

**The End of Christian Canada: Past Perspectives, Present Opportunities for
Faith and Public Life**

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1. Introduction

I am grateful to the University of Calgary, to the Department of Religious Studies and to Doug Shantz the co-ordinator of this Symposium on Religion and Public Life in Canada, for the invitation to speak tonight . I'd like to add just a few words to the title: The End of Christian Canada: Past Perspectives, Present Opportunities for faith and public life. What we won't be discussing are such questions as "What portion of Canadians call themselves Christian" or "How religious are Canadians?" These are questions for opinion pollsters and for sociologists such as Reginald Bibby in his recent book, *Restless Gods: the Renaissance of religion in Canada*. Instead, as a historian and as someone who has great respect for religion, I would like to raise a different set of questions: What as Canadians is our heritage of faith and public life? Is religious faith a private matter or can it have a meaningful voice In the public life of a pluralistic society? What are the challenges and opportunities faced by faith groups today in making a contribution to public life?

2. Two Expressions of Faith in Public Life in Canada

Let me begin with two expressions of faith in public life in Canada, both within fairly recent memory. [will cut the detail] On July 1, 1967, some 25,000 people gathered on Parliament Hill to celebrate Canada's one hundredth birthday.¹ Many had arrived early to watch the arrival of politicians and other dignitaries. The excitement peaked when shortly after 10 am a black open limousine arrived bringing the Queen and the Prince, who were escorted to a low platform by eight clergymen, representing a diversity of faiths, both Jewish and Christian. “A hundred years ago today,” read the distributed programs, “our ancestors witnessed the birth of a new nation. Now a century later, some twenty million Canadians share the heritage of freedom and material prosperity for which, on this historic occasion, all will wish to join in thanksgiving to God.” In the half-hour, nationally-televised ceremony that followed, Canadians across the country began their Canada Day celebrations of the country’s one hundredth birthday with prayer, Bible reading, and song: a call to worship from Psalm 33 and 95, read a prominent member of the Montreal Jewish community, representing the Canadian Interfaith Conference; the singing of the hymn, “O Lord My God.” by the

¹ The Order of Service of the Prayer Service described below, including the speech of the Queen and the various readings and hymns, was printed in *Hansard* (July 4, 1967), 2248-2257.

Descriptions of the event have otherwise been drawn from Greg Connelley, “French, English Canadians Urged: Resolved Differences,” *The Ottawa Citizen* (July 3, 1967), 15; “Disappointed: Few Hear Monarch’s Speech,” *The Ottawa Citizen* (July 3, 1967), 15; Lewis Seale, “Queen Urges Understanding and Goodwill,” *The Globe and Mail* (July 3, 1967), 8.

Centennial Choir and the audience, a confession of sin, and a reading from 1 Peter 3 by Prime Minister Lester Pearson. The ceremony was concluded with a communal litany as thousands of voices repeated the refrain, “We re-dedicate ourselves, O Lord.”

Contrast this to another gathering, held twenty-four years later, again on Parliament Hill, on September 14, three days after the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. An unprecedented crowd estimated at over 100,000 people had gathered. Prime Minister Chretien expressed the feelings of most Canadians when he conveyed, in the presence of the American ambassador, heartfelt support for the United States and its leaders. On this occasion, however, there was no reference to God, and the language and music were studiously neutral of any religious tones. Religious faiths were, indeed, represented in the front rows of the audience by clergy and officials from many Canadian religious communities. They were there at the explicit invitation of the Department of Canadian Heritage, but they sat in silence. Everyone observed a moment of silence for the dead, yet no one was called upon to say a public prayer. The country's faiths had become silent symbols, but of what, remained unclear.

Did this mean faith had disappeared? Not really. Once the immense crowd had dispersed, Chretien and his wife were among those who quietly entered the Roman Catholic Cathedral on Sussex Drive to attend a memorial mass for the thousands of victims of the attacks. And in many local communities and congregations services were held allowing people to call on the language of faith to voice their feelings. At this momentous national occasion, however, unlike less than a quarter century earlier, faith was not given a national public voice.

