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Creating a Godly Society: Witch-hunts, Discipline and Reformation in Scotland

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What does Alison Dick have to do with John Knox? Or, for that matter, what does John Knox have to do with Alison Dick, or any of the other women charged and sometimes executed, as witches in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Scotland? The traditional answer has been "not much."[1] Indeed, historians who study John Knox, the demagogic preacher who helped bring a particular kind of reformation to Scotland in the mid-sixteenth century, tend to be different historians than those who study witches in Scotland and the extensive witch-hunt which happened in that country. Knox continues to be studied by church historians. Accused witches such as Alison Dick are studied largely by social historians and sociologists. Thus the relationship between Knox and Dick, and thus between the Reformation and the accusation of witches, has not always been fully explored. Yet, I would argue, witch-hunting was directly related to the kind of reformation which came to Scotland and arose out of that reformation. The witch-hunts were not just a coincidence. They were one aspect of the general impulse to reformation throughout Europe, and particularly the vision of reform that came to Scotland. In considering this topic, this article is divided into three sections. The first explores changes in our understanding of the European witch-hunts in general, both in their historical developments and in events in our times which have shaped the questions historians have asked. The second section of the paper will focus directly on Scotland and the Scottish witch-hunt, as well as the increasing understanding of church discipline. The third section poses three questions

as areas for future consideration and research to understand better the relationship between witch-hunting and the reformation in Scotland. This article is very much a conceptual piece, one that both explores the historiography and suggests future areas of research.[2]

Changing Understandings of the European Witch-hunts

Hugh Trevor-Roper's extended essay in 1967 is a good place to begin a discussion of how an understanding of the European witch-hunts has changed.[3] The title of the essay said a great deal. What was going to be studied was all of Europe. What was being discussed was a craze, whether understood as a fad, or as something bizarre. Since Trevor-Roper's essay the exploration of the witch-hunts in Europe has become a significant field of academic inquiry and has produced a vast literature. Yet some of the themes articulated in the essay continue to influence the general imagination, both of historians and the public. As James Sharpe has noted, Trevor-Roper's article stands, not as the beginning of the new phase of creative and rich investigation into the European witch-hunts, but as the end of an older phase.[4]

New themes have been developed and there has been an attempt to see witch-hunting within its historical context. One indication of the growth of this field of enquiry is the publication of *Palgrave Advances in Witchcraft Historiography* in 2007. The book contains twelve essays exploring historiographical developments and the different approaches historians and others have taken to exploring and understanding what are generally called the witch-hunts, be they the perceived role of science and medicine in ending the hunts, or the way historians have dealt with the issue of gender.[5]

Several general surveys have been published, notably Brian Levack's *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, which has reached a third edition.[6] Major monographs have been published, dealing with the witch-hunt in particular geographic areas, or with particular issues such as intellectual developments, gender, or the process of witch-hunting.[7] There have also been several important essay collections published, including *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries* (1990), which explored how witchcraft was experienced in various countries of Europe such as Hungary, Iceland, Estonia, and others that often do not receive serious consideration.[8] Among English-language historians, "Europe" too often has been considered to be France and Germany, with

Scotland thrown in to help distinguish the continental pattern from the English experience. Too often, as well, North Americans continue to see the entire witch-hunt in Europe through the lens of the particular events that occurred in Salem, Massachusetts. There have been an explosion of research and interpretations, and it is understandable that those who work in cognate fields may not have recognized how much has changed in our understanding of the European witch-hunts over the last fifty years. Those of us who study the European witch-hunts also have to take some responsibility for not always communicating these changes effectively.

Our understanding of the events that are thought of as the European witch-hunts has changed from the days when Trevor-Roper spoke of a craze. While debate continues in many areas and around particular topics, certain trends are clear. First, there has been a move away from seeking mono-causal explanations for the witch-hunts. We no longer look to one factor, be it ergot poisoning, hallucinogens, or other single factors to explain the entire reality of the European witch-hunts. Instead, historians generally seem to accept Brian Levack's distinction between preconditions and particular events which triggered a witch-hunt.[9] Before witch-hunting was possible certain preconditions, such as particular beliefs about witches and judicial structures and laws, had to be in place. At the same time, these could be present without a witch-hunt necessarily taking place and indeed this was the case in many parts of Europe which did not see extensive witch-hunting despite sharing the same intellectual ideas and legal structures. It is thus necessary to also consider what led to or triggered witch-hunts in a particular time and place. These triggers might be a regional or national calamity (for example, famine or war) or could be more local and arise out of local tensions. This move away from simple explanations has been quite significant.

A second major change has been in understanding the numbers involved. These have declined dramatically from the eighteenth-century estimate of six to nine million executions to the current estimate of 100,000 to 200,000 cases, with approximately 40,000 to 50,000 executions.[10]

A third change that should be noted is that some of the earlier theories and arguments of feminist scholars have not proved universally applicable. While witchcraft was and remains a highly gendered crime, the reason for this is more complex than simple fear of women and their power, or the accusation of large numbers of midwives.[11]

Fourth, the complexity of the witch-hunt in Europe has been

recognized and described. It is no longer the continent (which tended to mean parts of Germany and France) with its massive witch-hunts versus England, which did not have these hunts. Instead, work on many of the countries of Europe has led to the realization that witch-hunting on the scale seen in England – an isolated accusation against one witch in her village – happened throughout the continent, and may indeed have been the normative pattern. It is the mass hunts that now strike one as more anomalous. Rather than seeing England as distinct from the rest of Europe we need to see it as one of many variations on a similar pattern.[12]

One final and significant change is that witch-hunting has now become recognized as a renaissance and reformation phenomenon, as something situated within the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, not in the earlier, medieval period. Historians have shown that the massive medieval witch-hunts did not happen.[13] Therefore, witch-hunting cannot be understood as the last gasp of medieval superstition, but must be understood as a product of these later centuries. This is certainly not an exhaustive list yet it makes the point that, as historians have done more detailed studies, the understanding of the European witch-hunts has changed significantly.

Historians arrive at interpretations not only in light of changing understandings of the past, but also as a result of changing circumstances in the times in which they write. For an earlier generation of historians McCarthyism was one of the best analogies when considering the witch-hunts. We now, tragically, have much better parallels, specifically with several prominent situations in North America where individuals have been accused of the ritual sexual abuse of children, often involving satanic rights, despite the incredible details recounted and the lack of any physical evidence that such crimes occurred. David Frankfurter has made a compelling case for these being seen as modern parallels to what was witnessed in early modern Europe.[14]

A second change has been the discussion and debates about torture – its effectiveness as well as what constitutes "torture" – has become a current affairs topic, not one for arcane historical comment. Finally, historians used to look to Africa and anthropologists who studied primitive tribal groups to understand witches, belief in witchcraft, and related ideas, even though witch-hunts among many of these groups was rare. In recent years, something similar to the European witch-hunts has affected much of Africa, as western technology and faiths affect that continent in a new way.[15] The context out of which researchers consider the European witch-

hunts has altered.

Changing Understandings of the Witch-hunt in Scotland

These changes in the understanding of the European witch-hunt obviously shape an understanding of any of the regional variants, including the witch-hunt that took place in Scotland. The modern study of the witch-hunt in Scotland really began with the publication of Christina Larner's *Enemies of God* in 1981.[16] In this pioneering work, Larner explored the Scottish witch-hunt surveying its geographic spread, its chronology and numerous topics including the driving forces behind witch-hunting and why women were accused as witches. This crucial book contributed not only to our understanding of the witch-hunt in Scotland but to the broader discussion of the European witch-hunt. The book was so influential that few scholars initially heeded Larner's own call that more research needed to be done. Her early death also removed an excellent scholar from the field. Thus it was only twenty years later, beginning roughly in 2000, that significant new works began to appear. However, as I've argued previously in an historiographic article entitled "*Enemies of God* Revisited," the way in which this literature developed – with scholars working in isolation from each other and then publishing their findings almost at the same time – prevented us from seeing how much of our understanding of the witch-hunt had evolved in the almost thirty years since the publication of *Enemies of God.*[17] There has been a tendency for each scholar to tell the story his or her own way without always clearly pointing the reader to the places where there is considerable debate or where some of the main themes developed by Larner have been challenged.

One of the significant changes discussed in "*Enemies of God* Revisited" centred around the early origins of the witch-hunt in Scotland, in particular the role played by the Scottish King James VI (later also James I of England). It seems clear that witch-hunting did not begin with James VI bringing continental demonological beliefs to Scotland in 1590. There was already a witch-hunt underway, and it is also unclear that James ever encountered those beliefs.[18] Another theme the article explored was the debate about the role the central government played in witch-hunting. Did the central government play a key role in driving witch-hunts as Julian Goodare (who continues to follow Christina Larner's contention that it was the central government which drove the witch-hunt) has argued, or did

the central government restrain witch-hunting as Brian Levack has contended?[19] The role of torture in the Scottish witch-hunt was also explored.[20] Finally, the chronology of the witch-hunt was re-examined. The significant point here is that, while Larner noted a massive witch-hunt in 1597, the number of known cases is far smaller.[21] When we note this lower number, it becomes clear that the vast majority of witch-hunting in Scotland did not take place until the mid-seventeenth century, specifically in two peaks witch-hunts in 1649/50 and 1661/1662. These would have been in the middle of the Wars of the Three Kingdoms, or the civil wars that affected Scotland, England and Ireland from 1638 through to 1660. More precisely the 1649/50 hunt came at the time when a radical wing of the Presbyterian movement was in charge of Scotland after the passage of the Act of Classes. The hunt in 1661 and 1662 coincides with the restoration of the Stuart monarchy. This different understanding of when the major witch-hunts in Scotland actually occurred has not yet been adequately addressed in the literature.[22]

Historians have continued to explore various themes related to the Scottish witch-hunt, resulting in additional important works. *Witch-Hunting in Scotland* (2008) an edited collection of some of the crucial essays by Brian Levack, has provided an excellent overview of his important contributions to an understanding of the witch-hunt in Scotland.[23] P.G. Maxwell-Stuart has published extensively in the field of European magic and witchcraft and related areas, including an important look at the massive witch-hunt which occurred in 1661-1662, *An Abundance of Witches* (2005).[24] Another important collection of essays has been published. The volume, *Witchcraft and Belief in Early Modern Scotland* (2008), includes articles on folk belief, charms and charmers, demonic possession, the devil, witch-hunting in Gaelic speaking areas, and a comparative look at the Scottish witch-hunt within the European context.[25] These and other essays,[26] have continued to expand our understanding of the witch-hunt in Scotland.

At the same time, certain themes require further investigation. Until quite recently, very little had been published related to the extensive hunt that occurred in 1649-1650, one of the two largest witch-hunts. Thankfully, historians are beginning to focus on research in this area and publish their results.[27] Given the considerable research already completed, the primary challenge for Scottish historians will be to analyse what we know about the witch-hunt and placing this effectively within the broader historical context.

While the changing understanding of the origins of the Scottish witch-hunt, of the role of torture, of the chronology, and of the role of central government were all addressed in the article "*Enemies of God* Revisited," one theme which did not receive adequate attention was our changing understanding of the role of the church in the Scottish witch-hunt. Enemies of God was a pioneering study. As a result, there were certain key questions to which Christina Larner gave ambiguous answers including the role the church played in the witch-hunts. Larner noted that the church had a role. At the same time Larner tended to suggest that the greater role – and thus key to witch-hunting – was the local nobility, the lairds.[28] Without their active participation, witch-hunting could not have taken place. They were the ones who had to obtain a legal commission from the government in Edinburgh to put an accused witch on trial. They were the ones who manned the courts, and oversaw the legal process – and witchcraft was of course a criminal offence. All of this was and is true. The active support of the local nobility and burgh officials was crucial if there were to be legal prosecutions. But, one need not conclude from this that it was the lairds who drove the witch-hunt; rather, once a suspected witch had been unearthed they were crucial in bringing that person to a legal punishment. It was the church, and church courts which were the key participants in the initial investigations of accusations of witchcraft. It was in the Kirk sessions, the church courts located in the local community, where we often find the initial accusations against a witch appearing. Alison Dick, to return to her, was first named in a Kirk session in Kirkcaldy as a suspected witch.[29] The church played a vital role in beginning the entire process.

An important link thus exists between the Reformation and witch-hunting, between church discipline and witchcraft accusations. Recent work has made it clear how crucial church discipline in Scotland was at the time.[30] One notable aspect of the Scottish Reformation was its attempt to create a godly society, to correct various forms of social (mis)behaviour and root out sin. Key to this were the system of church courts, beginning with the Kirk sessions, and then going up through the Presbyteries and Synods to the General Assembly. An effective structure was put in place which brought before the church all deemed to be sinners, whether that was because of holding a public argument in the High Street, skipping church services, having sex outside of marriage, or knowing various charms and cures. Witchcraft accusations form a smaller subset of these latter cases. The church wished to eradicate all of the traditional appeals

to extra-human interventions, and replace these with only approved churchly prayers, or with acceptance of God's inscrutable will. A godly community prayed. Godly people did not seek the assistance of the fairies, or know cures and charms, or seek help from the village witch. It is here that the link between the Reformation and witch-hunting exists. Witch-hunting was a somewhat natural outgrowth of the project of church discipline which sought to create a godly society.

Discipline did not require an interest in demonology. Belief that the Devil gave witches their power could be accepted as a basic reality (a precondition) without this automatically leading to witch-hunting. One of the fascinating realities discovered while studying the 420 different incidents of witchcraft allegations in Fife, was how the local clergy, despite being highly educated, seemed either unaware or disinterested in demonological theory of the kind contained in the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486) and similar treatises. Kirk session records do not contain constant indication of the kinds of concerns we have been told those interested in witches in seventeenth-century Scotland were obsessed with, that is, belief in the demonic pact, sabbats, and copulation with the Devil.[31] These are the factors, we have believed, which led to the severity of the witch-hunt in Scotland. Yet in Kirk session records from Fife these rarely occur. These kinds of beliefs usually come – when they come – later in the trials.[32] The concern in the Kirk sessions was with godly behaviour and with the creation of a godly community. And thus, I would argue, the witch-hunt in Scotland needs to be seen as a feature of the reformation, not something that just happened to occur at roughly the same time. Social historians need to better understand the religious dimensions of the reformation, and church historians need to take into account where this project of creating a godly society ultimately led. We are starting to do this, but this is an area where we need to consider the relationship between these two realities.

Questions for Future Research on the Reformation and Scottish Witch-hunt

It is clear that over the last fifty years our understanding of the European and Scottish witch-hunts has undergone a significant change. This article has also argued that within the field of Scottish studies, these changes have not always been recognized and, as a result, we continue to see the witch-hunt and the reformation as separate fields of historical

enquiry, rather than as vitally interrelated. In beginning to explore these relationships, several questions need to be considered. The first question is quite simple: is the term "witch-hunt" appropriate to describe all of the accusations of witchcraft in the period from roughly 1560 to 1710? There clearly were witch-hunts in Scotland which we can identify. What I mean by "witch-hunt" in this context is those times when people actively sought out witches – with the emphasis on "hunt."[33] These happened in Scotland.

But not all of those who ended up being accused, or even executed, were swept up in a hunt. There are two realities that need to be considered. The first is that many of the "hunts" were more broad than deep. Each village, when asked, could name its witch. But the process we imagine where the circle of accusations expands rapidly (an accused witch was interrogated, further names were sought, officials then interrogated the named accomplices and forced them to confess and then name others, and so on and so on) does not seem to have gone on in all cases; indeed, the kind of cases we imagine where everyone in a village suddenly became a suspect may have been unusual.[34] Even in what we might determine are "hunts" it seems that those named already had a bad reputation, and few without bad reputations were named. The accusers didn't stay within a village and suspect everyone (hence my use of the term "deep") but seem to have gone "broad," going to the next village and interrogating the woman or women with bad reputations in that village. It is worth testing to see if, when hunts occurred, this dynamic of a broad rather than a deep witch-hunt is more evident. But while we need to understand what the dynamic of a "hunt" was, it is worth remembering the second reality that the evidence shows many situations where there was no "hunt" at all. Rather, there was an incident. And when that incident happens, the individual in the community who everyone believed to be a witch was brought before the Kirk session and dealt with. In many cases no other individuals were named. And what is fascinating, as already noted, was that these women lived in the communities for years and the accusations against them went back for years before these cases developed. Historians describe this. But have we given enough careful consideration to what this might mean? What are the implications of this? Why weren't Kirk sessions more active in hunting known witches? Why are those who are victims of the suspected witch waiting so long before coming to the Kirk session with their fears?

A second question we need to consider concerns how we've mapped the witch-hunt in Scotland. Historians have spent considerable time

counting witchcraft accusations in Scotland.[35] But what are we counting? We find witchcraft accusations in the secular courts, through commissions to put a witch to trial, in burgh courts, as well as in other sources such as literary references. These account form a significant percentage of the cases. Church court records are another major place where we find references to many, many cases, particularly in the Kirk session and presbytery records. The survival of all of these records, and in particular the local Kirk session minutes is crucial. Is the portrait of the witch-hunt determined then by what records have survived? Fife is an area where we are aware of many witchcraft accusations, but is also an area where many Kirk session records have survived. In contrast, in the Wigtown area in the South West of Scotland we have very few witches.[36] We also do not have surviving Kirk session records for the crucial period of the mid-seventeenth century. So, what are we really counting: witches, or the witches we know of, because the records have survived?

This leads to one final and related question which needs to be further explored. Historians have long noted that what we are studying when we are looking at witchcraft accusations is not the prevalence of the practice of witchcraft but where and when the laws against it were enforced. But while we note it, we may also forget this along the way. What if we were to begin with the assumption that in every village and burgh in Scotland women were actively practising cures and charms, threatened their neighbours if they didn't get their way, cursed and blessed, acted (and I'm reluctant to use this word because I'm afraid that it might be misunderstood) as a witch?[37] How does that change our portrait of what was going on at this time? One thing it might help us recognize is that what was changing in this period was not behaviour but the understanding of what acceptable behaviour was. This returns us to the entire idea of the imposition of discipline, of a godly community and the link to the Reformation. Furthermore, this approach might help us to realize how feared and powerful witches were in these communities. If people were reluctant to name the witch, what does that say? This was what happened in the case of Alison Dick. She first appeared as a suspected witch in 1621. The Kirk session appealed to the community for information about her yet no information was provided. After a public dispute with her husband twelve years later in which they each accused each other of evil actions suspiciously like witchcraft, they were both brought before the Kirk session to face these charges. This time the session seems to have treated the case more seriously. Alison Dick was warded or imprisoned.[38] The

result was that information came forward, all pointing to Alison acting as a witch, cursing and threatening. She and her husband were executed as witches as a result.

As we study and teach about the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, historians need to talk about Alison Dick and John Knox. The reformation imagined by the latter led years later to the trial of the former. There seems to have been a broad change in piety and expectations across Europe, and the attack on traditional forms of magic and traditional cures seems to have been a part of that broader attempt to re-imagine and reconstruct how the average person should live out their Christian faith. Many scholars are noting this change.[39] By looking at the links between reformation and witch-hunting in one context, Scotland, further light will be shed on our broader understanding of not only the Scottish reformation but the reformation as a whole. Where church historians often focus on theological issues and changes in belief, these changes in piety and expectations and behaviour, may be every bit as crucial. What was the reformation attempting to do? What were some of the factors motivating it? One cannot, I would argue, consider these questions adequately without looking at what was done in the parishes and what was expected of the average member of the Christian community (a term with a very different meaning then from how we would understand this now). Church discipline, including the discipline of suspected witches, was a vial part of that program in Scotland. This attempt to create a godly society needs to be considered by both church historians and social historians.

