Between America and Europe: Religion, Politics and Evangelicals in Canada

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The United States and much of western and central Europe are often presented as contrasting models of religion and politics. The U.S. has a constitutional separation of church and state but a vivid religious presence in politics, driven particularly by evangelical Christians and their subset, the Christian Right. In contrast, most Western European nations have traditions of state churches but highly secularized politics, with little or no evangelical presence in public life or indeed in society generally.

Somewhere between these two models are Anglo-American nations like Canada, Australia and to some extent the United Kingdom, with their smaller but still noticeable evangelical populations. While not nearly as prevalent and visible as in the United States, evangelicals in these countries have a noticeable and seemingly growing political presence (Maddox 2005; McDonald 2010) and, linked in part by a common language, draw heavily on American evangelical ideas and resources (Reimer 2000, 2003; Katerberg 2000). But this presence operates on a terrain closer to European politics, with parliamentary institutions, state church legacies and highly secularized populations and political cultures. As in many other ways, these countries and their experiences stand somewhere between the U.S. and Europe.

This paper focuses on evangelical activism in Canada, placing it in the comparative context of American and European experience. It begins by discussing why, despite deep links to the United States, Canada did not see a Christian Right arise in the 1980s and 1990s. It then examines more recent developments in Canada and closer links between the governing Conservatives and evangelicals. Does this now suggest a Canadian Christian Right and American-style mixing of religion and politics? Or is it better understood in another context of broader developments in the rest of the world? The paper does not offer definitive conclusions, but argues that Canada offers useful comparisons for the status of religion and politics in both the USA and Europe.

The Comparative Study of Evangelicals

Despite the ever-growing literature on religion and politics around the world, scholars have paid relatively little attention to the comparative study of evangelical Christian politics in western industrialized nations. The obvious and continuing presence of religion and especially evangelical Christianity in American politics has spawned an extensive research literature (e.g.,Smidt *et al* 2009). But far less attention has been paid to these other Anglo-American countries that are perhaps closest in similarity to the United States. As this paper will show, while religion is not as obvious and prominent in those countries, it is not dead either.

The study of evangelicals and politics, especially across nations and societies, is fraught with complexities. The dominance of American experiences and scholarship leaves less room for larger comparative studies. A growing body of work has looked at evangelicals in developing nations (Freston 2001, 2008; Ranger 2008; Lumsdaine 2008) but less has looked at evangelicals in develop*ed* nations (though see Jelen and Wilcox 2002; Smidt and Penning 1997). This might be explained by the low numbers of evangelicals in most European nations, but we still lack recent comparative studies of the Anglo-American countries (see Bruce 1998 and Soper

1994). Furthermore, studies and discussion of evangelicals in other developed countries may frame the issue largely as one of creeping American influence (e.g., Maddox 2005) with little framing or generating of alternative cross-national theories.   This in turn ties into a larger neglect of religion and politics historically in the discipline (Wald and Wilcox 2006).

Canada presents a particularly interesting comparison. Canada has a small but significant evangelical Christian population of approximately 10% (see discussion below). But historically, Canadian evangelicals have been far less political active than their American counterparts. This is striking given the very close cross-border ties between Canadian and American evangelicals and generally similar societies and cultures.   Furthermore, as recently as the 1960s, Canada was considered more religiously observant than the United States (Noll 2006), with higher rates of churchgoing and considerable overlap between church and state institutions (Kim 1993).   But despite these similarities, Canada did not see a mobilizing Christian Right in the 1980s and 1990s similar to the United States. Why?

To the extent that anyone has asked the question at all, the prevailing explanation, based largely on UK research, has been institutional. As in the United Kingdom (Soper 1994; Bruce 1988, 1998), the Canadian parliamentary and political system produces more closed and concentrated power with fewer openings for evangelical lobbying and mobilization (Wald 2003; Malloy 2009). The more porous American system – especially its decentralized political parties and traditions of direct democracy – allow evangelicals numerous opportunities to influence party nominations and elections and even set their own ballot questions.