Later in particular by the Anglican Primate, Archbishop Michael Peers, the Chretien government was soundly criticized for virtually draining religious expression from public life. Yet even the Primate's long, well-thought out defence of the role which religion has traditionally played in Canadian public life, printed in the *Globe and Mail*, did not meet the approval of everyone. In the views of quite a few articulate Canadians faith and public life simply do not mix, to do so harkens back to a time of Christian triumphalism, reminiscent of some of the rhetoric heard this past year south of the border, and the sooner religion becomes a private matter, the better. And so the question is, what has happened to the expression of our corporate faith as a country? What has happened to the old Christian Canada, the country which chose at its motto the verse from Psalm 72 that God would have Dominion from sea to sea? ?

3. The Contemporary Situation: Canada and Multiculturalism

We have become a multicultural country, where Christianity, though still by far the largest, has become one of many faiths, and where church attendance has dropped dramatically. In such a country is it best for faith to be a private matter? In other words, should faith, like those religious leaders seated on the front rows that September day on Parliament Hill, keep silent or can it still make a meaningful contribution to the country's public life?

In raising these questions I have used the word "faith," rather than religious traditions. The religious traditions which historically established themselves on Canadian soil are indeed important, and I will focus on these in my historical analysis, but when talking about the contemporary situation I find the term "faith" more helpful. This is a term which speaks of core values. As such it

encompasses the human response to what gives ultimate meaning to life, to what draws out our deepest commitment. Because of this, as a human experience faith by its nature radiates outward and binds people together into community. Think of how the faith of Martin Luther King and Afro-American congregations galvanized and shaped the American civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s, or Nellie McClung, JS Woodsworth and other champions of the social gospel in early 20th century Canada, or closer to home, the contributions of Bill Aberhart or Preston Manning. Whether you agree with them or not, all of these found in religious faith the wellspring of their social and political action. Faith is not the "spirituality" of which so much is heard today. It is not an individualistic, feel-good, de-institutionalized religiosity which makes no demands on people. In the words of American public philosopher, Jean Bethke Elshtain, who has thought and spoken much about the public expression of faith: "...a private faith is no religion at all. One must have the public expression of faith for it to be faith." ²

How to define the term "public"? We have heard much about the "private" these last few years: private healthcare, private universities, privatization of services, the private sector. The distinction between "private" and "public" is not, however, that between "right" and "left" but rather the distinction gets at the very heart of what it means to be a democratic society. Political theorists, especially in the United States have for some time now been interested in the concept of a "public sphere" or "public realm" in a liberal society, where citizens debate, deliberate, and engage in collective democratic will formation. In civil society this

² Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Religion and American Democracy,"²⁰

happens through associational forms of life such as societies, churches, clubs, organizations, educational institutions, the media, all those places where human beings act and deliberate together to achieve many of the ends they consider most important - the nature of education, of medical care, support systems for the family, the nature of the help to be provided for those who are weak, ill, or poor. The concept of the public assumes, therefore, some connection between my own good and "the common good."³

4. Historical Analysis: Religion and the Public Sphere

Some history. The whole idea of a "public sphere," separate from the state and the economy is relatively new in western history, and is part of the differentiation of power, or separation of roles which has been part of western modernization. There was a time, some of you may recall, from your medieval history classes when the term Christendom described western society. These were centuries when church and state were much intertwined with one another and everyone belonged to one Christian church, outside of which there was no salvation. In this Christian Europe inevitably a power struggle broke out over who exercised ultimate authority, the church or the state. The Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century was about religious reform, but it was also

³ Some, realizing that the term "the common good" can mean something quite different to various groups of people, to women, for example, speak of "publics" in the plural. Still others, pointing out the heterogeneous nature of modern civil society, locate the public in a neutral legal system capable of sorting out conflicting views. C. Calhoun ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere*.