Endnotes

1. One fairly recent exception is Julian Goodare, "John Knox on Demonology and Witchcraft," *Archiv fur Reformationsgeschichte* 96 (2005): 221-45. Comments on this article will be noted later.

2. This paper is very much the thoughts of someone who has once worked intensely on this particular topic, returning to that topic after time away. One potential down-side of this is that there may be various relevant articles which I have not yet discovered or noted. My apologies in advance. At the same time, the process of sketching out ideas, even writing a text, and then modifying these ideas and text as one becomes aware of more recent historical scholarship, has been a valuable one.

3. The article has appeared in a variety of different places. H.R. Trevor-Roper, "The European Witch-Craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in *Religion, the Reformation and Social Change and Other Essays,* ed. H.R. Trevor-Roper (London: Macmillan Press, 1972): 90-192.

4. James Sharpe, *Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (London: Pearson Education, 2001), 8. The phrase "witch-craze" predates Trevor-Roper, but its use is suggestive of a continuing approach.

5. Jonathan Barry and Owen Davies, eds., *Palgrave Advances in Witchcraft Historiography* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

6. Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 3rd ed. (Harlow, UK: Pearson/Longman, 2006). Other surveys include G.R. Quaife, *Godly Zeal and Furious Rage: The Witch in Early Modern Europe* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987); and Joseph Klaits, *Servants of Satan: The Age of the Witch Hunts* (Bloomington, IL: Indiana University Press, 1985).

7. It is possible to provide only a selective list of some of the major works in the field of the European witch-hunts. Those who are interested may want to begin with the various articles in Barry and Davies, eds., *Palgrave Advances in Witchcraft Historiography*. Other key works, not referenced elsewhere in this paper, would include: Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbors: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996); James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), and Gary K. Waite, *Heresy, Magic and Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

8. Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen, eds., *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). Another important collection of essays is Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester and Gareth Roberts, eds., *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe, Past & Present Publications* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

9. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 3. The book's structure reflects this division, with chapter 2 and 3 exploring the intellectual and legal foundations or preconditions and later chapters, particularly chapter 6 and 7, looking at the specific experiences when witch-hunts took place.

10. Various estimates exist. The estimate in the text comes from Raisa Maria Tovio, "The Witch-Craze as Holocaust: The Rise of Persecuting Societies," in *Palgrave Advances in Witchcraft Historiography*, 100. Similar estimates can be found in Sharpe, *Witchcraft in Early Modern England*, 6; and Levack,

The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern England, 20-24.

11. Katharine Hodgkin, "Gender, Mind and Body: Feminism and Psychoanalysis," *Palgrave Advances in Witchcraft Historiography*, 182-85.

12. English exceptionalism dominated early discussions of the European witch-hunt in the English language. James Sharpe's work in particular has challenged this idea (*Witchcraft in Early Modern England*, 12).

13. Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons* (Sussex: Sussex University Press, 1975), Chapter 7; and Richard Kiekhefer, *European Witch Trials: Their Foundations in Popular and Learned Culture, 1300-1500* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 16-18.

14. David Frankfurter, *Evil Incarnate: Rumors of Demonic Conspiracy and Ritual Abuse in History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

15. It is surprising that the recent witch-hunts in sub-Saharan Africa have not received more comment, particularly given their similarity to the European witch-hunts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

16. Christina Larner, *Enemies of God: The Witch-Hunt in Scotland* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981).

17. Stuart Macdonald, "Enemies of God Revisited: Recent Publications on Scottish Witch-Hunting," *Scottish Economic and Social History* 23, no. 2 (2003): 65-84. This edition of the journal appeared in March 2005.

18. P.G. Maxwell-Stuart, "The Fear of the King Is Death: James VI and the Witches of East Lothian," in *Fear in Early Modern Society*, eds. William G. Naphy and Penny Roberts (New York: Manchester University Press, 1997); and Jenny Wormald, "The Witches, the Devil and the King," in *Freedom and Authority: Scotland C.1050 - C.1650: Historical and Historiographical Essays Presented to Grant G. Simpson*, eds. Terry Brotherstone and David Ditchburn (East Linton, UK: Tuckwell, 2000).

19. On the role of the state in driving the witch-hunts, see Larner, *Enemies of God*, 60; and Julian Goodare, "Witch-Hunting and the Scottish State," in *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context, ed. Julian Goodare* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 139. The role of the central government in limiting witch-hunting is made Brian P. Levack, "State-Building and Witch Hunting in Early Modern Europe," in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, and Gareth Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 100; and Brian P. Levack, *Witch-Hunting in Scotland: Law, Politics and Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

20. Levack, "State-Building," 105-106. See also Stuart Macdonald, *The Witches of Fife: Witch-Hunting in a Scottish Shire, 1560-1710* (East Linton: Tuckwell, 2002), 123-42; and Stuart Macdonald, "Torture and the Scottish Witch-Hunt: A Re-Examination," *Scottish Tradition* 27 (2002): 95-114.

21. There is a significant difference between the two graphs of the Scottish witch-hunt in relation to the 1597 hunt. Larner, *Enemies of God*, 61, records 200 known cases and projects the possibility of another hundred, for a total in the area of 300 cases. Macdonald, *Witches of Fife*, 20, records 83 known cases, and estimates a few more for a total of under 100. See also Macdonald, "Enemies of God Revisited," 73. Most recently, the graphs based upon the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft have noted 111 cases in 1597, which still makes it significantly smaller than the major hunts in the seventeenth century. Lauren Martin and Joyce Miller, "Some Findings from the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft," in *Witchcraft and Belief in Early Modern Scotland,* eds. Julian Goodare, Lauren Martin, and Joyce Miller (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 57.

22. One important article beginning to do this was recently published: Lauren Martin, "Scottish Witchcraft Panics Re-Examined," in *Witchcraft and Belief in Early Modern Scotland*.

23. Levack, *Witch-Hunting in Scotland: Law, Politics and Religion*.

24. P.G. Maxwell-Stuart, *An Abundance of Witches: The Great Scottish Witch-Hunt* (Gloucestershire, UK: Tempus, 2005).

25. Goodare, Martin, and Miller, eds., *Witchcraft and Belief in Early Modern Scotland*.

26. Many of the recent articles are contained in Goodare, Martin, and Miller, eds., *Witchcraft and Belief* (2008). Other recent articles include: Michael Wasser, "The Privy Council and the Witches: The Curtailment of Witchcraft Prosecutions in Scotland, 1597-1628," *Scottish Historical Review* LXXXII, no. 1 (2003); Julian Goodare, "The Scottish Witchcraft Act," *Church History* 74, no. 1 (2005); Lizanne Henderson, "The Survival of Witchcraft Prosecutions and Witch Belief in South-West Scotland," *Scottish Historical Review* LXXXV, no. 1 (2006); and Goodare, "John Knox on Demonology and Witchcraft." The challenge for Goodare, "John Knox on Demonology" is, as noted in his article, 221, that demonology and witches were not a major feature of Knox's theological or historical writings. The methodology used in the article is more traditional and focused on theology than the approach I am recommending which, following Michael Graham and Margo Todd, focuses a great deal of attention on the practical program of discipline and how this was carried out.

27. John R. Young, "The Scottish Parliament and Witch-Hunting in Scotland under the Covenanters," *Parliaments, Estates and Representation* 26, no. 1 (2006). A doctoral thesis on the 1649-1650 hunt was recently completed at the University of Strathclyde by Paula Hughes, and publications arising from this will soon be appearing.

28. Larner, *Enemies of God*, 84-85. Larner suggested a computer study of the names of the lairds who appeared in various commissions, 87, which indicates again that they, not the ministers, were crucial actors. More on this complicated issue can be found in Macdonald, "*Enemies of God* Revisited," 71.

29. Macdonald, *Witches of Fife*, 145.

30. Michael F. Graham, *The Uses of Reform: 'Godly Discipline' and Popular Behavior in Scotland and Beyond, 1560-1610* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1996); and Margo Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern Scotland* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002). This theme is also explored in *Witches of Fife*, 183-190.

31. One possibility is that while demonological beliefs were discussed as part of the session meeting, they were not recorded in the minutes. While possible, I would suggest this was unlikely. We do have cases – although as noted in the text not many of them – where demonological beliefs are indicated.

32. Stuart Macdonald, "In Search of the Devil in Fife Witchcraft Cases, 1560-1705," in *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context*, ed. Julian Goodare (New York: Manchester University Press, 2002): 33-50.

33. This is explored in Martin, "Scottish Witchcraft Panics Re-examined," 121.

34. The idea that witch-hunting takes on an impetus of its own that is very difficult to stop is well expressed in Robert Rapley, *Witch Hunts: From Salem to Guantanamo Bay* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007). The book is a fascinating case study of justice gone awry. My comment would be that the case studies of "witch-hunting" used in the book (Salem, Bamberg and Wurzburg, Loudon) were atypical even in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Most cases in Scotland do not seem to fit this model.

35. The first significant attempt to catalogue Scottish witchcraft cases was George F. Black, *A Calendar of Cases of Witchcraft in Scotland 1510-1727* (New York: New York Public Library and Arno Press, 1938). A major step forward was Christina Larner, Christopher Hyde Lee, and Hugh McLachlan, *A Sourcebook of Scottish Witchcraft* (Glasgow: Sociology Department, University of Glasgow, 1977). The project used a computer database of the time to catalogue cases. This resource was updated several years later, with

additional information and cases added. This was published as a CDROM as Stuart Macdonald, *Scottish Witch-Hunt Data Base, Toronto* (2001). The most recent project has been the extensive work done by Julian Goodare, Lauren Martin, Joyce Millar and Louse Yeoman which has produced the online resource The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft, 2003, http://www.shc.ed.ac.uk/Research/witches/. Comments on the findings from the Survey can be found in Martin and Miller, "Some Findings from the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft."

36. Macdonald, *Witches of Fife*, 22-23, notes only 8 cases from Wigtown, making it one of the counties in Scotland with the fewest witchcraft cases. See Henderson, "Survival of Witchcraft Prosecutions" for these cases and those in the neigbouring counties. Martin, "Scottish Witchcraft Panics Re-examined," discusses a different aspect of this issue focusing on the different results one obtains counting the number of accusations versus counting the number parishes where accusations were taking place.

37. This point is well articulated in P.G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Witch Hunters: Professional Prickers, Unwitchers & Witch Finders of the Renaissance* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Tempus, 2003), 39-40, 170.

38. Macdonald, *Witches of Fife*, 145-153.

39. This theme was explored in Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 2007), 80-89.

The Madness of his Method: Methodism, Discipline and the British World

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The idea of discipline was and remains central to Methodism. During the nineteenth century, discipline determined who was and who was not a member of the connexion; it comprised the rules that governed the church and it laid out the means of grace through which each Methodist could proceed from conversion to Christian perfection. As Thomas Frank points out, however, the place of discipline in Methodism has received surprisingly little scholarly attention. That may be because of its omnipresent nature: to study Methodist discipline is, potentially, to study the whole of Methodist existence. That is a tall order and, not surprisingly perhaps, this article takes a narrower approach to the topic. It is true, as Frank notes, that there was more to Methodist discipline than the regulation of ministerial behaviour.[1] But it is also true that clerical discipline left behind a particularly rich store of records. Drawing on those sources will allow us to analyze the operation of Methodist discipline within two groups: the Canadian Methodist connexion and the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Britain, including its missionaries in the colonies of Lower and Upper Canada. Adopting this transatlantic perspective, we will see that, despite different approaches to forging discipline, ministers on both sides of the ocean implemented it in similar ways. From the 1820s on, they transformed discipline into a tool of regulation and factional conflict. At the same time, discipline itself operated at a transatlantic level, with sometimes surprising results.

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Forging Discipline

If we are going to understand the meaning of discipline, we have to begin with John Wesley. Even before he felt his "heart strangely warmed" in 1738, Wesley was a stickler for self-regulation. As a young man, he demonstrated both his single-mindedness of purpose and his keen sense of his own sinfulness by vowing never to touch a woman's breasts again. Wesley almost certainly failed to keep that promise, but, as Methodism took shape in the early 1700s, he applied the same kind of rigorous thinking to all aspects of life.[2] The question of what one must do in order to be saved was one he asked himself and his growing number of followers; in annual meetings with his ministers, the discipline of Methodism took shape in answer to that question. At first, it concentrated on the organization of the class meetings, those small local gatherings where Methodists strove for Christian perfection; it also included a list of actions that would either contribute to, or stop a person from achieving, that happy state of salvation.[3] As Methodism expanded during the remainder of the eighteenth century, however, Wesley and his ministers added to the discipline. What might be called "connexional law" took up an increasing amount of each Conference's time. The plan fact was that, with a growing number of ministers in the field, the Methodists had to find a way to regulate the pastorate. As a result, discipline came to define who was and who was not a good minister. Given his central role in the connexion, Wesley himself became the model of an effective preacher – abstemious, sexually abstinent outside of marriage, and actuated by an almost fanatical dedication to the oneness of Methodism. But, as E.P. Thompson once pointed out, Wesley was a hard act to follow.[4]

After Wesley's death in 1791, discipline became a disruptive force among the Methodists on both sides of the Atlantic. Generally speaking, there were three great sins of the nineteenth-century Methodist pastorate: drunkenness, illicit sex, and schism. There was rarely disagreement among the clergy, whether in Britain or the Canadas, about the heinousness of those sins; but how exactly to define them became problematic once the connexional controls were no longer in Wesley's strong, pure hands. How drunk, for instance, did a minister have to be before he was no longer a trustworthy servant of God? What constituted illicit sex? And what was the difference between criticizing the church and schism? No matter how the Methodists in Britain and the Canadas approached the forging of disci-

pline, these remained difficult questions. Drawing on their American Methodist heritage, the Canadian Methodists made discipline the Conference's responsibility and published a regularly updated book containing all the regulations of the ministry and the connexion as a whole.[5] In the British connexion, there was no such discrete volume. Instead, British Wesleyanism had the ecclesiastical equivalent of an unwritten constitution; the rules passed at each Conference, and recorded in its published minutes, made up the discipline. It was left to the ministry to gather those rules together in manuals and guides.[6] In each case, the pastorate was left to regulate itself – to make and enforce the very discipline by which it was governed. That might have been fine if transatlantic Methodism had managed to live up to Wesley's vision of denominational oneness. Oneness, however, was difficult to find during the mid-nineteenth century. Beginning in the 1820s, Methodism in Britain and the Canadas split into factions and various ministerial groups attempted to interpret discipline to serve their own party interests. Discipline was thus transformed into a means of regulating ministerial behaviour and a tool of factional conflict – indeed, the two became increasingly inseparable.

Discipline as Regulation

That is not to say, however, that factional interests drove all cases of clerical discipline. Every year, at their local district meetings and at the Conference, the Wesleyan ministers in Britain questioned one another's character. And almost every year, there were cases of bad behaviour that, to the majority of the ministry, clearly required some form of punishment, whether suspension or outright expulsion from the pastorate. These were cases of pure regulation. For example, one evening in 1841, a minister named Smith found a young preacher, Mr. Simpson, "in his daughter's bed-room, when she was in bed, sitting on the side of her bed, without his clothes." When called to account for this extraordinary scene, Simpson rather disingenuously claimed that, "he went to her room, in accordance with her earnest request, to finish a conversation which had been commenced in the parlour, but which had been interrupted by a visitor." Of course, that did not really explain the whole naked thing. This affair was so potentially scandalous that one of the leading men of the connexion, John Hannah, personally interviewed Simpson and strongly suggested that he should resign from the ministry.[7] That was likely the preferred method

of proceeding; it would forestall any embarrassing questions, including how such a flawed a man could have become a minister in the first place.

The need for pure regulation was felt with equal force on the other side of the Atlantic, among the British Wesleyan missionaries and Canadian Methodists in Lower and Upper Canada. Far away from the connexional centre, ministerial misbehaviour appears to have been rife among the missionaries; or perhaps, given how few of them there were in the colonies at any given point, it was simply more noticeable than it was in Britain. Whatever the case, these transplanted British ministers accused one another of "intoxication," schism, and sexual indiscretions.[8] Every year, at their annual district meetings, they also uncovered a host of other sins requiring prompt correction, including being "deficient" in their knowledge of Methodism, resisting the authority of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (hereafter WMMS) in Britain, and becoming involved in unsuitable political causes.[9] In each instance, the missionaries sent a report to the WMMS and the connexional authorities in London decreed a suitable punishment. In particularly egregious instances, the offending party might be sent home to Britain to defend himself.[10] The Canadian Methodist ministers, in contrast, regulated the pastorate at their own district meetings and Conferences, even when they were united with the British Wesleyans between 1833 and 1840 and again from 1847 to 1874. So, when, in February 1858, one of the leading preachers of Canadian Methodism, Egerton Ryerson, failed to attend the means of grace at Adelaide Street Church in Toronto and allowed his daughter Sophia to attend a public dance, it was a fellow minister, John Borland, who accused him of moral laxity.[11] When Egerton's brother, John Ryerson, became addicted to brandy and opium, tumbled off a dock and had to be fished out of the water by the police and other passersby, it was the Canada Conference of 1858 that suspended him from the ministry for a year.[12] And it was that same Conference of 1858 that expelled Edwy Ryerson from the connexion for reasons that, to this day, remain unclear.[13]

Discipline as Factionalism

Even in these instances, however, it was difficult, if not impossible, to separate regulation and factionalism. The events of 1858, while based on matters of regulation, were also the culmination of a factional conflict that began four years earlier, pitting Egerton Ryerson and his supporters

against the more conservative wing of the Canada Conference. In 1854, Ryerson started to push for the elimination of one of the key points of the discipline: the requirement that all church members attend class meetings. He encountered such vehement opposition from his fellow ministers that he felt obliged to withdraw from the pastorate. Over the next two years, Ryerson maintained his ground on class meetings and attempted to gain readmission to the ministry on his own terms. Two other ministers, John Borland and James Spencer, opposed him. They were keen supporters of "Methodism as it is" and saw no reason to tamper with a section of the discipline that Wesley himself had established. And neither Borland nor Spencer seemed to be disturbed in the least by Ryerson's argument that, under the discipline, all church members had the right to criticize the connexion.

Indeed, Borland and Spencer proceeded to make whatever use they could of discipline to keep Ryerson out of the pastorate, or, at the very least, to muzzle him on the class meeting issue. In 1856, Spencer raised objections to Ryerson's character at the Toronto district meeting and in the pages of the Canadian Methodist newspaper, the *Christian Guardian*, of which he was the editor. At the Conference that year, Borland pressed the attack home, proposing a resolution censoring Ryerson's conduct and calling for his exclusion from the ministry for at least another year. Borland's motion split the ministry, dividing them into pro- and anti-Ryerson factions. As the President of the Conference, Enoch Wood, observed, "[t]wo days and a half were consumed with this . . . matter . . ." The debate itself was vicious – Wood compared it to "[t]umultuous waves hurled together by changing currents of wind after being agitated by a tropical hurricane . . ." In the end, the dispute was resolved through a compromise: Borland's resolution was defeated, but the class meeting remained firmly at the centre of Canadian Methodist discipline.[14] Borland and Spencer had to wait until 1858, when they and their supporters controlled the key positions in the Conference, to exact what vengeance they could on Egerton Ryerson through his hapless brothers, John and Edwy.