However, in recent years Canada has seen the growth of a more visible and militant religious right similar to the United States, with close ties to the ruling Conservative Party, and spurred by opposition to the legalization of same-sex marriage in Canada in 2005 (Malloy forthcoming). As we will see below, the Conservative government includes a number of notable evangelicals and has taken distinctive actions supported by the religious right on sexuality and abortion issues, and in support for Israel. It also has clearly indicated support for more religious involvement in public life generally.

These recent developments suggest that institutions do not tell the whole story about evangelical activism in Canada and other countries. One possibility is that galvanizing events and a supportive ruling party have produced a political opportunity structure that overrides the longstanding institutional explanations for muted Canadian evangelical activism. (This may also explain developments in Australia under the Howard government.)   Alternatively, this new visibility and activism may be related to similar broad changes in other industrialized countries, rather than simply the spread of the Christian Right. In other words, Canada is not merely copying American experiences, but rather is following other nations in grappling with a new and complex relationship between religion and politics.

What Happened to Christian Canada?

In a noted address titled "What Happened to Christian Canada?" Mark Noll (2006) argues that in 1950s Canada, "almost all measures of Christian faith and practice were stronger than in the United States" (251). But this religiosity was rooted more in tradition and the

dominance of traditional top-down denominations than the more sprawling and decentralized American experience.   With both British and French (and aboriginal) origins, Canada was founded as a state with two civil religions – Anglicanism in English-speaking Canada, and Catholicism in Quebec (Kim 1993). While neither was truly established as an embedded state religion akin to European experiences (including the Church of England), they operated *de facto* as the established denominations of English and French-speaking Canada. This created a somewhat flexible dual structure of state-church ties structured largely along Catholic and Protestant lines (incorporating a significant Irish Catholic population in English-speaking Canada and minority English-speakers in Quebec). Legacies of these denominational bargains remain; for example, the Canadian constitution requires full state funding of Catholic schools in certain provinces but not others.   The historic Canadian state-church relationship was thus dualistic and more pragmatic than monolithic.

Still, sociologists have pointed to the dominance of established denominations in Canada as a key factor that places Canada in a more European than American model of civil society and religion. S.M. Lipset asserts (1990) that "the differences between religion and Canada are large and clear-cut" (88), pointing particularly to the once-dominant but rapidly-declining influence of mainline Protestantism in Canada.   Martin (2000) also emphasizes the dual French and English founding settler cultures in Canada, which encouraged competition between their denominational structures but also ultimate decline, especially for Anglicanism.

Quebec provides a special case of religious dominance followed by rapid secularization. Until the 1960s, the Catholic church held tremendous sway in Quebec life – especially over education, there being no provincial ministry of education until 1964. But in what is known as "the Quiet Revolution", French-speaking Quebecers quickly asserted their political and economic rights as a minority in Canada, and shed most *overt* signs of Catholicism. This has produced a more European-style model of low religious participation yet high continuing identity; 15% of Quebecers regularly attend church but 83% still identify as Catholic, and the recent canonization of a Quebec monk attracted considerable public celebration and notice. (Valpy 2010)   Quebec also notably features distinct attitudes regarding Islamic dress; as in France, Quebecers largely oppose public wearing of the hijab and niqab, while these are largely (though not completely) accepted by English-speaking Canadians with little public debate.

Thus, unlike the U.S., religion has been more embedded in the Canadian state and closer to traditional European models, but in a non-sectarian manner that long straddled Catholicism and Protestantism.   Over the 20th century, denominational distinctions and public religiosity gradually dwindled, again in a manner more reminiscent of European experience. Still, as Beyer (2000) argues, "Canada is not just a mix of European and American factors; it has its own particularities that show again just how varied the possibilities for religious form are under modern circumstances (206)

What about evangelical Christianity? Like the UK and US, evangelicalism has formed an important part of the Canadian Christian tradition dating back to the eighteenth century and early frontiers (Rawlyk 1996). Counting evangelicals is a major methodological problem (Smith 2000; Wald 2003) but Hoover *et al* (2002) find that about 10-12% of Canadians are evangelical Christians; using similar criteria about 25-33% of Americans are evangelical. This finding

serves as a useful median; other studies using different criteria estimate the Canadian evangelical population as anything from 5.9% (using the category of "Conservative Protestants" in Bowen 2005) up to 31% (category of "born again" in Gatehouse 2004). Regardless of exact figures and criteria, it is clear that while proportionately smaller than in the United States, a noticeable minority of Canadians are evangelical Christians.