about the relationship of the state to the church. As Europe began to divide itself into nation states whose rulers chose either the Protestant or Roman Catholic faith, churches became national or established churches. Thus in each territory there was generally only one state-supported church, and all within the state were expected to belong to it or face persecution. Every new born infant was baptized and entered life as a little English Anglican, a Scottish Presbyterian, a Dutch Reformed, or a Spanish Roman Catholic. This was not a tolerant system, and it came under heavy fire during that time of questioning and debate in the 18th century known as the Enlightenment. First in the newly formed American republic, then in France, and by the 1850s in British North America, the churches became disestablished. Religion now became a voluntary activity; it could not be coerced, but neither could it look to the state for financial or legal support as it had in the past. By becoming separate from the state, and entering the voluntary sector religion now became a participant in the formation of the public sphere of modern "secular" society. The separation of church and state did not mean, that countries like Canada and the US were not religious. In fact, nineteenth-century observers noted that here people seemed far more religiously involved than in those countries where church establishments remained in place. There were, however, some important differences in the separation between church and state in the US and Canada

Canada and the US "How different are we?"

The most obvious difference was in the constitutional arrangements of the two countries. The United States was formed at a time when Enlightenment teachings offered great possibilities for a new social order built on the rights of the

individual to such freedoms as private property, conscience and religion. Thus the First Amendment to the United States Constitution in 1791 stated that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” There was to be no religion established by the federal government, although for some decades church establishments continued in various states. Religion was a social institution, and for it to flourish, the rights of free association and free expression were essential. In Canada, on the other hand, which was formed almost a century later, and under quite different circumstances, the British North America Act of 1867 made no mention of a religious establishment or of a state supported church. It simply assumed the practical loss of privilege which was already in place in the various British colonies at the time of Confederation.⁴ Both countries therefore implicitly or explicitly understood church and state to be separate. Yet there was an important difference between Canada and the United States. In the US there was what we would call today a free market of religion: freedom of expression meant freedom to experiment, to build new denominations - think of all the new forms of religion that began in the US - Mormons, Christian Disciples, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-Day Adventists, Christian Science, Pentecostalism. One historian speaks of "a lively experiment" of denominations, all competing to exercise their influence upon public life and to shape the values of the country's citizens. As a result religion may have been somewhat superficial but it also flourished and has made the

⁴E. R. Norman, *The Conscience of the State in North America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

United States today with its high church attendance an anomaly among western countries. In the nineteenth-century, however, it was Canada which struck observers as the more Christian nation. Here there were primarily six mainline denominations: Church of England, Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregationalist, Baptist, all with strong ties to mother churches in Britain. As well, Roman Catholics, who in 1871 formed 42.8% of the population, had received minority religious rights as early as the 1770s, and in the BNA Act, section 93 gave constitutional standing to the minority Roman Catholic and Protestant Schools on Ontario and Quebec.

A strange paradox happened. In Canada formal disestablishment in reality turned into two informal or shadow establishments, two highly public expressions of religion: Protestantism in English Canada and Roman Catholicism, primarily in Quebec. The major Protestant denominations were all in some form or other evangelical, which meant that they had a common understanding of the sinfulness of the human condition, a commitment to individual conversion, and to a moral life expressed in service to others. Their more individualistic approach to the Christian faith was in stark contrast with Roman Catholicism, which in the nineteenth century became strongly institutionalized and centralized in Rome. Both, however, were very activist in moral and social reform. Roman Catholics relied to a large extent on their religious orders for social services. Protestant laymen and women organized voluntary societies: temperance and prohibition societies, Bible and tract societies, houses of refuge for single mothers, orphanages, anti-slavery organizations, union Sunday Schools, hospitals, Benevolence and Poor societies, literary societies for moral and cultural uplift,

groups to welcome and care for strangers, YMCA's and YWCAs, home and foreign mission societies- the list is endless.

Although the two religious groupings had a common interest in moral reform, they also held different views on many matters such as Sunday observance, the role of ministers and priests, allegiance to Rome, to name just a few of their differences. Orange Day and St. Patrick's Day parades inevitably became sites of combat as these two groups battled out in public their understanding of religious truth. Thus, though religion was very public in the nineteenth century, it was also openly divisive. In education and prohibition, for example, religious opinions could not be ignored by politicians concerned to be re-elected. To be a federal statesman in nineteenth-century Canada, one had to mediate between two religious groups. For Prime Ministers such as Macdonald and Laurier it was important to prevent at all costs divisions along religious lines. For political purposes, in short, Christian Canada was sometimes more of a problem than a blessing⁵