On the other side of the Atlantic, the group of Wesleyan ministers that gathered around Jabez Bunting also raised the mixing of regulation and factionalism to a fine art. The Buntingites, as they were called, saw enemies all around them; and they too attempted to use discipline to shape Wesleyanism in their own image. In 1833, for instance, Bunting feared that

his reputation "might be injured in the opinion of the Junior preachers" by a rogue Methodist newspaper, the *Christian Advocate*. He and his allies used the annual trial of each minister's character at the Conference as an opportunity to crush any discontent that might exist in the connexion. When Bunting's character came up for consideration, the Buntingites praised him to the skies and denounced anyone who read or contributed to the *Christian Advocate* as "cowards, Blackguards & assassins." Since a Methodist layman edited the newspaper, he had no opportunity to defend himself before the Conference, which included only members of the ministry. The Buntingites also passed an official resolution commending their chief and all his actions.[15] Despite these tactics, however, discontent festered among those ministers who were either excluded from Bunting's inner circle or who simply did not agree with his views. Joseph Rayner Stephens was one such preacher. Throughout the early 1830s, Stephens attacked the Buntingites' support for the church establishment. Wesley's position on the relationship between Methodism and Anglicanism was, to say the least, ambivalent, but Bunting and his allies believed that they knew exactly what the great man had believed. In 1834, they charged Stephens with schism and drummed him out of the church.[16] Through a pitiless use of discipline, the Buntingites secured their interpretation of the Weselyan tradition and their position at the centre of the connexion.

Transatlantic Discipline

Of course, factionalism was never just about attacking others; it also involved protecting ministers who were on your side. It was in the latter context that Methodism's transatlantic context took on particular significance. The wider British world, of which both British Wesleyanism and Canadian Methodism were a part, frequently served as a connexional safety valve, allowing the church authorities to lessen disciplinary pressure when it suited their interests to do so. Take, for example, the case of the British Wesleyan missionary J.B. Selley. Selley arrived in Lower Canada in 1845. The secretaries of the WMMS declared him "a *superior* young man" and he married the daughter of Peter Langlois, the grandest lay grandee of Quebec City Methodism.[17] A year later, in 1846, Selley's fellow missionaries charged him with "delinquency in reference to his servant girl."[18] At a special district meeting held just to deal with the case, the missionaries examined Selley's character and found him guilty. As

discipline required, they wrote to the WMMS, noting that, "[t]he *final* decision" in the case "lies with you, and the sooner you can put us in possession of it the better." The missionaries also suggested that the connexional authorities in Britain should "exercise . . . all that mercy they can consistently extend." That recommendation was made "with the full conviction that Mr. Selley is truly and deeply penitent – for the very serious offence he had committed against God and the Church."[19] The WMMS took the hint; it would hardly be politick to recall and expel a minister who was related to one of the most important laymen in Lower Canada. Instead, the secretaries of the WMMS took advantage of Methodism's transoceanic missionary field: they assigned Selley to another part of the British world altogether – the West Indies – where his disgrace was unknown and where he could start again. Eventually, in 1853, when enough time had passed, the WMMS permitted Selley and his family to return to Lower Canada.[20] In the meantime, however, Methodism's position in the British world had allowed the WMMS to maintain the appearance of upholding discipline, while, in actuality, circumventing it.

As effective as that tactic could be, it is also important to note that there were instances when it backfired. The transatlantic career of the missionary John Barry provides a striking example of this point. By the time the WMMS sent Barry to Upper Canada in 1832, he had already established a reputation not only as a highly talented preacher whom the connexion would be reluctant to lose, but also as an incorrigible hell-raiser. While stationed in Ireland in 1819, Barry threw himself into a very public dispute between the Wesleyan connexion and the rival Primitive Wesleyan Methodist church in Kinsale; and, when the WMMS packed him off to Jamaica in 1825, he quarreled with his own ministerial colleagues and then crossed swords with a leading magistrate and newspaper editor over the issue of slavery – Barry being a determined opponent of the "peculiar institution."[21] As soon as the WMMS transferred him to the Canadas, Barry was at it again. By 1833, he had become one of the most vocal opponents of the union that the leaders of the British Wesleyan connexion had just negotiated with the Canadian Methodists. In letters to the WMMS, Barry argued that the Canada connexion had "no object in view *but the total and final expulsion of all that is English from Canada*."[22] This insubordination appalled the secretaries of the WMMS in Britain, and, once again, they turned to the discipline to deal with the situation. Jabez Bunting suggested that they should "recall" Barry to Britain, "or send him

. . . to South Africa, or some other place quite out of range of North American feeling and influence."[23] In the end, the WMMS sent Barry to Bermuda, having, one assumes, learned the thoroughly ironic lesson that mixing discipline and Methodism's transoceanic reach had the potential both to promote and disrupt connexional order across the British world.[24]

For the most part, however, transatlantic discipline did work to the advantage of British Wesleyanism and Canadian Methodism, drawing the two connexions together in ways that benefited each of them. In 1867, for instance, the British Wesleyan preacher William Morley Punshon agreed to become President of the Canada Conference. Punshon's appointment was quite a coup for the Canadian Methodists; he was one of the most celebrated preachers of his day and a proficient fundraiser.[25] But there was more going on here than met the eye. In part, at least, Punshon accepted the Canadian Methodist invitation to cross the ocean because it would allow him to get around his own connexion's discipline. Punshon was determined to marry his dead wife's sister – an action that was illegal in England, but permissible in Canada. As Egerton Ryerson pointed out, "[t]he lawfulness of a man's marrying his deceased wife's sister has never been called into question in this country." In fact, a "leading Physician in Toronto & an influential member of our Church" had "married his deceased wife's sister three or four years since" in the presence of "[s]everal Wesleyan Ministers," including Ryerson himself. That was good enough for Punshon and for his friends in the British Wesleyan Conference. He came to Canada, married Fanny Vickers in August 1868 and served as President of the Canada Conference until he returned to Britain in 1873.[26] And yet, despite the many successes of those five years, there were still some members of the British Wesleyan connexion who objected to his marriage "on Scriptural grounds."[27] With Punshon on the other side of the Atlantic, however, there was little they could do about it and British Wesleyanism was spared what would likely have been a divisive debate on the subject. When it was convenient, discipline could fall victim to the tyranny of distance.

Conclusion

Like many other aspects of the Methodist experience, discipline becomes more complex the closer we examine it. In part, discipline was a tool for shaping the ministry, but, because the pastorate itself was

responsible for forging and enforcing it, it was always open to abuse. With the rise of factions in both British Wesleyanism and Canadian Methodism, such abuse became almost unavoidable. And if that were not complicated enough, discipline also had another transatlantic dimension that should not be ignored. If, as Alan Lester argues, there were circuits of empire – channels of information that drew the British world together in the nineteenth century – there were also circuits of discipline within Methodism.[28] Disciplinary issues in one part of the Methodist gospel field could, and often did, affect connexional affairs in another part. Methodism's transatlantic reach certainly allowed ministers to play fast and loose with their own regulations, though, as in the case of William Morley Punshon, with beneficial results for the movement as a whole. Throwing discipline to the winds was, at times, the best move that the Methodist ministry could make.

Endnotes

1. Thomas Edward Frank, "Discipline," in *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, eds. William J. Abraham and James E. Kirby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 245-61.

2. Richard P. Heitzenrater and W.R. Ward, eds., *The Works of John Wesley: Journals and Diaries* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988-2003), 1:250; Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, 3rd ed. (London: Epworth Press, 2002), 78-83, 257-69.

3. John Lawson, "The People Called Methodists 2. 'Our Discipline,'" in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, eds. Rupert Davies and Gordon Rupp, 3 vols. (London: Epworth Press, 1965-1988), 1:191-94.

4. Lawson, "Our Discipline," 1:199-200; Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 174-76, 205-6, 237, 298; and E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin Books, 1968), 389.

5. For examples of the American and Canadian Methodist approach to discipline see *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: T. Kirk, 1804); and *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Canada* (Toronto: Anson Green, 1864).

6. Edmund Grindrod, *A Compendium of the Laws and Regulations of Welseyan Methodism*, 8th ed. (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1865), x-xvii; and Russell E. Richey, *The Methodist Conference in America: A History* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1996), 16-19.

7. John Hannah to Jabez Bunting, 7 May 1841, MAM PLP 49.4.43, John Hannah papers, Methodist Archives and Research Centre, John Rylands University Library of Manchester, Manchester (hereafter MARC).

8. 12 February 1821, Reel 3, District Minutes (Canada/Lower Canada), Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Correspondence (hereafter WMMS-C), United Church Archives, Toronto, ON (hereafter UCA); 15 May 1829, Reel 3, District Minutes (Canada/Lower Canada) WMMS-C, UCA; 18 May 1843, Reel 3, District Minutes (Canada/Lower Canada) WMMS-C, UCA; and 8 May 1847, Reel 3, District Minutes (Canada/Lower Canada), WMMS-C, UCA.

9. 18 May 1827, Reel 3, District Minutes (Canada/Lower Canada), WMMS-C, UCA; 31 May 1832, Reel 3, District Minutes (Canada/Lower Canada), WMMS-C, UCA; and 20 May 1841, Reel 3, District Minutes (Canada/Lower Canada), WMMS-C, UCA.

10. See, for example, the case of William Sutcliffe who was "charged with being overcome by liquor." R. Williams and R.L. Lusher to Joseph Taylor, 7 September 1821, Box 5, File 44, #31, WMMS-C, UCA; and John Hick and John DePutron to the General Secretaries of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, 9 February 1822, Box 6, File 48 #15, WMMS-C, UCA.

11. C.B. Sissons, *Egerton Ryerson: His Life and Letters*, 2 vols. (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Company Ltd., 1937-1947), 2:365-66.

12. Enoch Wood to the General Secretaries of the WMMS, 5 July 1858, Box 40, File 296, #12, WMMS-C, UCA.

13. Minutes of Several Conversations between the Ministers of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Canada (Toronto: George R. Sanderson, 1858), 9; and Sissons, *Egerton Ryerson*, 2:367.

14. This account of the class meeting debate is based on Goldwin French, "James Spencer," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967-), 9:737; Neil Semple, *The Lord's Dominion: The History of Canadian Methodism* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 229-31, 500 note 62; Sissons, *Egerton Ryerson*, 2:285-326. See also John Borland, *Dialogues between Two Methodists, Algernon Newways and Samuel Oldpaths* (Toronto: John Donogh, 1856), 5-7,

10; and Enoch Wood to Elijah Hoole, George Osborne and William Arthur, 28 June 1856, Box 40, File 291, #13, WMMS-C, UCA. The quotations are from Wood's letter.

15. John Rattenbury to Mary Rattenbury, 2 August 1833, MAM PLP 86.28.74, John Ratternbury papers, MARC. See also the record of the debates in the Conference in Benjamin Gregory, *Side Lights on the Conflicts of Methodism during the Second Quarter of the Nineteenth Century, 1827-1852* (London: Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1898), 129-32.

16. Michael S. Edwards, *Purge This Realm: A Life of Joseph Rayner Stephens* (London: Epworth Pres, 1994), 2-16; Gregory, *Side Lights*, 161-64. See also John Rattenbury to Mary Rattenbury, 6 August 1834, MAM PLP 86.28.76, John Rattenbury papers, MARC.

17. William Lunn to Robert Alder, 22 February 1845, Box 29, File 202, #9, WMMS-C, UCA. Emphasis in original. See also Peter Langlois to Robert Alder, 19 October 1849, Box 33, File 235, #17, WMMS-C, UCA.

18. Matthew Richey to Robert Alder, 27 October 1846, Box 29, File 210, #16, WMMS-C, UCA.

19. Matthew Richey to Robert Alder, 25 November 1846, Box 29, File 210, #19, WMMS-C, UCA; 8 May 1847, Reel 3, District Minutes (Canada/Lower Canada), WMMS-C, UCA.

20. George H. Cornish, *Cyclopaedia of Methodism in Canada* (Toronto: Methodist Book and Publishing House, 1881), 137; Peter Langlois to Robert Alder, 19 October 1849, Box 33, File 235, #17, WMMS-C, UCA.

21. Norman W. Taggart, *The Irish in World Methodism, 1760-1900* (London: Epworth Press, 1986), 151-53.

22. John Barry to the General Secretaries of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, 2 August 1833, Box 17, File 106, #35, WMMS-C, UCA. Emphasis in original.

23. Jabez Bunting to Robert Alder and John Beecham, 18 November 1833, MAM PLP 18.15.10, Jabez Bunting papers, MARC.

24. Taggart, *Irish in World Methodism*, 165-66.

25. William Westfall, "William Morley Punshon," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967-), 11:719-20.

26. Egerton Ryerson to William Morley Punshon, 19 June 1867, Portraits and Letters of the Presidents of the Canadian Conference, UCA. See also William Morley Punshon to Mr. Parkin, 18 August 1868, William Morley Punshon papers, UCA; Westfall, "Punshon," 11:719. For the legal niceties of Punshon's case, see Peter Ward, *Courtship, Love, and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century English Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), 35-37.

27. Gervase Smith to Egerton Ryerson, 17 August 1868, Box 5, File 153, Egerton Ryerson Papers, UCA.

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Church Union and the Presbyterians of Galt, Ontario

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As one of the more noteworthy religious events in Canadian history, the so-called church union of 1925 has been the subject of much scholarly research and writing. Within the historiography of church union, moreover, the controversy and schism within the Presbyterian Church in Canada has been a dominant focus. Yet, for all the attention paid to the issues of church union in general and the Presbyterian disruption in particular, one complex and persistent question has always resisted an easy answer for serious students: why did so many Presbyterians, standing against their General Assembly, choose not to join The United Church of Canada? John Webster Grant, for example, has written that "the motives that led individuals to support or oppose union were so complex as to baffle anyone who attempts to analyze them."[1] While admitting the genuine difficulty of the task, this paper will offer an answer to the above question that, though incomplete in and of itself, is able to shed some much-needed light on both how and why Presbyterians were divided by church union as well as the difficulties faced by those who have tried previously to understand this key aspect, or consequence, of the movement. Based on a close study of the four Presbyterian congregations of Galt (now Cambridge), Ontario – Knox's, Central, St. Andrew's and First – it will be shown that a great many Presbyterians were highly influenced in their decision about whether to join the United Church by interpersonal considerations. This thesis makes good sense of the evidence available and it also has the benefit of helping us understand the difficulties of making

generalizations about church union, and the Presbyterian "disruption," which are typically encountered.

Historians have often taken a keen interest in the large group of Presbyterians who stayed out of the United Church, anywhere from one third to one half of its members. Yet, in trying to understand the reasons for this development, the motivations of most individual Presbyterians have been inferred from the study of a few influential leaders. C.E. Silcox, for example, in his foundational *Church Union in Canada*, gleaned from the literature of the Presbyterian Church Association an extensive list of ideological reasons – including civil jurisprudence and theology – for the existence of a large dissenting minority. While he does acknowledge "local difficulties," these are presented as an afterthought and as having more to do with post-schism "community adjustments."[2] Although other historians have sometimes disagreed with some of Silcox's specific conclusions, their overall approach has been very similar.[3]

While the historiography of church union is often insightful, stimulating and helpful, two methodological difficulties have hindered ongoing progress. First, the surprising inconsistency and incoherence of participants' arguments tend to defy generalization. Second, even acknowledging that prominent leaders did not always mean what they said, it is not clear that conclusions based on their experiences can be applied to the motivations of others. In fact, it is probably better to start from the assumption that, for various reasons, they should not be. This kind of inference, however, has been made consistently. This paper will show, conversely, that the experiences of Canadian Presbyterians can often be examined fruitfully at the congregational level and that popular motivations do not have to be inferred so completely from the statements of prominent public figures or denominational leaders.

To this claim, it might be countered that a focus on local evidence has predetermined a parochial conclusion or that Galt's diverse group of Presbyterians were collectively unique. This paper, however, does not seek to put their experiences in opposition to those of well-known individuals or to Presbyterians in other communities. Nor is it implied that intellectual arguments about church union were unimportant. Rather, the point is simply that we can and should study the experiences of Canadian Presbyterians in their congregational contexts, rather than simply inferring the choices of the many from the rhetoric of a few. This study will tell the stories of Galt's Presbyterian congregations and, one hopes, demonstrate

a method that can lead us to a richer and more nuanced understanding of how and why Canadian Presbyterians were divided by church union.

Church Union in Galt's Presbyterian Churches

1. Knox's Church

Knox's, founded in 1844 as a Free Church, had called its first Canadian minister, R.E. Knowles, in 1898[4] and it was during his tenure that the subject of church union was first broached. At an early stage, many in Knox's believed that church union was a good idea for Kirk and country. When the Basis of Union was made available to congregations, in 1908, the Session offered a positive evaluation. Their Annual Report states,

> It is gratifying to observe the progress made toward organic union and to learn that all difficulties met with by the various committees are being overcome and that there is reason to hope that the great question will shortly be submitted to the congregation for their consideration.[5]

In March 1912, when Presbyterians across Canada were later asked to vote on two questions concerning church union – question one concerning church union in principle, question two the Basis of Union in particular – the result in Knox's showed a clear majority in favour of both.[6]

	Question One		Question Two	
	For	Against	For	Against
Elders	21	4	17	3
Members	291	61	231	55
Adherents	21	3	16	3
Totals	333	68	264	61

In the years to come, however, congregational sentiment began to change. In February 1907, Knowles had been involved in a train derailment near Guelph in which several people were killed. While he escaped with relatively minor injuries, the experience led to his having a nervous breakdown. Away from work for several months immediately following the accident as well as for long stretches in subsequent years, he never

fully regained his health and eventually resigned in January 1915.[7] In September of that year, the congregation called J.K. Fraser as its minister and this decision led to a shift in both the sentiment and position of the congregation. A native of Prince Edward Island, Fraser had come back to Canada just that summer after thirteen years in Charleston, South Carolina – largely to take part in the resistance to church union.[8] Having returned to Canada without yet having a call, he began his campaign against church union almost immediately after accepting one from Knox's. As early as August 1916, for example, John Penman noticed an anti-union article of Fraser's in *The Outlook* and wrote a letter to thank him, in which he also invited suggestions about an upcoming conference. Showing himself to be surprisingly familiar with the Canadian situation, Fraser replied, "The less Dr. Campbell and Dr. Scott have to say on the question, the better for us. I find men all over the church resent their attitude."[9] Soon after, Fraser wrote a telling letter to J.W. MacNamara, secretary of the Presbyterian Church Association, in which he stated that "I came to Galt only last November and do not have our men yet."[10]

In late 1915, Canadian Presbyterians were asked to vote again on the thorny question of church union. In Knox's, the congregation returned another pro-union vote, but this time by a narrow margin.[11]

	Question One	
	For	Against
Elders	18	4
Members	146	147
Adherents	6	9
Totals	170	160

The nation-wide results of this second referendum left the General Assembly in a difficult position – although a majority continued to favour church union, the opposition had grown. In response, the whole matter was set aside for several years. By 1923 at the latest, however, it was clear that church union would go forward and that it would split the Presbyterian Church.

When the Presbyterian Church Association began its final effort to keep the congregations in Galt and as many of their members as possible

out of the United Church, Fraser became its leading spokesperson and organizer in the city. He was able to secure, for example, despite two previous rejections by the unionist Session of his own congregation, Knox's building for an anti-union rally on 28 March 1923. Though the speakers that evening were well-known preachers, the meeting was something of a disaster for the Presbyterian Church Association. Atrocious weather had drastically limited attendance, while some overly-long addresses left no time for organizational work.[12] Only much later was a local executive committee formed.