Canadian and American evangelicals are closely intertwined through what appear to be very similar subcultures (Reimer 2000, 2003). Katerberg (2000) suggests the spawling American-based evangelical culture of megachurches and cultural products has created a consumerist mentality that spans borders, arguing "…the differences between Canada and the United States should not be overstated; from a long-term viewpoint the similarities are greater. Throughout North America religion continues to move in public life from politics to the market, from civic culture and citizenship to consumer-cultural markets." (298) Canada shares a similar if more muted evangelical culture of large suburban churches, Christian bookstores, and increasingly Christian radio and television stations, all of which overwhelmingly feature American products and ideas.

Canadian Evangelicals and Politics

However, even scholars like Reimer and Katerberg who note strong Canadian-American evangelical *societal* links make an important qualification – that the sharpest differences are over politics. Reimer (2003) upholds Lipset's assertion that "Americans are much more prone to see conflicts as reflecting moral concerns (Lipset 1990: 79) and Hoover *et al* (2002) found distinct differences in how Canadian and American evangelicals viewed economic issues and the role of the state. Other scholars hold similarly that are important differences in the public engagement and attitudes of Canadian and American evangelicals; Rawlyk (1996) labels Canadians as more "irenic" and "accommodating" and Noll (1997) suggests "there is a different set of expectations for relations between church and state" in Canada.

In the early 20th century, Canadian evangelicals led key populist movements of the left, similar to American contemporaries like William Jennings Bryan and other populists (Harrison 2007). Interestingly, while the American tradition of evangelical populism of the left diminished, the Canadian variety flourished, but with steadily diminishing religious saliency. Baptist minister Tommy Douglas successfully led the social democratic Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) to power in Saskatchewan in 1944. But Douglas's religious rhetoric and involvement steadily diminished over time as the CCF and its successors adopted a largely secular form of social democratic politics.

American-style mixing of the Bible and politics did arise in the mid-century Social Credit party, which governed British Columbia (1953-72 and 1975-1991) and Alberta (1935-71) and was a minor opposition party in federal politics. This tradition was far more openly religious, especially in the western province of Alberta, whose Social Credit premier, William Aberhart's, chief previous credential was as founder and president of the "Prairie Bible Prophetic Institute". After his death he was succeeded as party leader and premier by the Institute's star student, Ernest Manning, who hosted a national "Back to the Bible Hour" radio show on Sunday mornings throughout his tenure as premier. But despite this very public religiosity, Manning

and his government avoided religious references and instead followed a "gospel of individualism" (Finkel 1989) in a restrained state and pro-development policies.   And following the demise of Social Credit as a significant national force in the early 1970s[1], evangelicalism and religion generally disappeared from Canadian party politics – even while it was rising in the United States.

Why did Canada not follow the American religious right surge of the 1970s and 1980s? Farney echoes Noll in observing that:

> "in the period just before social issues emerged – the late 1950s and early 1960s – Canada was as religious a country as the United States,if not slightly more so (Noll 2006). There were opportunities, albeit short-lived ones, for appeals like those of the religious right to be made in Canada, but they were not made. (2009a)

Why not? One possibility is the differing political orientations of Canadian and American evangelicals as discussed above. But this does not fully explain limits on Canadian activism in the key evangelical areas of sexuality and reproductive rights. Instead, as discussed above, institutional explanations are usually given to explain the limited politicization of conservative Protestants in Westminster systems like Canada. (Wald 2003). Examining the British experience, Bruce asserts that "the relatively open texture of the sites for political action in the USA gives greater opportunity than does the UK for pressure groups to pursue their interests." (1998: 164)   Similarly, Soper (1994) has argued that "Political structures, particularly constitutional norms and electoral party systems, have shaped the political behavior of evangelical organizations" (3). Both Bruce and Soper extend their analysis beyond legislatures and parties to variables like mass-media and elite centralization.   But their analysis of the British parliamentary structure can easily be extended to the Canadian experience.