Secondly, with two dominant and conflicting religions, it was hard to make religion a source of patriotism without one group offending the other. This was quite different from the US, where despite the separation of church and state, there existed alongside the churches a kind of patriotic civil religion: the rhetoric of being a nation chosen by God which went back to Puritan times, and found expression in 4th of July parades, and in such stirring songs as the Battle Hymn of

⁵ Minority rights were regularly contested by the majority (NB schools 1872, the decision to hang Louis Riel in 1885, Jesuits' Estates 1888, Manitoba Schools 1890s).

the Republic which proclaimed the country's special role in bringing about the coming of the Lord. Canada's history didn't lend itself as well to such patriotism. When Protestants spoke of Canada as being "His Dominion" - they intended to create a Christian nation in their own image. And when Roman Catholic leaders spoke of French Canada as being an elect nation, they contrasted its spiritual nature to the materialism of the Americans and English Canadians around them.

Religion was, therefore, often a source of division in Christian Canada, but that is only one side of the coin. It also played an indispensable role in shaping a much needed safety net at a time when government services were minimal. It was the churches who fought hard for sabbath legislation to ensure that one day in seven workers would be free from their backbreaking labour. And the battles for prohibition were motivated by more than puritan scruples. A breadwinner's alcoholism could quickly lead to unemployment, wife abuse, and starvation for a family.

One of the strongest voices for reform was expressed by the churches in the 'social gospel' movement at the end of the 19th and early 20th century. As thousands of European immigrants flooded into the cities and the prairies, the churches and voluntary societies stepped in to provide such essential services as settlement houses, hospitals, and immigrant education⁶ As Christians social gossellers were convinced that the goal of history was to establish the Kingdom of God. In their idealism they envisioned that this would be a time and place where the justice and love of God would inform all aspects of social and economic

⁶ . Richard Allen, The Social Passion.

life. For some this included asking for the implementation of women's rights, calling for child welfare legislation and increasingly turning to government to clean up corruption in civic life.⁷ Seeing that a concerted effort was needed in politics, a number who were strongly influenced by the teachings of Christian socialism joined forces in 1933 to establish the CCF party.

By this date, though the commitment to social and moral reform remained strong, evangelical Protestants were experiencing divisions on such matters as the interpretation of the Scriptures and on their attitudes generally for or against intellectual and social change. Tomorrow you will hear more about how that played itself out politically on the prairies, in the form of such leaders as William Aberhart in Alberta and Tommy Douglas in Saskatchewan, each of whom, though at opposing points of ideological spectrum became a leader of a regional populist party to address the economic problems of the time. The depression, and the relentless efforts by the CCF and by church groups were major catalysts in

⁷. In 1907 they made a major step in this direction by forming (Moore and Shearer) an interdenom. Social Service Council of Canada to co-ordinate reform activities of churches, WCTU, labour and farm organizations.

United farmers of Ontario, of Alberta, Manitoba Grain growers: cf. Its secretary WR Wood writing to Salem Bland 'we are practically seeking to inaugurate the Kingdom of God and its righteousness.'

pushing the federal government to enact welfare legislation on such matters as old age pensions and medicare. By 1970 much of this was in place.⁸

Ironically, though it was motivated by Christian concern, this legislation played an important role in bringing about the end of the old Christian Canada, for the state now became much more involved in everyday life. The end of Christian Canada came very quickly: there was criticism from within the churches such as Pierre Burton's much publicized book, *The Comfortable Pew*, as well as dramatic internal and external change, especially in the Roman Catholic Church in Quebec with the Quiet Revolution and the reforms of Vatican II.