An ongoing dispute between Fraser and unionist elders, meanwhile, was leading to a bitter conflict in Knox's. At one point, we learn, Session meetings were deteriorating into four-hour arguments about church union.[13] A key bone of contention was the door-to-door canvass conducted by the Women's League in November in which they found an overwhelming majority, 716-196, opposed to church union on the basis of the proposed legislation.[14] Also controversial was a later anti-union rally held at Knox's. Although that event might have gone relatively unnoticed, those present passed an anti-union resolution and forwarded it to federal and provincial politicians.[15] These two actions – the canvass and the resolution – triggered a strong response from local unionists. A pro-union rally was then held in Knox's, at the instigation of the Session, at which George Pidgeon was one of the speakers.[16] Fraser complained to MacNamara that this was "an insult to me and the church."[17]

Anti-unionists in Knox's responded by asking the Session for a congregational meeting on 16 December 1923, to discuss the proposed church union bill. Although against the idea, the elders thought they had no choice but to consent. Just a week later, however, they discovered that the meeting would not be used for mere conversation but to vote on a resolution against church union. In a pre-emptive strike, Session declared that no vote would be allowed at the upcoming meeting and even that they were in favour "of church union as embodied in the bill."[18] What followed this was an unsightly public dispute carried out in the local newspaper. In one instance, Fraser used a feature article to criticize publicly the Session for its whole approach to the issue.[19]

At the aforementioned congregational meeting of 16 December, a resolution was indeed passed – one that called the church union bill "coercive and destructive of the rights of religious liberty." Afterward, anti-unionists began handing out ballots for a final congregational vote and

most of the unionists present walked out. At a Session meeting two days later, the elders declared their "unqualified disapproval" with the congregational meeting and that the resolution passed was "of no validity whatever."[20]

Throughout 1924, Fraser continued to campaign against church union, even using his summer holiday to speak on the issue in Prince Edward Island. Yet, he and others soon recognized a need to scale back their efforts if there was to be a Knox's preserved for Presbyterianism. Since the controversial events of December 1923, the congregation had been bitterly divided and, in the words of one, "had known no peace." Fraser's approach, in particular, had grown too zealous for even many anti-unionists.[21] In October, it was decided to cancel a planned anti-union rally as it was not, as Fraser said, "the psychological moment" for a meeting.[22]

Unionists, on the other hand, increased their efforts at this stage. Former minister Knowles, ironically, was especially active. In a fascinating turn of events, he had regained his health and, in 1922, moved back to Galt and joined Knox's as a member of the congregation. After re-marrying and traveling for a year with his new wife, he became a fixture in the congregation's church union controversy. In particular, he infuriated Fraser by sitting in the front pew on Sunday mornings in order to take copious notes of the sermons.[23]At a pro-church union rally in December, 1924, Knowles even rose to present a point-by-point refutation of Fraser's anti-union pamphlet: "Address to the Presbyterian Church, Alberton, PEI."

When the final ballots were counted, in January 1925, Knox's had decided, 540-363, to stay out of the United Church.[24] Subsequently, about 300 withdrew, 260 of whom went to First. While some had positive reasons for leaving Knox's, most left because they had been pushed by their minister. In a pastoral letter to every member of the congregation, Fraser had written that if Knox's voted for union,

> Hundreds of its members will have been taken from the church of their birth and choice. Does this seem fair or right? Might it not be better for those whose consciences compel them to enter the United Church to find a church of this fellowship elsewhere?[25]

Later, Knowles would write, "The cream of old Knox has come over to First . . . I might say that we are the whipped cream, and if we had not been whipped, we would not be here."[26]

The experience of church union was undoubtedly devastating for Knox's. Fraser was forced to resign and upon the arrival of his successor, in 1927, the congregational history observed that there was, "no visible repair to the damage that had been wrought" and that "morale was at an all-time low."[27] Although the remnant had secured their future as a Presbyterian congregation, ideological victory turned out not to be very satisfying in comparison to the high interpersonal costs involved.

2. Central Church

Central Church was formed largely by the vestige of Galt's Old Kirk following the Free Church controversy. From 1880 to 1914, its minister was Congregationalist James Dickson, a man of ecumenical spirit.[28] Having called a Congregationalist minister, Central seemed ripe for church union. Indeed, when the idea was first put to the people, in 1912, a large majority favoured it.[29]

	Question One		Question Two	
	For	Against	For	Against
Elders	13	6	9	7
Members	272	75	209	56
Adherents	25	6	18	1
Totals	300	87	236	64

Following Dickson's retirement, in 1914, the congregation called M.B. Davidson. Unlike his predecessor, Davidson opposed church union. On the eve of the second referendum, the Session asked him to preach on the subject and, on that occasion, Davidson left no doubt about his position. While Jesus' words from John 17:21 and the elimination of overlapping in the West were presented as dubious arguments for church union, he suggested that the real issues to be weighed were the benefits of a merger with the Methodists versus a split within Presbyterianism. Not surprisingly, given this logic, the results of the 1915 vote showed a significant turnaround in the congregation.[30]

Despite their shared opposition to church union, neither minister nor congregation became very involved in resistance movements – the

Presbyterian Church Association or the Women's League. Continually rejecting calls for help from Fraser and MacNamara, Davidson was unwilling to do anything that might threaten congregational unity. Even following the resumption of the church union controversy in the early 1920s, Davidson withstood outside pressure to become involved. He wrote to MacNamara, "it would be unfair of me now to enter on active, organized opposition," adding that the unity of the congregation was "The thing of supreme importance so far as my work as a minister goes."[31]

	Question One	
	For	Against
Elders	13	13
Members	115	302
Adherents	9	19
Totals	147	334

By and large, the congregation was pleased to focus on the preservation of their "one big family." Although the elders of Session were evenly divided on the church union issue, they insisted that no printed literature be distributed in Central.[32] When MacNamara asked for the use of the building for a Presbyterian Church Association rally, in 1924, the Session responded,

> We are of the opinion it will be better for the future of Central Church . . . if we as a church work within ourselves. Up to the present, we have had absolutely no feeling of bitterness, though we have quite a number in our church who favour church union. Our great desire is, if possible, to remain Presbyterian without a break in our ranks. We think we shall be more successful in this by not taking part in any outside meetings.[33]

Ultimately, the people of Central voted against joining the United Church, 470-166. Although 60 left the congregation, the split was amicable. Departing Clerk of Session David Nairn, for example, was given a gift in honour of his service to the Sunday school.[34] Despite the withdrawal of some to the United Church, Central remained intact as a community. Its leaders achieved their goals because they understood the

relational aspect of church union.

3. St. Andrew's Church

In response to Galt's rapid population growth, which followed the arrival of the Canadian Pacific Railway, the Young People's Society for Christian Endeavour at Central Church founded three satellite Sunday schools in 1891. One of these was very successful and grew into St. Andrew's Church. On 4 February 1916, the Presbytery of Guelph granted St. Andrew's the status of a mission charge and the congregation hired Knox College student J.D. Parks as a part-time minister. By October of that year, a large hall had been constructed and a Session formed.[35]

In 1917, Parks graduated and accepted a call to Tilston, Manitoba. His successor was J.J. Lowe, a member of the congregation in nearby Hespeler. An interesting character, Lowe was a revivalist who had travelled extensively, with D.L. Moody and Billy Sunday among others, and who had only settled in the area after marrying a local woman. In August 1919, Lowe was ordained in the Presbyterian Church and called as a full-time minister at St. Andrew's.[36]

Surprisingly, church union was not a pressing issue for this young congregation. As a visiting journalist noted, "The union question has been notable by its absence from the deliberations of officials and members in St. Andrew's."[37] Widely considered a "community church," most outsiders assumed that its Presbyterian identity was weak and that it would join the United Church. As an aid-receiving charge, further, the strong statistical trend would have been for St. Andrew's to enter union.[38] Contrary to expectations, however, the people of St. Andrew's were rather uninterested in the issue. Having literally to be nagged by Lowe to take a congregational vote in January 1925 – entry into the United Church being automatic absent a vote – the congregation decided, by a margin of 114 to 40, to stay out of the United Church. Indeed, of those who voted for church union, only two withdrew.[39]

The reasons for this response were the congregation's desire to remain together as well as the skillful leadership of an anti-unionist minister. Lowe was beloved by his parishioners, who called him "a veritable saint of God."[40] Had Lowe decided to join the United Church, the people would likely have followed him. Yet, his position was clear and firm. Lowe was known as one of the committed anti-unionists in the

Presbytery and he insisted on a congregational vote at St. Andrew's, knowing that the absence of one made entry into the United Church automatic. The path of least resistance for St. Andrew's was to follow Lowe and continue to work within a familiar context.

4. First Church

First was formed in 1822 during the visit of an itinerant American preacher of the Associate Reformed Church, Thomas Beveridge. Although Galt's first settlers belonged to the Church of Scotland, they were so grateful for Beveridge's visit that they joined his denomination.[41] In 1907, First severed its American ties and joined the Presbyterian Church in Canada.[42]

In 1907, the congregation also called its first Canadian minister, H.J. Pritchard. At that time, he and many others were already hoping for church union. After a first look at the Basis of Union, the Session declared "the 'Interim Report' of the committee on union of the churches presents a very satisfactory basis for union."[43] In 1912, the referendum showed a large majority in favour of church union.[44]

	Question One		Question Two	
	For	Against	For	Against
Elders	10	0	8	0
Members	137	15	124	13
Adherents	1	0	0	0
Totals	148	15	131	13

In May 1912, Pritchard accepted a call to Sault Sainte Marie and was replaced in the summer by K.J. MacDonald. When it came time for a second referendum, MacDonald advocated church union from the pulpit, arguing that the churches in Western Canada needed union and that its proposed constitution – the Basis of Union – was theologically and practically sound. It was the unionists, for him, who were the loyal Presbyterians, not their opponents.[45] Again, First showed its overall support for church union.[46]

When the church union issue reappeared, in the 1920s, controversy

was essentially absent from First and its few opponents within the congregation did not get actively involved in outside resistance movements. On 1 November 1924, the Session met to discuss church union and to arrange for a final congregational vote. Clerk of Session A.B. Scott was asked to make available a selection of literature from both sides while MacDonald, for his part, continued to advocate church union, both publically and privately.

	Question One	
	For	Against
Elders	14	2
Members	114	45
Adherents	5	0
Totals	133	47

While debate over the church union issue had caused little controversy in First, its actual consummation led to much anguish. After the congregation voted to join the United Church, 216 to 128, 55 withdrew while 268 arrived, mostly from Knox's.[47] In April, Knox College Principal Alfred Gandier was invited to fill the pulpit and offer his encouragement. The Session made note of his "very helpful sermon," which "reassured" the people of their decision.[48] On 31 May, the Session called a special meeting at which MacDonald was urged to make a statement, "strongly expressing to those who voted against church union that it is the earnest wish of the Session, Managers and Minister that they remain in First Church." Also telling was the Session's decision to suspend the usual practice of sharing summer services with the neighbouring Methodist congregation. Although the people of First were on the verge of joining them in the United Church, the elders felt "It would not be in the best interests of the church to hold joint services with the Wesleyan Ainslie Street Church during the holiday season."[49]

Amazingly, the Session also decided not to hold a joint service with the former Methodists to mark the birth of the United Church. On 11 June, Wesley United Church held such a service by themselves with only a handful from First in attendance: MacDonald, two recent transfers from Knox's and a couple in the joint choir.[50] It was not until the next Sunday,

14 June, that First held a church union service of its own. On that occasion, Pine Hill Divinity Hall Principal Clarence MacKinnon was the guest preacher and the Session made note of his "very helpful and inspiring sermon," which had "practical and spiritual lessons having a very direct bearing on the present crisis in the church."[51]

In the long run, church union provided an emotional and economic boost at First. In 1929, for example, an impressive and long-contemplated Christian Education wing was completed to house the Sunday school of nearly 400. MacDonald, a unionist partisan further, was able to remain happily until his retirement, in 1932. Nonetheless, the relational costs of church union proved very high. For a congregation that had joined the Presbyterian Church in Canada largely because of church union, the intellectual aspects of the issue were revealed, in the end, to be relatively minor concerns.

Conclusion

A lot of serious thought has obviously been given to the possible reasons why the Presbyterian Church in Canada split over church union, especially to the statements of leading participants in the controversy. As Grant noted, though, "public statements do not always tell very much about actual motives."[52] Reading between the lines, he and N. Keith Clifford have concluded, in similar ways, that anti-unionists opposed the creation of an unnecessarily large religio-political institution and its achievement at the cost of religious liberty.[53] While both have done brilliant work and are leading names in the field, neither has moved far beyond a reinterpretation of the intellectual arguments made by a relatively small number of prominent figures. Although their studies are very helpful and often convincing, the sheer diversity of church union experiences among Canadian Presbyterians still resists, in my view, such broad generalization and begs a more nuanced approach. Notably, on the other hand, the few localized studies of church union have, to date, repeatedly highlighted the presence of significant regional diversity across the country. In Western Canada, for example, where a relative uniformity of support for church union was long assumed, Clifford himself found remarkable dissimilarities that point in just the opposite direction.[54] In the Maritimes, also, it has been shown that Presbyterians in Prince Edward Island and Pictou County, Nova Scotia, responded in unique ways to differing local circumstances.[55]

What explains the presence of such bewildering diversity as we find consistently in any study of the Presbyterian schism? Admitting the extreme difficulty we face in trying to understand the internal reasons why individual Presbyterians supported or opposed church union or of making helpful inference from an extremely complicated body of statistical evidence, as attempted by John A. Ross,[56] it seems more methodologically helpful to examine, among a small sample such as this one has provided, why some individuals did, or did not, join the United Church. In other words, it is votes cast with feet, rather than with secret ballots or public rhetoric, which are most telling and significant. In light of this methodological distinction, it becomes clear, from a close study of the Galt congregations, that personalities and relationships made the difference for many Presbyterians.

In his grand study, Silcox himself noted the role of "local difficulties" around church union, especially the minister's "method and manner" as well as other unique congregational dynamics.[57] Clifford, who saw in common a shared defence of religious liberty among anti-union activists, also pointed to local influences, such as wealth and social identity, which were distinct in each congregation.[58] Both, however, preferred ultimately to emphasize other motivating influences upon Canadian Presbyterians, especially ideological ones. Grant, similarly, concluded that "most people stood by their individual convictions . . . breaking up not only congregations but personal friendships and family loyalties."[59] It is true, of course, that broader intellectual issues cannot be dismissed in an examination of church union at any level. Many Presbyterians supported or opposed church union for a variety of theological, historical or other reasons and chose their path accordingly. Nor can we dismiss the national context of the event. Church union was a nation-wide movement and the motives of both its supporters and detractors can only be understood in light of that fact. However, once the church union process was put in motion and the public debate framed, personal relationships became a major concern for a great many people in Canada's Presbyterian congregations.

In Galt, the realignment of the city's Presbyterian community, which came about because of church union, was clearly shaped much more by interpersonal considerations than by ideological ones. In this short paper, we have seen the particular importance and influence of congregational leadership – both lay and ordained. It has not been practical in these pages, unfortunately, to discuss the significant influence on many individuals

played by kinship ties, which we know to have been important as well. A perusal of the meeting minutes for the Sessions of the various Galt churches, for example, makes clear that movement between congregations was generally made by families, even extended ones, together. In such cases, there may have been a matriarch or patriarch who made an intellectual decision about church union, but the other family members generally followed because of the personal connection.[60] In light of all this evidence, it seems only reasonable to conclude that such congregational experiences as we have looked at here were shared widely, in some form, in other communities across Canada. By recognizing this, we are in a much better position to understand both how and why Canadian Presbyterians were divided by church union in the extremely complex way that they were.

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53. Grant, *The Canadian Experience of Church Union*, 53-54; and Clifford, *Church Union in Canada*, 1.

54. N. Keith Clifford, "Church Union and Western Canada," in *Prairie Spirit: Perspectives on The Heritage of The United Church of Canada in the West*, ed. D.L. Butcher, *et al* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1985), 283-295.

55. Tim F. Archibald, "Remaining Faithful: Church Union 1925 in the Presbytery of Pictou," *Canadian Society of Presbyterian History Papers* (1990): 20-38; and James Cameron, "The Garden Distressed: Church Union and Dissent on Prince Edward Island, 1904-1947" (Ph.D. dissertation, Queen's University, 1989).

56. John A. Ross, "Regionalism, Nationalism and Social Gospel Support in the Ecumenical Movement of Canadian Presbyterianism" (Ph.D. dissertation, McMaster University, 1973).

57. Silcox, *Church Union in Canada*, 212. Silcox offers a paragraph on the situation in Galt among his local examples in the chapter on "Community Adjustments" (313). For comparisons in fact and analysis, his description is included here:

> An interesting situation occurred in Galt, always a strong Presbyterian city of approximately 13,000 population in 1921. There were here three major Presbyterian churches and two Methodist. The three Presbyterian churches were First, Knox and Central. The First

> Church was originally connected with the United Presbyterian Church in the United States and steadfastly refused to enter the Presbyterian Church in Canada until 1907. Prior to that time, it had refused to join the Annual Week of Prayer services unless the other churches would agree to sing only the Psalms at these services. Knox's was originally a Free Church. Central was the result of amalgamation of St. Andrew's Church of Scotland and the Melville Succession Church (United Presbyterian Church of Scotland). These last two churches had come together after the formation of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, and had built a new edifice diagonally across the corner from Knox's Church which, at the time, was also in the Presbyterian Church in Canada. When the vote of 1925 was taken, Knox's and Central voted non-concurrence, and so these two continuing Presbyterian churches still remain as before in Galt, facing each other. The only church left to vote into Union was old First, which had been the last to enter the Presbyterian Church in Canada. A non-concurring minority of about fifty in the First Church went out to add their strength to the two continuing Presbyterian churches, while sixty members of Central and about 200 from Knox's came over mostly to First, so increasing its strength that additional accommodations costing $35,000 were necessary.

58. Clifford, *The Resistance to Church Union in Canada*, 4.

59. Grant, *The Canadian Experience of Church Union*, 51.

60. John Thompson Taylor, for example, a missionary to India from Knox's, led his large extended family from Knox's to First at the time of church union. He was an intellectual proponent of church union, but the majority of his clan joined the United Church because of his position in the family, not the arguments he espoused. Personal Conversation with Alex Taylor, 7 May 2006. For more on his influence, see John Thompson Taylor to Editor, *Galt Evening Reporter*, 5 January 1925, 3 and a letter from "Mother" to "Bairnies," dated 16 July 1925, Taylor Family fonds, 87.307c, 1-1, The United Church of Canada Archives.

"An Enterprise Calculated To Knit The Union": Evangelical Hymnody and Church Union in Canada, 1925-1931

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In the early spring of 1931 dignitaries and assembled leaders of the United Church of Canada – in a celebratory mood – met for an evening on the Roof Garden of the Royal York Hotel in downtown Toronto to recognize a much-anticipated achievement in the liturgical life of their young Protestant denomination. After guests had dined, a special presentation by the General Council of the United Church honoured the labours of the Reverend Alexander MacMillan and of the church's Committee on Church Worship and Ritual; it was under MacMillan's leadership that the Committee published the first official hymnal for use in the United Church.

