

Furrows of the Field: Methodology in Writing the Religious History of the Canadian
Prairies

A thesis submitted to
The Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Religious Studies
University of Regina

By
Connor John Thompson

Regina, SK

April, 2019

Copyright 2019: Connor John Thompson

UNIVERSITY OF REGINA
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
SUPERVISORY AND EXAMINING COMMITTEE

Connor John Thompson, candidate for the degree of Master of Arts in Religious Studies, has presented a thesis titled, ***Furrows of the Field: Methodology in Writing The Religious History of the Canadian Prairies***, in an oral examination held on April 23, 2019. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

External Examiner:	Dr. Murray Knuttila, Brock University
Co-Supervisor:	Dr. William Arnal, Department of Religious Studies
Co-Supervisor:	Dr. Bryan Hillis, Department of Religious Studies
Committee Member:	Dr. Andre Magnan, Department of Sociology & Social Studies
Chair of Defense:	Dr. Susan Johnston, Department of English

Abstract

The primary concern of this thesis is explanation of the drastic decline in church attendance that has characterized Prairie religious history, and Canadian history more broadly, over the course of the twentieth and early twenty first centuries. In the case of the Canadian Prairies as a region, this transformation has also been tied up with the change from a heavily social gospel influenced society based on the highly valued ethic of co-operation to a society that is increasingly non-church going and which more highly values the ethic of individualism. While more recent Prairie history has seen the region incorporated into North American consumer culture, I argue for the continued utility of regional analysis based on the mythology, symbols, and rituals that reinforce the sense of a distinct Prairie identity, and argue that analysis of these things is deeply tied into the transformation of Prairie religious history. Perhaps the most important element of Prairie social mythology is the farmer-as-symbol, which was once imagined as living by Christian ethics, but is increasingly imagined today as an entrepreneurial lone figure, whose values are concomitant with the individualist ethic promoted by emerging forms of religiosity. I demonstrate this by looking at how consumer culture molds the Prairie social mythology, and particularly, through a case study of the region's most prominent annual celebration – the Calgary Stampede – show the ways in which this mythology has been understood in recent years. The thesis concludes with consideration of new forms of religiosity that have emerged with this change in Prairie culture, and in particular, Spiritual But Not Religious behaviors. By paying special attention to how the term religion is used to categorize elements of life by both historians and historical actors, I treat religion primarily as an emic category, arguing that understanding contemporary Prairie religious history involves an understanding of how “religion” is treated within the popular consciousness of the region.

Acknowledgments

Written with gratitude, always, for the love and support of my family and friends.

D. E. G.

Appreciation to my supervisors, Bill Arnal and Bryan Hillis. It has been an honor to work under you both, and the discussions, support, opportunities and insights are certainly remembered.

I also want to thank my third committee member, André Mignan, and my External Examiner, Murray Knuttila.

Thanks, more generally, to the wonderful people in the Religious Studies department at the University of Regina, whose encouragement, conversation, and alimetary generosity made graduate life at this institution a true pleasure. I would like to extend the same sentiments to the people at Luther College, who I was very happy to get to know.

Nothing without the guidance of my various mentors, who have helped and inspired me.

Thanks to my good friends and fellow students in the Master's program at the University of Regina – most especially, Esther Guillen and Maysa Haque. "Ideas are important."

Thanks also to my confidants from the University of Alberta Honor's History program, with whom some of the ideas contained in this thesis took root.

"Love completes the work the intellect cannot."

I would also like to acknowledge the financial support of the University of Regina as well as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, both of which made the research for this thesis possible. I am beyond grateful for the direct support of this research, as well as for employment through the University of Regina and Luther College.

Contents

Introduction.....	1
-Literature Review.....	3
-Structure and Argument of Thesis.....	16
Furrows of the Field: Methodology in Writing the Religious History of the Canadian Prairies	
Chapter One: The Secularization Thesis and Writing Canadian Religious History.....	21
Chapter Two: Deeming Things Religious: Politics, Religion, and Prairie History.....	47
Chapter Three: The Weight of Years: Symbol, Ritual, and Place in Cultivating the Prairie Myth.....	71
Chapter Four: Reimagining the Rural Idyll: Prairie Culture and Social Transformations.....	88
Chapter Five: Spiritual But Not Religious People and Prairie Religious History.....	114
Final Considerations.....	140
Bibliography.....	147

Introduction

Some years ago, Bruce Guenther wrote the following in the paper “Populism, Politics, and Christianity in Western Canada”:

The scholarly work exploring the social and cultural history of western Canada has generally (there are some notable exceptions) isolated economic and political factors and neglected to include religious faith as a motivating force in the analysis of developments on the prairies. If religion is included at all, it has generally been treated as somehow strange and bizarre if not entirely irrelevant.¹

While the brutality required of any generalization should be kept in mind, Guenther raises an important observation on western Canadian historiography, the more general field of which my more modest analysis of Prairie historical writing is a part. How is it that, despite the immense influence of traditions deemed religious on developments in Prairie life, religion is generally neglected in analysis of developments in Prairie society and culture? How *can* religion be neglected as a point of analysis in Prairie society and culture? More generally, how have the ideological transformations in Prairie society been influenced by traditions deemed religious, and shaped, or responded to, the shifts in economic and political life on the region?

I will address two primary issues in this thesis. The first is some of the primary methodological and theoretical assumptions that have preoccupied the historiography of religion on the Canadian Prairies. The second is contributing to explanation of an important aspect of the history of the Canadian Prairies: namely, the precipitous decline in attendance

¹ Bruce L. Guenther, “Populism, Politics, and Christianity in Western Canada” *Historical Papers 2000: Canadian Society of Church History*, (May, 2000), 106. Published in the same year, David Marshall makes a remarkably similar observation: “There is a paucity of historical scholarship on religion on the prairies” “Out of the Cloister But Still on the Margins?: Recent Publications in Canadian Religious History” *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d’études canadiennes* 35:3 (Fall 2000), 304.

and adherence to churches, and how the character of the Prairies has transformed as this has occurred. Over the course of the twentieth century, a well-known change in the region's culture has occurred as it shifted from a pre-WWII society characterized by agriculture and Christian co-operative values to a post-WWII society characterized by resource extraction and increasing individualism. While this change is often explained in terms of economic and political factors, there remains a need to explain the system of ethics and values that have been contributed to this transformation.

In this thesis, I draw attention to some of the assumptions that may underpin the historiography's neglect of Prairie religious history post-WWII. I do this by using theoretical and methodological strategies developed by scholars of religion, thereby reading Prairie history in light of a Religious Studies perspective. As I explain in my literature review, this will involve addressing the "normative" view of Prairie history that historians have developed up to the present – a normative view which, itself, has generally neglected Prairie history after 1945. Keeping this in mind, I select several prominent examples that demonstrate what I suggest are theoretical and methodological assumptions Prairie historians tend to make that may inhibit effectively writing Prairie religious history. Prairie historians have tended to assume a Christian-normative character as to what religion is, and as a result, have tended to assume that the importance of traditions, beliefs, and behaviors deemed religious are a declining factor in Prairie history. By taking a different approach to thinking about religion, and particularly, how the use of the term "religion" frames particular elements of life, Prairie history can be more deeply understood.

Literature Review

Consideration of Canadian Prairie historiography necessarily involves authors that deal with other regions of Canada, authors that write on quite varied subjects, as well as authors who rarely deal explicitly with religious history. It is partly for this reason that, for purposes of my thesis, I will place greater weight in my generalizations on the normative works of Prairie history.² Like Guenther's statement at the beginning of this introduction, one could insert, after most of my generalizations, implicit brackets stating "there are some notable exceptions." The ability to generalize is vital because the focus of this thesis will consistently be methodological. As such, some of the generalizations I make about Prairie historiography may fail to consider exceptions – which I acknowledge from the outset may be subject to criticism. These generalizations will usually take into account the assessments made by Gerald Friesen's normative work *The Canadian Prairies* and, to a lesser extent, John Conway's *The West* – which I will address shortly. What I am primarily concerned with in this thesis are *normative* interpretations of Canadian Prairie religious history, as well as either major debates or broad consensus among scholars.

The Prairies have a remarkably deep well of historical writing – moreover, journals such as *Prairie Forum*,³ and provincial journals *Alberta History*, *Saskatchewan History*, and *Manitoba History* ensure a continually growing historiography.⁴ Moreover, *Great Plains Quarterly* continues to offer the opportunity to broaden the consideration of Prairie life through attention to the Canadian *and* American Prairie contexts together. In the four

² By normative work, I mean scholarly syntheses that attempt to present the historical consensus as to the historical outline of a given place, event, or person.

³ Recently, the University of Regina has begun releasing thematic collections of prominent *Prairie Forum* essays in the *History of the Prairie West* series.

⁴ Though *Saskatchewan History* has ceased publishing as of 2017.

Canadian journals, the writing on the religious history of these provinces is overwhelmingly oriented towards the pre-WWII era, and more specifically, to the settlement era.⁵ This is not unique to these journals but is instead a major element of the existing historiography.

The foremost normative work on the region remains Gerald Friesen's *The Canadian Prairies: A History*.⁶ A synthesis of academic writing on the Prairies that is extraordinarily broad yet nuanced, the survey of the region's historical writing conducted by Friesen remains a vital contribution to the work of writing Prairie history. This book nonetheless betrays much of the focus of scholars of the Prairies – most especially their concentration on economic and political matters. While Friesen certainly gives considerable attention to many areas of Prairie history in this book – it is, in this dimension, social history in the best sense – Friesen's writing on matters many would deem religious are quite limited in the volume, primarily restricted to a few select figures, events, and movements. Another major history of the region that includes British Columbia under the more general category of “the West” is John F. Conway's *The West: The History of a Region in Confederation*,⁷ published in its fourth edition as *The Rise of the New West: The History of a Region in Confederation*.⁸ While its subtitle may suggest that it is a general

⁵ A review of the table of contents of *Prairie Forum* and the *Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba History* journals reveals that there are hundreds of articles that deal with the importance of especially churches and Christian leaders in initiating settlement on the region, as well as dozens of articles that address Aboriginal spiritual practices. Non-Christian and non-Aboriginal groups receive little to no treatment in these journals, and where they are written about it is almost solely within the settlement context. The number of articles explicitly oriented towards the region's religious history after the 1940s numbers in the teens, and in some journals, in the single digits.

⁶ Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).

⁷ John F. Conway, *The West: The History of a Region in Confederation* 3rd ed. (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company Ltd., Publishers, 2006).

⁸ John F. Conway, *The Rise of the New West: The History of a Region in Confederation* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company Ltd., Publishers, 2014).

consideration of Prairie history, it is, in fact, rigidly focused on economic and political factors⁹ and is largely inattentive to the social, cultural, and certainly the religious history of the Prairies.

Other major works within the Prairie historiography involve a stricter focus on a particular province. Each province has several substantial volumes dedicated to its history: W. L. Morton's *Manitoba: A History* remains a classic on the province;¹⁰ Saskatchewan has the history written by John Archer¹¹ and the recent work by Alan B. Anderson, *Settling Saskatchewan*, which focuses most heavily on the major immigrant groups in the province;¹² Alberta has several broad provincial considerations of its history including Howard and Tamara Palmer's *Alberta: A New History*¹³ and *Peoples of Alberta*,¹⁴ a work similar to Anderson's *Settling* in that it focuses on different ethnic groups in the province. Typically, these histories have focused on the settlement period and the early period of establishing the provinces.¹⁵ The early settlement period, in both the urban and rural

⁹ As Conway notes in his introduction – *Rise*, 20.

¹⁰ W. L. Morton, *Manitoba: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967).

¹¹ John H. Archer, *Saskatchewan: A History* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1980).

¹² Alan B. Anderson, *Settling Saskatchewan* (Regina: University of Regina Press, 2013).

¹³ Howard and Tamara Palmer, *Alberta: A New History* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1990).

¹⁴ Howard and Tamara Palmer, eds., *Peoples of Alberta: Portraits of Cultural Diversity* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1985).

¹⁵ Friesen's *The Canadian Prairies*, for example, has nine chapters dedicated to the immediate 3–4 decades either before or after 1900, and only a single chapter dedicated to “the new west” post-1940. This should not, I think, be taken so much as a weakness of Friesen's work as a weakness of the historiography. The over 700-page tome R. Douglas Francis and Howard Palmer, eds. *The Prairie West: Historical Readings* 2nd. Ed. (Edmonton: Pica Pica Press, 1992) has a mere two essay section dedicated to the “modern west,” and the short historiographic essay that begins the section mentions writing on almost solely politics and economics.

context, has a massive historiography unto itself,¹⁶ while the history of early-twentieth century Western protest is perhaps the most substantial single focus of this period.¹⁷

Historiographic essays on the Canadian Prairies make quite clear the major foci of the historiography. Gerald Friesen explicitly mentions only several moments in Canadian Prairie religious history in his account of the region's historiography,¹⁸ with economic and political history undoubtedly remaining the focus of the region's historians. In the introduction to the 2010 edited volume *The West and Beyond*, Alvin Finkel, Sarah Carter and Peter Fortna note that previous publications arising from the Western Canadian Studies Conferences (fourteen volumes total), at one time the most important conference on topics related to Western history, was primarily focused "on political history and the agricultural settlement era," again, an important indicator of where much historiographical weight is placed in the writing on Prairie history.¹⁹

¹⁶ Among the most important collections focused on the urban context are Alan F. J. Artibise, ed., *Town and City: Aspects of Western Urban Development* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1981); Doug Owrarn, *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), as well as the below-discussed publications from the Western Canadian Studies Conferences being some major examples of the rural context. Paul Voisey's "Rural Local History and the Prairie West" similarly notes that the massive well of historical writing on rural local community history "emphasize[s] the period of agrarian settlement," in *The Prairie West* ed. Francis and Palmer, 497.

¹⁷ The historiography of Western protest, which implicates writing on the Co-operative Commonwealth Foundation, the United Farmers parties, the social gospel, the social reform movement generally, is absolutely massive. Among the earliest works on the subject is W. L. Morton, *The Progressive Party in Canada*, revised edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967); see also George Melnyk, *Riel to Reform: A History of Protest in Western Canada* (Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishers, 1992), which reprints several of the subject's major essays.

¹⁸ Such as the role European clergy played in creating social conflict at Red River (Gerald Friesen, "Historical Writing on the Prairie West" in *The Prairie West* ed. Francis and Palmer, 7), the church's role in Aboriginal assimilation (8), Riel's potential characterization as a "prophet" (13), the role of the social gospel in Prairie society and the United Church's role in social reform (13).

¹⁹ Alvin Finkel, Sarah Carter, and Peter Fortna, "Introduction" in *The West and Beyond: New Perspectives on an Imagined Region* ed. Finkel, Carter, and Fortna (Edmonton: AU Press, Athabasca University, 2010), xv. It should be noted that some of the papers are dedicated to groups or individuals deemed religious – three chapters are dedicated exclusively to the Hutterites in A. W. Rasporich, ed., *Western Canada Past and Present* (Calgary: University of Calgary, McClelland and Stewart West, 1975); Thomas Flanagan's well-

While preceding the above volume by two decades, R. Douglas Francis' essay "In Search of a Prairie Myth: A Survey of the Intellectual and Cultural Historiography of Prairie Canada" is nonetheless an important indicator of the poverty of studies extending beyond political and economic factors. Francis argues that "we know very little about the mental ethos – the intellectual mindset and cultural milieu – of the region."²⁰ Moreover, Francis notes that at the time of his essay the main focus of the intellectual and cultural historiography of the region have tended to be analyses of its regional identity, the history of protest in the region, social reform, and how people have represented the region.²¹ As a means of counteracting this tendency, Francis would publish the book *Images of the West: Changing Perceptions of the Prairies, 1690–1960*, which consists of exactly such a focus on the mental ethos of the region and how understandings of what the Prairies are have changed over time.²² However, in a more recent essay, Royden Loewen has criticized some of the work on the ways in which "images" of the region have been created: "Drawing epic romances of settling Alberta's Peace River and Manitoba's Interlake, and engaging in the filio piety of making every Dutchman and every Norwegian into a model farmer, they [Prairie historians] have focused on the bizarre and the damned, the naked Doukhobors, the hapless Barr colonists, the murderous Galicians, the communal Hutterians [sic]. They have emphasized the tragic and the dramatic, ...overlooking the everyday experience of ordinary farm men and women."²³ Such a pointed critique should make the writer of Prairie

known paper "Louis Riel: Insanity and Prophecy" was published in Howard Palmer, ed., *The Settlement of the West* (Calgary: Comprint Publishing Company, 1977), 15–36.

²⁰ R. Douglas Francis, "In Search of a Prairie Myth: A Survey of the Intellectual and Cultural Historiography of Prairie Canada" in *Riel to Reform* ed. Melnyk, 20.

²¹ *Ibid*, 20–21.

²² R. Douglas Francis, *Images of the West: Changing Perceptions of the Prairies, 1690–1960* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1989).

²³ Royden Loewen, "On the Margin or in the Lead: Canadian Prairie Historiography" *Agricultural History* 73:1 (Winter, 1999), 44.

history aware of simply reiterating these kinds of dramatic, but perhaps ultimately routine, stories.

While there has been a poverty of work addressing religion at a broad level on the Prairies, there are nonetheless such works present. Among the earliest such works would be William E. Mann's *Sect, Cult, and Church in Alberta*, which catalogued various religious groups in Albertan life including some of the more unusual minority groups that settled in Alberta.²⁴ This writing on "unusual" minority groups certainly continued in the notable focus of the literature on groups such as the Doukhobors, Hutterites, and Mennonites.²⁵ Several edited volumes have been solely dedicated to Prairie religious history, such as *Prairie Spirit: Perspectives on the Heritage of the United Church of Canada in the West*,²⁶ *Visions of the New Jerusalem: Religious Settlement on the Prairies*,²⁷ and *Religion and Society in the Prairie West*.²⁸ A recent edited volume, *The Prairie West as Promised Land*,²⁹ has accorded the religious dimensions of Prairie settlement history prominent attention while not explicitly centering on religious history. Benjamin Smillie argued in the preface to *Visions of the New Jerusalem* that the historiography of the Prairies

²⁴ William E. Mann, *Sect, Cult, and Church in Alberta* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1955).

²⁵ See William Janzen, *Limits on Liberty: The Experience of Mennonite, Hutterite, and Doukhobor Communities in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990); the work of Robert MacDonald on Hutterites, published in "The Hutterites in Alberta" in *Peoples of Alberta* ed. Howard and Tamara Palmer, 348–364, and "Hutterite Education in Alberta: A Test Case in Assimilation, 1920–1970" in *Western Canada Past and Present* ed. Anthony W. Rasporich (Calgary: McClelland and Stewart West, Ltd., 1975), 133–149; chapters in Benjamin Smillie's *Visions of the New Jerusalem* (see footnote 27) are dedicated to Mennonites, Doukhobors, and Hutterites.

²⁶ Dennis L. Butcher et. al., eds., *Prairie Spirit: Perspectives on the Heritage of the United Church of Canada in the West* (Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 1985).

²⁷ Benjamin G. Smillie, ed., *Visions of the New Jerusalem: Religious Settlement on the Prairies* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1983).

²⁸ Richard Allen, ed., *Religion and Society in the Prairie West* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1974).

²⁹ R. Douglas Francis and Chris Kitzan, eds., *The Prairie West as Promised Land* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007).

has generally “explained the motivation for settlement as the seeking of economic prosperity or political freedom. While these reasons are undeniably important, we feel that this outlook often looks upon religious beliefs as strange, bizarre phenomena and, therefore, downplays the primacy of faith as motivation.”³⁰ Indeed, several prominent essays on Prairie settlements has shown that such a utopian vision accorded to the Prairies was frequently motivated by particular interpretations of Christianity.³¹ Nonetheless, Smillie’s assessment of the historiography in 1983 echoes Guenther’s more recent assessment of the historiography’s tendency to downplay the role of religion.