There remained symbols of Christian Canada in the late 1960s, and there was greater acknowledgment of the presence of the Jewish faith, as we saw in the Centennial prayer meeting. In retrospect, however, it has become clear that the display of religion at that ceremony looked back to the Christian Canada of the past, not forward to the secular Canada of the present. Since that date, our ethnic pluralism has increased and multiculturalism, as one historian has put it, has become part of our Canadian common sense. In addition, as the state has become more involved in social and economic life we have experienced considerable conflict concerning moral, in particular "family", issues. These so-called 'culture wars' have been especially lively in the United States as the courts were called

⁸ [Implementation 1950 of universal old age security over 70 years, incremental introduction of gov't funded hospital insurance first introduced in 1946 by Douglas and CCF in Sask., 1962 it introduced medicare, by 1970 other provinces forced to follow; Canada pension Plan, Old-Age Supplement, Pearson Gov't: uniform social security measures across Canada]

upon beginning in the 1960s to arbitrate on a range of issues concerning religion and individual rights and freedoms,; the right to abortion, to sex education in the schools, the right to say prayers in the schools, gay rights, the right to euthanasia. These issues brought about new cleavages in American religious life and society, not between Protestants and Roman Catholics, but within denominations, as people took up positions to the right and the left of the issues. The response as you well know was the politicization of the religious right in the US, as fundamentalists and neo-evangelicals took their concerns into party politics and election campaigns.

These culture wars have been much less pervasive north of the border, though they have not been entirely absent. In part because of our nineteenth-century history of religious strife, there has been a real concern not to fan divisions on moral issues of our own time. Instead we have responded by becoming a secular country, but what that means still seems to need definition.

5. Canada: A Secular Country

There are two ways of understanding the secular ideal. One way is to see it as the enemy of religion, as a form of established unbelief and a protector of strictly individual rights of expression. In such a view there is little room for the expression of religion in the public realm. This seems to be a way favoured by many, especially by those whom sociologists call the Knowledge Class, who dominate the media, culture and education. There is, however, another way of understanding the secular ideal, a way more in keeping with the intent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, namely to disestablish religion and replace it with a religious pluralism. For a variety of reasons, some of which we have just

examined, this ideal did not fully happen in Canada and two forms of Christianity took on a hegemonic nature which often at times made them seem culturally oppressive and imperialistic.

One of the reasons why the first secular ideal rather than the second has taken such hold is that we still live with the ghost of the old Christian Canada. For some, it is the spectre of an intolerant past; for others, especially more conservative Protestants, it is an ideal to be recaptured. In neither case does it allow us to be the country we could be. One cannot simply dismiss religion from public discourse. In the words of one American commentator, no complex democratic politics can survive if we go underground with what we care about most deeply. [Elshtain, 22). To force religious differences out of the public realm is no way to practice the tolerance on which we Canadians pride ourselves. To say, for example, to the parents of a Sikh child as happened recently in Quebec, "As long as your son keeps his kirpan at home, you can be Sikh" is hardly an expression of robust religious pluralism. Yet how do we negotiate these different religious rights within a secular society in ways that don't accelerate fragmentation or pit one group against the other?

This fragmentation is increasing. In many ways with the coming of the 1982 Charter of Rights and Freedoms we have drawn closer to the experience of the United States. By stating that everyone has fundamental freedoms, including "freedom of conscience and religion (subject only to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society." the Charter has brought to the foreground the principle of individual rights and freedoms, and moved us into a moral space very different from the two

hegemonic public religions of the old Christian Canada. That is one reason why we cannot return to the old Christian Canada. Alongside this, and not unrelated is the phenomenon of globalization which has been breaking down old national identities in favour of smaller tribal and regional loyalties, and in economic matters replacing them with the values and power of transnational corporations. Rather than being a cause for despair, or a reason to stifle all religious differences, this pluralism can be the source of a healthy secular state where faith is valued as an important contributor to a robust public life.

6. Affirming a Place for Religion and Public Life in Canada

To begin, we need to remember the definition of faith as those core values which give ultimate meaning to life, and which draw out our deepest commitment. In the nineteenth century, especially for evangelical Protestants sin, repentance, forgiveness and service were concepts which addressed the meaning of life. And while at the time, Protestants saw only the differences of Roman Catholics, as we look back, we note that it is the biblical foundation and long tradition of charitable work of both these faiths which motivated them to undertake the moral reform which was so characteristic of the Christian Canada of a century ago.