Farney (2009a, 2009b) adopts a modified neo-institutional approach to argue that norms "about the boundaries of politics" were embedded into Canadian party institutions and practices, even in the absence of explicit institutional rules.   Examining the national Progressive Conservative party in the 1970s and 1980s – the time of the rising evangelical right in the Republican Party - he argues (2009b) that party leaders and elites were able to marginalize and downplay social conservative elements that did not fit the party's moderate centre-right strategy. Even in the absence of explicit rules to discipline and expel all but the most recalcitrant members, the norms and traditions of Canadian leader-dominated parties (Carty et al 2000) allowed party elites to control religious and social conservative infiltration.

This deliberate obfuscation was seen in a parliamentary vote on abortion in 1990. Canada's existing abortion law had been deemed unconstitutional in 1988, and the Progressive Conservative government of the day introduced a compromise bill that maintained the law but with more permissive restrictions, in an attempt to partly satisfy both pro-life and pro-choice activists. Both the Conservatives and the main opposition party, the Liberals, freed their members (except for cabinet ministers) to vote as they wished, leading to an unusual cross-party

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[1] The Social Credit party remained in power in British Columbia off and on until 1991, but with a steadily dwindling religious dimension.

muddle in which the bill cleared the House of Commons by nine votes but was defeated in a tie vote in the Senate, with no government revisiting the issue since. While the government was criticized for "anemic leadership" (Pal 1991:298), both major parties escaped being labeled as either for or against abortion.

Overall, institutional arguments provide intuitive and convincing explanations for the absence of a Canadian Christian Right in the 1980s and 1990s, despite proximity and deep connections with the United States. As argued above, Canadian political parties can do much to discourage grassroots infiltration and pressures from evangelicals or other groups, allowing them to set what Farney calls the "boundaries of politics" quite different from the decentralized American parties. Relatedly, the Canadian parliamentary system encourages tightly disciplined legislators, with few opportunities for MPs to pursue their own substantive agendas. As well, and unlike many other parliamentary democracies, the Canadian single-member-plurality electoral system further discourages minor parties from arising. (In vivid contrast, Australia, with its varied electoral systems, has seen the rise of several marginal social conservative parties and legislators over the years). Finally, the professionalized and non-partisan Canadian public service resists the politicization and controversial appointments found in the United States system.

In short, 20th century Canadian evangelicalism and religion and politics in Canada generally followed different political patterns than the United States, with a more European model of gradual and seemingly relentless secularization. While engaged in public life and debates, 20th century Canadian evangelicalism generally avoided a partisan tilt like that between evangelicals and the Republican Party in the United States since the late 1970s. Instead, according to Stackhouse (2000), Canadian evangelicals were more likely to seek non-partisan engagement and accommodation rather than confrontation; those that chose a more aggressive approach were marginalized and left on the fringe of political life. At the turn of the century, this appeared to be an enduring and fixed phenomenon that provided a very clear contrast between Canada and the United States (Malloy 2009).

Canadian Evangelicalism Since 2000

In the 21st century, Canadian evangelicals have become noticeably more politicized, with religion taking an increasing role in elections and party politics. This flies in the face of much of the literature reviewed above, with its stress on Canadian-American differences and the role of institutional barriers. Yet the evidence is clear. This section will review the new face of Canadian evangelical activism through four categories: (1) political party changes; (2) voting data; (3) pressure group engagement; and (4) the behavior of the Conservative government since 2006.

(1) Party Upheavals

As we saw above, Canadian political parties have generally sought to avoid religious polarization and cleavages, especially on issues like abortion. But the Canadian party system underwent significant upheavals in the 1990s, with important subsequent implications for religion and especially evangelical Christians. Stressed by the unpopular leadership of prime

minister Brian Mulroney, the Canadian political right split badly in 1993 into the longstanding centre-right Progressive Conservatives and a new more conservative party, the Reform Party. While led by the openly evangelical Preston Manning (son of the "Back to the Bible" premier mentioned above), the Reform Party emphasized fiscal and economic issues rather than social conservative issues like abortion and gay rights, and avoided an American-style "moral" agenda (Harrison 1995; Flanagan 1994).   In doing so, it appeared to follow the longstanding Canadian tradition of not mixing religion with partisan politics.