In another essay on the historiography of the region which was included in *The West and Beyond*, Gerald Friesen argues that there are five major “generations” among Prairie historians: the first being a generation focused on empirical, political history, the second interwar generation being especially focused on economic questions, the third devoted to a regionalist focus on balancing “the West and the nation” (in light of W. L. Morton’s work), a post-1968 group of social historians devoted to writing “history from below,” and a more recent group of post-modern, especially post-colonial and feminist, historians.³² This most recent group of historians, Friesen notes, argued for the rethinking of “such basic terms as gender, race, space, the state, the body, and identity.”³³ Notably, of course, religion is absent from this list.

³⁰ Benjamin G. Smillie, “Preface,” *Visions of the New Jerusalem*, x.

³¹ A. W. Rasporich, “Utopian Ideals and Community Settlements in Western Canada 1880–1914” in *The Canadian West* ed. Henry C. Klassen (Calgary: University of Calgary, Comprint Publishing Company, 1977), 37–62. This essay has been reprinted in *The Prairie West: Historical Readings* and *The Prairie West as Promised Land*.

³² Gerald Friesen, “Critical History in Western Canada, 1900–2000” in *The West and Beyond* ed. Finkel et. al., 3–12.

³³ Friesen, “Critical History,” 6.

A main thrust of my argument will be to consider *how* the term ‘religion’ is used in the writing of Prairie history. In the writing of Canadian religious history more broadly, such reconsiderations of the term religion remain relatively rare.³⁴ This has led to a neglect of the ways in which the category has been employed for the purposes of law and government policy, an important area of study in the writing of Prairie religious history.³⁵ Some historians explicitly define what they mean by religion,³⁶ others overtly note religion’s relationship to its secular political context,³⁷ but very few historians undertake any effort to problematize the term.³⁸ Nonetheless, there has been extensive writing on how religion and other categories of life intersect. In recent years, the relationship of religion and ethnicity, or religion’s place in multiculturalism, have been a main focus of academic writing on the topic.³⁹

³⁴ A notable exception is Paul Bramadat, “Beyond Christian Canada: Religion and Ethnicity in a Multicultural Society” in *Religion and Ethnicity in Canada* ed. Paul Bramadat and David Seljak (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 1–29.

³⁵ A notable exception to this being Janet Epp Buckingham’s *Fighting Over God: A Legal and Political History of Religious Freedom in Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014). There are already several studies that have implicitly engaged this topic, though in light of the recent ruling on the Ktunaxa’s Jumbo Glacier case, such attention to this topic is timely, if not crucial.

³⁶ David Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith: Canadian Protestant Clergy and the Crisis of Belief, 1850–1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 6.

³⁷ Primarily in relation to issues relating to Aboriginal practice. See, for example, Lori G. Beaman, “Aboriginal Spirituality and the Legal Construction of Freedom of Religion” in *Religion & Canadian Society Second Edition: Contexts, Identities and Strategies* ed. Lori G. Beaman (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press Inc., 2012), 235–248.

³⁸ Another related issue is the limited extent to which *categorizations* of religions are engaged by Canadian scholars of religion. One example that attempts to counteract this trend is Paul Bramadat’s engagement with the idea of “diaspora religions,” a category which he rightly notes implies that Christianity is somehow a non-diasporic religion. Furthermore, Bramadat states: “I am interested in the problematic understanding of Canadian identity that I believe underlies the common use of the term [diaspora religions]... I believe it is an example of the extent to which Christianity, and especially European Christianity, has become “naturalized” by many thinkers.” Paul Bramadat, “Beyond Christian Canada” in *Religion and Ethnicity in Canada*, 14.

³⁹ Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, eds., *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008); Bramadat and Seljak, eds., *Religion and Ethnicity in Canada*; Lori Beaman, ed., *Religion & Canadian Society*.

While somewhat dated, Mark McGowan and David Marshall's characterization of the historiography of religion in Canada as being divided into providential (i.e. histories meant to glorify God and/or the church's mission), humanist (the initial histories that attempted to practice a "methodological atheism"), and social history (histories that emphasize the interaction between religion and the broader society/culture) remains helpful – especially on the Prairies.⁴⁰ This is because, for example, while the authors characterize providential histories as falling into disfavor post-WWII, much of the early history of religion on the Prairies – which began to gain momentum thanks to journals such as the *Alberta Historical Review*, founded in 1953 – could be characterized as providential history, if not a transition between providential and humanist history, much as H. H. Walsh's *The Christian Church in Canada* can serve as a transition between these two types of writing.⁴¹ A later three-volume series, *A History of the Christian Church in Canada*, represents a greater transition to what McGowan and Marshall call humanist historical writing.⁴² This early focus on the history of Christianity would be the norm for much of the writing of Canada's religious history.⁴³

⁴⁰ Mark G. McGowan and David B. Marshall, "Writing Religious History in Canada" in *Prophets, Priests and Prodigals: Readings in Canadian Religious History, 1608 to Present* ed. McGowan and Marshall (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1992), xi–xxi.

⁴¹ H. H. Walsh, *The Christian Church in Canada* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1956). The book is recognized by John Webster Grant as being "[t]he only comprehensive history of the Church in Canada" in John Webster Grant, *The Church in the Canadian Era: The First Century of Confederation* (McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1972), 227. The only other national history of Christianity in Canada Walsh acknowledges as preceding his is *Canada and its Provinces*.

⁴² H. H. Walsh, *The Church in the French Era: From Colonization to the British Conquest* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1966); John S. Moir, *The Church in the British Era: From the British Conquest to Confederation* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1972); John Webster Grant, *The Church in the Canadian Era*. A familiar structure of Canadian Christian history is presented in Robert Choquette's *Canada's Religions: An Historical Introduction* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2004), where the influence of the above series is quite clear.

⁴³ As Paul Bramadat argues, "Any even casual assessment of the existing academic writing about religion in Canada will demonstrate that scholars have focused almost exclusively on the place of Christianity in

While social histories have been tremendously influential in the writing of Canadian religious history,⁴⁴ Canadian religious historians have been interested in broader interdisciplinary questions – especially that of secularization. An important area of attention in recent years is the effect of the 1960s on Canadian religious history, which is the period where Canada underwent a massive campaign of redefining its identity. The period after the 1960s saw the beginning of a precipitous decline in church attendance, a trend analyzed through the sociological studies of scholars such as Reginald Bibby,⁴⁵ Brian Clarke, and Stuart Macdonald⁴⁶ but also by historians in volumes such as *The Sixties and Beyond: Dechristianization in North America and Western Europe, 1945–2000*.⁴⁷ This effort to interpret the reasons for declining church attendance has led to historians debating the secularization thesis, which posits a decline in religion’s influence as society becomes increasingly secularized.⁴⁸ This debate is among the most significant formal overlaps between the writing of Canadian religious history and the theoretical concerns of the broader field of Religious Studies.

Canadian history and society” “Beyond Christian Canada” in *Religion and Ethnicity* ed. Bramadat and Seljak, 3.

⁴⁴ A transition signaled by, in one major example, Richard Allen’s classic book *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada 1914–28* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973).

⁴⁵ Reginald Bibby, *Fragmented Gods: The Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 1987).

⁴⁶ Brian Clarke and Stuart Macdonald, *Leaving Christianity: Changing Allegiances in Canada Since 1945* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017) – the book’s fifth chapter is devoted to the 1960s.

⁴⁷ Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, eds., *The Sixties and Beyond: Dechristianization in North America and Western Europe, 1945–2000* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

⁴⁸ See, for several historians who argue for the utility of the secularization thesis, Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985); David B. Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith*. A major engagement of some of these historian’s arguments can be found in Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada, 1900–1940* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996). Michael Gauvreau has, elsewhere in his work, debated heavily against the secularization thesis.

Religious Studies has been the site of major debates and developments over the past several decades. Richard King has recently emphasized a “Copernican turn” in the academic study of religion, centered on the realization of the academic’s role in creating what religion *is*, rather than the discovery of something “out there” in the world.⁴⁹ This Copernican turn was perhaps most influentially initiated by Jonathan Z. Smith’s *Imagining Religion*, where the famous assertion that “*there is no data for religion*” opens the book.⁵⁰ This claim has been variously accepted, debated, and expanded upon, with Smith rigorously arguing for the utility of the category religion precisely because of its artificiality: as the title of his first book makes clear, “map is not territory,” and academics of religion should focus themselves on making effective maps.⁵¹ The effort to define religion, to demarcate the boundaries of the field, has since been a major preoccupation.

But this Copernican turn has also led to a greater attention to the ways in which religion is crafted as a category of life by those *outside* of the academy. This has been most notably undertaken by scholars of secularism, who have drawn attention to the ways in which religion frames the secular way of life in – especially – Europe and North American governments and cultures. Such studies have also drawn attention to the ways in which

⁴⁹ Richard King, “The Copernican Turn in the Study of Religion” in *Religion, Theory, Critique: Classic and Contemporary Approaches and Methodologies* ed. Richard King (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 5.

⁵⁰ Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982). The famous quotation in the book’s opening paragraph makes this clear: “...while there is a staggering amount of data, of phenomena, of human experiences and expressions that might be characterized in one culture or another, by one criterion or another, as religious – *there is no data for religion*. Religion is solely the creation of the scholar’s study... For this reason, the student of religion, and most particularly the historian of religion, must be relentlessly self-conscious” (xi).

⁵¹ Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 289–309. Another interesting statement Smith makes in this paper, that is probably driving at the same point as the recent trends of studying “lived religion,” is the assertion that scholars should be attentive to the “banal” aspects of religion, and that “[w]e have not been attendant to the ordinary, recognizable features of religion as negotiation and application but have rather perceived it to be an extraordinary, exotic category of experience which escapes everyday modes of thought” (308).

assuming the category of religion as a “taken-for-granted” may distort our interpretations of other parts of the world and – though this is perhaps more obvious – other periods of history. Talal Asad has been among the scholars whose influence has spanned many different fields, particularly his writing on secularism and the category of religion.⁵² Asad’s attention to the ways in which secularism seizes on categories such as the sacred, or science, and frames them relative to categories such as religion, provides a useful lens to understand not the inherent *content* of the word religion, but the ways in which the category “religion” is used both within and without the academy to ascribe particular areas of life with particular qualities (private and public being one important legal example).⁵³ William Arnal has similarly drawn the academy’s attention to these issues through a variety of writings,⁵⁴ arguing that “the academic future of religion as a concept will need to focus on deconstructing the category and analyzing its function within popular discourse... the concept of religion serves modern political ends and reflects modern political circumstances.”⁵⁵

Religious Studies has also become well-known for its usage of comparison as a methodology. As Luther Martin notes, “comparison is so common in the modern study of religion that “comparative religion” is often used to designate the field itself.” The issue,

⁵² Among his most important books are *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

⁵³ See, for example, Asad’s discussion of how Victorian anthropologists discuss “secular” vs. “religious” morality, (*Formations*, 94–95); an extended discussion of how secular thinking reformulated many categories such as myth, inspiration, and pain can be found in the first chapter of *Formations*, 21–66.

⁵⁴ William Arnal, “The Segregation of Social Desire: “Religion” and Disney World” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69:1 (Mar. 2001), 1–19; William Arnal, “Critical Responses to Phenomenological Theories of Religion: What Kind of Category is “Religion”?” in King, ed. *Religion, Theory, Critique*, 421–434.

⁵⁵ William Arnal, “Definition” in *Guide to the Study of Religion* ed. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (London: Continuum, 2000), 30–31.

of course, is *how* and *why* particular religious matters are compared.⁵⁶ Again, Jonathan Z. Smith has drawn a great deal of attention to the nuances of comparison,⁵⁷ including through the critique of problematic comparisons that create analytic categories that may be unhelpful.⁵⁸ The usage of comparison as a methodology is prominent in the humanities and social sciences, but it has taken on special importance in Religious Studies. Among the most important reasons for this is the question as to whether or not scholars of religion are simply reiterating the terms of adherents, which is certainly a worthy enterprise, but not one that would develop the field beyond simply descriptive efforts. Another reason is the emphasis on developing particular concepts and categories that transcend merely the claims of adherents – categories such as myth, symbol, ritual, culture, and belief have been deeply theorized by Religious Studies academics. The utility of such categories extends far beyond debates over simply things that would ordinarily be understood as religious. Theorizations of such terms will greatly influence my writing on Prairie history in this thesis.

This attention to the ways in which a “religious” quality is ascribed to certain things has been fostered by a variety of scholars, a recent intervention on this matter by Ann Taves focusing primarily, though not exclusively, on religious experience. In the book *Religious Experience Reconsidered*, Taves makes several provocative arguments, among the most important for my purposes being that scholars should focus more attention on “the process whereby people constitute things as religious or not.”⁵⁹ Taves proposes a broader object of

⁵⁶ Luther H. Martin, “Comparison” in *Guide to the Study of Religion* ed. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (London: Continuum, 2009), 45. See also, Richard King, “The Copernican Turn in the Study of Religion” in *Religion, Theory, Critique* ed. King, 1–20.

⁵⁷ Described in *ibid.*, as well as Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion*.

⁵⁸ The first chapter of Smith’s *To Take Place*, “In Search of Place,” is a thorough examination of Mircea Eliade’s category of the “sacred axis,” 13–14. See also Martin, “Comparison” in *Guide*, 51–52.

⁵⁹ Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building-Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 21.

study (the more generic term “special” is suggested in the book) in which to situate religion as one potential quality ascribed to certain things such as objects, experiences, agents, and so on. Taves suggests that “[r]ather than stipulating a definition of “religious ascriptions” or “things deemed religious,” we can use the idea of “specialness” to identify a set of things that includes much of what people have in mind when they refer to things as “sacred,” “magical,” “mystical,” “superstitious,” “spiritual,” and/or “religious.””⁶⁰ Such a method will underpin much of my thesis’ argument, and this effort to situate the category “religion” within, and/or relative to, broader categories of life has been a preoccupation of many other scholars.⁶¹ Nonetheless, I should make clear that my tendency to prefer terminology such as “things deemed religious” throughout this thesis, in line with Taves, is meant to draw attention to the fact that *someone* is deeming this thing religious, and that such a process is usually a statement laden with other important meanings rather than its inherent nature as a “religious” thing.

Structure and argument of thesis

In the first place, I take seriously Jean-Claude Schmitt’s assertion that “a hypothesis that is still hardly substantiated may be more fruitful than a ‘definitive’ conclusion.”⁶² As such, this thesis will put forth a hypothesis that is not based on entirely exhaustive reading of the Prairie historiography, but that is instead focused on normative interpretations of

⁶⁰ Taves, 27.

⁶¹ Bruce Lincoln’s eclectic work *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification* 2nd. Ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) being one example of such an approach.

⁶² Jean-Claude Schmitt, *The Holy Greyhound: Guinefort, Healer of Children Since the Thirteenth Century* trans. Martin Thom (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 155.

Prairie history and, aside from these normative interpretations, case studies that aid in making the broader point of each chapter. It is to these case studies that I have directed my primary source research.

Several notes should be made about terminology. While influential historian George F. G. Stanley (among others) has asserted that the term Western Canada should refer simply to the Prairies,⁶³ the consensus of the historiography at present has been to refer to either the Prairies (the region that encompasses Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba) or to the West (the former provinces and British Columbia). For a plethora of reasons, though mainly rooted in the shared history of agriculture, immigration, and (to a more varied extent) discontent over the issue of resources, I find the category of “the Canadian Prairies” to be of more utility than the idea of “the West.”⁶⁴ As such, I will prefer the terminology of the Prairies throughout my thesis, and certainly, my analysis is focused specifically on the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.

A note should also be made on how I will use the term “religion.” For reasons that should become clear by the end of this thesis, I will use the word religion primarily in three senses: the first, where historical actors ascribe a religious quality to some thing; the second, where I am discussing the secular political or legal category “religion;” the third, where academic writing employs the term, or where the term “Prairie religious history” is

⁶³ And in rather humorous fashion: “When [*The Birth of Western Canada*] was published in 1936, a critic at the University of British Columbia took me to task because I had written only of the Prairie Region, under the general title of Western Canada; I had said nothing of the Pacific coast province. Obviously I am quite unrepentant, because in this paper I am going to do the very same thing.” George F. G. Stanley, “The Western Canadian Mystique” in *Prairie Perspectives: Papers of the Western Canadian Studies Conference* ed. David P. Pagan (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada Ltd., 1970), 8.

⁶⁴ While these are not easy problems to parse out, and the sense of “western alienation” has involved British Columbia at times, I find the identification of British Columbia in a region called “The West” of analytic utility only in quite particular periods of history.

necessary to designate the field as currently understood. In all other cases in the rest of my thesis, I attempt to avoid the usage of the term “religion” as a means of designating bodies of thought/traditions/systems of belief and practice, such as Hinduism or Sikhism or Christianity. For the moment, I will avoid directly addressing my reasons for this, as they will be fully developed over the course of this thesis.

The historiography of the Canadian Prairies has tended to focus overwhelmingly on the settlement period, and in the case of Prairie religious history, this is especially true. In this thesis, I will focus on the ways in which “religion” as a category is thought about and used to categorize phenomena, and to the ways in which myths, symbols, and rituals create shared bonds between groups of people. The ways in which “religion” is used to categorize elements of life are inseparable from the secular thought that has circulated in Canada, but as it impacts the Prairie region, little attention has been paid to some of the contradictions and difficulties within secular thinking that have preoccupied Religious Studies scholars. The usage of myths, symbols, and rituals within Prairie history to craft a distinct regional identity has been more thoroughly addressed by Prairie historians, though I will attempt to analyze Prairie myths, symbols, and rituals as they more overtly as they relate to the region’s religious history.

There are several primary benefits to the application of Religious Studies theories and methods to the writing of Prairie history. The foremost is a simple fact of the writing of history: the asking of new questions leads to the employment of new primary sources and/or the reading of primary sources in new ways. Directly related to this is the question of theory in history – while historians generally recognize their field as interdisciplinary, there nonetheless remains a gap in the *explicit* usage of theory to craft historical narratives

and understand history as such.⁶⁵ As relates to religion specifically, I have found a paucity of theoretical discussion regarding religion in Prairie history, and want to contribute to such a discussion by means of my work here. This will not only contribute to a greater understanding of Prairie history generally, and Prairie religious history in particular, but contribute theoretical nuance to understanding of the dramatic changes the Canadian Prairies have undergone in the twentieth century. The explanation of these changes primarily by economic and political analysis has neglected many aspects of the changes that are usually understood as in some way “religious” – the ethics, philosophy, theology, popular discourse, and so on – involved in justifying and explaining these changes by historical actors. Moreover, the act of *historians* categorizing some things as “religious” and others as “economic” or “political” have in some cases resulted in a misreading, I argue, of the content of the aforementioned categories.

This thesis will address these issues in essentially two halves – the first two chapters focusing in greater depth on some major theoretical issues in writing on the settlement era and religious history generally, and the last two chapters focusing more intensely on some issues in writing post-WWII Prairie religious history, with the third chapter considering issues relating to both of these aspects of my area of interest. Over the course of the past century, the Canadian Prairies have been guided by a central transformation in its moral, ethical, and theological self-understanding – that is, from a broad focus of much of its population on creating a Christian society centering community on the church, to a more diffuse spiritual milieu that is increasingly characterized by Spiritual But Not Religious

⁶⁵ See Anna Green and Kathleen Troup, *The Houses of History: A Critical Reader* 2nd ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 1–4.

behaviors. Neglecting elements of life that are usually understood as religious from the writing of Prairie history can inhibit understanding the primary change in the region's history that has been undergone over the course of the twentieth century; this change within the Prairie provinces can be summarized as the transition from the heavily social gospel-influenced agrarian revolt, its challenge to the capitalist dynamics of the time, and its status as an overwhelmingly church-going society, to the current character of the Prairies that tends to value individualism, consumer-capitalism, and has increasingly rejected behaviors related to institutions deemed religious. Seeking means of explaining this transformation, especially from the perspective of religious history, will be the main concern of this thesis.