Officially known as *The Hymnary of the United Church of Canada*, this new worship volume was intended to serve as a harbinger of the 1925 church union between the majority of Canadian Presbyterians, Canadian Methodists, and the smaller Canadian Congregational church.[1] Quite fittingly, the congratulatory evening at the Royal York Hotel concluded with a rousing "hymn sing" (led by Reverend MacMillan himself) from the crisp bindings of the new hymnal. To its passionate, if not idealistic, promoters *The Hymnary* offered the very best of three worship traditions now comprised in the United Church; in the words of its Preface, the hymnal exemplified "the stateliness and tenderness of the Scottish Psalter, the glowing passion and evangelical fervour of the Wesleys, and the lyrical

qualities by which Congregational Hymnody has been ever distinguished."[2] By introducing a standardized hymnal for use by United Church congregations across Canada, the Committee's deliberations to that end are pertinent to any meaningful analysis of the church's formative years not only as a prominent social institution in twentieth-century Canada, but also as a particular theological community.

Not surprisingly, forging a cohesive canon of worship music – let alone its predication on a coherent theology and social ethic – required a five-year deliberative process involving clergy, church musicians, engaged laity, and seminary professors. It was the stated aim of the Committee on Worship and Ritual "that all worshippers within the United Church of Canada … be provided with a book of common praise, whereby they may continue the gracious patience of singing and making melody in their hearts to the Lord."[3] In order that this vision might be realized it was the hope of the Committee that the new hymnal be put to widespread denominational use in pews and Sunday School classrooms across the nation; in this manner it would serve as a representative anthology of the disparate modes of worship and hymn traditions now joined in a single church communion.[4]

What is at first striking about *The Hymnary* of 1930 are the solid evangelistic overtones throughout the many hymns chosen to be representative of the new United Church. This may come as a surprise to the contemporary observer accustomed to a so-called "liberal" United Church occupying (self-professedly) the opposite end of the Protestant spectrum from so-called "conservative" evangelicalism. And it would be artificial, of course, to extract the production of *The Hymnary* from a consideration of the broader context surrounding church union: Its centrality to the trajectory of Canadian Protestantism in the twentieth century and a confluence of Canadian nationalism and a postmillennial optimism. Yet the trajectory of the church's theological convictions (particularly of its nineteenth-century "evangelical" roots) has not enjoyed the same level of agreement among historians as has the United Church's social influence in English Canada.[5] Amidst a scholarly climate that contests the chronology of the inescapable decline of an "evangelical" identity for the United Church, hymnody may well demonstrate itself to be a religious modality with considerable explanatory power.[6]

Hymnody long has been central to the worship life of Christian communities, particularly in the life of revivalist and evangelical church

movements. The emotive and lyrical qualities of many hymns are at their apex when dealing with such intricacies as atonement theology, lucidly espoused in William Cowper's well-known eighteenth-century stanza (*The Hymnary*, #491):

> There is a fountain filled with blood
> Drawn from Immanuel's veins
> And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
> Lose all their guilty stains.[7]

One recent academic study observes the striking ability of hymns to comment "at unexpected length on relations between church and society, particularly as a barometer of shifting cultural standards."[8] Put another way, hymns possess significance beyond their doxological function in the worship life of a congregation. This latent power of hymnody prompted one Congregationalist minister to state bluntly: "Let me write the hymns of a Church and I care not who writes the theology."[9]

There is, to be sure, a potential fallacy in affording hymns too much interpretive weight. Hymns themselves are imbued with various interpretive frameworks beyond operating as a theological bellwether such as their musical or literary qualities. Yet it is often the case within studies of institutional church history to focus on the intellectual and theological debates of church leaders rather than synthesizing them with the modes through which the formation and internalization of those beliefs take place. When hymns are seen as a compelling nexus of clerical/institutional authority and the spiritual formation of the faithful they gain a particular gravity in explaining the theological commitments of those who sing them.

Markedly absent from the extensive committee work on the hymnal of 1930 is any coordinated effort to induce a departure from the nineteenth-century hymnody that was the veritable lifeblood of revivalist and evangelical spirituality well known to the United Church's denominational predecessors. To be sure, there were dissenting voices to the notion that the hymnal was a tool of preservation; for some concerned parties, the new United Church could not move away fast enough from what were perceived to be archaic, even irrelevant beliefs and styles to often-referenced "modern sensibilities" of the twentieth century.

The formative years of the United Church are best interpreted through the lens of the hymn traditions it perpetuated and maintained –

more significantly than those it abandoned – in the early-twentieth century. By interrogating the specific publication process of *The Hymnary* one encounters, perhaps surprisingly, an overtly evangelical worldview centred on the authority of the Bible, the centrality of Christ's atoning death, and the importance of conversionism. In contrast to the minority that saw gospel hymnody as archaic, the words of the mandate from the General Council of the United Church actively encouraged the production of

> a collection of spiritual songs widely representative of the Hymnody of the Church Universal . . . for there is no surer link with our fathers of generations past, and with our fellow Christians today than is provided by the psalms and hymns and spiritual songs which are our common heritage.[10]

When declared in such an unambiguous fashion, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that the production of *The Hymnary* was nothing if not a *conservative* endeavour. Despite subsequent developments within the United Church in particular and Protestant Canada at large (as has been aptly noted already at this conference), *The Hymnary* positioned itself neither as a militant evangelical entrenchment against that ominous "modernism" nor as a resurgence of a evangelical mode that had been slipping away. I would suggest that it *maintained* a position of evangelical prominence in many of the church communities now united in the new denomination.

It is striking to note the extent to which *The Hymnary* retained hymn material from the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries – a span of time where religious growth and dynamism was fuelled by prolific hymn-writing. In contrast to one North American Methodist hymnal of 1884, which cut out many of the original hymns penned by and for the Wesley brothers' original *Collection Of Hymns For The Use Of The People Called Methodists,* the United Church hymnal appears to have gone out of its way to reinstate the old hymns of the faith.[11] And in spite of fears that the hymnal might be perceived as competing with existing liturgical orders of individual congregations, it was a prevalent opinion that the hymnal was very much needed. As W.S. Dingman, a committee member from St. Thomas, Ontario later recalled in the United Church's publication, the *New Outlook*: "Besides the value of [*The Hymnary*] as a unifying force it has been sorely need by churches which have been struggling with the

inconvenience of two different [hymn]books, sometimes more, in their services."[12] And Reverend Alexander MacMillan's oversight of the committee work allowed him to proclaim boldly an optimistic spirit about the ecumenical promise of the new hymnal to meet particular needs of United Church congregations around the nation:

> One congregation may find its heart expression in Charles Wesley's splendid hymn – O for a Thousand Tongues to sing"; another may feel the impulse to sing the 145th Psalm in the stately Scottish version: "O Lord Thou art my God and King," while still another may turn to Isaac Watts, the first and greatest of Congregationalist hymn-writers, and sing: "Jesus shall reign." A golden opportunity will be afforded ministers preaching on the place and power of song in the worship and life of the Church . . .[13]

While this may appear an idealistic and lofty goal, the index of the 1930 volume indicates that, at least in publication, the Committee succeeded in their goal for balance and equitable representation. Were there a concerted effort to craft a major departure from a normative nineteenth-century theological disposition within the United Church, the Committee on Worship and Ritual was not a site of major doctrinal shift. In order to demonstrate the spirit of evangelical faith maintained in *The Hymnary*, it would be profitable to display some of the best examples from the volume.

In the extended version of this paper I employ examples framed through the grid of David Bebbington's familiar quadrilateral for delineating aspects of evangelicalism: conversionism, activism, crucicentrism, and biblicism.[14] It should be stated that the Bebbington model is by no means the authoritative rubric for defining evangelicalism; his model is, however, both widely accepted and concise that it serves to aid rather than impoverish analysis of evangelicalism in the context of hymnody. For the sake of brevity in this present context I will limit my observations to "conversionism" and "biblicism," two aspects of evangelical identity that I feel best sum up the emphases that were maintained in *The Hymnary* of 1930.

Conversionism

Perhaps no other aspect of evangelicalism has been more influential

in the shaping of its hymnody than spiritual conversion. Evangelical parlance has many names for this crucial moment in a Christian's life: "getting saved," being "born again," "accepting Christ," or the more sentimental (if not theologically suspect) "asking Jesus into your heart." These attitudes are abundantly employed in the lyrical selections of early United Church hymnody. The first verse of one eighteenth-century hymn evokes the language of an evangelical conversion experience:

> Come, ye sinners, poor and wretched,
> Weak and wounded, sick and sore;
> Jesus ready stands to save you,
> Full of pity joined with power:
> He is able, He is willing,
> Doubt no more.[15]

There is no doubt in the wording above that the individual sinner is in need of a saviour: "Weak and wounded" one must come to Jesus who stands with both pity (empathy) for the sinner who believes as well as the divine power to remedy the spiritual malaise. The stately lyrics of Charles Wesley express a similar outlook:

> Long my imprisoned spirit lay
> Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
> Thine eye diffused a quickening ray;
> I woke; the dungeon flamed with light;
> My chains fell off, my heart was free,
> I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.[16]

Often times lyrics melded the personal aspect of conversion with the "crucicentric" aspect of atonement for sin through the crucifixion. Hymn #476, Frederick Whitfield's "I Need Thee, Precious Jesus" is emblematic of such multi-layered themes:

> I need Thee, precious Jesus,
> For I am full of sin;
> My soul is dark and guilty,
> My heart is dead within:
> I need the cleansing fountain,
> Where I can always flee,

The blood of Christ most precious,
The sinner's perfect plea.

And nearly two decades before the evangelist Billy Graham and his musical counterpart, George Beverly Shea, made "Just As I Am" the most famous evangelical anthem of the conversionism, it was published as a gospel chorus in the United Church hymnal of 1930:

Just as I am without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that thou bidd'st me come to Thee
O Lamb of God, I come.[17]

Biblicism

Where it may be difficult to readily identify other universal or uniquely "evangelical" characteristics, little ambiguity exists in the high regard that is held for the Bible. It is therefore interesting to note the rich biblical mandate for the use of hymns as a mode of worship to God. The Psalms of David in the Old Testament are flooded with calls for songs, musical instruments, etc. The Apostle Paul, in his New Testament letters to young Christian churches, spoke of joyfully offering up "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" as a communitarian worship ritual.[18] Similarly, a hymn reflecting on the truth and normative authority of the Bible in the Christian's life was listed in *The Hymnary*'s index with an opening chorus:

Lord, Thy Word abideth
And our footsteps guideth;
Who its truth believeth
Light and Joy receiveth.[19]

Perhaps no other hymn embodies the belief in the vereties of biblical revelation than William Walsham How's *O Word of God Incarnate*. It is worth quoting at length given its high view of the Bible in an era in which more modernist voices were also challenging these claims. That these lines of text would appear in the first hymnal of the United Church suggests that there was a preservation of a biblically-centric creed:

O Word of God Incarnate
O Wisdom from on high
O Truth unchanged, unchanging
O Light of our dark sky,
We praise Thee for the radiance
That from the hallow page,
A lantern to our footsteps
Shines on from age to age.

It floateth like a banner
Before God's host unfurled
It shineth like a beacon,
Above a darkling world;
It is the chart and compass
That o'er life's surging sea,
'Mid mists and rocks and quicksands,
Still guide, O Christ, to Thee.[20]

It is important to note, however, that the hymnal was not an uncontested sphere; there was a tangible struggle to find balance between evangelical doctrinal orthodoxy and the updating of hymn lyrics that appealed to so-called "modern sensibilities." One of the more telling cases demonstrating conservation over innovation was the rejection of the Reverend W.G. Colgrove's copy-edit of one of *The Hymnary*'s drafts. What Colgrove described as an effort "for the sake of clearer understanding and more intelligent singing" was, in effect, a theological overhaul of the hymnal's most evangelical hymns. In his own words Colgrove offered "over 400 corrections" for *The Hymnary* ranging from "Theology and Bible reference, Psychology and Philosophy, [as well as] Science and History."[21] Admittedly, only conjecture can be made in this instance: Colgrove's entire contribution to the hymnal draft – indicative of many laborious hours – was ignored for the final publication; not a single suggestion was adopted from Colgrove's edits. One can speculate that this was rejected by the Committee in light of its considerable revisions and the type of hymnal that would have been the inevitable result.

Rather than a severe redaction of the years of accrued hymnody, the explicit desire of most people was for an evangelically-inspired volume. A letter from a former Methodist considered *The Hymnary* an opportunity to revive certain hymns with an explicit evangelistic emphasis:

> I have a very earnest desire that some more of the old Methodist hymns may be inserted in the new hymn book . . . I refer to some hymns that were left out of our latest Methodist hymn book [1884]. To be more particular, I refer to certain hymns that are most expressive of the old-time evangelical fervour and of the experience of full salvation interpreted in harmony with the doctrine of perfect love as stated in the doctrinal portion of the basis of union.[22]

A prominent example of the debate over modern sensibility and queasiness over earlier missionary mentalities is the hymn "From Greenland's Icy Mountains" written in 1819 by Reginald Heber. This hymn typifies the Anglo mentality of enlightened Christian civilization and the "benighted" non-Christian civilizations in need of salvation. In a November 1928 letter to MacMillan and the Committee on Worship, the head of the Board of Foreign Missions for the United Church, the Reverend A. E. Armstrong, wrote with strong reservation to the racial superiority implicit in certain evangelical missionary hymns:

> I hope that care is being taken to see that not only some of the best among the recent missionary hymns are included in the Book of Praise, but that the language of all missionary hymns included will be satisfactory to the people of non-Christian lands who are sensitive concerning the way in which they are described in some of the books and the hymns of years ago. Certain of the old missionary hymns may have to be omitted altogether, but if not, some of the phrases ought to be revised . . . It is offense to all self-respecting peoples of Asia and Africa to be designated "lesser breeds without the law." I am sure you will be very careful to guard the new book in these particulars.[23]

To others, however, these represented zealous sentiments in the midst of religious revival and that attempts to suppress these hymns was tantamount to quelling revivalist fervour: one letter in favour of including the hymn "From Greenland's Icy Mountains," albeit with some lyrical modification, appeared in the 29 January 1929 edition of *The New Outlook*:

> This great hymn sprang out of the living heart of the revival [in England] and historically the words convey a sense entirely different . . . than the new nationalist and racial consciousness. All historians attest the coarse, brutal, even savage irreligion of England before the

great revival[.][24]

In the end it was the "living heart of revival" that won the day, and the hymn found its home in the "Missions" section of *The Hymnary,* #256.

Given the widespread preservation (and, in some cases, re-introduction) of eighteenth and nineteenth-century hymnody, there is little evidence to suggest that there was a concerted effort on the part of the Committee to suppress or limit the scope of hymn subjects within *The Hymnary*. Most of the hymns that were excluded from publication were dropped because of concerns from the music sub-committee; often this meant that there was an instance of obscurity or unpopularity of the tunes, not their lack of theological merit. Of the few examples where contemporary sensitivities did result in a tangible theological shift, one stands out as a tack away from the inherent violence of atonement theology. Lyrics such as "His wounds for me stand open wide" were, upon recommendation by a lay contributor, changed to "The door of grace stands open wide."[25]

The editorial decisions of the *New Outlook* balanced criticism of the new hymnal with positive anticipation of the ecumenical volume. A division that should not be overlooked quickly is the divergent cultural and social situations of United Church congregations across Canada. One letter to the *New Outlook* highlighted the divide between "common people" and professional musicians. There needed to be a balance between "professionalized" scoring and familiar, four-part harmonized favourites, the author stated. Both of these types of hymns, it was suggested, could "conform to Scripture and contain accuracy of metaphor and poetic statement."[26] Another letter spoke to the national diversity of Canada, even in the 1920s, suggesting that "we are a composite people, and every race that has taken its place in our [national and church] life has its own traditions of worship. It is our privilege and duty to make room in our hymnals for the best hymns of these races."[27]

In the same issue of the *New Outlook* the Committee published a "viewpoint" to put the opinions and editorial deliberations into context. After stating that denominational openness for such a project was both welcomed and deemed to be important the comment went on to assert that the selection process was indeed an arduous task: "There is a difficulty in the process of eliminating so many hymns . . . [yet] there is no desire to encumber the [new hymnal] with tunes and hymns that are no longer sung by the church." As a primary goal, the comment concluded, there was a

strong desire to have a balance between "old familiar and favourite tunes [and] new generations of music."[28] And yet amidst this optimism for the future of the church there was a preservationist undertone. A certain A.E. Allin of Invermay, Saskatchewan highlighted the magnitude of this project:

> The future of the United Church will depend very much on the hymns we sing or do not sing . . . It is especially important that the new hymnal contain a good supply of the best evangelical hymns and sacred songs suitable for evangelistic services. Since we claim to be an evangelical church this should take first place. It is certainly important to nourish spiritual life once the worshipper possesses it, but first the sinner must be made to "Awake out of sleep and arise from the dead' that Christ may give [them] light." Let us have hymn suitable for this purpose.[29]

Similarly, an anonymous contributor to the editor of the *New Outlook* advocated for an explicitly gospel-oriented hymnody to be the backbone of the new hymnal:

> I believe there are in our church hundreds of people who, like myself, would like to have a few more evangelistic hymns and songs . . . I feel there is a need for more good old-fashioned, heart-reaching and stirring hymns with choruses, some new and some old. So often lately I have heard young people speak of attending meetings (not in our church) where they go to sing and enjoy hearing the singing.[30]

And so it was on 23 July 1929 that the final draft of *The Hymnary* was submitted and approved by the Executive of the General Council for the United Church. In the Church's annual report of 1930, the Committee on Worship and Ritual gave testimony of its proceedings and concluded with these optimistic words:

> It is the confident conviction of the Committee that the book thus provided will be at once widely representative of the hymnody of the Church universal, true to the traditions and genius of the three Communions contained within The United Church of Canada, and adequate to the manifold needs of our people.[31]

Following publication, the *New Outlook* provided one final full-page

exposition on the significance of the new hymnal for United Church life. It was the committee member W.S. Dingman, who tellingly declared that *The Hymnary* of 1930 was "an enterprise calculated to knit the union." Gauging by the "success" in terms of cultural influence and numeric growth, it is safe to safe that *The Hymnary* accomplished its intended goal to knit a cohesive union – regardless of the direction that union would take in subsequent years.

In many ways *The Hymnary* was an ideal that integrated itself into a decade-long resurgence of personal evangelism with the United Church. It is not surprising, therefore, that it found its place in United Church pews at the dawn of an era when evangelical modes in the church were normative. Both the public editorials and opinion pieces as well as private (unpublished) correspondence between United Church ministers or concerned laity and the Committee on Worship and Ritual reveals the production of *The Hymnary* to be a conservative process. The new hymnal was designed to preserve that which was most cherished from the older evangelical traditions.

Wesleyan revivalism – a central component of the Methodist movement – was "toned down" only in that it was melded with less "enthusiastic" expressions of Protestant Christianity (namely, Scottish Presbyterianism and its emphasis on singing the biblical Psalms). Yet in so doing there was no significant loss of what can be rightly called "evangelical fervour." Put another way, the emphasis on personal transformation and piety towards a more corporate expression of social faith in the hymns sung by United Church parishioners maintained a delicate balance in *The Hymnary* of 1930. An example of this sentiment is found in the printed bulletin from the celebration dinner for the new hymnal included this brief statement: "*The Hymnary*, in the element that is new to us, contains only a limited number of tunes recently composed, but on the contrary *abounds old tunes which have received preference* [emphasis mine] . . ."[32]

Where there is a tendency to project the militancy of the fundamentalist-modernist controversies too much towards the mainstream of the Canadian evangelical experience, the hymnody of the early United Church counters with a leavening spirit of Canadian-style evangelical moderation. Conversely, too much emphasis on a social gospel induced liberalism is mitigated by the presence of a strong social ethic of the evangelical Fanny Crosby, whose socially-aware "Rescue the Perishing"

was just as likely to be sung in the new United Church as at a Baptist meeting in 1930. Through the tireless labours of the Committee on Worship and Ritual the United Church of Canada, in its infancy, was given a volume faithful to the hymn traditions it received and relevant for the future it created.