The Reform party retooled itself as the Canadian Alliance in 2000, with a new leader, Stockwell Day. Also an evangelical, Day was more open about his religiosity, for example pledging not to campaign on Sundays, and was more willing to mobilize evangelicals and churches to support his leadership and to directly confront a libertarian opponent who favoured abortion access and gay rights. Yet Day faced considerable public ridicule of his professed piety, along with other more secular mishaps. He failed to make further party gains in the 2000 election and soon faced a revolt in his own party parliamentary caucus, with evangelicals among his strongest opponents (Grey 2004). Again, it appears that the Canadian institutional and party system prevented any surge in evangelical politicization and mobilization.

However, in 2003 the Canadian Alliance merged again with the rump Progressive Conservatives after their ten year estrangement, forming a new Conservative Party of Canada under a new leader, Stephen Harper, who came from the Reform/Alliance tradition. Harper, while also reportedly evangelical (Campbell 2006), avoided both Day's open piety and engagement with divisive "moral" issues. Yet he also demonstrated a new willingness to expand "the boundaries of politics" (Farney 2009a) to accommodate social conservative issues. In an oft-noted 2003 speech, Harper argued that "neo-cons" and "theo-cons" needed to come together in a united party that reflected both fiscal and social conservative elements.(McDonald 2010); another noted speech in 2009 identified "freedom, family and faith" as key foundations in Harper's worldview (Akin 2009). But beyond these isolated remarks, Harper has said very little about either his personal beliefs or his view of religion and politics – far less than either Manning or Day.

Thus the Canadian political right underwent a split and later reconciliation in the 1990s, with three evangelical Christian leaders who to varying degrees emphasized their faith as part of their public profile. In turn, the Liberal party (in government since 1993) appeared at times to actively polarize against evangelicals. Hutchinson and Hiemstra – in-house researchers with the moderate Evangelical Fellowship of Canada - identify two incidents in the 2000 and 2004 elections – the first where a Liberal party representative mocked opponent Stockwell Day's alleged creationist beliefs, and the second a "push poll" that asked respondents if they 'would be less likely to vote for the Conservative Party if they knew it was taken over by evangelical Christians." Though not official party pronouncements, Hutchinson and Hiemstra (2009) argue they were widely noted by evangelicals as evidence of Liberal hostility.

More substantially, the Liberals moved to support the legalization of same-sex marriage, with Prime Ministers Jean Chretien (1993-2003) and Paul Martin (2003-2006) switching their positions, in part because of a series of court decisions declaring existing laws discriminatory. Martin introduced a same-sex marriage bill in 2005, and expelled a junior minister from cabinet

for voting against it.   The then-opposition Conservatives did not enforce a party position, but nearly all Conservative MPs opposed the bill. Thus, both symbolically and substantively, Canadian party politics began to polarize more over religion, with evangelicals clearly favouring one party over another.

(2) Voting

These changes in party positions have been matched by changes in voting patterns.   Religion has historically influenced Canadian voting behavior - but in ways that have puzzled scholars. A noted article by Irvine (1974) observed that Catholic/Protestant identity continued to be among the most significant determinants of voting choice in Canadian elections, despite the absence of obvious contemporary issues. In 2005, Blais returned to this "paradox" (2005) in which "Catholics vote differently but they do not appear to differ on the issues." (829). Protestant voting has been more difficult to track because of varying categories and methodologies (Kay et al 2009), but as recently as 1997 Hoover (2007; see also Bean et al 2008) argued that "Christian Right" supporters preferred the Liberal party over the two right-wing parties of the time, the Progressive Conservatives and the Reform Party.