Chapter One – The Secularization Thesis and Writing Canadian Religious History

In the writing of Canadian Prairie religious history, it would seem that the secularization thesis has not been perspicuously argued for, but instead, tacitly accepted. How is this made apparent? If we take the assessment of historiographies of the Prairies seriously, we can see a broad agreement that economic and political factors take precedence; indeed, much of the writing on Prairie religious history is focused on the pre-World War II period, and the historical writing on the years after the War is devoted overwhelmingly to political and economic matters. Is this evidence of the secularization thesis' acceptance? Part of the interpretive difficulty in the first place is the fact that the secularization thesis has been variously explained – its ultimate effects have been summarized in many different ways, and the mechanisms by which it operates have not always been clear. While there can be no doubt that the process of secularization has an effect on religiosity, what precisely this means for “religion” as a category, and for historians of religion, has been a major area of debate in Canadian religious history at large.

In this chapter, I aim to do two things. In the first place, I will summarize some of the major debates surrounding the secularization thesis in the broad field of Religious Studies, which necessarily involves input from sociologists, historians, anthropologists, and other specialists in the academic study of religion. Secondly, I will look at debates over the secularization thesis in the field of Canadian religious history, and then some salient examples of how the assumptions of the secularization thesis may be playing a role in understanding Canadian Prairie history. Ultimately, I want to make the relatively modest argument for a) the continued importance of elements of life commonly implicated by the term “religion” in the writing of Canadian Prairie history, and b) a language of change or

transformation in the religious character of the Prairies, rather than ‘declines’ or ‘rises’ in religion as a category.

I – The Secularization Thesis and the Academic Study of Religion

The debate surrounding the secularization thesis has occupied academics of religion, I would suggest, for two main reasons: the first, because it involves the basis of the field itself (what religion is and how it, as a category, is affected by/affects other social processes), and two, because for most academics it involves the very context in which they are situated. That is, because the debate surrounding the secularization thesis has generally been steered by North American and especially West-European scholars, to debate the secularization thesis is to debate over the nature of their socio-political context, where revolutions that instilled secular governments and widely admired theorists of the secular state were once, or still are, situated.

The secularization thesis has been articulated in numerous ways but can be perhaps most uncontroversially summarized as a theory positing the general decline in adherence to religious institutions, and a general decline in religiosity as a whole, over time as the secular-modern state and scientific-rational thought continue to develop. Frequently, this has been summarized in the language of a decline in religion over time.⁶⁶ Evidence such as

⁶⁶ “It is not difficult to put forth a simple definition of secularization for the purpose at hand... When we speak of culture and symbols... we imply that secularization is more than a social-structural process. It affects the totality of cultural life and of ideation, and may be observed in the decline of religious contents in the arts, in philosophy, in literature and, most important of all, in the rise of science as an autonomous, thoroughly secular perspective on the world... Put simply, this means that the modern West has produced an increasing number of individuals who look upon the world and their own lives without the benefit of religious interpretations” Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*

lower rates of church adherence, and the rise in people claiming to have no religious affiliation, are among the evidence claimed to be the most compelling for such a decline in religion, as well as a theory of a growing replacement of a religious consciousness by one that requires little reference to religion. The understandings of religion that underpin such an argument are often centered on “belief in the supernatural,” which is repeatedly said to be in decline as a rational and/or scientific consciousness replaces the former religious consciousness.

Among the most well-known individuals to argue *against* the secularization thesis is Rodney Stark, who employs primarily sociological methods to debate it. Stark has drawn attention to numeric increases in religious participation, the fact that the past is perhaps not as religious as first appears, and the fact that religion and science bear little actual relationship to one another – these, Stark argues, are some ways the secularization thesis may be flawed.⁶⁷ Moreover, Stark, along with Roger Finke, have been strong proponents of what is referred to as “rational choice theory,” which asserts – at its most basic – that sociologists use a “marketplace” model of the religious world, where we understand people as religious consumers whose demand for religion is constant (because only religion can answer certain questions about what happens after we die, for example) and that, therefore, the suppliers on the market (the churches and other religious institutions) can change their behavior to capture greater shares of the market.⁶⁸ What Stark has asserted is that, in large

(New York: Anchor Books, 1969), 107–108. It is important to note that Berger eventually recanted this interpretation though, as this chapter will indirectly demonstrate, for potentially problematic reasons.

⁶⁷ Rodney Stark, “Rationality” in *Guide to the Study of Religion* ed. Braun and McCutcheon, 251–252; Rodney Stark, “Secularization, R.I.P.” *Sociology of Religion* 60:3 (Autumn, 1999), 249–273.

⁶⁸ This is outlined in Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America 1776–2005: Winners and Losers in our Religious Economy* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2005). See also Joel Thiessen, *The Meaning of Sunday: The Practice of Belief in a Secular Age* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2015) for an important recent effort to test this theory against ethnographic data.

part on the basis of statistical information, religious vitality is returning to America or remaining constant, and can be expected to return to other parts of the world.⁶⁹

The strict evaluation of religious vitality primarily by such statistical means leads to a particular understanding of what “religion” is, an understanding that has tended to depend on belief in the supernatural and behaviors associated with a particular institution.⁷⁰ But are these particular measurements a productive means of understanding the nature of religion? What traditions and institutions are necessarily being assessed by such measurements? It should be said that it is in primarily Christian-dominated contexts that such forms of academic analysis are dominant, and that it is Christianity that dominates the discussion in these studies that are, as the academics state, assessing the vitality of “religion.”⁷¹ It should also be noted that some of the fundamental questions regarding this idea of religious decline cannot be answered without more detailed data.⁷²

Can we accept such a refutation of the secularization thesis based on numerical data, and the implied understanding of “religion” such a means of refuting it assumes? The nature of what religion is has occupied the field for some time, and is quite deeply entwined

⁶⁹ See Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Faith: Why the World is More Religious Than Ever* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2005), esp. 185–204, for the assessment of the United States. Stark suggests that there may be, at present, a global religious awakening – “Contrary to the constant predictions that religion is doomed, there is abundant evidence of an ongoing worldwide religious awakening” (212).

⁷⁰ Though certain sociologists of religion have broadened what they assess by statistical data – such as attempts to assess happiness, morality, and approval/disapproval of certain behaviors in other people.

⁷¹ In “Secularization, R.I.P.,” for example, Stark cites dancing and singing (with women) as examples of “entirely unreligious activities” conducted in churches that should be seen as examples of a less religious Medieval Europe than is often asserted by proponents of the secularization thesis (258, emphasis added). This, I argue, betrays the fact that the discussion for or against secularization’s effect on “religion” are frequently based, in fact, on a normative understanding of Christianity – are not dancing and singing important forms of ritual in many contexts, including Christian ones?

⁷² As suggested by Joel Thiessen and Lorne L. Dawson, “Is There a “Renaissance” of Religion in Canada? A Critical Look at Bibby and Beyond” in *Religion & Canadian Society, Second Edition: Contexts, Identities, and Strategies* ed. Lori G. Beaman (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press Inc., 2012), esp. 109–110.

with the question of the secularization thesis.⁷³ Jonathan Z. Smith has made the influential argument that religion, as a term, aids in establishing a “disciplinary horizon” for the scholar, and that the utility of the term lies precisely in its estrangement from much of the data academics designate as being a form of “religious” behavior.⁷⁴ While such an understanding of religion’s nature has found strong roots in the field of Religious Studies, convincing recent efforts of academics such as Talal Asad,⁷⁵ Russell McCutcheon,⁷⁶ Timothy Fitzgerald,⁷⁷ and others, have shown that religion as a concept is so caught up in other issues (especially political ones) that to define it is an effort that is not only difficult, but largely impossible to do, without invoking this larger area of debates, polemics, and arguments. Any definition of religion can be, to some extent, either indefensible or polemical in a way that a definition of language or culture is not. Asad has said the following on this issue:

To define is to repudiate some things and to endorse others. Defining what is religion is not merely an abstract intellectual exercise; it is not just what anthropologists or other scholars do. The act of defining (or redefining) religion is embedded in passionate disputes; it is connected with anxieties and satisfactions, it is affected by changing conceptions of knowledge and interest, and it is related to institutional disciplines... When definitions of religion are produced, they endorse or reject certain uses of a vocabulary that have profound implications for the organization of social life and the possibilities of personal experience.⁷⁸

⁷³ One relatively recent debate on the very categories of religion and the secular can be found between Steven Engler and Timothy Fitzgerald in *Studies of Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 40:4 (2011), 419–460.

⁷⁴ Jonathan Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 281–282.

⁷⁵ Especially Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

⁷⁶ Russell T. McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), see particularly 127–157.

⁷⁷ Timothy Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity: A Critical History of Religion and Related Categories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁷⁸ Talal Asad, “Thinking About Religion, Belief, and Politics” in *Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies* ed. Robert A. Orsi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 39.

The field, as such, remains caught in a tension between the following: acceptance of the term “religion” as a disciplinary horizon; rejection of the word “religion” and the adoption of other conceptual frameworks such as “worldview,” “culture,” “ideology,” “systems of belief and practice” and so on; contingent acceptance of the term “religion” where explicitly situated in a particular socio-political setting.

For the argument I am making here, the latter option is among the most interesting, and one that is vital for analysis of the claims of the secularization thesis. This is because it focuses analysis on how the concept “religion” is used to divide areas of social space, either by government action (“it is the state’s duty to protect freedom of religion”), by self-designation (“we, as a church, are a religious institution”), or by simple public discourse (“religion is oppressive”). What this involves is not looking for *religious* things, but looking for things that are said to be religious and analyzing the process by which such a designation is made, as well as the effects of such a designation. This leads to the following question: is the secularization thesis simply, or in part, an implicit restatement of the claims of secular governments? In one sense, this must fundamentally be the case to the degree that the task of demarcating the domain where it is appropriate for “religion” to operate is a project of secular governments, which the secularization thesis reinforces, as do some of its counterarguments.⁷⁹ But more fundamentally, in the way that the secularization thesis

⁷⁹ What I mean here is that the secularization thesis often focuses on similar components of the category “religion” that secular governments do as a measuring stick of the supposed “health” of religion. For example, if it is assumed at the popular level, and therefore to some extent in the legal and academic sphere, that religious behavior is primarily centered on private belief – which, in Canada, the K’tunaxa/Jumbo Glacier ruling recently confirmed – then the secularization thesis, by claiming that the consciousness of people is becoming secularized, also reinforces the idea that private belief is a fundamental component of “religion.” Similarly, the treatment of “religious” institutions as special locations set apart from other kinds of property tends to be the focus of secularization theorists (i.e. church attendance as an indicator of religion’s vitality) *and* secular governments that offer them tax exemptions, whereas “private” practices are not deemed worthy of such exemptions (i.e. a person who

is frequently argued, what is argued is not *just* that institutions deemed religious are losing attendees, members, and revenue, but that the *consciousness* of individuals is also becoming secularized.⁸⁰ What is implied here is that secular governments, which claim to avoid the violent or potentially divisive logic at work amongst religions, use an irreligious logic to overcome all other identities to create an embracing unity. Where “religion” is divisive, the state identity unites.

A salient example, that may serve as representative for other proponents of the secularization thesis, is Steve Bruce’s book *Secularization: In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory*. Bruce, who self-identifies as an obstreperous intervener on the matter of the secularization thesis (or ‘secularization paradigm,’ his preferred language),⁸¹ offers something of a definition of both religion and secularization. Religion, in Bruce’s understanding, involves “beliefs, actions, and institutions based on the existence of supernatural entities with powers of agency (that is, Gods) or impersonal processes possessed of moral purposes (the Hindu and Buddhist notion of karma, for example) that set the conditions of, or intervene in, human affairs.”⁸² The first sentence of the book proper summarizes what the secularization paradigm seeks to explain: “the displacement of religion from the centre of human life.”⁸³ Secularization, as Bruce explains it, “is concerned

has a family altar in their home that they pray to would not likely receive the same tax exemption, and in many cases, such a practice may be deemed an abnormality or evidence of secularization succeeding over religion). Many proponents of the secularization thesis tend to focus on a particular series of behaviors as a measuring stick of secularization, and these are frequently Christian behaviors and/or Christian institutions.

⁸⁰ Frequently summarized as an element of the “disenchantment of the world,” a phrase coined by Max Weber.

⁸¹ Bruce writes that he wrote the book in part “out of frustration and annoyance,” *Secularization: In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), vi.

⁸² Bruce, 1.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 1.

largely with the demand for religion” as well as a multitude of other effects of modernization on religious institutions. Among its effects that are clearer to demonstrate are the increasing power of political institutions over how religious institutions handle themselves, and a larger degree of secular control over social events and functions once under the purview of religions. Some of secularization’s effects are perhaps less tangible but nonetheless vital to Bruce’s argument, such as a decline in how *seriously* people take religion, a decline in how much “time, energy, and resources” people dedicate to the supernatural, a decreased social influence of religion generally, and – a fascinatingly recurrent argument amongst secularization theorists – a more rational outlook on the part of society.⁸⁴ It should be emphasized that, while Bruce acknowledges that religion is not guaranteed to decline terminally, he does state that “[t]he purpose of religion is no longer to glorify God: it is to help find peace of mind and personal satisfaction.”⁸⁵ This is among the most revealing usages of the word religion throughout the book, and reinforces a very particular understanding of what religion *is* and once *was*. Suggesting that finding a fundamental contentedness with oneself is evidence of secularization, and therefore, the wane of religion, and conversely, that religion’s purpose was once to glorify God, should stir some level of skepticism as to what exactly Bruce is considering religion to be.

It should be emphasized that Bruce levels the effects of secularization at essentially everything secularism supposedly does not involve – i.e., religion, folk beliefs, superstition, and spirituality. This conceptualization of how life is divided enforces several ideas and dichotomies related to the religious/secular divide that religious studies

⁸⁴ Ibid, 2–3.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 13.

academics, among others, have found quite troubling, such as supernatural vs. natural, faith vs. truth, irrational vs. rational, belief vs. reason, body vs. mind, emotion vs. intellect, and so on.⁸⁶ What is troubling about many of these dichotomies is that the former in the above categories are often assumed to solely belong to religious behavior, while the latter belong to other forms of behavior – particularly, as it relates to the secularization thesis, politics and economics. Conceptualizing, or perhaps less charitably, reifying “belief in the supernatural” as somehow capable of being homogenized as a totality that the process of secularization can affect in some manner is among the foremost assumptions made by this articulation of secularization.⁸⁷ It also may obscure some of the ways in which aspects of life frequently characterized as religious remain a fundamental part of secular societies.

Another assumption that seems to underpin Bruce’s work is that of a religious ‘golden age’ that he places in the rather broad area of the Middle Ages.⁸⁸ This can only

⁸⁶ Fitzgerald, *Discourses*, 6; Talal Asad, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, Saba Mahmood, *Is Critique Secular?: Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), viii.

⁸⁷ I will address William Cavanaugh’s book *The Myth of Religious Violence* below, but among the simplest challenges he poses to such an understanding of religion involves the following: the famous cases of the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ refusal to salute the flag (a controversy in both the United States and Canada), which involves a bizarre confrontation of ‘religion’ with something that supposedly is *not* a religious act: “the term “religion” refers *not* to ritually putting one’s hand over one’s heart and reciting a pledge of allegiance to a piece of cloth endowed with totemic powers. The term religion applies only to the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ refusal to do so.” *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 182.

⁸⁸ Bruce cites the Middle Ages to this effect on pages 5–6, 31, 33–34, 38–39, 44–45, 47, 79–80, 121, 175 (this list may not even be exhaustive, as Bruce does not list “Medieval” or “Middle Ages” in his index). The scholarship on the Middle Ages has revealed that while, of course, Christianity was the lens through which life in Europe during this period was overwhelmingly understood, the hegemony of the Church and its authorities was remarkably inconsistent. The Church was faced regularly with decisions about accommodating or resisting certain groups that, in many cases, quite overtly challenged their authority (the apostolic poverty movement, for example, saw the *Humiliati* and the Franciscans accepted as orders in the Church, while the Waldensians were rejected; see Herbert Grundmann, *Religious Movement in the Middle Ages* trans. Steve Rowan (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2005)). Moreover, microstudies done by scholars such as Emmanuel Leroy Ladurie, Carlo Ginzburg, and Jean-Claude Schmitt evidence the fact that the hegemony of the Church over certain communities was often tenuous. See: Emmanuel Leroy Ladurie, *Montaillou: Cathars and Catholics in a French Village, 1294–1324* trans. Barbara Bray (London: The Folio Society, 2005); Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller* trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (New York: Penguin Books, 1986); Jean-Claude Schmitt, *The Holy*

serve to buttress the secularization thesis, but it is also an obfuscation of the degree to which the hegemony of the Church was challenged, and of the ways in which unusual forms of belief predominated. Bruce emphasizes that, in a gradual process following the Protestant Reformation, an “internal secularization” of the Church occurred⁸⁹ in the form of a declining orthodoxy, which eventually combined with declining church attendance, as well as a general decline in supernatural beliefs normally associated with mainstream Christianity. At a broader level, as supernatural beliefs related to the Church decline, supernatural beliefs in general – superstitions, folk beliefs, and so on – also decline. Demonstrating these effects takes up over half the book’s length. What we see here, however, is an interesting paradigm of how belief functions that must necessarily assume several things: that supernatural beliefs are the crucial dimension of religion and that scientific rationality necessarily displaces such beliefs, and that the *genuineness* of the belief is the crucial measure of a belief’s function.

The idea of “genuine” versus “ingenuine” beliefs is a distinct philosophical category in itself that is widely debated. However, it should be kept in mind that beliefs are

Greyhound. What such a diagnosis of the Middle Ages also does is reinforce a stereotypical view that holds the period as being, if not merely wholly mired in the concerns of “religion,” also primarily mired in irrationality and superstition (Bruce comes just short of such a direct assertion on p. 27 of *Secularization*, where he asserts that The Protestant Reformation and Monotheism together led to Rationality). What Bruce fails to address in his book is the utility of a strict differentiation between the Christianity of the Middle Ages and what Cavanaugh argues in the previous footnote – that is, the modern act of swearing an oath to the totemic symbol of a flag, representing a host of apparently eternal truths (liberty, freedom, justice) mandated in some interpretations by God (“One Nation Under God,” “men are endowed by their Creator...”), and how this is analytically distinct from “religion,” except to say that the state labels certain institutions and behaviors *as religious* while the state is not.