Endnotes

1. At its inception in June 1925 approximately 4,800 Methodist congregations, 3,700 Presbyterian congregations, 166 Congregationalist churches, and a handful of union churches already existing in western Canada comprised the United Church of Canada (see Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992], 281-84).

2. Preface to *The Hymnary of the United Church of Canada* (Toronto: The United Church Publishing House, 1930), vi.

3. Preface to *The Hymnary*, v.

4. See the "Prefatory Statement to a Draft of the Hymnary Submitted to the Third General Council of the United Church of Canada, September 1928."

5. A helpful monograph is John Webster Grant's, *The Church in the Canadian Era*, Revised and Expanded (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1998). See also N. Keith Clifford, *The Resistance to Church Union in Canada, 1904-1939* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1985); and Mark Noll, "What Happened to Christian Canada?" *Church History* 75, no. 2 (2006): 265-70.

6. There exists a formidable corpus of scholarship on the subject of the nineteenth-century evangelical consensus out of which the founding denominations for the United Church emerged. For the Methodist contribution see Phyllis Airhart, *Serving the Present Age: Revivalism, Progressivism, and the Methodist Tradition in Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992); and Marguerite Van Die, *An Evangelical Mind: Nathanael Burwash and the Methodist Tradition in Canada, 1839-1918* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989). Most helpful for Canadian Presbyterian inclinations is Duff Crerar's essay, "'Crackling Sounds from the Burning Bush': The Evangelical Impulse in Canadian Presbyterianism before 1875," in *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience,* ed. G.A. Rawlyk (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997); and a broad perspective on nineteenth-century evangelical Protestantism in Canada is offered by Michael Gauvreau,

The Evangelical Century: College and Creed in English Canada from the Great Revival to the Great Depression (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991).

7. William Cowper, "There Is A Fountain Filled With Blood," *The Hymnary*, #491.

8. Richard J. Mouw and Mark A. Noll, eds., *Wonderful Words of Life: Hymns in American Protestant History and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), xvii. I explicitly state "academic study" as much of hymnology is based in popular works of compilations, "hymn biographies," and devotional literature.

9. Rev. R.D. Wade quoted in Ian Bradley, *Abide With Me: The World of Victorian Hymns* (London: SCM Press, 1997), 81.

10. Mandate from the General Council of the United Church of Canada, quoted in the Preface of *The Hymnary*, v.

11. Nicholas Temperly, *The Hymn Tune Index: A Census of English-Language Hymn Tunes in Printed Sources, Volume 1* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 421-30.

12. W.S. Dingman, "The Making of the Hymnary," *New Outlook* 7, no. 22 (3 June 1931): 517.

13. Alexander MacMillan, "The New Hymnal," *New Outlook*, 7, no 16 (22 April 1931): 367.

14. See Mark Noll, David Bebbington, and George Rawlyk, eds., *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, The British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1990* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

15. Joseph Hart, "Come Ye Sinners," *The Hymnary,* #476.

16. Charles Wesley, "And Can It Be?" *The Hymnary,* #276.

17. Charlotte Elliott, "Just As I Am," *The Hymnary*, #499.

18. See Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16.

19. Henry Williams Baker, "Lord, Thy Word Abideth," *The Hymnary,* #186.

20. William Walsham How, "O Word of God Incarnate," *The Hymnary,* #182.

21. W.G. Colgrove Revisions to "Draft of the Hymnary", Box 28-9, General Council / Committee on Worship, United Church Archives, Toronto, ON (hereafter UCA).

22. Thomas Voaden in "Correspondence of the Secretary of the Committee," Box 2-3, GCCW, UCA.

23. Letter to Dr. MacMillan, 14 November 1928, Box 2-3, GCCW, UCA.

24. John MacDougall, "From Greenland's Icy Mountains," *New Outlook* 5, no. 4 (24 January 1929): 99.

25. Walter J. Phelps, "The New Hymnal," *New Outlook* 5, no. 3 (15 January 1929): 72.

26. Robert Murray, "The Coming Hymn Book," *New Outlook* 5, no. 1 (2 January 1929): 21.

27. James G. Gorvill, "Criticizing the Critics," *New Outlook* 5, no. 3 (15 January 1929): 74.

28. "The Hymnary Committee Viewpoint," *New Outlook* 5, no. 3 (15 January 1929): 75.

29. A.E. Allin, Letter to the Editor, *New Outlook* 5, no. 4 (24 January 1929): 94.

30. Anonymous Letter to the Editor, *New Ourlook* 5, no 4 (24 January 1929): 90.

31. "Annual Report by the Church Worship and Ritual Committee to the United Church of Canada," in *United Church of Canada Year Book* (1931): 81-82.

32. Brochure, "Dinner to Celebrate the Publication of the Hymnary of the United Church of Canada and to Honour the Rev. Alexander MacMillan, D.D.," 16 April 1931, Committee on Worship and Ritual, 28-9, GCCW, UCA.

The Remains of the Freeman-Froude Controversy: The Religious Dimension

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Panel Discussion

"That Silly, Outmoded Profession": The Cleric in Recent Fiction

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As she was planning the program for the 2010 meeting of the Canadian Society of Church History, Vice President and program chair Ruth Compton Brouwer considered inviting Linden MacIntyre, author of *The Bishop's Man*, to address the society. The novel speaks directly to issues in Canadian church history, and Ruth had heard that MacIntyre was an excellent speaker. Church historians being rather as frugal as church mice, however, the prospect of paying travel costs and an honorarium to Mr. MacIntyre thwarted the program chair's plans. However, a conversation with President Marguerite Van Die led to a new option: a panel on novels with clergy as central characters.

William James, Sandra Beardsall, and Andrew Atkinson agreed to be panellists. A lively e-mail discussion ensued about which fictional works to choose. The final criteria were threefold: clergy as central (not peripheral) characters, recently published novels, and works that were reasonably well known and/or celebrated. Each of the three novels chosen reflected those principles: Linden MacIntyre, *The Bishop's Man* (2009); Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead* (2005); and Elizabeth Strout, *Abide with Me* (2006). Bill James suggested a title: "That Silly, Outmoded Profession," which he believed to have been penned by John Updike. Although he was unable to locate his citation in Updike's work, the title set a suitably light-hearted tone for the presentations and the discussion that followed.

Reflecting on Elizabeth Strout's *Abide With Me*

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One of the most interesting aspects of this collaboration came in the weeks and months that followed the initial invitation, as we decided what would be the focus of a panel on clergy in fiction. Should it be historical novels, as befits this Learned Society devoted to church history? Should it be Canadian fiction? Or should the emphasis be contemporary? We knew that with three panelists, each presenting one work, there would have to be some comparative basis. Moreover, we did not want the works to be so obscure that audience members would be unlikely to have read any of them. For a time we thought about doing recent Canadian works dealing explicitly with religion, such as Margaret Atwood's *Year of the Flood* or Linden MacIntyre's *The Bishop's Man*. Then, too, with a plenary session being offered at the Congress in Montreal featuring Lawrence Hill, maybe a panel at least partly dealing with *The Book of Negroes* might be a good idea.

In the end the decision was made to present three novels with clergy protagonists written in the last decade. Linden MacIntyre's *The Bishop's Man*, winner in 2009 of the Governor-General's Award for English Fiction, provided Canadian content and was likely to have been widely read. Another prize-winner, Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead*, was awarded the Pulitzer the year following its publication in 2004. The third novel chosen, Elizabeth Strout's *Abide With Me*, was published in 2006. All three novels are contemporary, although the two American ones – *Gilead* and *Abide With Me* – are set in the 1950s.

The phrase in the title for the panel, "That Silly, Outmoded Profession," I had thought came from John Updike's novel, *A Month of Sundays*. I told Marguerite Van Die that was the source. But then I could not find these words anywhere in the book, even after paging through it forwards and backwards several times. I also mentioned to Marguerite that I thought that a colleague had used these words, quoting Updike at a convocation ceremony at Queen's. Finally I confessed my lack of confidence in being

able to name any source for these words at all. Marguerite, who I have always thought of as among the most accurate and meticulous of historians, came to my rescue. She told me, "Well, you said it, Bill, and so we'll leave it in quotation marks!" And we did.

On Abide With Me

Set in 1959, *Abide With Me* is about the recently widowed thirty-two-year-old Rev. Tyler Caskey, a Congregational minister in a town in northern New England. He's been there, in this first parish, for six years. At the novel's beginning, he's struggling with his grief and trying to be the single parent of two young girls. The older daughter has behavioural issues, and doesn't talk much. The younger one has been taken away by Tyler's overbearing mother who's also trying to find her son a new wife.

Caskey memorizes his sermons, and preaches without notes – preaching still counted for something in those days. One of his questionably relevant sermons, however, is entitled "On the Perils of Personal Vanity," an oblique argument against the church's need for a new organ. He loves Bonhoeffer – he keeps talking about "cheap grace" – and quotes Reinhold Niebuhr, Tillich, Kierkegaard, Augustine, Tolstoy, and Saint Thérèse of Lisieux. He also experiences, consonant with C.S. Lewis's Joy, or *Sehnsucht*, what he calls "The Feeling" – for Canadian readers also reminiscent of W.O. Mitchell's Brian O'Connal in *Who Has Seen the Wind*. While in many ways a conventional Protestant cleric of the 1950s, Caskey perches and preaches ominously at the end of the decade. For 1959, the narrator tells us early on, "happened to be the first year in many where countrywide church membership had not increased at a greater rate than the general population."[1]

With this, *Abide With Me* opens up some interesting comparisons for a contemporary reader, because the ecclesial culture of the late 1950s prefigures in Strout's view of things much of the church in our own day. Some of Caskey's congregation attend only on the High Holy Days of Christmas and Easter, while others have drifted away altogether. Some of the remainder are indifferent, or are caught up in the petty issues of church politics. Many watch their minister and gossip about him. He is rumoured to be having an affair with his housekeeper and his daughter's problems at school have become alarming. Caskey can't effectively deal with things any more, and has declined into depression and inactivity, though he

wishes he could be a hero like Bonhoeffer and courageously go out to be hanged – perhaps remembering his wife's dying words, "you're such a coward" – or else go off to the South to contribute in the burgeoning movement for civil rights.

The novel catalogues for us the issues and conventions of its day, especially within the Protestant church. Blacks, Jews, Catholics, gays all get referenced in ways that anticipate changes to come – or the need for such changes. The Cold War and Krushchev and Sputnik threaten in the background and some of the townsfolk have built bomb shelters. Consumption and shopping have become hobbies – especially for Caskey's late wife, who has left him in debt. There is some talk about the Bible as myth, the possibility of voicing hatred at God – whose death was to be proclaimed in a few more years – and the therapeutic, as Philip Rieff was soon to detail, is becoming religion's chief competitor. The demythologizing psychologist who is seeing Tyler's daughter explains to him that the Garden of Eden is about shattered innocence – "because we really feel guilty by our sense of being enraged as infants, by that unconscious desire to kill our parents."[2] She explains the problems of the Caskey girl in terms of "infantile grandiosity," and when Tyler resists this interpretation, she tells her friends about his narcissistic rage.

What *Abide With Me* fails properly to engage are the ethical issues it raises – or else Strout may be suggesting that the resources for proper engagement were unavailable at the time. In advance of Joseph Fletcher's situational ethics, the Rev. Caskey is plunged into a personal ethical dilemma that he can no longer adequately frame in deontological terms. At first believing that God would save his wife from a death by cancer, and then unable to stand her continuing suffering, Caskey finally leaves a bottle of pills by her bedside. This gesture, perhaps, results in his wife's stinging comment about his cowardice. Although he does not regret assisting her suicide in this indirect way, Caskey never fully examines his role: "It was wrong, but he would do it again."[3] Yet he also wishes that he had dared directly to end her life. When his housekeeper, Connie, tells him that she killed two paralyzed patients in her care at the nursing home by deliberately overfeeding them, the horrified Tyler sees her as a murderer and encourages her – but again, only indirectly – to turn herself in. Though Tyler Caskey is uncomfortably reminded of his own deeds when he visits Connie in the county jail, he distinguishes her mercy killing from his own complicity in his wife's death. He also places Connie in a different moral

category from a woman seeking an abortion. Despite his reverence for Bonhoeffer's heroism, Caskey seems unable to confront his own demons fully. When he has a breakdown in the pulpit one Sunday, the courageous act that leads to his restoration is standing up to his mother,[4] and reclaiming his younger daughter. It's more Tillich's *Courage To Be* than Bonhoeffer.

In all, *Abide With Me*, written almost fifty years after the events it depicts, wants to say that the late 1950s presage our own time. It suggests that many of the moral and ethical issues that preoccupy us have their roots there, at the end of the decade that began the unraveling of America's Protestant hegemony. For her contemporary readers Elizabeth Strout throws in a few asides about gays, about the effects of Korean War combat fatigue, about class divisions, about the first glimmers of the coming sexual revolution, about television becoming the small-town drug of choice, and touches on the international issues that shake America's security and self-confidence. Is she trying to locate too many of our own current preoccupations in this New England parish at the end of the 1950s? Is it likely that a young Congregational minister, a graduate of small seminary, would possess the kind of theological knowledge that Caskey has? Or that the lives of his parishioners would have so much relevance from our own vantage point a half-century later? They are alarmed by the popish way he raises his arms for the benediction, and warn him not to get them into any liturgical holding of hands. What is easier to credit is the way Strout uncovers the small-mindedness of a rural parish and its effects on an earnest clergyman dealing with his own suffering. The novel instigates sympathy for the protagonist at the same time as it dissatisfies the reader by skirting the deeper issues that it raises without fully addressing.

Endnotes

1. Elizabeth Strout, *Abide With Me* (New York: Random House, 2006), 96.
2. Strout, *Abide With Me*, 250.
3. Strout, *Abide With Me*, 285.
4. Strout, *Abide With Me*, 283.

There is a Balm in *Gilead*

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I learned early in my ordained life to withhold, if I could, my identity as a minister when confined to close public quarters with strangers, such as on an airplane. It turned out that my seatmate invariably loved Jesus, hated the church, or was immersed in a spiritual crisis, any of which could make a long flight seem even longer. Likewise, I tend to approach the construction of clergy as major characters in fiction with wariness. For there is apparently nothing so deliciously entertaining, from Chaucer's nasty "Pardoner"[1] on down, as a fallen cleric.

The delight I took in the novel *Gilead*,[2] then, may stem partly from my relief that John Ames, minister of a Congregationalist church at Gilead, Iowa, has made it to age seventy-six without descending into addiction or committing any obvious sexual peccadilloes, without going mad, and without losing his faith. Of course, one might ask: where's the story in that? This is part of the genius of Marilynne Robinson's 2004 Pulitzer Prize winning novel: with stunning prose she manages to create a compelling, best-selling character who simply does what clerics are intended to do: to observe, articulate, and mediate grace and faith in the parishes where they are planted. I will briefly outline the narrative of *Gilead*, and then offer some beginning reflections on what Robinson attempts to achieve with her Rev. Ames.

The Narrative

Robinson's narrative is subtle: while it appears to be a meandering reminiscence, it actually features a complex of nestled plots. In first person, John Ames pens a "letter" (247 pages long) in 1956 to his seven-year old son. The nameless son is the child of Ames' unexpected second marriage after the early death of his first wife – fifty-one years previous – in childbirth. Ames, born in 1880, is now ill with a heart condition. He realizes his son will grow up without him, and so leaves him a memoir by way of testament, the story of Ames' life told in the circuitous fashion

most life-stories are told: the present evoking memories, the memories interrupted by the present, in a seeming ramble. But we are, in fact, going somewhere, as several relationships unfold in the course of the novel. There are roughly three plots that intersect: first, the father/son/sibling relationships of the narrator's grandfather, father, and brother with him and with each other; second, Ames' relationship with his young wife and son – with echoes of his first wife and the daughter who lived but a few hours; and last, Ames' lifelong friendship with the neighbouring Presbyterian minister, "old" Boughton, and Boughton's apparently wayward son, Jack, who has been named after John Ames himself.

Similar questions drive each of these plots: how did these characters come to relate to one another as they do? What secret deeds lie in the shadowed corners of their histories? Which of them is reliable, both as a witness to their times and as a person in John Ames' life? What became or will become of them? Robinson tantalizes us with just enough information to whet our curiosity.

The three generations of Ames men have all been named John, and have all been Congregationalist clergy. The grandfather, a one-eyed wild visionary, traveled from Maine to Kansas in the 1830s, part of an abolitionist drive to claim Kansas as a free state. He went to the Civil War as an older man, consigned to a chaplain's role because of his age. His son, the narrator's father, was ordained and took a Congregationalist congregation in the small town of Gilead, Iowa, which his son, the narrator, now serves. John the father became a pacifist, and argued bitterly with his firebrand father, who disappeared back to Kansas and died there, unreconciled with his son. The narrator's brother, named Edwards after his uncle (who, in turn, was named after Jonathan Edwards), was brilliant, dropped the "s" from his name, studied theology in Germany, and came home to a college teaching position as an atheist, breaking his father's heart. The pacifist father, weary of the world, retired out of state and left his Gilead church in the care of his younger son, John, our narrator. This Ames family narrative is interspersed with tales of Civil War violence, heated family discussions, and the poignancy of father/son misunderstanding and alienation.

The narrator's two marriages, the first to his childhood sweetheart, and the second to a mysterious young woman, thirty-five years his junior, who arrives in his church and steals his heart, form a second plot, driven mainly by our curiosity about the second wife, Lila. She comes from a

dispossessed background, has no family, has drifted for several years, and is not even baptized. "No one seen to it when I was a child," she explains. "I been feeling the lack of it."[3] While the details of her past emerge only in slight hints, Lila's story resolves for us in her quiet purposefulness. This plot allows us to experience the hardship, loss and poverty that have marked the underside, the non-triumphal narrative, of American history. It also lets us in on the funny and endearingly human side of Ames as he tries to resist the powerful crush he develops on Lila, and then with some embarrassment defends his decision to marry this much younger woman, which apparently caused some gossip in Gilead – the closest we come in this novel to a "fallen" cleric.[4] John Ames thus becomes the only one of our three clergy today who gets to end his narrative within a loving intimate relationship.

The third, and most provocative plot, centres on Old Boughton and his son, now forty-three years old. Jack is the classic prodigal son, and because he was named after Ames, our narrator works hard, and against his instincts, to try to embrace Jack with the unconditional love of the father of the parable. Ames is afraid that Jack has designs on Lila. But Jack turns out to be a complex character, and at the end of the novel we realize that his anger and distance relate to the racism of the mid-twentieth century United States, for Jack is deeply in love with an African American teacher, with whom he has a son. His lover's father, an African Methodist Episcopal minister, has rejected him. Jack is adrift between two racial solitudes, and the novel ends just after Ames blesses Jack, and his father – in the midst of that social evil – with quiet reverence.