However, other studies suggest that the 1990s split of the Canadian political right produced distinct evangelical voting patterns.   This somewhat challenges studies of Reform party under Preston Manning, which generally suggest that moralism and religion were largely absent from party positions and rhetoric (Harrison 1995: Flanagan 1995), with its key issues being more regional and economic in nature.   Yet Lusztig and Wilson (2005) argue that "moral traditionalism" was a key underlying force in the decision by many PC supporters to switch to Reform. Looking at policy preferences among declared Reform, Progressive Conservative and Liberal voters, Lusztig and Wilson find the strongest differences on "moral traditionalism" positions like abortion, sexual orientation, etc. They state that "the PCs' failure to occupy the socially conservative issue space is more important than regional, constitutional, fiscal and nativist issues in explaining the partisan shift on the Canadian right" (111) and that "the moral traditionalism variable illustrates a sharp distinction between PC loyalists and Reform switchers…many PC supporters of the late 1980s found a more morally conservative party an enticing electoral option" (121). A similar clear distinction is found in 1996 data by Guth and Fraser (2001), who find relationships between religious values and party identification in Canada, with evangelicals favouring the Reform Party, mainline Protestants the Progressive Conservatives, Catholics the Liberal Party, and "secularists" the NDP.   In short, and significantly, evangelicals were turning to the Reform party even in the absence of a strong Reform social conservative policy agenda.

These studies are not always directly comparable because of different categories – "evangelicals", "moral conservatives", etc. – but the overall trend is clear and has continued after the reconciliation on the political right in 2003. Canada saw national elections in 2000, 2004, 2006 and 2008, with a steady increase in evangelical support for the Conservative over the Liberal party. Gidengil et al (2009) report that while "fundamentalist Christians" already preferred right-wing parties in 2000 and 2004, the 2006 and 2008 elections saw even more dramatic increases:

 "Christians who believe that the bible is the literal word of God preferred the Alliance [predecessor to the Conservatives] to the Liberals by a margin of 15 points in 2000. By 2008, they preferred the Conservatives by a margin of almost 50 points. Even controlling for a variety of other social background characteristics, fundamentalist Christians have clearly become less and less likely to vote Liberal." (2009: 4).

This suggests that the reconciled Conservative Party has been able to retain evangelical Reform supporters. Hutchinson and Hiemstra (2009) report similar trends, stressing their above thesis that evangelical support for the Liberals has dropped sharply. But they find evangelicals voting not only for the Conservative party, but also the social democratic New Democratic Party and the separatist Bloc Quebecois party, and suggest that evangelical support for the Conservatives has "either reached a plateau or begun to decline." (21).

What explains these trends? The most obvious is the legalization of gay marriage in Canada in 2005, an issue that split largely along party lines with, as we saw above, the Conservatives generally opposed and the Liberals – excepting a vocal minority – generally in support. Kay et al (2009) focus particularly on this, arguing that voter positions on abortion and especially gay marriage are more solid explanations than religious denomination alone in determining voting in the 2006 election. In contrast, Stephenson (2010) finds that same-sex marriage and other issues have not seriously weakened continuing Catholic support for the Liberals. She concludes, building on Johnston (1985), that the relationship rests less on religion or specific issues, and rather a broader and more ephemeral "Catholic ethos" rooted in social and cultural factors.

(3) Pressure Group Engagement

A third change in the status of religion and politics in Canada has been a growth of evangelical and true Christian Right pressure groups.   As noted, Stackhouse (2000) found that Canadian Christian groups in the 1990s were politically moderate and notably avoided partisan politics, with no significant Canadian religious right to speak of. The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, roughly equivalent to the American National Association of Evangelicals, began meeting with public officials and issuing publications on policy issues in the 1980s. Similarly, since the 1960s a Canadian National Prayer Breakfast – closely modeled on the American prayer breakfast movement – has been held (www.parliamentaryprayerbreakfast.ca). Focus on the Family Canada was established in 1983, with offices in British Columbia and concerned more with the group's conservative educational mission than visible policy advocacy.   And while Canada saw a strong anti-abortion movement, it was significantly more identified and led by Catholic rather than evangelical activists.   Overall, evangelical activity prior to 2000 exhibited inconsistent and unclear patterns, leading Herman (1994) to write "Academics are divided over whether the Christian Right is a vibrant or a dying force in Canada." (276)

But as with political party and voting changes, new groups and activists have arisen in more recent years, positioning themselves more directly as social conservatives rather than religious activists. The Canadian Family Action Coalition was established in 1998 to focus primarily on sexuality issues and the Centre for Cultural Renewal was established in1997 as a small conservative think-tank on cultural and social issues. In 2003 a well-known Alberta activist,

Craig Chandler, ran for the leadership of the soon-defunct Progressive Conservative Party (finishing last); Chandler also founded a group called Concerned Christians Canada that undertook advertising and events in Calgary to promote and attack election candidates; in 2005 a new group called Equipping Christians for the Public Square arose to promote social conservative candidates in local Conservative nomination contests in Ontario and Nova Scotia (Galloway 2005).