⁸⁹ Bruce, 13. The assessment of internal secularization of the Church is actually an interesting and valuable project, depending how one frames the idea of internal secularization - i.e. if the assumption is that an increase in clerical work for priests is a measure of secularization, this surely neglects much of how Church officials have functioned throughout Christian history (see David Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith*, 129). A study of how churches have understood what they see as the secular, or secularization, and internalized such a definition, is for a variety of reasons an interesting area of potential study.

not simply a matter of interior mental processes: they are embodied actions that structure human behavior and social relationships.⁹⁰ As such, the claim that a person's *self-reported* lack of belief in the supernatural is evidence of declining belief (especially when one continues to engage in a behavior that is only justifiable by reference to some supernatural force, such as luck, spirits, charms, etc.) should be approached with at least some skepticism, as should the assumption that a person's *self-reported* abundance of belief is *de facto* evidence of belief. One intervention on the matter of the secular framing of religion that is indicative of the inconsistency with which "religion" is isolated as a factor in human life is William T. Cavanaugh's *The Myth of Religious Violence*. In it, Cavanaugh notes that the scholar must be sure to observe that not just belief, but behavior are important in understanding how violence (the focus of his book) is undertaken:

Where... arguments [that religion is peculiarly prone to violence]... fail is in trying to separate a category called religion with a peculiar tendency toward violence from a putatively secular reality that is less prone to violence. There is no reason to suppose that so-called secular ideologies such as nationalism, patriotism, capitalism, Marxism, and liberalism are any less prone to be absolutist, divisive, and irrational than belief in, for example, the biblical God. As [Martin Marty] implies, belief in the righteousness of the United States and its solemn duty to impose liberal democracy on the rest of the world has all of the ultimate concern, community, myth, ritual, and required behavior of any so-called religion... But surely, the objection might go, nobody really thinks the flag or the

⁹⁰ Slavoj Žižek has repeatedly drawn attention to beliefs that function despite no one *actively* believing in them in the first person: it is enough to presume that someone else believes in order for the belief to operate. I take issue with the degree to which Žižek asserts this as the dominant lens of belief today, but I do think this category of belief is predominant enough that it should give us pause regarding what data we use to interpret the state of religion at present. While there are more serious examples Žižek suggests, a humorous example involves Christmas presents and the belief in Santa Claus: "If you ask parents they will tell you "I am not crazy, of course there is no Santa Claus: I buy the presents. But I pretend to take it seriously so that my children will not be disappointed. *They* believe." Then if you ask, privately, the children, of course, they will tell you "I am not an idiot. But I pretend, I don't know, not to disappoint parents, to get presents,"" Zizekian Studies, "Slavoj Žižek | Maybe We Just Need a New Chicken | Full Film" accessed Aug. 29, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hHqY3id5p5Y&t=3273s> Žižek's point is that *socially*, the belief functions perfectly well *as a belief* regardless of the individual's "private"/"interior" stance on the matter.

nation or money or sports idols are their “gods” – those are just metaphors. However, the question is not simply one of belief, but of behavior. If a person claims to believe in the Christian God but never gets off the couch on Sunday morning and spends the rest of the week in the obsessive pursuit of profits in the bond market, then what is absolute in that person’s life in a functional sense is probably not the Christian God.⁹¹

Cavanaugh engages in a genealogy of the term “religion,” ultimately concluding that not only is religion an incoherent term, but if anything, a potentially dangerous one in terms of what it authorizes, deauthorizes, encourages, discourages, points to and distracts from. While the particular instance of violence is not the sole example that the term is used for, the idea that certain kinds of violence can be understood as solely, or primarily, religious while other types of violence are not leads to the following unconscionable dichotomy: “[t]he myth of religious violence reinforces a reassuring dichotomy between their [religious] violence – which is absolutist, divisive, and irrational – and our [secular] violence, which is modest, unitive, and rational.”⁹² This type of distinction has been argued by many scholars of secularism as being a foundational idea of secular ideology: religion is associated with irrationality, violence, oppression; secularism is associated with rationality, peace, freedom, among other similar oppositions. In the same vein as scholars like Ann Taves, Cavanaugh recommends scholars cease attempting to define religion and instead “ask why certain things are called religion under certain conditions.”⁹³ Such developments in how categories like religion and secularism are understood should make us reconsider the secularization thesis’ efficacy, as well as how certain repudiations of the

⁹¹ Cavanaugh, 55. A similar argument is presented by Timothy Fitzgerald: “One can imagine examining... the non-theistic representations of Humanism which offer an interpretation of the whole of reality and the meaning of life, and demand total loyalty and commitment. In such a case it is not immediately clear what is to be gained by distinguishing this social value system from a “religious” value system.” Fitzgerald, “Experience” in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, 129.

⁹² Cavanaugh, 183.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 118–122.

secularization thesis (in terms of the type of evidence focused on to refute it, such as Rodney Stark's rational choice theorization) select their evidence to argue *against* it.

I do not want my argument to be misunderstood. Of course, in Canada (and elsewhere) there *is* a decline in church attendance at present, there *is* a relegation of administration of education, health care, and other social services from churches to governments, there *is* a decline in the social authority of officials associated with institutions deemed religious – there are concrete phenomena to explain regarding secularization. However, this is not the same as a supposed decline in religion, or the authority of what is usually meant by the term religion (ethical/moral debates, engagement with matters of ultimate concern, belief in the supernatural, etc.), in secular nations. Many articulations of the secularization thesis vastly underestimate the ability for traditions deemed religions to accommodate and adapt to their sociocultural circumstances. Furthermore, the most fundamental issue for academic acceptance or rejection of the secularization thesis is that it can be argued in vastly different ways depending on how one defines religion. While this may not be an issue for certain scholars of religion, it is perhaps not the most efficient method of fostering academic consensus or ensuring a shared language such that scholars can write on a united front. My modest proposal to begin such a fostering of greater academic consensus is to do away with discussion of 'declines' or 'rises' in religion as a category, but rather, to consciously prefer the language of transformation and change. I will explain the efficacy of this terminology in the next section, in light of academic writing on religion in Canada.

II – The Secularization Thesis and Writing Canadian Religious History

In the context of Canadian religious history, the language of declines and rises in religious history has early precedents. Among the earliest attempts to account for the Christian history of Canada is H. H. Walsh's *The Christian Church in Canada*. Walsh's book tends to favor the political, as well as developments within the church hierarchy, over most other aspects of Canadian church history – especially the laity, and social life as it relates to Christian history. The laity, most often, are used to demonstrate some period of religious *decline* than anything else. There is a common narrative thread that runs, most especially, through the first half of Walsh's book. This involves the assumption of some period of “decline of spiritual ardour,”⁹⁴ a “general religious apathy,”⁹⁵ an “irreligious spirit of the times,”⁹⁶ a “seriously deteriorating... religious situation,”⁹⁷ a “religious lethargy,”⁹⁸ that is then remedied by some denominational authority or another, or at least fought by a powerful personality who makes it their mission to combat this decline in religious life. Writing about such ‘declines’ in religious life sets the stage for the triumphalist tone in which Walsh tends to write about overcoming such degenerations.

Such language has remained prominent in writing about religious history in the Canadian context. David Marshall has been one of the most vocal proponents of the secularization thesis in the writing of Canadian religious history, and has given this understanding of religion a prominent place in his book *Secularizing the Faith*. Quite importantly, Marshall argues the following in the book: “Secularization cannot be viewed

⁹⁴ Walsh, *The Christian Church in Canada*, 67.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Walsh, 76.

⁹⁷ Walsh, 92.

⁹⁸ Walsh, 113.

as a necessary linear, irreversible, or inevitable process. Religious decline may also be halted, briefly, or temporarily reversed in an age of secularization.”⁹⁹ Moreover, Marshall notes that by dealing with “this world,” what was in fact occurring was an indirect process that created this decline: “numerous accommodations were made by the churches and clergy [over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries] to the demands of popular culture, which in subtle ways had the effect of secularizing the faith from within... Compromises were made within the evangelical creed which transformed its message and character to something that was more concerned with this world and more attuned to the tastes and demands of consumer culture.”¹⁰⁰ What this process entails is perhaps not so far from what John Webster Grant was arguing some years earlier,¹⁰¹ in that these accommodations within the church lead to a decline in religion. Religion, Marshall notes, is differentiated from other elements of life by its relationship to the supernatural,¹⁰² and because the process of secularization involves a process of a decreasing reliance on supernatural accounts of how the world works, religion may be declining.¹⁰³ In other words: “Religion became an empty shell; the church’s mission became secularized.”¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Marshall, 18.

¹⁰⁰ Marshall, 19.

¹⁰¹ Grant, *The Church in the Canadian Era*, 185. In Grant’s phrasing, “Canadians slowly realized the anomaly of a situation in which the churches encouraged sobriety and stewardship while the media pressed them mainly to get and spend money. The rituals of the Grey Cup and the Calgary Stampede had an obvious relevance to the new Canada which those of the churches lacked, and the role of the latter increasingly seemed to be that of easing the consciences of the bourgeois as they moved out of the old simple ruralism into a frankly commercial and industrial age.” The bulk of this thesis’ second half will address this relationship between consumer culture and Canadian Prairie religious history.

¹⁰² Marshall, 6.

¹⁰³ Marshall, 7; 18–19.

¹⁰⁴ Marshall, 5.

The language of decline in religion has permeated the literature that addresses Canadian religious history in the twentieth century,¹⁰⁵ and especially writing on Canadian religion from a sociological standpoint.¹⁰⁶ A major focus of Canadian scholars of religion remains the dramatic decline in church attendance and Sunday school attendance over the course of the twentieth century. The first chapter of Reginald Bibby's landmark book *Fragmented Gods*, "The Great Canadian Attendance Drop-Off," introduced these statistics as a central concern of sociologists of religion in Canada, opening the chapter by noting that, while in 1946 about two in three Canadians would be in a church on Sunday, by 1986 that number stood at about one third of Canadians.¹⁰⁷ This decline in church attendance has continued, with weekly church attendance declining from 31% in 1975 to 25% in 2000.¹⁰⁸ To give a further indicator of this remarkable trend, in regards to Roman Catholicism – the largest single denomination in Canada – the numbers of Roman Catholics outside of Quebec saying they never attend church increased from 11.1% in 1986 to 25.3% in 2011,

¹⁰⁵ Several examples: Ramsay Cook, concurring with the argument advanced by scholars like Jeffrey Cox that religion is in decline, argued in his book that "[b]y urging Christians to emphasize social utility and to downplay or ignore doctrine, these advocates of the social gospel were in fact making the church irrelevant," *The Regenerators*, 6. In John Webster Grant's classic study *The Christian Church in the Canadian Era*, he notes a "boom in religion" post-WWII, and that this boom "passed its peak" by the beginning of the 1960s, *The Christian Church*, 160–185.

¹⁰⁶ Reginald Bibby opened *Resilient Gods* with the statement that "[v]iewing religion across Canada these days is like viewing devastation after some tragedy has hit. It's as if a fire of secularization has devastated much of what, through the early 1960s, was a flourishing religious forest... Religion no longer occupies centre stage. Protestantism is no longer a pivotal feature of Anglo culture, while Catholicism is no longer at the heart of Québécois culture. Religion's importance for many other cultural groups has similarly declined as those groups have been increasingly integrated into mainstream Canadian life," *Resilient Gods: Being Pro-Religious, Low Religious, or No Religious in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017), 7–16. Joel Thiessen asserts "a downward trajectory in individual levels of religiosity, which is a consequence of societal secularization that started half a century ago in Canada. Simply put, at least in Canada religion has, is, and will be on the decline," *The Meaning of Sunday*, 176.

¹⁰⁷ Bibby, *Fragmented*, 11–23.

¹⁰⁸ Bibby, *Resilient*, 7–8.

and those who attend at least once per week decreased from 40.7% to 25.2% over the same period.¹⁰⁹

Sunday School enrolment has also suffered a spectacular decline. For example, statistics gathered by Brian Clarke and Stuart Macdonald show that the United Church of Canada, once one of the strongest churches in terms of public influence and membership in the country, saw the numbers of Sunday School attendees drop from over 750,000 at the start of the 1960s to below 80,000 in 2011.¹¹⁰ Similarly, Anglican Sunday School enrolment peaked at over 310,000 in 1958, declining to 44,867 in 2011,¹¹¹ and Presbyterian Sunday School enrolment has withered from 112,157 in 1961 to 17,146.¹¹² These extraordinary trends have captivated Canadian scholars of religion, and given Christianity's prominence in Canadian history, have served as a main buttress to the claim that "religion" has been declining as secularization has occurred.

What are some of the mechanisms that have been understood to be at the center of this process of secularization in the writing of Prairie religious history more specifically? Biographies can provide a telling example of how exactly "religion" is understood, in that the focus on the individual rejection of religion is usually justified by the writer on quite specific grounds. I have previously criticized Anthony Mardiros' writing on William Irvine's understanding of religion,¹¹³ and in the case of Irvine's *rejection* of religion, Mardiros' interpretation is quite interesting. Mardiros argues that most proponents of the

¹⁰⁹ Clarke and Macdonald, 143. It should be noted that the rates in Quebec are even worse than this, though they are best examined separately from the rest of Canada.

¹¹⁰ Clarke and Macdonald, 45–47.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 45.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 47–48.

¹¹³ Connor Thompson, *Toilers & Exploiters, Competition & Co-operation: Social Gospel Discourse in Alberta* (Honors' Thesis, University of Alberta, 2017), 53–60.

social gospel conducted their work through secular institutions (politics, primarily), and that Irvine rejected religion in large part as a result of his readings in natural and social sciences. Belief in the supernatural entirely left Irvine's framework of thought.¹¹⁴ Moreover, the institutions of the Church – such as the churches themselves, and Sunday Schools – “continued to teach children fables about the world as if they were fact, thus producing confusion in their minds and inhibiting the development of a rational outlook.” Ultimately, Mardiros claims that Irvine eventually gave up on the social gospel, and entirely embraced socialist humanism, and “ceased all association with churches of whatever kind and joined the International Humanist and Ethical Union.”¹¹⁵

Such an assessment gives the historian pause for two main reasons. In the first place is the simple error that Irvine did not, in fact, cease association with “churches of whatever kind” later in his life; a salient example can be found in a 1958 letter to J. C. Johnston responding to an invitation to speak to the Calgary Unitarian Church, where Irvine states: “I know of no body of people that I would rather address than the Unitarians of Calgary.”¹¹⁶ Irvine continued to speak at Unitarian churches throughout his time as an MP in Ottawa. Moreover, the assertion is made that the entry of social gossellers (which would include Irvine) into politics meant a rejection of religion – this, again, assumes a radical attachment of religion to the supernatural and particular institutions, rather than ethics, morals, and ideas that are of ultimate concern. Such a position may have been held by Irvine, though again, the archival record challenges this: in some writings that are from the late 1940s or

¹¹⁴ Anthony Mardiros, *William Irvine: The Life of a Prairie Radical* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, Publishers, 1979), 32–33.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Letter, William Irvine to J. C. Johnston, Sept. 16, 1958, M-7508-102 & 141, Calgary Unitarian Church fonds, Glenbow Archives, Calgary, Alberta.

early 1950s, Irvine writes that “Ethics = Religion in its social aspect... Religion in politics is not when a man puts on Religion as a cloak to cover his designs, like a wolf might attire himself in the skin of a sheep so as to plunder the flock unobserved... A Religion that can be left out of politics and economics isn’t worth having.”¹¹⁷

Irvine’s rejection of the church, and the claiming of a more “authentic” core of religion, is similarly present in J. S. Woodsworth’s thought and is similarly regarded as an indirect secularization of Christianity. Woodsworth is perhaps most well-known in Canadian history as the founder of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), but he is also well-known for his somewhat scandalous break from the Methodist Church, which Woodsworth left in disgust after its vocal support for the First World War.¹¹⁸ Allen Mills, in *Fool for Christ*, states that contrary to Woodsworth’s previous attempt to resign from the Methodist Church in 1907 (after which the Church reassigned Woodsworth to the All People’s Mission in Winnipeg), his final break from the Church was premised not on “the religious [reasons] he had advanced in 1907 but rather such obviously political issues as war, pacifism, and the dominance of the church’s affairs by a wealthy business élite.”¹¹⁹ As Mills surmises about the Christianity Woodsworth would end his life with, “social change is not all that Christianity stands for, and Woodsworth failed to confront this fact.” Arguing with Ramsay Cook that the social gospel’s focus on “this world” led to the paradoxical effect of secularizing Christianity, Mills asserts that “Woodsworth helped

¹¹⁷ Acc. No. 83.115, Box 3, File 69A, William Irvine fonds, Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta.

¹¹⁸ On his pacifism during World War One, see Kenneth McNaught, *A Prophet in Politics: A Biography of J. S. Woodsworth* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959), esp. 70–71. On his resignation from the Methodist Church, *ibid*, 82–87. McNaught’s biography can be seen as somewhat celebratory, and a more recent, extended analysis of Woodsworth’s political thought was undertaken: Allen Mills, *Fool for Christ: The Political Thought of J. S. Woodsworth* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

¹¹⁹ Mills, 56.

promote the secularization of his world.”¹²⁰ Even during his time as a minister, Woodsworth repeatedly critiqued the church as an institution, insisting that religion was not a matter of adherence to a church. Writing in a regular column for the *Grain Grower’s Guide* called “Sermons for the Dissatisfied” in 1915, when discussions of church union between Protestant denominations was already underway, Woodsworth argued that the union of churches would not contribute any solution to the broader problems of society. He suggested that, more fundamentally, “[l]et us think in terms of the community – not of the church – and our difficulties will soon disappear.”¹²¹ Woodsworth would repeatedly emphasize that the sacred and secular division was a false one, and that all life should be made sacred. Woodsworth surmised that, upon making this realization, “[c]onventional religion loses its hold upon us; a more profound religion challenges our thought and obedience.”¹²² Similarly, the same article notes that “[e]xclusive religion must more and more give way to an all-inclusive religion. Religion in the future will no longer be identified with the church and Sundays and prayers and priests”.¹²³ Such criticism of the institution of the church and its failure to properly address societal problems was a regular feature of Woodsworth’s writing and would only increase over time, until he left the Methodists. The religion Woodsworth is discussing above, clearly, does not require institutions, traditional authorities, and particular practices in order to be accessed. This is, if one wanted to accept Woodsworth on his own terms, a religion that he would come to *practice* by seeking

¹²⁰ Mills, 254.

¹²¹ *The Grain Growers’ Guide* [hereafter GGG], Aug. 4, 1915, p. 14.

¹²² GGG, July 7, 1914, p. 18.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

politics as a means of social reform and ethical conversion of Canadian society, while rejecting the institution of the church as being capable of executing on such change.

I am not raising these two examples as an insistence that we accept emic¹²⁴ perspectives uncritically. I am raising these examples to suggest, as other scholars have argued,¹²⁵ that the secularization thesis has somewhat clouded our understanding of this period of Canadian religious history. This is because it assumes that a rejection of a normative form of Christianity (i.e. Christianity that involves church attendance at a minimum, if not Sunday schools, ministers, and so on) is, quite often, also a rejection of what we *as historians* assume to be “religion.” It also diverts our attention from the ways in which ideas and ethics normally associated with politics, science, philosophy (including secular philosophies), are constitutive of ideologies we, as scholars, might associate with “religion.” As a simpler matter of actually understanding what historical actors are doing, the question must be asked: if the category “religion” is frequently used when solely Christianity is under discussion, what assumptions regarding Christianity are being transferred onto other traditions deemed religious?

Other assumptions about the decline of religion have colored more general writing on Canadian Prairie history as a whole. Clark Banack, in a recent volume about the influence of Christianity on Albertan politics, has argued that this is among the main

¹²⁴ This distinction between ‘emic’ and ‘etic,’ one that has grown in importance in Religious Studies, is borrowed from anthropology and denotes – most basically – “the participant’s (emic) and the non-participant’s (etic) viewpoints.” The terms themselves are derived from the words phonemic and phonetic – the first referring to the sounds used in language itself, and the latter to the “signs and systems scholars devise to represent and then compare the manner in which the basic phonemic units of a language are produced and pronounced” Russell T. McCutcheon, *Studying Religion: An Introduction* (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2007), 89.