The Project

As the novel unfolds we come to see Marilynne Robinson's intentions for the Rev. John Ames. In a life that reaches back, through his grandfather, to the 1830s, and ahead, through his young son, to the present day, where Ames Jr. would now be a sixty-one year-old baby boomer, Ames presents us with a gracious and soaring Calvinist lens through which to view a century and a half of tumultuous American history: war, plague, boom and bust. It is an epoch that ends, carefully, before the *next* tumultuous era of Vietnam, civil rights and liberation movements. Puritans and evangelicals of old sometimes used the word "grave" to describe a good Christian – a person of serious and thoughtful demeanour, deep and

sincere.[5] John Ames is charmingly grave. He has taken to heart the humanism reflected in the response to the first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism: "What is the chief end of man?" "To glorify God and to enjoy God forever." Ames indeed has an aim: he looks for, and finds glory, joy, transcendence, in every part of life. His discoveries flow gently through the novel: two young grease monkeys horsing around at the local garage;[6] Ames' childhood act of baptizing a litter of feral kittens;[7] his grandfather's Greek New Testament, soaked in a river during a Civil War retreat;[8] the "sacred mystery" in sorrow;[9] the radiant prairie dawn; and the "prevenient courage that allows us to be brave."[10]

By reclaiming – to the delight of many North American Calvinists[11] – the oft-neglected deep humanism in Calvinist theology, Robinson, through Ames, takes on both the militant atheism and the religious fundamentalism that contend for the right to write American history and to shape the national myth. It is an argument that Robinson takes up in her most recent, non-fiction book*, Absence of Mind*.[12] It is writ large in *Gilead*, too, in that subtle way novels have of inviting us into a worldview. The carefully rambling recollections of John Ames intertwine both sides of that battle: a profoundly religious, indeed Calvinist, mindset and a searing post-colonial critique of American history, brought to life in the shabby folk and the musty church buildings of a small Iowa town.

Ames has refused to leave Gilead, despite his father fleeing to easier pastures, and his atheist brother's advice that it is a backwater. Instead, he reflects, "To me it seems rather Christlike to be as unadorned as this place is, as little regarded."[13] The Rev. Ames has indeed found a balm in Gilead. His testament hints that perhaps if people stopped awhile in this place of little regard, they too might find something to soothe the sin-sick national soul.

Endnotes

1. Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Pardoner," in *Canterbury Tales,* ed. A. Kent Hieatt & Constance Hieatt (New York: Bantam, 1981), 338-69.
2. Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2004).
3. Robinson, *Gilead*, 207.

4. During the panel discussion, my co-panellists reminded us that Jack Boughton reproaches Ames about his May/December union: "You have made a somewhat – unconventional marriage yourself. You know a little bit about being the object of scandal"(*Gilead*, 230).

5. See, for example, the pilgrim Christian meeting "a grave and beautiful damsel named Discretion" at the house Beautiful in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. Roger Sharrock (London: Penguin, 1987), 43.

6. Robinson, *Gilead*, 5.

7. Robinson, *Gilead*, 21-23.

8. Robinson, *Gilead*, 90.

9. Robinson, *Gilead*, 137.

10. Robinson, *Gilead*, 246.

11. For example, Robinson is a senior fellow at the Center for Theological Inquiry at Princeton. She was also the keynote speaker at the "Rediscovering Calvin" Conference held in Toronto in June 2009.

12. Marilynne Robinson, *Absence of Mind: the Dispelling of Inwardness from the Modern Myth of the Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

13. Robinson, *Gilead*, 246.

Et cetera vs. Eternal Hope: Father Duncan MacAskill as Catholic Existentialist in Linden MacIntyre's *The Bishop's Man*

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"[L]et me tell you what I think a priest should be," says Father Duncan MacAskill, the protagonist of Linden MacIntyre's Giller prize-winning novel *The Bishop's Man*. "I think a priest should, first of all, be human."[1] To be human, may be the calling, but just what it means to be human is a question for our sharpest philosophers. Martin Heidegger, a philosopher MacAskill is fond of evoking, claims that Dasein (the *being-there*, or the being in the throes of existence) is he for whom being is an issue. Following Heidegger, being human isn't simple at all, but a process of disclosing a fluctuating existence amid the constructs of our social imaginary. To be human, in the Catholic frame, is to be like Christ; and this is where Father MacAskill has most of his trouble – in embodying forgiveness, hope, new life. He is much more inclined toward dread and discipline.

The priesthood has not been an easy calling for Duncan MacAskill. After a run in with the bishop's bridge partner, MacAskill is shipped out to the hinterland – Honduras – where he falls in love with a young woman, Jacinta. After an irrevocable split with Jacinta, MacAskill has time enough to contemplate dread. It as a dean at a "nominally Catholic university" in Antigonish that MacAskill develops his second specialty, discipline.[2] At the bishop's command, he relocates pedophile priests and attempts to intimidate them into righteousness. Amid this dirty business, MacAskill finds time to mull over the subtle depravity of quotidian existence. When sequestering a fellow priest from his young housekeeper who "seems to be putting on weight," MacAskill tells them, "life is full of temporary absences"[3] – absence of love, absence of purpose, absence of God.

MacAskill experiences the desolation of unfulfilled faith, and in this light, begs to be read beside the young male protagonists of Cormac

McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road*; characters who are caught up in death before it has come. Both MacIntyre and McCarthy are Catholics who, in the words of Jacob Taubes, have "gone stale."[4] Somehow, McCarthy has found a way to reignite "the fire."[5] In interviews, our priestly MacIntyre claims he can't carry it anymore.[6]

This has something to do with existentialism. I would argue that MacIntyre's variety of Catholic existentialism is associated with a modern reading of Christology. This Christology takes seriously the problems of contingency, materiality, history with a small "h." It implies that if Christ is a unity of God and "humanity," then his humanity is not to be reduced to fit some idealized myth. The human must be taken in all of its "nitty gritty." A list of artists who take up this problematic would include Martin Scorsese, Flannery O'Connor, Don DeLillo, Thomas Pynchon, François Mauriac, Georges Bernanos, the aforementioned McCarthy, and of course, Graham Greene. Their works contain two heaps of dread for every cup of goodness. Death, despair, nihilism, and moral ambiguity are aplenty. They also link theological realism – the idea that matter is underwritten by divine substance, which is symbolized in the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist – with the aesthetic of realism that dominates modern literary, visual, and dramatic arts. There is a tension between the ideal and the real here, but it is productive, and according to Catholic doctrine, true.

You will find the Catholic Greene, then, linking the "reasonable" explanation for human existence together with the Catholic Dogma, very much in the vein of a theologian like Teilhard de Chardin. In *The Honorary Consul*, Greene writes "I believe that God is suffering the same evolution that we are."[7] This paradox of the apathetic deity being put through the wringer of limited, shifting, changing, mutable existence leads to some blatant contradictions (and interesting literary analogies). So Greene, caught between modernity and Catholicism, calls himself a "Catholic Agnostic," which, as worked out in the form of his character Morin, entails losing belief but not faith – belief being associated with theological arguments for God, and faith with that which exceeds the disproval of these arguments.[8] In Greene's world "lack of belief is a final proof" of faith.[9]

A confessed fan of Greene, MacIntyre appropriates the thematic of despair, yet he leaves behind the contrapuntal note of hope that his mentor celebrates. Father MacAskill envisions himself as a soldier who protects the weak, but he is known in the parishes by the type of monikers that are

reserved for mafia hitmen – "The Exorcist . . . The Purificator."[10] His despair seems to be generated from the contradictions he lives in and the blind spots that they foster. On the one hand, he is a power for righteousness – the one just man; on the other hand, he is imprisoned by an oath of celibacy to which he only loosely adheres. He appears to be a well ordered enforcer of top down commands, and yet he finds himself waking from a drunken stupor on the floor of the chancel, unable to abstain from drink. His career of relocating problem priests to backwoods parishes appears to be an attempt at last minute renovations on a condemned structure.

MacAskill's actions are rationalized by his zeal for the faith, a genuine concern for his "flock," and his desire to protect the Church from an outward tarnish, but he is not at peace with his calling. During one meeting with a victim of abuse and his father, readers are given a glimpse of MacAskill's internal drama:

> I sat for a long moment, head down, hands clasped before my face. Fighting the embarrassment and nausea. The room was silent. Help me here, I was thinking. Help me find the words and the wisdom to navigate through this. Then I felt the anger swelling within me, imagining the fool who exposed himself and all of us to this potentially lethal awkwardness. And an unexpected wave of resentment directed at the whining adolescent in front of me, dredging up this garbage to deflect God knew what crisis in his own miserable life.
>
> "In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit," I said, crossing myself.[11]

During introspective passages such as this, which are plentiful in the novel, MacIntyre puts his journalistic talents to work, drawing from interviews with priests who have worn MacAskill's shoes. MacAskill is a composite for sure, yet his spiritual-political-vocational dilemmas appear to have a root in lived experience.

MacAskill is also figured, as are so many of the protagonists of Catholic existentialist novels, as a representative of Christ who participates in the God-man's passion. Every individual, according to this theology, is caught in the suffering of disordered materiality – the flesh – and must persevere through a harsh winter before the resurrection of spring. Father MacAskill preaches this natural analogy to his congregation in Creignish, Nova Scotia:

> In January it becomes impossible to defer the reality of winter and her casual betrayals. You feel that summer and her pretty sister, autumn, have gone perhaps forever. There is that sense of personal abandonment. That's when we turn inward, and hope to find comfort there.
>
> That was my message January 1, 1995. I thought it was an appropriate reflection on the meaning of Christ's birth and the eternal hope He brought with his arrival among us. The extraordinary promise that gets us through the dark days until the enlightenment of Pentecost and the rebirth of spring. And the promise that one day we will know a summer without end. Et cetera.[12]

Where Mel Gibson's *The Passion* conceives of this suffering in the cosmological mode, it is the privatized angst/dread/despair[13] of contemporary continental philosophy that MacIntyre entertains: "eternal hope" vs. "Et cetera."

The theme of existentialism enters into the novel through a dubious character whose story is fleshed out in a complex series of flashbacks. While in seminary, MacAskill is enamoured with the Catholic existentialism of Father Roddie MacVicar, who offers compelling appropriations of Heideggarian thought. When he appears unannounced at Father Roddie's office, MacAskill finds Roddie in a compromising position with a teenage boy. He attacks his mentor. The bishop, who is Roddie's bridge partner, soon relocates MacAskill to Honduras, where he becomes involved in a *ménage à trois* that ends in the death of his best friend, the ideal political priest, Alfonso. After two years he is brought back to Antigonish, and appointed as a dean at the local university. MacAskill assimilates his disciplinary function into his academic role: "I guess by then a part of me accepted that I'd become a specialist in discipline. Technically it's part of the dean's job, and I was officially a dean."[14]

The disciplinary tasks do not leave him unchanged. The strategies he uses to deaden the response of his pedophile brethren seem to reshape him to the core. His soldier mentality began at an early age, when he rescued his sister from an abusive relationship with their shell-shocked father. Plagued by despair from his youth, MacAskill saw the priesthood as "a substitute for suicide."[15] This realization, however, does not sink in until he has been sent for rehabilitation at Braecrest, a counseling facility in Orangeville, Ontario.[16] MacAskill's stint in rehab occurs late in the novel, and in order to consider the ending, we must return to the opening

pages.

The first event of the novel is Father MacAskill's transfer from the "nominally Catholic university" (where MacIntrye was educated), to the rural parish in Cape Breton where he was raised. In this parish, he suspects that a young parishioner was molested by Brenden Bell, a pedophile that MacAskill previously relocated to a small parish in Cape Breton. Several years after his removal from a parish in Newfoundland where he molested several young boys, Bell leaves the priesthood. He goes on to become a successful business man with ties to organized crime, much like the real-life ex-pedophile priest, Ronald Hubert Kelly.[17] The epistemological suspension that divides MacAskill from his desired certainty about Bell is the principal engine that moves this narrative towards its end.

And the end is where MacIntyre runs into problems. MacAskill has a complicated relationship with the MacKay family, and their son, Danny, who was the victim of sexual abuse. MacAskill suspects that Bell was the perpetrator. Six months after Danny commits suicide, MacAskill is preparing his boat for sea when a drunken "old timer," Willie Hawthorne, confesses to him that he molested the young McKay boy. At this disclosure, MacAskill snaps. He throws Willie some distance onto a moored boat, and Willie dies from the impact. Willie's last words, "Help me, Father . . ." do not move MacAskill to administer last rites, even though he is fingering the confessional stole in his pocket.[18] With this failure to administer the sacraments, MacAskill renounces his vocation and loses his faith. This was a shock to me as a reader. I was convinced that MacAskill's suffering was going to find some redemption in his priestly sacrifice, like Greene's celebrated Whisky Priest of *The Power and the Glory*. Moreover, I am still of the opinion that MacIntryre has ruptured Greene's aesthetic form with a *deus ex machina*. The pedophile that comes to light in the end is not a priest, and the suspected priest, Bell, the symbol of all duplicity and evil, is vindicated. Oddly, although the novel spends three hundred pages describing the despair with which MacAskill and his flock struggle at the hands of pedophile priests, the ending succumbs to MacAskill's despair, while redeeming the guilty (ex) priest (Bell).

MacIntyre's ending speaks to the ambiguity of the age in which he writes. On the one hand, he knows the Church and the plausible psychology of the priest well enough to convince most readers of some correspondence between his text and reality. On the other hand, his love of the Church does not support faith but underwrites a secularist trajectory. I

suspect that MacIntyre has written himself into the novel in two places. First, I suspect that MacIntyre thinks both he and MacAskill end up in an authentic post-metaphysical situation – the convinced atheist. However, there is a scene earlier in the text, when MacAskill is at Braecrest and attempting to keep his identity as a priest a secret. His roommate freely admits that he is a priest with a gambling problem, and he wonders what MacAskill's vocation might be. When the roommate desires to celebrate mass, he asks MacAskill to assist him. At a crucial part of the ritual, the visible priest forgets the text of the liturgy, and the invisible priest, MacAskill, completes the rite without knowing it.[19] This peculiar priest then, seems to have much in common with the invisible priest that is MacIntyre. The author knows the Church so well that he can't help but represent it in all of its reality – educated as he was in Catholic existentialism at St. Francis Xavier; yet even while the novel's ending distances the Church from the sin of pedophilia, his disavowal of faith and mercy seem like an aesthetic infraction.

It leads me, in the end, to believe that MacIntrye is much like Greene – an author who is not sure of his certainties, and who is too certain of his doubts. Are MacIntryre and the novel, in the end, secular, Catholic, or post-secular Catholic? He hasn't decided. In other words, buy his next book.

Endnotes

1. Linden MacIntyre, *The Bishop's Man* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2009), 348.
2. MacIntyre, *The Bishop's Man*, 10.
3. MacIntyre, *The Bishop's Man*, 9.
4. Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, trans. Dana Hollander (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 103.
5. Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (New York: Vintage, 2006), 283.
6. "Linden MacIntyre – *The Bishop's Man*," *Allen Gregg in Conversation*, TVO, 6 February 2010.
7. Norman Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene, Volume 3: 1956-1991* (Toronto: Viking, 2004), 689.

8. Sherry, *Life of Graham Greene,* 688.
9. Sherry, *Life of Graham Greene,* 689.
10. MacIntyre, *The Bishop's Man*, 233.
11. MacIntyre, *The Bishop's Man*, 104.
12. MacIntyre, *The Bishop's Man*, 143.
13. MacIntyre, *The Bishop's Man*, 315.
14. MacIntyre, *The Bishop's Man*, 10.
15. MacIntyre, *The Bishop's Man*, 339.
16. Braecrest is a close fictionalization of Southdown in Aurora, Ontario. See Sarah Schmidt, "Religious Rehab: at a private facility near Toronto, some of North America's most notorious sexual offenders – members of the Catholic clergy – have sought treatment," *National Post*, 6 April 2002.
17. Erik Jackson, "El Espino's Least Desirable Neighbor," *The Panama News*, 11, no. 14 (17 July - 6 August 2005).
18. MacIntyre, *The Bishop's Man*, 389.
19. MacIntyre, *The Bishop's Man*, 340.

CSCH President's Address 2010

"We who speak . . . and write books": Writing and Teaching the History of Christianity In a Secular Canada, 1960-2010

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Despite your executive's remission in issuing press releases and giving interviews to the media you are probably all aware that 2010 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Canadian Society of Church History (CSCH). This is an event which, given the transitory nature of life and the fragility of academic disciplines, calls for deep gratitude, not to mention amazement, that we are still here, and to all appearances, thriving. Anniversaries are occasions to ponder one's changing identity. Those whose memory goes back to our previous milestone, the Society's fortieth anniversary, may recall the witty foray into that subject offered by Sandra Beardsall in her presidential address. Sandra made the unforgettable comparison of our society to a three-headed calf, the kind one might run across at a county fair, a freak of nature (or is it design?), whose one head stares intently at theology, its second at history, and its third at religious studies. Her provocative question, "[As a three-headed calf] Do we play any meaningful role in the Canadian academic barnyard, or are we really intended for a tattered tent in a tawdry sideshow – a slightly shocking lesson in the pitfalls of inter-disciplinarity?" is still with us.[1] Ten years later, I'd like to address the matter of identity in a rather different way. Regrettably I cannot replicate the creativity and wit of my predecessor, but instead must

ask you to plod along with me to reflect on a few critical moments in our collective history this past half century.

As a Society we owe our existence to the decision by Lorne Pierce, editor-in-chief of the Ryerson Press, in collaboration with H. H. Walsh, author of the 1956 publication, *The Christian Church in Canada,* to prepare the production of a definitive three volume work to mark Canada's centenary. With this in mind, and eager to know who was doing what in the field of Canadian Church history, they contacted others and organized this society in 1959. In May 1960 the newly formed Canadian Society of Church History launched its first annual meeting, to coincide with those of the Canadian Society of Biblical Studies and the Canadian Journal of Theology. Membership was open to "all who are seriously interested in Church History," an interest, which according to the recollection of John Moir, found alleviation on the humid days of annual meetings by recourse to the beer tents.

With the reassurance that fifty years later, conviviality continues to enliven and for some, lubricate, the Society's annual meetings, I want to look a little more intently at the decade of our founding, and explore a few facets of the title of my address: "'We who speak and write books': writing and teaching the history of Christianity in a secular Canada, 1960-2010." The first part of the title comes from a line in a recently discovered sermon of Augustine "We who preach [in our case 'speak'] and write books . . . speak as we are still knocking for understanding."[2] I sympathize with that sentiment, which was also captured so effectively in the title of Richard Allen's presentation on Salem Bland earlier this afternoon, "God's Truth Comes to Us in Fragments." My thoughts (which certainly have no pretension to divine truth), also come to you in fragments. Aware of the time of day you would be listening to my remarks and of my limited grasp of the topic under review, and totally against my Calvinist upbringing to shun the personal, I have decided to intersperse my comments with a few autobiographical fragments. In the unlikely event that conviviality languishes at our impending celebratory dinner, I'm hoping that my recourse to the autobiographical will be a catalyst to similar disclosures on your part, and in that way that we continue to enrich our collective history.

As a child nurtured on religious patriotic literature extolling Dutch resistance during the sixteenth-century Spanish occupation, and later to the Nazis, I thrilled to the words of hymns such as "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus," and "Faith of Our Fathers Living Still in Spite of Dungeon, Fire and Sword. "The words might be in English, belted out in a Christian

Reformed basement church in Canada in the 1950s, but in my mind they placed me in touch with a heroic religious tradition, as spellbinding in the past as it remained alive in the present. Later, when I enrolled at Victoria College, University of Toronto, where unlike in my immigrant community, life did not revolve around faith and church, I saw no need to abandon my fascination with Christianity. University life in the mid 1960s did test old boundaries, but for those so inclined, there was comfort in the Protestant ethos still evident in Victoria's residence life, and more widely in Toronto the Good and its thriving churches. History courses, though challenging my earlier bent towards the heroic and patriotic, became opportunities to examine the teachings and practice of the institutional church in settings as varied as medieval Germany and early twentieth - century French Canada. These were not considered marginal, but key topics in the history of the period under consideration.