In early 2006, Focus on the Family Canada established its first Ottawa office, called the Institute on Marriage and the Family Canada; also in 2006, the National House of Prayer was founded in Ottawa to promote prayer for the Canadian government and politicians; and a youth-oriented organization called 4 My Canada began to hold rallies in front of the Canadian parliamentary buildings to "pray" but also advocate heavily on issues like abortion and same-sex marriage.   These developments led to considerable Canadian media speculation about whether an American-style Christian Right had come to Canada (e.g. Dreher 2006, McDonald 2010).

I have argued elsewhere (Malloy forthcoming) that the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2005 was key to spurring this new wave of activism.   But I also argue that its sustainability is in doubt. While many in number and often attracting publicity, many of these new groups are weak and driven by single individuals such as Tristan Emmanuel (Equipping Christians for the Public Square), Faytene Kriskow (4 My Canada), etc. In most cases their tactics are limited to direct action through protests and media publicity, rather than systematic voter engagement or lobbying, and their ability to influence electoral outcomes or public policy is doubtful and unclear.   They lack the broad membership and institutionalization that characterizes more successful pressure groups, including Christian Right organizations in the United States.

(4) The Conservative Government

Preceding sections have shown how religion and politics took a notable post-2000 tilt in Canada from a modified European secular model to a more American model – with more polarized parties and voting and a (possibly temporary) surge in pressure group activism.   A fourth and final area is the policy initiatives of Stephen Harper's Conservative government, elected in 2006.

Journalists and activists have explored evidence of a "hidden agenda" on sexuality and reproductive issues in the Harper government (McDonald 2010; Warner 2010) with particular attention to the prime minister's beliefs and the presence of evangelicals in the cabinet and parliamentary caucus. But the Harper government displays an unusual pattern in all its policies that mixes flexible centrism with unexpectedly strong ideological moments (Martin 2010). It held a parliamentary vote on whether to revisit gay marriage legalization; the vote was defeated and the government has said it will not hold another; neither does it plan to introduce new abortion legislation. And while some policies appeal to social conservatives and a "family agenda" – such as a universal child care tax credit (instead of state day care) and greater credits for dependent children and families – they can be seen as blending social conservatism with low-tax agendas and other broader priorities.

At other times the Conservative government has chosen to support its social conservative base and seems to deliberately polarize, rather than broker, contentious issues like censorship, sexual orientation, and abortion. Three examples are a proposal to deny tax credits to films with objectionable content , (Curry and Macdonald 2008; El Akkad 2008); the cancellation of funding to Gay Pride parades (Libin 2010); and the exclusion of abortion from extensive new funding for international maternal health development in early 2010.   The Conservative government has also relied on certain discrete issues to please social conservatives, like the raising of the age of sexual consent, a common social conservative concern that is framed as preventing sexual predators but also consistent with their regulatory approach to sexuality (Warner 2010). In 2008 the Harper government raised the age of heterosexual consent from 14 to 16 (while retaining the age of homosexual consent at 18). This pleased evangelical and social conservative activists at little political cost or controversy, since none of the opposition parties dared to stand against such a change (or to argue for lowering homosexual consent).   Finally, the Conservative government appears to have tilted decisively in support of Israel, a common (though not universal) evangelical priority.

The "hidden agenda" thesis notes that all this has been done while the Conservatives are in a parliamentary minority; if and when they receive a majority, a full social conservative agenda will emerge. But even if we reject this argument, the Conservative government has taken a very different approach than its 1980s predecessors - sharpening partisan differences rather than muddling them on the key flashpoints of reproductive and sexuality rights – in a way much more consistent with American religion-infused politics than the traditional Canadian approach of secularism.   However, a notable difference remains the overt use of religious references in politics. Unlike many Americans, Canadian evangelical politicians generally refrain from direct references to God, the Bible and Christianity in their political communication. While Stephen Harper was noted for saying "God Bless Canada" at his 2006 election victory, equally significant has been his reluctance to use the phrase since (Malloy 2009).

