

“The Holy See is very afraid of Communism, the centre of which, in Canada, is Toronto,” wrote James C. McGuigan, Toronto’s Roman Catholic Archbishop, in 1937. Written during the Spanish Civil War, this statement illuminates the veritable chasm separating the institutional Church and the revolutionary left (Maurutto 1997, 2003)—one McGuigan could have traced back over 100 years. On either side of this traditional chasm, however, a closer examination can discern new tendencies: for Depression-era Roman Catholics, a new interest in left-wing prescriptions for social and economic ills, and among 1930s leftists, a new emphasis on radical state planning through parliamentary means. Focused on Toronto, this thesis is about these new religious and political formations, which took root within the interstices of older ways of understanding the relationship among the church, the state, and civil society. It proposes that Catholics, examined institutionally and through lived expressions of faith, and socialists were influenced by the problems and opportunities created by a crisis-ridden liberal order, one whose assumptions about humanity and politics both felt compelled to challenge (McKay, 2000, 2005). Did significant numbers of Catholics become leftists, and what were the implications for them within their faith community? Did socialists and Catholics address the perceived antithesis between Christian faith and socialist politics? What united and divided these contrasting critics of Canadian society and politics? Did their conversations and debates reflect a process of “secularization?”

In examining these questions, this thesis addresses some of the major issues posed by a flourishing Canadian historiography. Award-winning recent scholarship has dramatically revised an earlier monochromatic depiction of Catholicism’s role in the social transformation of Quebec (Gauvreau, 2005). Outside of Quebec, many studies have looked at the intricacies of the Antigonish movement (MacInnes, 1978; Neal, 1998; see also Coady, 1980), and there is one general survey of social Catholicism that encompasses English Canada (Baum, 1980). Yet, when one considers such Canadian work in the extensively-analyzed international context (see, for example, Fisher, 1989; Horn, 2001), one is struck by the need for much subtler and more archivally-sensitive work, attuned above all to the many local cultures of Catholicism at work in Canada, using newly-released primary source material held by the Vatican itself. Although ethnicity remains crucial to discussions of Catholicism in Toronto, traditionally emphasized as a cohesive force among minority cultural communities (Iacovetta, 1992; Clarke, 1993; McGowan, 1999; Stanger-Ross, 2006), this thesis freshly engages this variable by posing new questions about the language of politics and religion at play in the 1930s. It also adds an innovative dimension to transatlantic debates over secularization (among this vast literature see, for example, Allen, 1971; Brown, 2000; Bruce et al., 1992; Hamelin et al., 1984; Marshall, 1992; Van Die et al., 2000). My initial findings suggest a very different reading of the religious, cultural, and political history of Canada than one captured in orthodox models of an inflexibly conservative church reacting against a “secular society” that it held in fear and contempt, or accommodation models that suggest secularization was hastened by attempts to adapt to modernity. The implications of this project’s radical rethinking of Catholicism and Canadian leftism will extend far beyond Toronto.

This thesis will advance in three sections. The first section of this thesis will examine intellectual developments in social Catholicism. Chapter 1 will analyze international developments within Catholic social thought, drawing on newly-available documents for the 1920s and 1930s at the Vatican Secret Archives. Chapter 2, in turn, will look at the ways that Catholic interpretations of the world were disseminated in Canada with special reference to how the Catholic press constructed and connected them to such theologically and politically innovative movements as the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order and the League for Social Reconstruction. In Chapter 3, I shall focus on a particularly under-appreciated element in the new Catholicism of the 1930s—Jacques Maritain’s “personalism,” a philosophy which, coupled with his presence in the city, it will be argued, functioned very much to cultivate social Catholicism in Toronto. The second section will examine in detail the range of social initiatives influenced by these intellectual developments. Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 will

describe and analyze a fascinating array of activity, innovations, and experiments: Catholic youth activism in Newman Clubs and the Student Christian movement; a settlement house run by Catherine de Hueck, influenced by the work of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker's movement in the United States, with particular attention given to her work among emerging immigrant communities from Eastern Europe; Catholic 'Back to the Land' experiments located north of Toronto that used a communitarian approach to rural resettlement; and how observance of relief strikes in Ontario, like the one in Welland in the mid-1930s, helped spawn labour schools set up by the institutional Church to educate workers on the importance of unionization, advancements in labour legislation, and options for collectivization particularly in the agricultural sector. Close attention in all of these treatments will be paid to how Catholic social thought and action paralleled and diverged from developments within the left, as well as the liberal state, during this period. The final section sets forth conclusions about Catholicism's relationship to the left and its impact on the institutional Church. Chapter 8 recasts the famous, but ill-understood, rapprochement between the Church and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, which enjoyed substantial and sustained support from Catholics in particular parts of the country, notwithstanding serious reservations on the part of the Church hierarchy. As chapter 9 will conclude, many of the English-Canadian roads to Vatican II can be found in the previous generation's attempts to harmonize Catholic institutions and culture with an expanding social democratic left. I aim to address nation-wide questions by exploring the detailed, nuanced and complicated patterns at the local level—with the conviction that this strategy is uniquely suited to the study of a Church and a political movement too often homogenized and stereotyped in past scholarly treatments.

Archival material is plentiful, and it is available at a host of ecclesiastical, university, municipal, and provincial archives in Toronto, Montreal, and Quebec City, as well as Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa. In the United States, the vast collection housed at the Jacques Maritain Centre at Notre Dame University in South Bend, Indiana and the Dorothy Day papers and Catholic Worker records located at the Marquette University Archives in Milwaukee, Wisconsin offer crucial insights into Depression-era Catholicism and evidence pertaining to Toronto that has not been closely examined in prevailing scholarly treatments. Outside of North America, English- and French-language records held at the Vatican Secret Archives will unlock new understandings of the international Church's influence on the relationship between English-Canadian Catholics and the emerging left formation of the 1930s. The travel requirements for my research include an initial ten months split between Ontario and Quebec, a four-month period spent in the United States, and, finally, four months spent in Rome.

I am in the second year of the doctoral programme at Queen's University, which is an ideal base for my research and training with its excellent library and archival resources. My research benefits tremendously from the supervision of Dr. Ian McKay, an expert on the Canadian left, and the guidance of a committee that includes Dr. Marguerite Van Die, a leading scholar of religion in North America. Having already completed my field requirements (The State and Civil Society in 19th and 20th Century Canada, Religion and North American Society 1800–2000, and Modern Italian History), I am currently preparing to defend a detailed thesis proposal. I shall be engaged in thesis research full-time by January 2007, which will continue for eighteen months. The draft of my thesis will be written between July and December 2008, and revisions, thesis defence, and submission will conclude by August 2009. My preliminary findings will be presented at an array of Canadian and international conferences, including the Annual Meetings of the Canadian Historical Association and the American Society of Church History. Though some early work will be published as articles, this project is intended to produce a monograph that will make an important contribution to the English-Canadian literature on religion, and add to a wider body of scholarship on social Catholicism in North America and Western Europe. I anticipate an international readership for my work, particularly where the issues raised by Catholicism, secularism, and the left have been the focus of historical reflection and contemporary debate.

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