In was supported by the administration, faculty, and the Students’ Administrative Council. McNaught, *Conscience and History*, 177-179.

30. 14 September 1965, Board of Chaplains Meeting, Falconer Association, File: Sir Robert Falconer Association, Box 9, B79-0059, SCM Records, University of Toronto Archives.


34. McNaught, *Conscience and History*, 83-84.