¹²⁵ See Christie and Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity*.

reasons for the dearth of scholarship devoted to religion in Canada: the prediction of “a decline in religious belief generally and the decoupling of religion from political allegiance specifically, has no doubt encouraged this general tendency to overlook or downplay religious influence on historical and contemporary political thought and action.”¹²⁶ This is indeed a vital factor in the academic writing on the Prairies. Roger Gibbins, in *Prairie Politics and Society*, suggests that “[a]cross Canada there has been a progressive decline in the political importance of religion and religious issues... the impact of religious issues, leaders, and organizations on prairie politics has declined precipitously.”¹²⁷ The question must then be asked: what issues, leaders, and organizations are here being designated as religious? Other histories of the Prairies, which either relegate motives deemed religious to the periphery despite their centrality in the motivations of the period, or entirely omit such motivations, are evidence of the tacit acceptance of the secularization thesis, or at a bare minimum, an assumption of a certain nature as to what the category “religion” encapsulates. This category, usually, is separate from politics and economics in particular, if not other spheres of life.¹²⁸

Such assumptions are underpinned by a particular understanding of religion’s nature that has been repeatedly challenged within the field of Religious Studies.¹²⁹ One

¹²⁶ Clark Banack, *God’s Province: Evangelical Christianity, Political Thought, and Conservatism in Alberta* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2016), 9–10.

¹²⁷ Roger Gibbins, *Prairie Politics and Society: Regionalism in Decline* (Scarborough: Butterworth and Company Ltd., 1980), 76–77.

¹²⁸ This is certainly the case with Conway’s *The West*.

¹²⁹ Timothy Fitzgerald, in a debate between himself and Steven Engler, succinctly summarizes this problem by noting that “rhetorical constructions of “the nature of religion” are found (explicitly or implicitly) in philosophy, literary studies, political science, economic science, international relations, sociology, anthropology, and history. Typically in all these disciplines there is little or no critical awareness of the kind of discussion Steven and I are having now in this journal. For most people, religion, like politics, is an *intuitively* deployed concept,” “A Response to Steven Engler, “‘Religion,’ ‘the Secular’ and the Critical Study of Religion” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 40:4 (2011), 444.

tenet of the secularization thesis that is, from the perspective of Religious Studies, indefensible is the assumption that society becomes increasingly “rationalized” via the process of secularization.¹³⁰ While few may say so forthrightly, the implication here is that religion is inherently, or usually, irrational while secular societies are somehow rational. It also assumes that processes such as the greater adoption of the scientific method or scientific thinking, societal differentiation, greater division of labour, and so on are inherently rational processes. One could, perhaps, define “rational” so as to eliminate from it the valuation inherent in the term’s usage (being rational is typically a good thing, being irrational is typically a bad thing), but this would be unlikely to advance any discussion beyond polemics. What this assumption neglects is the fact that things such as science (as opposed to the scientific method), or a tendency towards greater division of labor in society, are also *themselves ideologies*, or constitutive of ideologies, including ones deemed religious. It also fails to grasp the fact that one of the most important, most vital, constitutive elements of traditions deemed religious are their rationality – provided several things are assumed, within the worldview itself is a perfectly normal, rational process of thought.¹³¹

¹³⁰ For example, one of the most popular textbooks used for classes on religion in Canada remains Robert Choquette’s *Canada’s Religions: An Historical Introduction*. As a means of introducing the chapter on secularization, Choquette quotes Bryan Wilson as saying “religion [through the process of secularization] becomes marginal to the operation of the social system, and... the essential functions for the operation of society become rationalized, passing out of the control of agencies devoted to the supernatural,” Mircea Eliade, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Religion* vol. 13 (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), quoted in Choquette, *Canada’s Religions* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2004), 354. See also Bruce, *Secularization*, 27.

¹³¹ For me, the classic summation of this argument is that provided by Jonathan Z. Smith: “...one of the fundamental building blocks of religion [is] its capacity for rationalization, especially as it concerns that ideological issue of relating that which we do to that which we say or think we do” *Imagining Religion*, 57. Similarly, Willi Braun has argued – drawing from Bruce Lincoln’s definition of religion – that religious discourses, in their socially cultivated senses, are “those marked by an orientation to certain topics (the transcendent) that are then handled within a rhetorical framework of self-authorizing credibility

In line with the above cited assertions that scholars study things deemed religious, and why certain things are considered religious under certain conditions, we can see a salient example of the term's ability to exclude certain traditions from historical analysis. In a book chapter from *Religion and Ethnicity in Canada*, David Chuenyan Lai, Jordan Paper, and Li Chuang Paper argue that the Chinese community in Canada is possessed of an "unrecognized religion," that consists of a variety of beliefs and practices that Chinese-Canadians themselves assert to be a non-religion.¹³² There are a number of ways to approach why, historiographically, what Chuenyan Lai et. al. call "Chinese Religion" has been excluded from the writing of Canadian religious history. Most basically, if Canadian scholars assume "belief in the supernatural" as the salient element of religion,¹³³ what the authors call "Chinese religion's" reliance on the supernatural is mixed: ritual behavior devoted to dead ancestors is frequent, but much of "Chinese religion" is based entirely around ethics and moral behavior. If the test of religion involves community behavior,¹³⁴ "Chinese religion" may fail to meet this criterion in that many of its rituals are centered on the home, and the family. Nonetheless, the consequences of the myths, symbols, and rituals of the Chinese worldview are vital for academic analysis, in that they have the potential to inform all realms of life, and certainly, realms of life that would normally be understood as – *public*.

structures" Willi Braun, "Religion" in *Guide to the Study of Religion* ed. Braun and McCutcheon, 11. Again, the rationalizing capacity of such discourses is acknowledged through such an understanding of religion.

¹³² Though the authors note some respond that their religion is "Buddhist" or "Christian." David Chuenyan Lai, Jordan Paper, and Li Chuang Paper, "The Chinese in Canada: Their Unrecognized Religion" in *Religion and Ethnicity in Canada* ed. Paul Bramadat and David Seljak (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 89.

¹³³ As Marshall does: "[t]he notion of the supernatural is religion's essential and defining features" (*Secularizing*, 6).

¹³⁴ A vital element of Clifford Geertz' influential understanding of religion in *Interpretation of Cultures*, which has influenced writing on Prairie religious history – see, for example, Banack, *God's Province*, 11.

Is it possible that other forms of religiosity have been neglected by historians of the Prairies, or narrowly/dubiously interpreted by historians of the Prairies, as a result of assuming the decline of religion, or a particularly restrictive understanding of what religion is? To fully answer such a question would require many assumptions on the part of the analyst, and indeed, would perhaps involve a degree of critical tone that is undue given the many excellent historians who have worked, and are working, in the area of Prairie history. Nonetheless, there are some striking patterns in the historiography. Histories that involve religion on the Prairies overwhelmingly focus on the pre-World War II era.¹³⁵ Considering this in light of the secularization thesis, this can implicitly be taken as speaking to the assumption that religion *is* in decline, and is therefore increasingly irrelevant as a causal element in Prairie history;¹³⁶ it may speak to the assumption that religion is primarily connected to the institution deemed religious, and is therefore, where worth mentioning, primarily a story of religion's decline; it might be taken as an argument that emerging forms of religiosity are an unimportant factor in historical analysis, or at a minimum, difficult for the historian to analyze.

Normative understandings of what religion is can and do contribute to a potentially self-fulfilling vision of Canadian Prairie history that has neglected to address the more

¹³⁵ There are some notable exceptions in the broader Canadian context, certainly, and on the Prairies specific exceptions would include writing on Ernest Manning, Tommy Douglas, and occasionally, denominational and congregational histories offer in-depth elucidation of their post-WWII history. Writing on ethno-religious groups is one notable exception, with Frances Swyripa's *Storied Landscapes: Ethno-Religious Identity and the Canadian Prairies* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2010), Royden Loewen and Gerald Friesen, *Immigrants in Prairie Cities: Ethnic Diversity in Twentieth Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), and Alan Anderson's *Settling Saskatchewan* being important examples. This is far from the general trend, however.

¹³⁶ This may be confirmed by some of the historiographies I have cited in my introduction, in that where events *explicitly* associated with religion are mentioned, they are overwhelmingly focused on the pre-World War II context (such as Christian missions, Louis Riel, the social gospel, William Aberhart's time in politics, etc.)

recent religious history of the region beyond the story of declining adherence to institutions deemed religious. Furthermore, while “institutional religion” could potentially be a useful category of analysis (in the sense that institutions that claim, and are identified, as serving foremostly a religious purpose can be readily demarcated as an area of study), as they are understood in Canadian historical writing, both the adjective “institutional” and the noun “religion” have remained ill-interrogated, and instead, are taken for granted. This, I argue, is a disservice to understanding the region’s history. If religion is merely understood as the exuviae of a society entering the (post)modern world,¹³⁷ then historical writing on the Canadian Prairies is defining religion in such a narrow fashion as to impede analysis at a minimum, or is, I argue, omitting a vast area of the region’s history at a maximum. How these assumptions impede analysis, and omit particular elements of the region’s history, will be further elucidated in the following chapters.

¹³⁷ Or, if one preferred, “a more structurally and socially differentiated industrialized world.”

Chapter Two – Deeming Things Religious: Politics, Religion, and Prairie History

Historians of Prairie religion are writing, now, in a context of Reconciliation. A greater understanding of what exactly is meant by the term religion is among the most important means by which historians can contribute to this process, and has already been engaged by Canadian scholars of religion such as Lori Beaman, who has pointed out that “[a]boriginal spirituality is legally constructed outside the boundaries of religious freedom.”¹³⁸ How could such a state of affairs exist? Beaman draws our attention to the gulf between how “sacred space” is conceptualized by Aboriginal groups, as opposed to the colonizing Christian conceptualizations of such spaces: primarily, *buildings* designate the boundaries of such space for Christian individuals, while sacred space is far from limited to human-made structures in the practice of Aboriginal spirituality.¹³⁹ And yet, the fact that many spaces that are not human made are popularly recognized as sacred for Christians and other traditions identified as religious¹⁴⁰ should draw the historian’s attention to analysis of the *process* by which some things are declared religious while others are not.

While certain examples have frequently highlighted the intersection of religion and politics on the Prairies,¹⁴¹ a common assumption through much of the historiography is that this intersection is unusual if not illegitimate.¹⁴² Historians can take a point from scholars

¹³⁸ Lori Beaman, “Aboriginal Spirituality,” 235–248.

¹³⁹ Beaman, esp. 242–245.

¹⁴⁰ Such as the Cave of Hira, and the broader *Jabel an-Nūr* for Muslims; the *Govardhan Hill* for certain Hindu traditions; the Sea of Galilee or Mount of Temptation for many Christians – other examples almost immediately come to mind.

¹⁴¹ Among the most prominent examples are the extensive writing on the social gospel and the various reforms it influenced; the Manitoba Schools’ Question; debates over Louis Riel’s status as a “prophet.”

¹⁴² As exemplified by historians who assume that social gossellers “abandoned” religion for politics.

working in religious studies by critiquing the assumption that religion and politics are somehow easily separable categories, let alone that religion can be easily understood as separate from the activity of governments.¹⁴³ To conduct such an analysis, the initial assumption that some things are religious while others are not must be sacrificed for the assumption that any thing, whatever it is, may or may not be religious depending on the individual or community/society making such a designation, whether emic or etic. Indeed, the Prairies provide a wealth of such historical examples, *especially* where promises of “religious freedom” are concerned.

Such a model has been variously stated. Historians of religion have repeatedly noted that all things have been invested by humans with religious significance at some time, in some culture.¹⁴⁴ This being the case, one way of navigating this difficulty in assessing what things are deemed religious in a given historical context is to assume a broader category of things held to be important, and how people choose to elevate that thing to the status of being religious. Ann Taves has suggested such a model of treating human interpretations of things deemed religious as involving the study of “special things,” where the scholar acknowledges that “there are lots of special things that do not have

¹⁴³ Talal Asad has done some of the most influential work on critiquing secularism. In the book *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), Asad notes that a growing understanding of how the secular nation state functions can reveal how deeply the supposedly separate categories of religion and politics involve each other (200). Naomi Goldenberg has argued, quite provocatively, that religions can be analyzed as “vestigial states,” which can be interpreted as “the structures of former sovereignties that continue to operate with differing degrees of autonomy within present-day government domains” Naomi R. Goldenberg, “The Category of Religion in the Technology of Governance: An Argument for Understanding Religions as Vestigial States” in *Religion as a Category of Governance and Sovereignty* ed. Trevor Stack, Naomi R. Goldenberg and Timothy Fitzgerald (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2015), 283. While I am skeptical as to how generalizable this theory is, the system of residential schools – as one example – can only be interpreted as just such a relationship, where Canadianizing was equated with Christianizing, in the oft repeated phrase.

¹⁴⁴ See Smith, *Imagining Religion*, esp. 40–44.

religion-like connotations, but... it is quite possible that the more special people consider something to be the more likely they and others are to place it under some religion-like heading (for example, “religious,” “sacred,” “magical,” “superstitious,” et cetera).”¹⁴⁵

The acknowledgement of things held to be special as a more generic category of human valuation begins to grasp the means by which certain things come to be considered *so* special as to be religious, or to be of the highest, deepest, most powerful human concern. Things like language are frequently said to be crucial to one’s religious experience by practitioners of a particular faith,¹⁴⁶ but there is a process by which special things like language, acknowledged as special by others, may nonetheless be deemed an irreligious element of life. In this chapter, I will use this model to analyze elements of Prairie history involving special things and how they are deemed either religious or not. I begin by analyzing some prominent instances where religious matters are separated from political ones in ways that are potentially inimical to historical analysis.

I – Politics and Religion as Categories of Historical Analysis: A Case Study

Lewis H. Thomas, an important historian of Western Canada, contributed an elucidation of Saskatoon’s early history for the 1981 edited volume *Town and City: Aspects*

¹⁴⁵ Taves, *Religious Experience*, 165.

¹⁴⁶ Such as the importance of reading the *Guru Granth Sahib* in Punjabi, precisely because it was the language of the gurus. A similar insistence is made on reading the *Qur’an* in Arabic, where it is frequently asserted that translation of the words cannot capture the original beauty, depth and meaning of the text. For an interesting discussion of the latter and what is meant by this untranslatability, see Talal Asad, *Secular Translations: Nation-State, Modern Self, and Calculative Reason* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), esp. 58–67.

of Western Canadian Urban Development.¹⁴⁷ The article, after offering a periodization of the city and some notes on its development out of the sale of land to colonization societies, enters into a discussion of how and why Saskatoon's early history emerged as it did. Thomas alludes to the broader moral reform movement that characterized both the United States and Canada in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but focuses in on the specific movement that birthed the city: the temperance movement. Thomas then discusses the Temperance Colonization Society, which he notes was formed predominantly by "clergy and members of the Methodist Church." Following this is an outline of the Society's administration, as well as the early settlement of Saskatoon.¹⁴⁸

Surveying the practical elements of organizing civic life at the nascent townsite, Thomas then writes about the extensive efforts that the Temperance Colonization Society undertook to encourage settlement in Saskatoon. A large sell-off of the Society's shares followed after a publicity campaign that "was carried on through the temperance organizations."¹⁴⁹ At the same time, as people began to settle, criticism of colonization company schemes by the Council of the North-West Territories became more heated, and the Temperance Colonization Society itself was attacked for its misleading claim that Saskatoon, as a city, would be entirely temperate: enforcement of this moral imperative was impossible due to the Canadian government's unwillingness to recognize the legality of such restrictions.

¹⁴⁷ Lewis H. Thomas, "Saskatoon, 1883–1920: The Formative Years" in *Town and City: Aspects of Western Canadian Urban Development* ed. Alan F. J. Artibise (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1981), 237–258.

¹⁴⁸ Thomas, 240–241.

¹⁴⁹ Thomas, 242.

Thomas discusses some of the activities that characterized the early years of Saskatoon, such as the founding of Temperance Colony Pioneers' Society, whose membership was widespread throughout the town. The founding of the regular school district (the Protestant Public School District), which usurped the voluntary school the Temperance Colonization Society established in 1884, is also discussed by Thomas, along with the establishment of the Central Saskatchewan Agricultural Society in the town. At this point in the article, Thomas remarks that “[a] discussion of the first period of the history of Saskatoon would be incomplete without reference to religion.”¹⁵⁰

This sudden intervention in an article that many, from the common-sense of the Canadian context, might claim was already discussing “religion” is provocative. In the paragraph that follows, Thomas notes that “the church played an important role in community life,” citing the fact that Methodists predominated in the city, with home mission programs preventing the incursion of a “new sect” in the town. Presbyterians, Anglicans, and Roman Catholics would establish a presence in Saskatoon by the end of the nineteenth century, with Baptist services becoming a regular feature of the town by the start of the twentieth.¹⁵¹ From here Thomas moves the discussion towards other areas of Saskatoon’s early history.

Thus, “religion” is clearly connected with the presence of formal Christian institutions in the form of churches – or, at least, church services. But does this mean that the Temperance Colonization Society is *not*, in some sense, a religious institution despite the attention to its dominance by Methodist clergymen and members of the Methodist

¹⁵⁰ Thomas, 246–247.

¹⁵¹ Thomas, 247.

Church? In fact, the ultimate assessment of Thomas on this matter is not immediately clear. Particularly revealing is that, while perhaps not attempting to be indirect in his phrasing, Thomas predominantly characterizes the temperance movement as a *political* force:

The founders of the community, and many of the early homesteaders, were supporters of one of the reform movements which swept over the United States and Canada during the nineteenth century: this was the temperance movement, the battle for sobriety and for the destruction of the political power of the liquor interests.¹⁵²

Thus, while the *impetus* for the Temperance movement may be multifarious (religious, social, moral, ethical, etc.) its consequences, ultimately, are best characterized as relating to the political realm: it is, in fact, a political struggle between the forces of temperance and the forces of the liquor interests.¹⁵³

There is, of course, no reason to believe that Thomas would not have accepted the characterization of the temperance movement, let alone the Temperance Colonization Society, as simultaneously religious and political in nature. Certainly, Thomas may have accepted other adjectives as being acceptable characterizations of these things. However, is such compartmentalization – describing something as either political or religious – helpful as a means of advancing historical analysis? Despite the extensive influence of Christian ethics on early twentieth-century Western protest, many insist on writing “political histories” that eschew any mention of these ethics.¹⁵⁴ This avoidance of matters

¹⁵² Thomas, 240.

¹⁵³ A similar diagnosis is present in the writing of other historians of the temperance movement: Nancy M. Sheehan’s article “The WCTU on the Prairies, 1886–1930” is sorted within the “Politics” section of *The History of the Prairie West’s* volume *Women’s History*, and itself tends to favor the lobbying, educational, and bureaucratic activities of the WCTU more than analysis of the Christian ethics that underpinned, and were expressed in, these activities. Nancy M. Sheehan, “The WCTU on the Prairies, 1886–1930: An Alberta-Saskatchewan Comparison” in *Women’s History: History of the Prairie West Series, Vol. 5* ed. Wendee Kubik and Gregory P. Marchildon (Regina: University of Regina Press, 2015), 11–30.

¹⁵⁴ Conway mentions the farmers’ goal to establish the “Kingdom of God on Earth” in relation to the agrarian revolt in a single paragraph (*The West*, 57–58), and mentions almost nothing about the social

deemed religious from the history of politics and economics on the Prairies functions as a reflection of the secular assumption that religion is, or should be, separated from these other spheres of life.