A Canadian Christian Right?

So does God now matter in Canadian politics? The above evidence suggests that Canada may be moving from its modified European secularism to a more American-style Christian Right.   But much rests on recent developments and any conclusions must be tentative.

It is useful to make a brief comparison to Australia here. Maddox (2005) has been the leading scholar arguing for a similar tilt in Australian politics under John Howard and a "hidden" social conservative agenda like Canada's Harper, and Smith (2009) notes that "the rise of the Religious Right became the dominant interpretation" of the new politics of religion in Australia (614). But Smith and others suggest a more complex picture. Warhurst (2007) agrees that religion appears more evident in Australian politics after an apparent past consensus that it should remain largely private, as in Canada. But he notes the pluralist range of this new visibility, rather than a narrow Australian Christian Right, and is cautious to draw conclusions. This pluralist interpretation is also supported by Smith's study of the 2007 Australian federal election that finds a range of religious political involvement well beyond "the religious right." (2009).   As with Canada, any evidence of an American-style move must be tempered with other evidence and a more long-term focus.

This leaves scholarship at a fork in the road. Has Canada (and perhaps Australia and others) moved into a new American-style phase of religion and politics? Can this fit with the institutional explanations that have previously explained the lower profile and impact of evangelical groups in Canada and other parliamentary systems? It may be that these are temporary phenomena, based largely on unusual political opportunities and personalities, rather than sustainable and ongoing trends in political culture and society. If so, the institutional explanations still largely hold. Or there may be alternative explanations that can make better sense of these developments, especially linking them to changes in other Western industrialized countries.

A key conceptual point here is to separate religion from social conservatism and the "Christian Right". When we broaden the focus from sexuality and reproduction issues to other areas of religious involvement in Canadian politics – including Catholic and non-Christian involvement - we see a broader picture. For example, the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, the chief umbrella organization for Canadian evangelicals, has actively opposed same-sex marriage, abortion rights, expanded sex education, and similar issues. Yet it is also highly active in refugee issues, homelessness and poverty, and other areas not associated with the political right. The former category may remain a priority, but this demonstrates a larger heterogeneity among religious activists separate from their social conservative aspects. Evangelicals are not necessarily always on the political right, and their concerns can range well beyond issues of sexuality and reproduction. Grenville (2006) argues that evangelical support for the Conservative party in 2006 was driven more by recent Liberal financial scandals than same-sex marriage; Stephenson (2010) makes similar claims for Catholics turning to the Conservatives. Recall also Hutchinson and Hiemstra's argument (2009) that evangelicals turned to the Conservative and other parties because of the active failure of the Liberal Party to court evangelicals beyond the Christian Right, an accusation also made of the American Democratic Party (Sullivan 2008). This hetereogenity of evangelicals beyond the "Christian Right" and conservative parties is also seen in the United States and especially the so-called "evangelical left" (e.g.Wallis 2006), in Australia (Warhurst 2007) and in "mediating evangelicals" in Northern Ireland (Ganiel 2008).

The important question to ask may not be "is Canada developing an American-style religious right?" but rather "How is religion and politics evolving both in Canada and other countries?" To understand these developments, we may need to move to broader frameworks that focus not exclusively on the religious right or even Christianity, but ask more broadly how religion remains significant and even resurgent in Western developed societies. This however is a considerably more complex and multi-faceted question. But it may be more useful for tying Canadian developments to European experiences, as nominally secularized societies find themselves grappling with a new visibility of religion and politics, including non-Christian identities often associated with multiculturalism and immigration.

To conclude, Canada poses an intriguing mix of European-style secularity with, in recent years, significant streaks of American-style evangelical activism. But the explanations for this new activism, and its future prospects, are unclear. Along with Australia, Canada provides intriguing similar-society comparisons of evangelical political engagement. However, it is not

yet clear whether this is simply an expansion of the American Christian Right, or whether this signals broader shifts and a new set of models for religion and politics in developed countries.

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