Redemption, reconciliation, renewal and restoration remain powerful symbols of the new life which people can create when they work together.⁹ Such working together is, however, being increasingly undermined by our growing emphasis on individual rights as the organizing structure of society. In the eighteenth-century enlightenment, it was extremely important to assert the rights and freedoms of the

⁹ Gerald VannDeZande, *Justice: Not Just Us*

individual, and this continues to be true if we wish to honour human dignity. What was sometimes minimized, however, at the time, and what is increasingly neglected today, is reflection on the nature of the human individual whose rights and dignity were to be respected.¹⁰ At the time, the tradition of biblical religion, expressed in such terms as "All men are endowed by the Creator with certain inalienable rights, and church-based social life continued to be largely taken for granted. What Americans learned in the next century or so, was that the exercise of freedom inevitably erodes moral communal traditions and ultimately threatens the essential humanity of the individual.¹¹ This happens if people are only seen as rights-bearers, and as individuals whose worth can be entirely enumerated and quantified. Religious traditions insist that people are also social by nature, and that there is ultimately a transcendent element to human dignity, which in most religions is directly connected to a divine Source? To flourish, an individual and a society need both faith and freedom, or as the Americans put it, "Liberty under God." In the same way, in Canada, some fought hard to have inserted into the preamble of the 1982 Charter that the country was founded upon principles that "recognize the supremacy of God." Why do we need the voice of faith in the public square? Simply put, we need it to remind us that every person is of infinite worth, that none is more important than the other, that economic growth

¹⁰ See for example, the essays in T. William Boxx & Gary M. Quinlivan eds., *Public Morality, Civic Virtue, and the Problem of Modern Liberalism* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2000).

¹¹ Contemporary observers as varied as Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Pope John Paul II have made a similar case.

is not an end in itself, but that all people need material security to be fully alive. These are the insights that faith gives, and that is how I would interpret and add teeth to this phrase in the Charter's preamble, which has become largely a dead letter. Without the transcendent in human life, without God, no one single story unites people.

Does that mean that all religions must shed their differences and concentrate only on a few shared beliefs? Sometimes, in their anxiety to accommodate minority religious groups some Christians seem to think this is the way to go. Let me cite the response to this of Suwanda Suganisiri, a *Toronto Star* columnist on Buddhist-Christian relations. In one of the conferences we hosted at Queen's University on religion and public life in Canada, Suganisiri commented, rightly in my view, on the need to exchange the conflictual nature of Judeo-Xn institutions with ways that that are more consensual. He was quick to exclaim, however, "Am I asking you to get off your high horse of J-X'y and Western humanism? Heavens, no! I'm inviting you to be firmly seated on that horse and only to look to the other shores, to see what others have to offer. Instead of a conflictual approach, he offered the four sublime ways of the Buddha: sharing, pleasant speech, the social good, and egalitarianism. What he was doing was simply pointing out that religious pluralism enriches a society by offering it more ways to counteract the centrifugal tendencies of our society.

Rather than being a cause of dissension, faith can contribute an important dimension to public policy by offering a counter-cultural voice. The most obvious example here is the prophetic tradition, which is part of the Judeo-Christian heritage, but also the Muslim faith. As we begin to think again of winter and of

the sad need to activate yet again programmes such as Out of the Cold, it is important to be reminded of the tenacity of mainline denominations in lobbying federal and provincial governments on matters of social justice. I keep a file of newspaper clippings about such efforts, and one of my favourite clippings is An Open Letter by Dow Marmur, now Rabbi Emeritus of Holy Blossom Temple, Toronto, entitled "Dear Mr. Harris: You're Not Listening."¹² You may exchange the name of our former Premier with yours, or with Ontario's current premier, for in three years there has been no change.

Marmur's letter to Harris and his government was a plea to address the plight of the destitute and the homeless in concrete ways rather than simply spewing out statistics intended to daze critics and deflate their anxieties. What especially struck me was that he laid out his religious motivation, and he did this by appealing to the universal values which are embedded in his own religion, Reform Judaism: "Justice and compassion are the foundations of faith and the criteria of decency. Our prophets and sages have taught that a civilized society is judged by how it treats its victims, not by how it regards its victors. If the federal government isn't doing enough, this should be an added incentive for the provincial government to do more."