Writing on the political history of the Prairies is a substantial historiography in itself, and while I can only address so much of it, the tendency to divide religion and politics in analysis of Prairie history has early, influential, and persistent precedents. W. L. Morton's repeatedly reprinted essay "A Century of Plain and Parkland"¹⁵⁵ says the following about Prairie political culture:

The second element [of civilization in the West] is the apolitical, or even anti-political, character of its public life. This development began in the assertion of the sectional needs of the West; it found fullest expression in Alberta through Social Credit as a medium of expression of religious fundamentalism, sectionalism, and the sense of novelty, of the possibility of new beginnings.¹⁵⁶

The claim that the character of Prairie politics tended to "really" express other things like religious fundamentalism, sectionalism, or a desire for the new, is an implicit assertion about the character and definition of what is properly political. It is also an implicit assertion that religion is a separate matter from politics. Morton writes that, due to Social

gospel's influence on labour revolts from the same period. Kelly Hannan, in his article on the Non-Partisan League, explained the goals and ideology of the Non-Partisan League without any mention of Christian ethics, despite both of the *Alberta Non-Partisan's* founders (William Irvine and Jack Ford) being ardent social gospellers, and one of the first MLAs to represent the Non-Partisan League, Louise McKinney, being a passionate temperance advocate. Kelly Hannan, "The Non-Partisan League in Alberta and North Dakota: A Comparison" *Alberta History* 52:1 (Winter, 2004), 13–23. While all the academic authors allude to either the social gospel or Christian socialism in Donald C. Kerr, ed., *Western Canadian Politics: The Radical Tradition* (Edmonton: NeWest Institute for Western Canadian Studies Inc., 1981), the actual engagement with Christian ethics is minimal.

¹⁵⁵ The paper was first printed in the *Alberta Historical Review* 17 (Spring, 1969), 1–10; printed in *A Region of the Mind: Interpreting the Western Canadian Plains* ed. Richard Allen (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1973), 165–180; printed in *The Prairie West: Historical Readings*, 2nd ed., ed. Francis and Palmer, 27–42.

¹⁵⁶ Morton, "Century," 10.

Credit's eschewing of political revolution and tendency to reforming economic matters, this gave it "its appeal to many religious people."¹⁵⁷ One must ask: what, here, is meant by "religious people?" What are the vast silences hanging over such a designation?

Many movements within the broad history of the Prairies exemplify the ways in which politics and religion have been repeatedly entwined. Certain concepts that are fundamental to Prairie (political) history, such as co-operation, evidence the degree to which Christian discourses work with other discourses to create a concept vital to the politics of the period. The idea of co-operation, which was so influential in the development of a Prairie regional identity, was developed by an appeal to science and politics, certainly, as well as Christian philosophy, ethics, and theology.¹⁵⁸ Within the Prairie churches, co-operation was seen as a primary means of advancing the cause of Christian righteousness and bettering society. The Labour Church movement, for example, has been understood as the earliest seed of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation – its leaders, J. S. Woodsworth and William Irvine, would be early supporters of the Canadian Labour Churches.¹⁵⁹ The extensive involvement of social gospel thinkers and ministers in the

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 177–178. To put the matter perhaps too directly, I cannot imagine Morton writing that such tendencies gave Social Credit its appeal to "economic people," or "political people."

¹⁵⁸ In a single example of an institution crafting the concept of co-operation, one can look at the University of Saskatchewan's lecture series at the Co-operative School, which developed the concept of co-operation as not only a fundamental moral principle but also a law of nature. James A. Sharrard, a professor of philosophy, said the following in one of these lectures: "It is evident, therefore, that social co-operative life is not an exception, but rather a rule or law of nature in animal life; and that it takes on its highest forms as we come to the higher vertebrates... Species which practice co-operation live; those which abandon it die out" R-1556 Box 2 File 3.41 "Co-operation in Nature, ca. 1930," Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan [hereafter PAS], Regina. In the same lecture series, John T. Hull spoke on various reform movements throughout history, saying of Christianity that "[t]he wealthy have never been condemned in harsher language than is used in the New Testament and the early church fathers are explicit about the communism of the body of the faithful" R-1556 Box 2 File 3.53 "Reform Movements and Ideas, ca. 1930" PAS, Regina. Hull later argued that the Protestant Reformation led to two schools of thought: "the one school leading to individualism and capitalism, and the other school leading to socialism and co-operation" R-1556 Box 2 File 3.61 "What to Read in Cooperation, n.d." PAS, Regina.

¹⁵⁹ For this interpretation, see Allen, *Social Passion*, 173–174.

agrarian revolt created a powerful ability for the movement to direct political matters, and instill the ethic of co-operation within society's fabric.¹⁶⁰ While influential clergy were involved in this movement, outside of the clergy, the thought of individuals such as Salem Bland was significant: John A. Maharg, president of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association for over a decade, agreed with Bland about importing Christian ethics into politics and argued that more ministers should enter the political field.¹⁶¹

This idea of co-operation, which was fundamental to the governments that characterized the Prairie provinces of the early twentieth centuries, saw this value as a representation of Christian ethics. Rituals such as UFA Sunday and Grain Growers' Sunday bespeak a resistance to a strict secular separation of "political" from Christian (or, "religious") organizations. The short-lived nature of these would-be traditions also indicates the fact that such an understanding would, increasingly, become the general consensus of the region.¹⁶² While individuals such as William Aberhart and Ernest Manning, and later Preston Manning and Stockwell Day, represent varying degrees to which explicit Christian ethics are championed within political life, a silent consensus that Christian discourse was not welcome in political discourse would slowly develop on the Prairies. This was cemented in Canadian society more broadly by events such as Pierre

¹⁶⁰ See Allen's *The Social Passion*, 203–211; Richard Allen, "The Social Gospel as the Religion of the Agrarian Revolt" in *The West and the Nation: Essays in Honour of W. L. Morton* ed. Carl Berger and Ramsay Cook (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 174–186.

¹⁶¹ *Saskatoon Daily Star*, Dec. 16, 1916, p. 2 "Notable Address on Policies for Rural Advance in Future." Bland was also a speaker at the 1919 annual convention of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association.

¹⁶² The conviction behind Grain Growers' Sunday in particular, which seems to only have been celebrated for a little over half a decade, was nonetheless powerful: the president of the Women's Section of the SGGA asked "Why not a Grain Growers' Sunday Every Sunday?" in an article for the *Saskatoon Daily Star*, May 28th, 1917. At the level of explicit discourse, however, the idea of a strict separation of Church and State has long been a leitmotif of Canadian political debate. See, for an example during the Manitoba Schools Question, Paul Crunican, *Priests and Politicians: Manitoba Schools and the Election of 1896* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 118.

Trudeau's famous statement that the State "has no business in the bedrooms of the nation," a rather radical statement for a Roman Catholic. However, this period of the late-nineteenth and the early-twentieth centuries is probably not a period where, for most of the settlers, "religion" and "politics" were explicitly separated *magisteria*, where it greatly mattered where Christian (religious) discourse ended and political (secular) discourse began. This is made clear by the fact that most of the leaders in the settlement period were Christian leaders; the vision of the society to be made on the Prairies was a Christian vision; the politics of the period were often explicitly modelled on Christian ethics. Moreover, while the Jeffersonian "wall of separation" loomed over some debates, this separation was not, of course, part of Canada's history up to that point.

It should be clear that separation of religious from political discourses as a matter of historical analysis is often difficult, and indeed, that apparently solely "political" movements almost always derive their strength from a variety of ethical, philosophical, and valuative discourses. As such, Thomas' assumption that the discussion of religion can be reserved to churches and that the Temperance movement is, *de facto*, a political movement is flawed. Moreover, it is unclear what this separation of "religion" from "political" considerations regarding the founding of Saskatoon offers in terms of analytic value, or indeed, what the distinction between "religious" and "Christian" offers in terms of analytic value, given that it is only Christian churches under discussion in Thomas' consideration of "religion."

II – Language and Religion as Political Categories During the Settlement Era

Language was a gift from the Creator... It was a way to pass on our laws; the Creator's laws. Taking our language was meant to take away our customs and our culture.¹⁶³

-Langan Goforth

The K'tunaxa people are trying to... express ourselves, using the English language, to the rest of the area around us, to proponents, to the Province, trying to get them to understand that... when we say "sacred place," we're meaning it in the same way that you understand "sacred." Or how do you understand "sacred?" What is sacred for you?

-Joe Pierre, Nasu?kin (Leader) of the ?aq'am Community, K'tunaxa Nation¹⁶⁴

In the previous section, I have attempted to challenge the historical understanding of Christian thought in the founding of a major Prairie city, and have presented evidence to challenge such a treatment. I want to argue more broadly, in light of my case study above, for a reconsideration of the ways in which the analytic categories of "language" and "religion" are used in historical analysis of political developments on the Prairies. In this next section, I will attempt to consider these two broad categories as "political" rather than, so to speak, "natural" categories. That is, I will look at the ways in which political actors on the Prairies have considered and framed "language" and "religion," rather than assuming their "natural" status as things within the historical period. While Canada's status as a secular government is peculiar relative to other states such as the United States or France, the consideration of secular philosophy in the academic study of religion has been

¹⁶³ Langan Goforth, guest lecture delivered in RLST 267 (Religion in Canada) course, Nov. 14, 2018.

¹⁶⁴ Joe Pierre, *Jumbo Wild*, Directed by Nick Wagoner, Sweetgrass Productions, 2015.

a crucial area of scholarly focus in recent years, and has much to offer historians on the Canadian Prairies as a means of grappling with this area of its history.

Settlement on the Prairies meant a promise of religious freedom, implicitly in some cases and explicitly in others. Many of the settlers that arrived on the Prairies were determined to maintain their identity, among the most famous of such cases being the Ukrainian settlers – particularly those of Ukrainian Catholic ancestry. Ukrainian Catholics saw themselves as an ethno-religious group, and indeed, tended to see others as ethno-religious individuals. So strong was Catholicism tied to their sense of identity that becoming a Protestant was understood as denying one's Ukrainian ethnicity.¹⁶⁵ Ukrainian Catholics were well known by Roman Catholics in the early settlement period to be rather truculent when confronted with demands to content themselves with Roman authorities; they were entirely determined to have priests of the Ukrainian rite overseeing their Catholic practice. Even Redemptorist Priests, who attempted to learn Ukrainian in Galicia before venturing to Canada, were rejected by the Ukrainian settlers because “they were not Ukrainian, they did not have full command of the language, and they were of the Latin rite.” Roman Catholics that attempted to maintain a tight grip over the entire Catholic community on the Prairies were derisively referred to as “Latinizers.” The insensitivity of

¹⁶⁵ Vivian Olender, “The Cultural Implications of Methodist Missions” in *Continuity and Change: The Cultural Life of Alberta's First Ukrainians* ed. Manoly Lupul (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, 1988), 224. In seeing others as ethno-religious individuals, Olender quotes an incident where a Ukrainian woman remarked that someone could not be a Russian because “he is a Baptist.” One Ukrainian folk story well reflects this derision for Protestant missionaries. In the story, two preachers from “some new-fangled church” visited an ill Ukrainian man: “They spoke at length against incense-burning and against the veneration of Christ's mother, until they got hoarse. Then they stood up, one on each side of the patient's bed and asked the patient: “Well, how do you feel now?” The patient glanced at both of them and said: “Christ might have felt the same way on the cross, between the two robbers”” Bohdan Medwidsky, “Three Types of Ukrainian Folk Tales in Canada” in *Continuity and Change* ed. Lupul, 176.

the Roman Catholic clergy to Ukrainian demands ultimately created inroads for proselytization by other churches and, indeed, an attempt by the Ukrainian Bishop of the United States to bring Prairie Ukrainian Catholics into his fold.¹⁶⁶ What this demonstrates is a profound intertwining, at least in the early settlement period, of particular languages with Ukrainian ethnicity and a distinctive Christian practice.

Explicit promises of religious freedom were made to certain ethno-religious groups willing to settle on the Prairies. James A. Smart, Deputy Minister of the Interior at the turn of the twentieth century, wrote that the Hutterites “will not be molested in any way in the practise of their religious services and principles, as *full freedom of religious belief prevails throughout the country.*”¹⁶⁷ A similar promise was made to Mennonite settlers on the Prairies, with the Dominion government promising in 1873 that “The fullest privelege [sic] of exercising their religious principles is by Law afforded to the Mennonites, without any kind of molestation or restriction whatever, and the same privelege extends to the educations of their children in schools.”¹⁶⁸ Such promises of freedom from persecution for their religious beliefs were, of course, an enticement to bring groups such as the Hutterites, Mennonites, and Doukhobors to Canada. Nonetheless, despite the fact that particular languages were vital to how these groups understood their religious practice, the ability to maintain a particular language within the group was severely tested – especially where the

¹⁶⁶ Stella Hryniuk, “Pioneer Bishop, Pioneer Times: Nykyta Budka in Canada” in *Prophets, Priests and Prodigals* ed. McGowan and Marshall, 149–153.

¹⁶⁷ J. A. Smart, Deputy Minister, Department of the Interior, to W. F. McCreary, commissioner of Immigration, Winnipeg, 27 October 1899, National Archives of Canada, RG 76, vol. 173 (microfilm reel C7330), quoted in William Janzen, *Limits on Liberty: The Experience of Mennonite, Hutterite, and Doukhobor Communities in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), p. 144n16. Emphasis mine.

¹⁶⁸ Dept. of Agriculture, Immigration Branch, Ottawa, “Mennonite Treaty,” July 23, 1873, Hon. W. M. Martin papers, Section I.54 “Education: Mennonite Schools, 1916–1921,” R.7.2., PAS, Regina.

role of schools in the community was concerned. Often, Hutterite settlers were challenged by English Canadians on their ability to maintain their own schools, the hope being that the public school would eventually break up their way of life and result in assimilation into the host society. This, many argued, would be done through the use of English and the breakdown of the German School in which Hutterite children were raised.¹⁶⁹ Similar pressures were levelled at the Mennonites – some Old Colony Mennonites found the restriction on the use of German in schools so debilitating that they fled to Paraguay and Mexico rather than live under the legal restrictions of the Prairie Canadian context.¹⁷⁰ Such examples illustrate the importance of the German language to these particular ways of life, and its connection with the Christianity being practiced.

French Catholicism is widely recognized by historians as being one of the most important forces in the history of Canada post-colonization. Certainly, on the Prairies, it has been influential and has been targeted through the political apparatuses of the region. Raymond J. A. Huel argued that French Catholics on the Prairies saw the preservation of this identity as a means of extending Christian France past 1789, that *la survivance* was “a struggle to preserve the French language in order to better preserve the Roman Catholic faith, which for these believers was the true channel of grace and salvation.”¹⁷¹ Edward J. Hart concurs with this assessment, noting the degree to which the clergy sought to “lead... the community in the maintenance of their French outlook” by means of regular social

¹⁶⁹ This was the hope of schoolteachers involved with the Hutterites – see Robert J. MacDonald, “Hutterite Education in Alberta: A Test Case in Assimilation” in *Western Canada Past and Present* ed. A. W. Rasporich (Calgary: McClelland and Stewart West Ltd., 1975), esp. 137–140.

¹⁷⁰ See Janzen, 88–115, esp. 94–98.

¹⁷¹ Raymond J. A. Huel, “*Gestae Dei Per Francos*: The French Canadian experience in Western Canada” in *Visions of the New Jerusalem* ed. Smillie, 50. See also “French-Speaking Bishops and the Cultural Mosaic in Western Canada” in *Religion and Society in the Prairie West*, 55–56.

activities organized within the French-speaking parish. Hart emphasizes the desire among the clergy to intertwine Catholic and French identity, quoting Bishop Langevin as saying “nous avons des traditions de foi et de langue, conservons-les et pour les conserver il faut marcher avec notre clergé la main dans la main.”¹⁷² In the case of Saskatchewan, William Calderwood highlights the degree to which the prejudices of the province were ignited against the *Fransaskois* by the fact that this culture was supported by “the twin pillars of the French language and the Roman Catholic religion.”¹⁷³ This desire to preserve the French language as a means of preserving proper Catholic faith was especially pronounced on the Prairies due to the imminent threat by the growing English community – including Irish Catholics, who the clergy also saw as threatening to this goal.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, the Manitoba Schools’ Question was understood by French Catholics from the outset as being an imposition of Protestant Schools, under the guise of common schools, upon the province’s Catholics.¹⁷⁵ Bishop Vital Grandin saw preservation of the French language as a way to preserve the Catholic faith, and depicted “the school question as a religious war where French was persecuted to annihilate the Catholic religion.”¹⁷⁶ While the French language was not, in itself, understood to be a religious thing, it was nonetheless understood

¹⁷² *L’Ouest Canadien*, Sept. 28, 1899, quoted in Edward J. Hart, “Role of the Elite in the Franco-Albertan Community” in *Essays on Western History* ed. Lewis H. Thomas (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1976), 163.

¹⁷³ William Calderwood, “Pulpit, Press and Political Reactions to the Ku Klux Klan in Saskatchewan” in *The Twenties in Western Canada: Papers of the Western Canadian Studies Conference, March 1972* ed. S. M. Trofimenkoff (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1972), 191.

¹⁷⁴ This argument is presented in the interesting analysis offered by Brian E. Rainey on the *Fransaskois*, who apparently saw Irish Catholics as essentially a threatening ‘near Other’: “[The *Fransaskois*] were surrounded by enemies – English, Freemasons, Orangemen, Communists – but none were, in their eyes, more insidious than the Irish” “The Fransaskois and the Irish Catholics: An Uneasy Relationship” *Prairie Forum* 24:2 (Fall, 1999), 216. See also Huel, “French-Speaking Bishops,” esp. 58–63.

¹⁷⁵ See Wilfrid Laurier’s summation of this issue in Parliament, Crunican, *Priests and Politicians*, 198–201.

¹⁷⁶ Manoly R. Lupul, *The Roman Catholic Church and the North-West School Question: A Study in Church-State Relations in Western Canada, 1875–1905* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 145.

as being a crucial element of the religious identity of French-Catholic Prairie citizens and a carrier of that identity.

As demonstrated above, there is widespread agreement within the historiography about the intertwining of the French language and the French-Catholic faith, that the two were perceived by historical actors English and French-speaking as being vital to one another.¹⁷⁷ To my knowledge, the ways in which Prairie Canadian governments separated language issues from religion has been addressed primarily in terms of the Manitoba Schools' Question,¹⁷⁸ where a rich historiography has attested to the intertwining of French-Catholic identity and English-Protestant identity.¹⁷⁹ However, on the Prairies, this separation of language from religion – that is, the compartmentalization of “language” from a political/legal category declared “religion” – was a historical process. The dramatic episode of the Manitoba Schools' Question aptly illustrates this, where despite an

¹⁷⁷ This consensus has been nuanced, especially in the twenty-first century, by the ways in which this understanding of language's relationship to religion has been taken advantage of as a matter of mission work and conversion. This intertwining of language and conversion were seen as indispensable from the earliest days of Christian settlement on the Prairies, as is exemplified in its most wicked form by the activities of residential schools (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada's Residential Schools: The History, Part 1, Origins to 1939: The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* Vol. 1 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), see esp. 85). More specifically related to the matter of French and Catholicism, Anne Gagnon has offered a striking analysis of Presbyterian efforts to convert French Catholics by targeting usage of the French language in order to decrease the influence of Catholicism through school-homes, in the article “Qui perd sa foi, perd sa langue?” School-homes were established by the Presbyterians for these French Albertans which included practical training along with daily religious and English language instruction. The eventual intermarriage of these students was encouraged as they became shunned by their Roman Catholic counterparts, thereby leading to English rather than French tending to be passed onto the next generation (Anne Gagnon, “‘Qui Perd Sa Foi, Perd Sa Langue’?: The Birth and Decline of a French Protestant Community in Alberta, 1916–1940” *Prairie Forum* 37 (Fall 2012), 14–15). While conversion from Catholicism to the Presbyterian faith was not widespread, the ability to convert Roman Catholics to Protestantism at all was attributed to the employment of English. As Reverend Duclos, who ministered to this Albertan mission, stated: “Loyalty is best instilled into the mentality of the foreigner by education with the leaven of the Gospel in it, and imparted in the language that reaches the heart” (Rev. Duclos, “Education and the Gospel,” *The Missionary Messenger*, Vol. XI, No. 8 (Sept. 1924) p. 245 quoted in *Ibid*, 14).