No doubt insulated by the religious values of an immigrant society, and by those vestiges of a Christian past still evident in university life, I remained blind to the dramatic seismic shift the church in Canada was at the time undergoing.[3] Much more prescient was the observation in 1967 by John Webster Grant, one of the Society's founding members: "The image of a Christian Canada – churchgoing, moral, and devotedly partisan – strikes both believers and unbelievers today as somewhat archaic. Whether we like this image or not, it is unlikely that the church will have sufficient authority in our time to replace it with another."[4]

And yet, despite his observation, when reading the presentation titles and the minutes of the annual meetings of the CSCH in the 1960s I was struck by the absence of any evidence that those writing church history realized its implication for their own discipline. Like Augustine, it would seem they were still knocking for understanding. What you do notice is a shared emphasis on the importance of heritage, on the need to record the past. We remain greatly indebted to the results of those efforts, especially to the Centenary Series by Walsh, Moir and Grant.[5] Helpful in understanding the mindset of that generation of church historians, through the lens of one of their own, is the historical survey John Moir gave at the twenty-fifth anniversary of the CSCH in 1979.[6] His description of the CSCH during the 1960s and early 1970s testifies to a culture that retained the strong influence of the church. Not surprisingly, the Society's founding members were all male, most had clerical training and were attached to churches and seminaries. As was the custom, they were accompanied on their summer academic outings by their "ladies," whose accommodation

had to be arranged elsewhere than in the university residences that housed conference participants. Presentations, in Moir's succinct wording, were "largely by Protestants, for Protestants and about Protestants."

It was not until the 1980s and early 1990s that the loss of church authority previously noted by John Grant became a matter of scholarly interest.[7] A younger generation of historians, no longer "church historians" like the "founding fathers," but historians interested in religion as a force of intellectual and institutional change, entered into a lively debate that drew in various ways on "modernization as secularization" theory. Their focus was not, however, on the 1960s. Interested in the origins of the decline of Protestant mainline belief and practice so evident in their own time, they concentrated on what they saw to be the corrosive impact of scientific and theological thought of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Their argument, that there had been an "inner secularization" or accommodation of Protestant thought to a secularizing Canadian society, did not go uncontested. Others maintained that instead of religious decline, late Victorian Canada was distinguished by a remarkable vitality of evangelical Protestant religion. This is not the place to recapitulate the "secularization debate" so familiar to many of you.[8] It found a forum in several panel discussions at the CSCH, the first in 1986 examining Ramsay Cook's award-winning book, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in late Victorian Canada* (1985), and the second in 1994, focussing on David Marshall's *Secularizing the Faith: Canadian Protestant Clergy and the Crisis of Belief* (1992). The debate gave Canadian religious history a brief popularity, and more enduringly, a series of publications that built on, and took in new directions the earlier work on nineteenth-century Canadian religion by the founders of the CSCH. However, partly because of a lack of clarity about what was meant by secularization, and also because of the exclusive focus on churches, clergy, and social reformers, I would have to agree with the view of Ian Mackay, that to an outsider the debate seemed "somewhat strained and inconclusive." [9]

In retrospect I believe that even in the 1980s and early 1990s, in our approach to secularization as historians, we were still implicitly being influenced by an earlier church culture. We took Christian identity so for granted that we did not clearly define it nor confront the intricate ways that it was part of a wider social, political and economic structuring of daily life. What was notably absent from our debate was a sophisticated understanding of the complex ways Christian identity had been formed in

past ages not only by "internal" factors such as theology and church socialization, but also by "external factors" such as gender, social class, economic structuring and law. Since then, sociologists such as David Martin and Jose Casanova have contested and thoroughly refined the classical theory of "modernization as secularization" that had informed the Canadian secularization debate.[10]

As a result of their work, and of other recent historical studies into religious change in western societies, I now see the concepts of Christendom and de-Christianization to be more helpful than the term "secularization" as a historical framework for understanding the loss of Christian authority. As defined by British historian Hugh McLeod, Christendom is

> a society where there are close ties between leaders of the church and secular elites; where the laws purport to be based on Christian principles; where, apart from certain clearly defined outsider communities, everyone is assumed to be Christian; and where Christianity provides a common language, shared alike by the devout and the by the religiously lukewarm.[11]

By being more precise, this concept avoids the pitfalls of subjectivity and lack of clarity that were evident in the inconclusive debate on secularization of the 1980s. Rather than assuming that there was once a single "Christian Canada" that at some point in time declined (we are reminded of the desire of the CSCH's forefathers to "preserve our heritage") we can instead examine the different forms that Christendom has undergone as part of the restructuring of society. Given Canada's colonial origins, its struggle with inadequate resources before and after Confederation, and such ongoing concerns as minority religious rights and Indian policy, the state has played an unusually strong part in shaping the various forms Christendom has assumed from the sixteenth century to the 1960s. This strikes me as an especially fruitful theme when writing an overview of Canadian religious history that distinguishes itself from earlier syntheses such as those authored by the CSCH's founders. Christendom took on distinctive forms because of the close relationship between religion and the state first in New France, then in the efforts at Anglican religious establishment, followed by evangelical Protestant voluntarism upon disestablishment and by Roman Catholic ultramontanism within and outside Quebec; in the constitutional arrangement of 1867, and in the shift to economic capitalism at the turn of the century, and more recently in the transition to the welfare state in the 1960s. In such a framework, religious

change is not a steady downward slide into "secularization," but an intricate and ongoing process of readjustment in which leaders of the church and secular elites interact in new ways; where religion and law are dynamic in the way they interrelate to shape a changing Christian moral order; and where Christian identity and discourse "shared alike by the devout and the by the religiously lukewarm" take on different forms over time.[12] In examining these various forms of Christendom, attention has to be given also to the tensions and contradictions that in turn led to change. Among these tensions and contradictions was the situation of religious and ethnic outsiders. How was their identity constructed? How did they themselves construct it? What was their part in the various forms assumed by Christendom?

The preceding does not assume that Christendom can be endlessly reconfigured. Its "decline . . . has been a very long drawn out process," McLeod notes, emphasizing that one of the most important and elusive steps in the decline has been the gradual loosening of the ties between church and society.[13] Within this slow process, in his recent book, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, he, along with others, most notably Charles Tayor in *A Secular Age*, Callum Brown in *The Death of Christian Britain*, and Robert Wuthnow in *The Restructuring of American Religion*, have noted the rapid de-Christianization that happened in the 1960s. Their work on this pivotal decade recalls another observation by John Grant: "Realization that Christendom was dead, even in Canada, dawned with surprising suddenness in the 1960s . . ."[14] But was it so sudden, or was the death so intimately tied up with the restructuring of the Canadian state in the 1960s, that those who had been formed by Christendom simply "could not see the 60s coming?"

Here we come again to our Society's founding decade, and to Augustine's experience of "still knocking for understanding." Fifty years later as historians we are in a position to raise questions about Christian identity overlooked by the founders of the CSCH, and even by those who more recently concentrated on "inner secularization" at the end of the nineteenth century. In the case of Quebec's "Quiet Revolution" of the 1960s, colleagues such as Roberto Perin, David Seljak, Gregory Baum and Michael Gauvreau have done impressive work. For English-speaking Canada, important foundations have been laid by such CSCH members as Catherine Gidney, Gary Miedema, Bruce Douville, and Ruth Compton Brouwer. Either anticipating or working within, the new historiography on the 1960s, they have moved away from the earlier concentration on church

and clergy in their analysis of religious change to focus on previously unexamined public sites: the university campus, the state's place in defining the religious celebrations of Canada's Centennial, youth participation in overseas development, and the formation of new spiritualities.[15] By including forces external to religion, their work connects with European, British and American historiography on the dismantling of Christendom in the 1960s, and at the same time adds to the growing body of comparative trans-Atlantic studies.

There are three additional reasons why I find the concept of Christendom a more fruitful approach to the writing and teaching of the history of Christianity in a secular Canada. First, "Christianity" (again citing McLeod), "is not equivalent to or dependent on the maintenance of Christendom."[16] Despite its loss of cultural authority, religion, as we are reminded regularly in the media, continues today to flourish in many sites. Again, let me give a personal observation. As those who teach in seminaries and evangelical colleges, and as all familiar with the statistical work of Stuart MacDonald, Reginald Bibby and others, are aware, a good number of Canadians today continue to experience organized religion as part of their identity.

I am one of those. Many years ago I changed my denominational allegiance, but each time that I worship with family members in the Christian Reformed congregation that helped to shape my youthful enthusiasm of a Christian past, I am made aware of how much of that past remains. Scores of blond-haired, blue-eyed children flock to the front of the pulpit each Sunday for the minister's childrens story as their parents and grandparents settle in for a half-hour of theological and biblical sermon reflection, followed by a lengthy congregational prayer. Laying out the needs and joys of the community, the prayer is followed by a different form of public witness: well-funded collections for local and church causes, ranging from the needs of a city mission or the local Christian school to famine relief in drought-stricken Africa. Fifty years after its founding by Dutch immigrants, this church, and so many like it, continues to reflect many of the facets of the image of a Christian Canada which historians and other observers, including most of the media, have long since considered vanished.[17] Exploring the reconfiguration of "Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada" (to cite the title of a recent collection) continues to be one of our tasks as historians in today's pluralistic, post-Christendom context.[18]

Second, those who reject Christianity do not necessarily replace it

with a purely secular worldview. Referring to today's fascination with spirituality, American historian Leigh Eric Schmidt has pointed out that "the invention of 'spirituality" originated in large measure in the search by nineteenth-century Americans "for a religious world larger than the British Protestant inheritance." That religious world has continued to expand. Where at the time of the founding of the CSCH, a "serious interest in Church History" was sufficiently comprehensive to describe the society's mandate, fifty years later, as Bruce Douville's work on radical forms of religion in the 1960s reminds us, it is impossible to make a clear distinction between those who fit within "church" history, and those who do not. Alternative forms of religion are part of the broader context of changing religious identity, and have to be examined on their own terms, and not only as evidence of loss of Christian authority.

That brings me to the third and final reason why I see the concept of Christendom so important for the writing and teaching of Canadian religious history today. In 1985 when I was first appointed to Queen's, I could expect that most of the undergraduates who chose to take my history course in religion and North American society had some personal connection to organized Christianity and understood its basic terminology. Twenty-five years later this is no longer the case.[19] For students (and for readers of our work), who have had little or no such socialization, the intricacies of nineteenth-century denominational differences are often mystifying and confusing. The concept of Christendom, however, makes the complexity of religious identity more accessible. It allows religion to be approached not in the first place through the byzantine maze of doctrine and church polity, but as a way of organizing society and shaping personal and communal identity in different times and places.[20] Thus it takes into account such more familiar forms of social structuring as gender, the economy and government, which together helped shape the various forms of Christendom. It also calls attention to the tensions and contradictions these structures brought to religious belief and practice, and to the ways whereby people addressed these.

Here I need to mention, at the risk of repeating what is becoming a refrain in my own writing, the importance of the methodology of "lived religion" in helping students understand religious practice and identity. Pioneered by American historians such as Robert Orsi, David Hall, Colleen McDannell and Leigh Schmidt, and shaped by the insights of post-structuralism, this approach emphasizes religion's constant dialectical relationship with the social.[21] Like anthropologists seeking to understand

an unfamiliar society, these scholars of religious history in a secular age take as their guide ethnography rather than institutional or intellectual history, as was once the case. Institutions, denominations, theologies and doctrinal teachings are part of the context from which lived religion is extrapolated, but the primary focus is not on these but on what people actually make of them. This calls for an awareness of the idiomatic possibilities and limitations within the culture under investigation: of what people were able to desire, express, fantasize. Why, for example, did the rich imagery of a heaven figure so prominently in nineteenth-century accounts of death, to disappear almost entirely in our own time? How in each instance did Christendom and its replacement help define the experience? Related to this is the importance of the prevailing knowledges of the body: what was it that people in a certain period of time and place tasted, felt, smelled, heard? Asking such questions, historian Robert Orsi has been able convincingly to reconstruct for readers with no religious background, the lush rituals and feasts of Italian Roman Catholic immigrants in early twentieth-century Harlem, while CSCH past-president James Opp has offered a layered analysis of the faith healing in early twentieth-century Canada.[22] Excavated with care, skill, and observation, practices that could easily be derided or criticized instead become the subject of informed understanding. In such a method, students are encouraged to recognize that religious idioms, symbols and institutions do not simply reflect a world (as was the assumption in the older approach to history), but that they also ***make*** a world, a world with all its tensions, contradictions, and ambiguities.

The emphasis on religion as dynamic experience in dialogue with its context also has implications for students' own self-awareness. As researchers and writers, they begin to recognize their personal implication in the study and writing of human history, and hence to realize the importance of their own "spirituality," of their own religious formation or lack thereof. Thus, rather than seeing the religious past as "dead" and its actors as "other," they are encouraged to explore to what extent their own circumstances as thinking, feeling people, caught in the complexities of daily life can provide at least an entry into the religious experience of, for example, Pentecostals in the early-twentieth century. In short, along with and as part of, the usual reading and analysis of texts, students become more aware of the kinds of religious worlds people have made, and of the scholars, including themselves, who study these worlds.

This approach does not call for a confessional position. Historian

Robert Orsi, for example has been clear that for him there can be no return to the Roman Catholic piety of his youth, nor to any confessional faith. At the same time, in an insightful essay on the way the personal and the historiographical have been linked in his work, he has acknowledged how his insight into the lived experience of devout Roman Catholics has sharpened his own self-insight as a human being.[23]

Such an approach would not have been possible if the moral authority of the old Christian Canada were still in place. Rather than being forced to take a creative, multifaceted approach to excavating the religious experience of an earlier time, students (and their instructors) would have simply assumed that a knowledge of institutions and theology alone was needed. Moreover, it has been my experience that prior Christian socialization, though in some ways a benefit, can also limit, even to the point of distortion, a person's openness to the rich layers of meaning within historical texts. Overlooked then is the messiness, the contradictions, and the tensions that were (and are) part of lived religion, as of life more generally.

Instead, "lived religion" as a methodology that sharpens student perception of religion within the warp and woof of existence, raises awareness of the many ways in which the quest for the sacred has shaped, and continues to shape people's negotiation of daily life. Belief and practice are then seen as never static, but sensitive to the context of its practitioners. Yes, at age fifty we are still a "three-headed calf," but some may see us as an academic freak, we are so by necessity and design.

And that strikes me as an appropriate way to bring these meandering reflections to a conclusion on this occasion of our fiftieth anniversary. Because of the dynamic nature of religious practice, the identity of the CSCH in 2010 cannot be a continuation of "the faith of our fathers" about which I, and others, once sung so lustily or spoke of with such conviction. The massive de-Christianization of the intervening period has permanently displaced such an option. What it has done, however, is opened a space in the academy for a more perceptive approach to religion, one that recognizes the ambiguity of life, the tensions and contradictions that are part of living within the given structures of place and time. Where once in my youth (and in our country's youth), the history of Christianity was seen as a heroic enterprise, today its study is more complex. Yet as I grow older, I see it as more rewarding, as demanding a deeper self-knowledge and a keener awareness of the fragility and ambiguity of every day life not only in the past, but also in the present.

Endnotes

1. Sandra Beardsall, "The Three-Headed Calf: Triple Vision and the Canadian Society of Church History," President's Address, *Historical Papers: Canadian Society of Church History* (1999): 197-211.

2. Cited in "Augustine Through the Ages," *Times Literary Supplement*, February 4, 2000.

3. For the prevalence of a Protestant ethos in Canadian university life until well into the 1960s see Catherine Gidney*, A Long Eclipse: the Liberal Protestant Establishment and the Canadian University, 1920-1970* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004).

4. John Webster Grant,"The Church and Canada's Self-Awareness," *Canadian Journal of Theology* 13, no. 3 (1967): 164.

5. The last two were not published until 1972, when the American purchasers of the Ryerson Press issued them "as a part of their policy to Canadianize their image" (John Moir, "The Canadian Society of Church History – A Twenty Year Retrospect," *Canadian Society of Church History Papers* [1979]: 89).

6. As summarized by Moir, the Society's minutes also carried references to such congregational practices as purging the roll of non-paying members, sporadic membership drives directed to an ill-defined constituency, recurring and inconclusive debates on the same issues, and financial vicissitudes which varied according to the skills of the volunteer treasurers (*Canadian Society of Church History Papers* [1979]: 76-98).

7. There exists no comparable survey to Moir's to offer insight into the culture of the CSCH in the 1980s and 1990s, but panel discussions such as "Church History of Canada: Where from Here?" (1980), "Recovering Women's Experience in Church History" (1990), and "How Ought Church Historians to do Church History?" (1992) point to a growing self-consciousness concerning church history as a discipline.

8. An informed recent analysis of the debate on secularization among Canadian historians can be found in Richard Allen, *The View from Murney Tower: Salem Bland, the Late Victorian Controversies, and the Search for a New Christianity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), xv-xxvii.

9. Ian Mckay, "CHR Forum: the Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History," *The Canadian Historical Review* 81 no. 4 (December 2000): 925, note 16.

10. David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1978); and José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

11. Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 18.

12. I have elaborated this argument in "'From Sea to Sea': Protestant Forms of a Christian Canada, 1812-1960," paper presented to the American Society of Church History Annual Spring Meeting, Montreal, April 17, 2009.

13. Hugh McLeod and Werner Ustof, eds., *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 11.

14. John Webster Grant, *The Church in the Canadian Era*, 2nd ed. (Burlington, ON: Welch 1988), 216; cited by Mark Noll in a more wide-ranging analysis, "What Happened to Christian Canada?" *Church History* 75, no.2 (June 2006): 252.

15. The reader is directed to the Cumulative Index of CSCH Papers (1960-2009), prepared for the Society's fiftieth anniversary and available on its website.

16. McLeod, *Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, 265.

17. Nor is it entirely absent in the United Church congregations where I have mainly worshipped since. The image may have experienced something of a time warp but the contours remain. They are evident in the aging congregation's intense concern with "faith and justice" issues, but also in its reenactment of a social and communal identity at variance with today's fragmented, busy and individualistic urban lifestyle. In 2004 I launched for theology students a course on church renewal with the provocative title (for the United Church) "Evangelism for Non-Evangelicals," in which presentations offered by guest ministers gave evidence of many contemporary vital and vibrant congregations within the old "mainline" denominations.

18. Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, eds., *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

19. Hence to focus on the "inner secularization" of, for example, Methodists and Presbyterians, or even the imprecise term "Protestants" becomes a mystifying experience.

20. The term also draws attention to commonalities, as well to the more recent interest in placing the Canadian experience within a larger trans-Atlantic context. See for example, Richard Todd Webb, "How the Canadian Methodists Became British: Unity, Schism, and Transatlantic Identity," in *Transatlantic Subjects*, ed. Nancy Christie (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), 159-198, and Richard Vaudry, *Anglicans and the*

Atlantic World: High Churchmen, Evangelicals, and the Quebec Connection (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003).

21. Robert N. Hall, ed., *Lived Religion in America: Towards a History of Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997; Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Consumer Rites: The Buying and Selling of American Holidays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); and Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

22. Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); and James Opp, *The Lord for the Body: Religion, Medicine, and Protestant Faith Healing in Canada, 1880-1930* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005).

23. Robert Orsi, "'Have You Ever Prayed to Saint Jude?' Reflections Fieldwork in Catholic Chicago," in *Between Heaven and Earth: the Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 146-176.