Harris' reply was as expected, to give more statistics, to note that the best response to poverty was a vibrant economy with strong job growth and employment, and that poverty and homelessness, were complex matters, too complex for religious groups, who should mind their own tasks, and leave policy

¹² *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 22/12/99,

up to the state.¹³ Harris's reply nicely overlooks the fact that for centuries churches and religious groups with their strong communal tradition have concerned themselves with matters such as poverty, homelessness, education. It is also true, however, that one of the features which distinguishes our time is the complexity which these age-old issues have assumed. Thus no religious group can point to an unchallenged unified tradition within its own ranks, for all have been affected by the process of modernization: Jews and Christians arrange themselves on both sides of the private/public divide. Marmur himself had noted in his open letter that probably many members of his own congregation had voted for Harris and PC's: "The message of the self-made man who encourages self-reliance, hard work and private enterprise is attractive to many Jews." Indeed his letter did arouse controversy within the Holy Blossom congregation. One should, therefore, not be naïve. When faith enters the public realm, it has to be ready to accept that this is an area of ambiguity, where people have to give reasoned answers for their stance, and where they cannot simply expect universal approval. What is at stake here is that both groups within this congregation were in agreement on the one issue on which the faith tradition is clear- in this case, you must love your neighbour as yourself. What they needed to debate was how best can we bring that about, ie. how can we as Jews serve the common good. The same is true for Christians, who sadly in the last decades have become increasingly polarized over what divides them, rather than coming together on those issues on which their tradition is unequivocal, such as concern for the poor and the weak, for creation, for the

¹³ Harris to Marmur, Feb. 9, 2000.

welfare of the coming generation. One of the tasks challenging all religious denominations when they enter into public life, therefore, is to re-examine their faith tradition, to find out what are their core beliefs, what does their faith say about the meaning and purpose of life, and how can this be translated into public policy.

One of the arguments for social and religious reform which social gossellers at the turn of the century often trotted out was the statement, "The true religion of Jesus has never yet been tried." So too, in the aftermath of September 11, Islamic scholars and many devout Muslims took pains to present to uninformed Americans, what they considered to be the true tenets of their faith, which they believed had been totally distorted by the terrorists, and sadly, also by some of the media. Education in the faith remains therefore the challenge of every religious group in a truly secular society, education of the membership and of the outside world.

We are coming to the end of our time, and it may seem that I have left you with many generalities but with few specific concrete suggestions. There is a reason for that: as a historian I am convinced that faith in its many forms is an inexhaustibly rich resource to help people live together. Each age, however, has to do that in new ways, and there is no simple blueprint we can blindly follow. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, for better and for worse, Canadian social life was in part held together by the moral concern and action of its Roman Catholic and Protestant population. As a country we have in our more recent history come to value cultural and racial pluralism. Religious pluralism should be part of this. At the dawn of a twenty-first century we would do well, therefore,

to consider the special contribution which religious pluralism can make in counteracting the centrifugal tendencies of a social order which is shifting its foundations from tradition and communal responsibility to rights and freedoms.

In a religiously pluralistic Canada, faith can help us formulate public policies and shape a society which honours the wisdom of the past and which recognizes the infinite worth of each individual, of nature, and of all of life as God-given. These are beliefs which have been richly elaborated and explored in our different religious traditions. To express the implications of those beliefs in ways that enhance the common good, that is the task of each of us, and in the discussion we can share some ways in which this can be done more specifically.

Conclusion

In summary, faith with its concern for the common good, can be a way to heal the divisions caused by different economic perspectives, life styles, and political leanings. Without such faith a society founded only on the freedom of the individual will become dysfunctional. Let me close with a quotation from Michael Ignatieff, *The Rights Revolution* (the 2000 Massey Lectures). Although Ignatieff is not speaking here of religious faith, his words are very pertinent to suggesting how true religious pluralism can help us envisage new possibilities of living together [136]. "The precondition for order in a liberal society is an act of the imagination, not a moral consensus or shared values, but the capacity to understand moral worlds different from our own. We may be different, but we can imagine what it would be like to *be each other*."

What we have here is a vision of how different faiths with their long history of stimulating the moral imagination, can work together to enrich the public life of

Canada in a new century. It's a vision which offers a challenge to our growing individualistic and consumerist way of living, which puts us in touch with our past without becoming its prisoner, and which calls on our best creative energies and our deepest hopes for our families, our country and our world.