¹⁷⁸ Which, of course, was partially determined by the assumptions and prejudices of the BNA Act as well as the Ontarian immigrants who were very influential in establishing early Prairie institutions.

¹⁷⁹ See, for example, Crunican's “overture” to the beginning of the school's question proper, 8–10.

understanding of French and Catholicism, and English and Protestantism, as being deeply intertwined, language and religion were at the political level officially said to be separate issues. The following exchange is symptomatic of such an understanding:

Hon. Mr Ives – “The remedial legislation [regarding the Manitoba Schools Question] would concern the minority alone.”

McCarthy – “Well, it depends upon what you mean by concern. The English-speaking citizens are concerned in seeing the French learn English.”

Quimet – “That is to cease to be French and Catholics.”

McCarthy – “Not to cease to be Catholics but to cease to be French. That is what Dr. Bryce mentions as desirable to have a homogenous people.”¹⁸⁰

This is despite the fact that, quite famously, the speech at Portage la Prairie by D’Alton McCarthy and Joseph Martin involved the proclamation that Catholicism *and* French were being eradicated from Manitoban education.¹⁸¹ Another dramatic episode that illustrates this separation is the Saskatchewan campaign for “English only” in education.¹⁸² At multiple points in this debate, it was argued that language is *not* a religious issue. Charles A. Dunning, who would eventually become Premier of Saskatchewan, in his speech on the amendment of the School Act to make English the sole language of instruction in schools, makes the striking point that “[t]he only school rights safeguarded in the British North America Act are the rights of religious minorities. The provinces have absolute power over

¹⁸⁰ *The Brandon Mail*, Mar. 14, 1895, p. 6

¹⁸¹ Friesen, *Canadian Prairies*, 215–218. As Friesen summarizes Martin’s speech in particular, Martin “matched McCarthy’s fervour by promising to abolish the official use of French in Manitoba’s legislative publications and to terminate the dual educational system which permitted Roman Catholics to operate their own tax-supported schools separate from and independent of the Protestant section” (216).

¹⁸² Relating to the Manitoba question and Anglophone bigotry towards the French, there is an abundance of correspondence to W. M. Martin, Premier of Saskatchewan during the peak of the Saskatchewan “English-only” controversy, arguing that French is a foreign language and/or that English should be the sole language of instruction in – especially – elementary school education. The government, nonetheless, conceded some protections to French in the amendment to the School Act that resulted from the controversy. Hon. W. M. Martin papers, Section I.53 “Education: Language Questions, 1916–1922,” R.7.2., PAS, Regina.

the language in the schools.”¹⁸³ Language and religion, as a matter of Prairie politics, had effectively become separated in Saskatchewan at this time as a matter of government policy despite something of a laxity towards enforcing English as the sole language of instruction in schools up to this point. On the Prairie region, this debate exemplifies an important moment where both language and religion are crafted as political categories.

The simple effort to expand a patriotically British society should, of course, be an important consideration when looking at how language and religion were thought about during the settlement period. As Rev. Principal Lloyd, of the Clergy Training College in Saskatoon, so forcefully put it: “...Imperialism is not a thing to be bandied about between politicians of varying opinions, but a highly religious thing, a Divinely-provided means for bringing the world nearer to the Throne of Grace.”¹⁸⁴ This type of effort to expand the British Empire is one manifestation of the broader common sense amongst many Protestant denominations that to Canadianize non-English Protestant immigrants or Aboriginal groups was to Christianize them. In order to fit these groups within the English Canadian identity that was being pressed for on the Prairies, they had to be a particular type of Christian and English speaking.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ “The Language Question Before the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan: Official Hansard Report of the Debate on Bill No. 31 “An Act to Amend the School Act” Dec. 19th, 1918,” (Prince Albert: Le Patriote de l’Ouest, 1919), Hon. C. A. Dunning’s address, 8.

¹⁸⁴ *Diocese of Qu’Appelle*, Spring 1913, Occasional Paper No. 110, p. 16–17, R-705 Box 1, PAS, Regina.

¹⁸⁵ For some more focused studies on how the extremes of this type of attitude influenced early Prairie politics, see the studies of Raymond J. A. Huel, “J. J. Maloney: How the West was saved from Rome, Quebec, and the Liberals” in *The Developing West: Essays on Canadian History in Honor of Lewis H. Thomas* ed. John E. Foster (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1983), 219–242; Chris Kitzen, “Preaching Purity in the Promised Land: Bishop Lloyd and the Immigration Debate” in *Prairie West* ed. Francis and Kitzen, 291–312. While there are several interesting overlaps between Maloney and Bishop Lloyd, particularly notable for my current discussion were the accusations that Premier James Gardiner in Saskatchewan was Pro-Catholic (if not “a puppet of Rome and Quebec,” in Maloney’s understanding), and diluting British ideals by means of immigration and “foreign” influences (see Kitzen, 306–307; Huel, 226–229).

If one's conditioning to their social world – and their orientation to matters relating to religion, in particular – is tempered by one particular language,¹⁸⁶ which is then either restricted or reconfigured as to the legal legitimacy of its usage (i.e. where/when it may be spoken), the consequences are undoubtedly quite severe. It is true that multilingualism can have the effect of increasing or deepening one's connection to a variety of aspects of one's life. However, coerced employment of a language, or the act of limiting the usage of a particular language, is another matter entirely. Additionally, the Prairies are quite well-known for English dominance over time rather than bilingualism or multilingualism as factors such as exogamous marriage and greater assimilation into the dominant Anglophone society became more pronounced. In the Canadian case, “numerous studies of language shift in Canada have shown [that] exogamous marriages do not lead to bilingualism but to English unilingualism.”¹⁸⁷ The phenomenon of second and third generation decline in usage of foreign languages is also well demonstrated.¹⁸⁸ This has begun to change with continued efforts at second language programs in public schools and universities, but over the course of the twentieth century, these trends are clear.

So far as I am aware, in the historiography of the so-called “Language Question” debates in the Saskatchewan Legislature during the 1910s,¹⁸⁹ little if any attention has been

¹⁸⁶ Talal Asad neatly summarizes *habitus*' use for understanding religion as follows: “The concept of *habitus* invites us to analyze the body as an assemblage of embodied aptitudes... the possibility is opened up of inquiring into the ways in which embodied practices (including language in use) form a precondition for varieties of religious experience,” *Genealogies of Religion*, 75–77.

¹⁸⁷ Gagnon, 15.

¹⁸⁸ See Loewen and Friesen, *Immigrants in Prairie Cities*, 134–137. To look at detailed data on German language usage in Saskatchewan, Alan B. Anderson's statistics in *Settling Saskatchewan* suggest that use of German amongst German-origin groups in Saskatchewan has declined from 73% in 1941 to 42.2% in 1971, though Anderson points out that “only about 10% were actually still speaking German at home” (133).

¹⁸⁹ See, for example, Alan Anderson, *Settling Saskatchewan*, 140–146; Kurt Tischler, “The German Canadians in Saskatchewan With Particular Reference to the Language Problem, 1900–1930” (MA Thesis,

drawn to the important question of how exactly language was divorced from the idea of “religion” as an issue. Are the historical actors merely fooling themselves into thinking that language is not a religious issue? Was this truly just a maneuver for an essentially “religious” act – i.e. Protestant politicians eradicating Catholicism by eradicating the French language, among other “foreign” elements such as Mennonites? Or is this simply a particular Protestant position imported into political action – that language is indeed, *not* a religious issue because it is the personal connection to God and Scripture, regardless of language, that matters? The question might seem naïve at first glance, but when contrasted to the degree to which the conflicts between French Catholics and English Protestants have been taken for granted, the question becomes more pressing. When an extensive body of scholarly literature can assume that the French language and Catholicism are intimately connected, and the English language and Protestantism (or, more specifically, Anglicanism, Methodism and Presbyterianism) are intimately connected, the question must be asked by historians: why would provincial governments adopt the position that language is suddenly an issue entirely separate from religion?

University of Saskatchewan, 1978). Clinton O. White has written extensively on, especially, the context surrounding this subject – see, for example, “Pre-World War I Elementary Educational Developments among Saskatchewan’s German Catholics: A Revisionist View” *Prairie Forum* 18:2 (Fall 1993), 171–196; “Pre-World War I Saskatchewan German Catholic Thought Concerning the Perpetuation of Their Language and Religion” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 26:2 (Jan. 1994), 15–46; “The German Catholic Parochial Schools of Saskatchewan’s St. Peter’s Colony, 1903–1934: Their Teachers, Curriculum and Quality of Instruction” *Prairie Forum* 24:1 (Spring 1999), 65–90. This area of historical writing has an interesting series of disagreements, with White in particular offering a sweeping critique of previous historian’s interpretations of the use of German in German Catholic-majority schools by arguing, and demonstrating through the weight of overwhelming empirical data, that German Catholic immigrants to Saskatchewan tended to prefer public schools and, quite often, English instruction. Nonetheless, Anderson, for example, argues that quite often the “public schools... were virtually indistinguishable from the separate schools insofar as they were definitely oriented toward German Catholic traditions and used the German language extensively, while other public schools probably used some German and still others possibly some German” (141).

It is not my intention to devote the remainder of this chapter to pursuing this inquiry, but only to point to some of the important questions it may answer. In the first place, it places the focus of the historian on the question of *why* certain things are declared religious while others are not, and draws our attention to who benefits and who does not benefit from such a designation. It also betrays the fact that identifying language as being either religious or not is not a transparent designation, in contrast to – to use a classic example – declaring a walnut a walnut rather than a pecan on the basis of its possessing petals.¹⁹⁰ This does not mean that, from the legal perspective, designating language as not falling under the legal parameters of freedom of religion is inherently an undue hardship or anything of the sort.¹⁹¹ I am merely arguing that language can be a religious thing for practitioners, and that historians should be attentive to the means by which, and the motivations for, its declaration as a religious *or* non-religious part of life.

I suspect that such an investigation into how language became separated from religion as a matter of its “essential” content on the Prairies would involve at least some of the typical ways in which scholars of religion have elucidated how “religion,” as a category, has been constructed, whatever cynical subterfuge may be attributed to the

¹⁹⁰ Smith, *Imagining Religion*, 1–18. Some of the considerations of Asad on the ritual non-translatibility of the *Qur'an* are helpful here: the concerns over translating the *Qur'an* stem from “a concern about secularization, a worry that abstracted intellectual meanings of the text will displace its relation to the reading/reciting/religious self. It assumes that certain messages cannot be separated from the medium because *how* the medium comes to inhabit the subject and engage her is crucial to what they mean” (*Secular Translations*, 76). Is such an understanding so different from, say, the Hutterite and Mennonite devotion to the German language as an element of religious life? Or even, for the French Catholics most devoted to preserving both pillars of French-Catholic identity, rituals as basic as prayer in the French language? One of the points Asad is making (that I would agree with) is that it is not, in the case of the *Qur'an*, Arabic language itself that is sacred, but the way certain messages are delivered in certain languages and the way they structure particular forms of experience that are deemed religious. This analysis, I argue, is analogous to some of the cases I have discussed above.

¹⁹¹ Certainly, under the policy/social philosophy of Multiculturalism these questions become much different than the early-twentieth century context I am primarily concerned with in this case study.

political games surrounding the Manitoba Schools' Question or Saskatchewan's own language controversy. Religion's status as a profoundly personal aspect of life, that is private and based on choice, is undoubtedly imported into Canada through – especially – English settlers influenced by British secular thought, and American settlers influenced by Jeffersonian-Enlightenment views about freedom of religion and what that entails. Religion's status as being profoundly a matter of belief, and thus, in some sense, divorced from practical external action – these types of debates and understandings were also imported onto the Prairies by American immigrants, perhaps most especially.¹⁹² Earlier in history, one must consider the separation of one's "religious" identity from their national identity – perhaps the *sine qua non* of secularism as a political ideology – which undoubtedly involves language becoming an element predominantly of one's national/regional/ethnic identity rather than one's religious identity. Other such debates and positions could further elucidate how language and religion were separated on the Prairies as a matter of religious freedom.

I am not arguing that these questions can be asked separately from the national picture – certainly, the fact that Ontarian immigrants were so influential in these debates is the first obvious point to refute such a suggestion. What I am arguing is that the Prairie settlement process offers an interesting window into *how* things are declared religious or

¹⁹² While not directly addressing any of these debates, some of the considerations in Talal Asad, "Thinking About Religion, Belief, and Politics," 36–57 are useful for thinking about how this argument was carried out – especially Asad's observation that, to modern thinkers of secularism, "belief cannot – in the sense of impossibility – be coerced. That is the core of Locke's theory of toleration and one part of the genealogy of secularism... Therefore – so the argument went, and so the argument still goes – force employed by civil government should be directed only at securing objective public interests: the protection of life, limb, and property" (43). As such, the subjugation of a particular language's usage, from the state perspective, cannot be a matter of religious freedom: the beliefs themselves, because beliefs are private and freely held, are not impacted by language. The usage of English on the Prairies, as a *lingua franca* of the region, was often framed in the above debates as an "objective public interest."

not, and for what reasons, and what the consequences of such a designation are. These questions are pressing, and the debates especially tumultuous, in the context of settlement. To return to the context of Reconciliation, the painful paradox of having to designate certain practices as being religious or not to avoid their subjugation by the government – for example, declaring the powwow a “secular” dance, lest it suffer the same fate as the banned Potlatch and Sundance – is one instance of how the declaration of something as religious or not may have severe consequences as a matter of public policy.¹⁹³

III

Usually, the sensitivity to the connection between language and religion in the Prairie historiographical context has been most thoroughly attended to by scholars of ethnicity or Aboriginal history. More generally, however, the connection between experience of one’s religious beliefs through a particular language has been thoroughly addressed by Religious Studies scholars. This speaks to an inconsistent quality of Prairie historiography, and the inattentiveness with which historians have addressed the issue of how and why certain things are deemed religious, or not, in certain circumstances. Despite the degree to which *French* Catholicism is stressed by historians, and a distinct link between the French language and Catholic identity is understood by historians as a matter of religious repression in the Manitoba Schools’ case, little consistent attention to language itself as religious or irreligious phenomenon is apparent in the Prairie historiography. Other

¹⁹³ Marc Fonda, “On the Origins and Spread of Pan-Indian Spirituality in Canada” *Studies in Religions/Sciences Religieuses* 45:3 (2016), 312.

processes of deeming things religious tend to be little better addressed: whether something is religious or not tends to be taken for granted.

Thus, the attempt to compartmentalize either “political” or “religious” histories of the Prairies may be, in the final analysis, a kind of Morton’s fork: to write political histories necessarily involves moral, ethical, even *theological* debates; to write the history of traditions deemed religious solely by reference to institutions such as churches is perhaps possible, but must necessarily employ a definition of religion that would discount the more general social effects of such institutions, and thus, be rather meager historical analysis. Where language has successfully been separated from religion, it should *not* be reduced to a simplistic reading of the usage of political power: it is *also* the establishment of a common sense, a diffuse hegemonic perspective, on the region. Writing the history of the Prairies requires an attentiveness to this process of identifying some things religious and others not, and understanding how such categories come to function within Prairie life.

Chapter Three – The Weight of Years: Symbol, Ritual, and Place in Cultivating the Prairie Myth

Roger Gibbins, in the introduction to *Prairie Politics and Society: Regionalism in Decline*, opens his book with a personal anecdote about his surprise at the state of Prairie society upon his 1973 arrival in Calgary, having lived in British Columbia most of his life. Raised on picturesque expectations of what the Prairies consisted of, his arrival in Calgary was a shock, where he found a metropolis composed of skyscrapers, suburbs, and characterized by “a white-collar, technocratic economy.”¹⁹⁴ This initial comment sets up Gibbins’ engagement of how a distinct regionalism has tended to decline during – especially – the post-World War II era, focusing analysis on the electoral behavior of the Prairie provinces. Ultimately, it is expected that this hard data might dispel the romantic imaginings Gibbins himself succumbed to before moving to Alberta:

Discussions of prairie regionalism, and particularly of western alienation, have too frequently relied upon evidence that is both quizzical to non-westerners and evasive of empirical documentation... [it is not] my intention to ignore the attitudinal and mythological aspects of prairie regionalism. However, attitudinal data, whether impressionistic or empirically garnered, provides an inadequate base for the examination of regional patterns in political behavior, particularly when such an examination is concerned with the character of change over time... it is hoped that some of the mythology and even romance that clouds discussions of western Canadian politics in general, and of western alienation in particular, can be stripped away through the use of simple empirical data.¹⁹⁵

The thesis of Gibbins’ book is acknowledged from the outset as debatable, and it should be said that the continued sentiment of western alienation, the rise of the Reform

¹⁹⁴ Gibbins, 1.

¹⁹⁵ Gibbins, 12–13.

party in the 1990s, and the inflammation of western separatist sentiment post-Gibbins' book, all present potential challenges to this book's main thesis.¹⁹⁶

Nonetheless, do not historians of the Prairies implicitly, or in some cases explicitly, assent to Gibbins' analysis of the region? Gibbins makes clear perhaps the most important feature of the region's transformation in its character: "[a]s most prairie residents adopt an urban lifestyle little different from that experienced by the residents of Toronto, Vancouver, or Hamilton, the West is rapidly losing its regionally distinctive rural character."¹⁹⁷ A more specific argument has been offered by Paul Phillips, where he states that the Prairies do not constitute an economic or political region any longer, preferring instead to think of "western" and "eastern" prairies, with the western prairies characterized by a reliance on the energy economy and the eastern prairies characterized by a reliance on the agriculture, manufacturing, and hydroelectric industries.¹⁹⁸ Is not the greater influence of a consumer culture on the Prairies, populated by multinational corporations and indistinct building forms, by a diminishing of the region's reliance on agrarian economics, by a greater urbanization and radically declining number of people directly engaged in agriculture, by a greater general affluence – is this not all evidence of a decline in regionalism best exemplified by a continued focus by historians on the settlement era, and

¹⁹⁶ Gibbins qualifies and clarifies some elements of his argument in this very book, with a post-script on the 1980 election (217–219), as well as consideration and nuances in the book's sixth chapter (195–216). See, for a consideration of the above-mentioned episodes in Prairie history, Conway, *The West*, esp. chpts. 8, 9, 10.

¹⁹⁷ Gibbins, 70; this reading is confirmed, but qualified, in Friesen, *Canadian Prairies*, 418–419.

¹⁹⁸ Paul Phillips, "Canada and the West: Then and Now" in *The Prairie Agrarian Movement Revisited* ed. Murray Knuttila and Bob Stirling (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 2007), 14–15.

a quite meagre focus on the dimensions of the “New West” beyond political and economic factors? In short, is the *culture* of the region, then, not worth studying as a regional unit?

I will offer some thoughts on these questions, most especially as it concerns factors that engage the beliefs and practices of the Prairies – including those that would normally be deemed religious. However, the main thrust of my argument is directed at analyses of the “New West” that assert the primacy of political or economic factors, and particularly statistical data, as a means of understanding the changes in the Prairie region’s culture.¹⁹⁹ While most academics making such arguments qualify their use of empirical data – as Gibbins does – nonetheless, as historians of the region, I argue that it must be acknowledged that the “New West,” in many ways, still *sees* itself as a region. The empirical data and the fantasy of the Prairies are still regularly confused, or at a minimum, the fantasy of the Prairie region still maintains a strong grasp over how life is lived and understood within the region. I argue for a recognition of the fact that where historians think about the continued importance of “images of the west,” this analysis must acknowledge the fact that the Prairies are a neoliberal consumer culture; where historians analyze the “New West,” it must be recognized that political and economic analysis should consider the *ideology* of the region at a general level. Attempts to dispel the myth of regionalism have failed to actually engage the *myth* of regionalism; that is, the “deeply true” elements of this myth.

Myths have received a great deal of attention amongst scholars of religion. Much of the interest in myths as a category has centered around the idea of myth as an element

¹⁹⁹ The subtitle to Friesen’s chapter on “The New West” in *The Canadian Prairies* is “Political and Economic Change.”

of discourse that structures basic understandings of reality, a narrative that is deeply true and possessed of a strong explanatory power. Bruce Lincoln has defined myths, for example, as being distinct from fables, legends, and histories in that they make truth-claims, and have “both credibility and *authority*.” This understanding of myth is advantageous for purposes of analysis, especially amongst historians, in that it focuses not just on the content of the narrative, but on “the claims that are made by their narrators and the way in which those claims are received by their audience(s).”²⁰⁰ Such an ability to analyze the claims of narrators and/or the reception of the audience is well within the grasp of the historian of the Prairies.

What may be referred to as the “myth of the Prairies” is, in its broadest sense, focused on the settlement era of the region in a variety of dimensions. The myth, at its most basic, has frequently been summarized in the hardiness of the settler – the period where the intrepid, masculine pioneer took it upon himself to strike it out on the land, thereafter forging a new life amidst fields of grain rippling like a great sea amidst islands of wooden homes built of their own hands.²⁰¹ Maps of the Prairies, while being dotted today with several major cities and many towns, nonetheless seem to reinforce this image of a predominantly rural *mentalité* that matches the landscape. However, as the urban element of the Prairie society has grown in sheer economic and social importance, this rural myth

²⁰⁰ Lincoln, *Discourse*, 22–24.

²⁰¹ R. Douglas Francis discusses this in chapters 4, 5, and especially 6 of *Images*; J. E. Rea, “Images of the West” in *Western Perspectives 1* ed. David J. Bercuson (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada Ltd., 1974), 4–9, is a particularly interesting engagement of the historian’s role in creating this image via a case study of the work of W. L. Morton which, Rea argues, focuses so heavily on the settlement period as to neglect any influence of the “urban West” on the creation of the Western identity, with George Stanley, Lewis G. Thomas and Lewis H. Thomas fitting this same category as well.

has, in some senses, grown stronger in its evocation of particular values, fundamental truths about the region, and a more simplistic “nostalgia for simpler times.”²⁰²

This myth of Prairie settlement is still frequently evoked by means of ritual and symbolic behavior. What is quite commonly stressed in assessments of the region’s unusual character is relationship of the land and the people – the Prairie myth is intimately tied to the settlement era, and the values learned by particular groups within the population during that time. This myth, it should be stressed, is typically exclusionary, as should be clear from the failure of Aboriginal Prairie peoples to become a successful agricultural group on the region.²⁰³ This attachment to the settlement era and the rural idyll is a pervasive element of the Prairie region in recent times. The Calgary Stampede organization, for example, has stated for years that its core purposes was to “promote western heritage and values,” with settlement-era imagery a constant visual reminder of where this heritage derives from.²⁰⁴ As the Saskatchewan Western Development Museums recorded a preschool teacher saying, “[t]he prairie experience is one that is being lost. Most families do not have ties to a family farm anymore. The WDM allows the student to experience an important part of our prairie heritage.”²⁰⁵ We see, here, how thoroughly the ‘prairie experience’ is associated

²⁰² This is an argument raised by R. Douglas Francis in *Images*, 201: “[the image of the rural west] is one still deeply embedded in the western Canadian psyche. While becoming citified, western Canadians still think of themselves – still have images of themselves – as a rural, agricultural people.” Robert Collins stresses this in the celebratory book *Prairie People*, saying “The pioneer era is still close. Nearly every prairie-born person has, or had, a parent, grandparent, or great-grandparents who pioneered. All that misery, hardship, determination, and plodding endurance has been passed on, vivid and real, by word of mouth” *Prairie People: A Celebration of My Homeland* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 2003), 14. This is regularly confirmed in newspapers – a great example of this can be found in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, Dec. 19, 2011, p. A13 “My place is the Prairies”: “[t]he Prairies’ sometimes-harsh climate has made the people here tough, but friendly – people who recognize the benefits of co-operation and are farsighted.”

²⁰³ See, for example, Sarah Carter, ““We Must Farm to Enable us to Live”: The Plains Cree and Agriculture to 1900” in *Prairie West as Promised Land* ed. Francis and Kitzan, 103–126.

²⁰⁴ Various annual reports, CS.99.26 Box 2 (Set 1) “Annual Reports 1980+” Stampede Archives, Calgary.

²⁰⁵ *Western Development Museum 2016–2017 Annual Report*, p. 18.

with the settlement era, with farming, and – by extension – with this Prairie myth. This agricultural element, as Prairie citizens understand it, must be preserved.

Jonathan Z. Smith has written about the intertwining of memory and place – particularly pointing to the fact that memory “appears to be preeminently a matter of time, yet it is as much an affair of space.”²⁰⁶ Such a notion of the intertwining of time and space, and particularly the usage of ritualized behavior as an evocation of a mythologized past, should give Prairie historians some pause as to how thoroughly the “New West” is associated solely with the activities of resource extraction. A plethora of heritage villages can be found across the region, which routinely re-enact and educate Prairie people and tourists about the region’s history, such as Fort Edmonton, the Ukrainian Cultural Village near Vegreville, the National Doukhobor Heritage Village, Cannington Manor Historic Park, Weyburn Heritage Village, Fort Calgary, the Mennonite Heritage Village, the Arborg and District Multicultural Heritage Village, among others.²⁰⁷ The work of academics such as R. Douglas Francis have drawn greater attention to the ways in which the *image* of the Prairies holds such a tremendous intellectual power over the citizen of the Prairies²⁰⁸ – this is thoroughly exemplified in such heritage villages where a ritualized evocation of this Prairie myth occurs regularly. It is not simply that memories of a place are an interior element of the individual person’s experience; the fact that a community is situated at a

²⁰⁶ Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place*, esp. 24–46.

²⁰⁷ For an interesting elucidation of heritage preservation efforts in Saskatchewan and the context of such preservation efforts, see Bruce Dawson, “‘It’s a Landmark in the Community’: The Conservation of Historic Places in Saskatchewan, 1911–2009” in *The West and Beyond* ed. Finkel, Carter, and Fortna, 397–416. See also *Prairie Forum* 15:2 (Fall, 1990), a special issue which deals with heritage preservation on the Prairies.

²⁰⁸ See footnote 202. Similarly, the recent work by Frances Swyripa has shown how traditional ethnic-ethno-religious identities and commemorative events can keep alive the self-image of communities and individuals despite the changes in Prairie society. Frances Swyripa, *Storied Landscapes*.

particular place that is laden with memory both internally recalled *and* externally enacted via ritualized behavior weaves together that community's social fabric.

Ritualized re-enactments that evoke images and landmarks important to the region's settlement era only tell part of the significance place has on the mind in the Prairies, however. W. L. Morton, in his classic essay "The West and the Nation," focuses on the effect of the square land survey in its profound symbolic dimensions, especially as it concerns the possibility for a duality of French and English on the Prairies. By disposing of the river lot survey common to Red River, what was instead enforced was an efficient commodification of the land that followed the American model that treated landforms as largely meaningless and existing custom as unimportant.²⁰⁹ Ronald Rees sustained this analysis by noting its effect on the settlers that eventually arrived on the Prairies, and found a complete lack of any sense of place: "[the rectangular survey] interposed an inorganic network of roads and field and farm boundaries between the settlers and their surroundings. The effect of such mechanistic treatment of the landscape was to intensify topophobic sentiment associated with the empty, impersonal plain."²¹⁰ Rees goes on to note, again supporting Morton's line of analysis, that this contributed to the rejection of duality (in the sense of French and English) but *also* to Aboriginal lifeways on the Prairies, by eradicating old highways, trails, and places. "Homesteaders, therefore, suffered a double loss," Rees notes: "they were separated both from their own homelands and histories and from the

²⁰⁹ W. L. Morton, "The West and the Nation, 1870–1970" in *Prairie Perspectives 2: Selected Papers of the Western Canadian Studies Conferences, 1970, 1971* ed. A. W. Rasporich and H. C. Klassen (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada Ltd., 1973), 16. The influence of this paper is reflected in the title of a collection of essays honoring Morton: Berger and Cook, eds., *The West and the Nation: Essays in Honour of W. L. Morton*.

²¹⁰ Ronald Rees, "Nostalgic Reaction and the Canadian Prairie Landscape" *Great Plains Quarterly* 2:3 (Summer, 1982), 160–162.

history and traditions of the territory they had come to occupy. As the old landscape disappeared, its most evocative feature, the regional trail, became the object of a new nostalgia.’²¹¹

A sense of place was often created in European forms by the efforts of Christian leaders on the Prairies during the early settlement process. Patterns of settlement modelled around traditional methods seems to have been common, and often involved the placement of either churches or prayer houses at important locations in these settlements.²¹² This process transformed the region from one centered upon Aboriginal efforts at placemaking to ones modelled primarily off of Christian-European patterns; in addition to the efforts at traditional settlement noted above, many churches began constructing magnificent cathedrals and massive buildings as a means of ‘bringing civilization’ to the Prairies.²¹³ The sense of places created by these churches still holds a strong grasp on the memory of

²¹¹ Ibid, 161.

²¹² By “traditional” I mean settlement patterns distinct to a particular community, whether developed in Canada or the homeland of a particular immigrant group. Russian German settlers in Saskatchewan typically organized around a *dorf* style, which was a “communal village clustered around a church... remnants of which still exist” (Alan B. Anderson, *Settling*, 83). Doukhobors created villages “similar to those that they had left in the Caucasus. Even the village names were reproductions.” These villages also regularly included a prayer house (known as a *dom*) separate from other buildings in the village (Ibid, 210). Mennonites would create “*strassendorg* line villages” not dissimilar to the early Doukhobor style of settlement (Ibid, 402). Anderson states of Ukrainian settlers around Beaver Hills that establishing churches and cemeteries early upon arrival was common (Ibid, 163). In the case of Métis settlements, at least some of those in Saskatchewan were crafted in “*le style typique de la Riviere Rouge*,” with the efforts of Catholic priests proving vital in these settlement processes after the Riel Rebellions.

²¹³ As Canon Beal put it, the “very prairie itself, which stretches its bare expanse around them [the settlers], is “dreary, dull, and uninteresting, unpicturesque and unattractive.” Somewhere in the midst of this depressing environment the Canadian settler makes his home, which for some years at least, is generally... “devoid of beauty in any form or degree.” Under such circumstances the need of something approaching beauty, or at least dignity, in the church which at length is erected for public worship assumes an importance which is not easily realized by those who are accustomed to more cheerful surrounding at home... In Canon Beal’s own words... “The church may be, and should be, the most beautiful spot in the Settlement”” *Diocese of Qu’Appelle*, Spring 1912, Occasional Paper No. 106, p. 23, R-705 Box 1, Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan, Regina. This mentality was further reinforced by the frequent tendency of naming Prairie towns after locations in Europe.

many people; in Kalyna Country, for example, the old churches – primarily Russo-Greek Orthodox, Ukrainian Orthodox and Ukrainian Catholic – have regularly been maintained despite non-attendance or minimal attendance, and guided bus tours have been offered as late as the 1990s.²¹⁴ Virtually every major city on the Prairies has made efforts to preserve the built heritage of major churches. This is not to say these were distinctive “prairie” forms of architecture, but their situatedness within the Prairie landscape was itself an element of the place, and often evoked the particular homeland from which these immigrants came.

Distinctive places on the Prairies that evoke Aboriginal belief and practice typically remain excluded from urban landscapes. While in many cases this is because such places are far from urban centers – such as medicine wheels, buffalo jumps, or Naapi effigies – others have simply been erased by settlement and urbanization.²¹⁵ A similar process has affected the preservation of Métis patterns of life. While the Red River lot has perhaps lost its significance within the popular consciousness, it is nonetheless reinvoked through processes of heritage preservation and various discursive and symbolic practices – though the lots themselves have largely disappeared beneath urban development.²¹⁶ Particular

²¹⁴ *Edmonton Journal*, Mar. 14, 1999, p. B1 “Monuments to the faithful.” Another interesting effort by Ukrainians to preserve the memory of their ethno-religious identity is visible via preservation of even the *place’s* status as a Christian spot: when St. Onuphrius Ukrainian Catholic Church was disassembled and moved to the Canadian Museum of Civilization, a brick outline of the church’s foundation and a plaque were placed there as a means of maintaining the memory of that church. See Swyripa, *Storied Landscapes*, 213–216.

²¹⁵ See Donald Dwayne, “Edmonton Pentimento: Re-Reading History in the case of the Papaschase Cree” *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies* 2:1 (2004), 21–53. Using the erasure of the Papaschase reserve as a major case study, which was situated directly within the lands that now constitute a major portion of south-eastern Edmonton, Dwayne demonstrates how “Canadian history has been interpreted predominantly by evaluating the activities of settlers and pioneers according to the purposes they served in achieving the ultimate goals of the nation... power was expressed through the displacement, removal, and dispersal of Aboriginal populations from the land, acts that allowed the history of the place to be re-imagined and re-constructed” (47).

²¹⁶ Historical writing being among the most obvious examples of this effort to reinvok the Red River Lot. The symbolic practice of placing replica Red River carts in public places (as can be seen in front of the University of Alberta’s Pembina Hall, in Selkirk, Manitoba, at Saskatchewan Landing Provincial Park, and at

ways of thinking about the use of land impact the possibility for particular experiences, rituals, and structures deemed religious. This can be most obviously assessed through the control of land by Canadian governments – a frequent inhibitor of religious expression by Aboriginal peoples.²¹⁷ In the past, this claim to control of the land directly inhibited the capacity to celebrate certain important rituals – including, most importantly on the Prairies, the Sun Dance, which was prohibited under the Indian Act from 1885 until 1951.²¹⁸ However, the ways in which space is regulated by governments have other consequences in the urban sphere, such as the difficulties churches face due to planning disputes.²¹⁹

Such practicalities all, of course, influence how space is thought of relative to various systems of belief and practice. The degree of ease with which particular uses of land are implemented, and the ways in which bureaucratic processes favor certain types of use and inhibit others, should suggest the relative importance accorded to certain developments. However, this should not lead historians to neglect the fact that the concrete dimensions of the Prairies – the greater degree of urbanization, the changing place of agriculture in the Prairie economy, the displacement of institutional Christianity as the

various museums throughout the Prairies) is evocative, of course, of the Settlement. Interestingly, Emma Larocque argues that Red River, due to its politicization, has lost some of its significance as a place Métis identify with, in “For the Love of Place – Not Just Any Place: Selected Métis Writing” in *Place and Replace: Essays on Western Canada* ed. Adele Perry et. al. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2013), 179–180.

²¹⁷ See Lori Beaman, “Aboriginal Spirituality.”

²¹⁸ For a summary of this moment, see Edward Ahenakew, *Voices of the Plains Cree* ed. Ruth M. Buck (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1995), 46–47. See, for a concise summary of the importance of the Sun Dance and its banning for Plains cultures, Eldon Yellowhorn, “Algonquians/Plains” in *Aboriginal Peoples of Canada: A Short Introduction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 82–97.

²¹⁹ For example, the St. Mark’s Coptic Orthodox Church purchased land in 2008, but City Council began the second reading of a bylaw that proposed removing religious assemblies from light industrial zones, which were considered “conditional uses” in land zoned for that purpose. *Winnipeg Free Press* Dec. 31, 2011, p. I.13, “Church can’t build on own land.” A more general sentiment related to some of these issues is reflected in the headline of the article “When God Meets Zoning: Places of Worship Not Always Welcome” in *Calgary Herald* Jan. 6, 2001 p. H3.

primary arbiter of moral discussion and behaviors on the region – must always compete with the *ideological fantasy* of the Prairies. Farm life itself may not play as important a role in the sheer actuarial facts of Prairie life,²²⁰ but is it prudent to confine analysis to purely these numerical analyses? Would not such an analysis dispose of the most important facet of Prairie life – that is, in Jonathan Z. Smith’s terms, “Father Place?”²²¹

These fantasies need to be situated within a simple fact of recent life on the Prairies: its movement towards a consumer culture, especially as affluence brought about by resource extraction has transformed the region. The startlingly massive consumerism that characterizes the Prairies – and *especially* Alberta – is one of the most important defining features of the region’s recent history. West Edmonton Mall is perhaps one of the Prairies’ most famous locations internationally, and is a major tourist destination that – the Mall claims – hosts 30.8 million visitors per year.²²² If one merely looks at a map of Alberta’s major cities today, vast swaths of them are devoted exclusively to the activity of shopping.²²³ The sheer importance of consumerism to Alberta culture characterizes Prairie

²²⁰ Paul Phillips, “Canada and the West: Then and Now,” 15.

²²¹ This is the title of the second chapter in Smith’s book *To Take Place*. The main point I am driving at here is the hold that the Prairie landscape, in all the meanings that are laden within it, has on the imagination. Related to Smith’s work specifically, as well, are the *ritualized evocations* of those meanings on the Prairies.

²²² West Edmonton Mall, “About WEM,” Accessed Mar. 16, 2018, <http://www.wem.ca/about-wem/overview>.

²²³ Several major examples of this include South Edmonton Common, which proudly declares its size as one of its most important features – it cover 320 acres and is home to “more than 2.3 million square feet of dining, shopping, and entertainment space, making it one of the largest open-air retail developments in North America” (South Edmonton Common, “About Us,” accessed Mar. 19, 2018, <https://www.southedmontoncommon.com/about-us/>). Moreover, South Edmonton Common is just under 4 kilometers from another major shopping center (the Southpark shopping area), and roughly 10 minutes’ drive from Southgate Mall, which itself contains in excess of 165 stores and services (Southgate Mall, “About Southgate Centre,” accessed Mar. 16, 2018, <https://www.southgatecentre.com/about-us/southgate-centre/>). In Calgary, a similar abundance of shopping centers characterizes the landscape – among the most significant is CrossIron Mills, which is itself 1.4 million square feet and 674 acres, with “more than 200 specialty stores and premium brand outlets, and 17 large-format anchor stores.”

culture as a whole to varying degrees (this depends on the town or village under discussion), but its influence on urban Prairie life is beyond doubt. Saskatoon, Regina, and Winnipeg all have sizeable shopping malls and centers of their own, and smaller locales on the Prairies are increasingly characterized by strip malls – though in Alberta, the emphasis on size and abundance is unmatched.²²⁴ It should also be kept in mind that even efforts at heritage preservation are fundamentally consumer activities – heritage villages predominantly charge admission and maintain gift shops that sell clothing, books, and toys that evoke the settlement era of Prairie history. This immense consumer culture is a vital component of Prairie culture today, and the logic of consumerism structures interaction with Prairie heritage.

What *must* be acknowledged if such an understanding of the region is accepted is the importance of North American consumer culture²²⁵ on the Prairies, and its increasing influence on how Prairie social culture is lived. Consumer culture on the Prairies frequently seizes onto this sense of place.²²⁶ One notable recent example of this is the business Prairie

(CrossIron Mills, “About CrossIron Mills, accessed Mar. 16, 2018, <https://www.crossironmills.com/about-us/about-crossiron-mills/>). A plethora of malls and shopping centers are scattered throughout the city.

²²⁴ The year in which West Edmonton Mall opened – 1981 – needs to be situated within the unprecedented economic and urban growth in Alberta and the city of Edmonton. While all Prairie urban centers had been experiences a significant rise in population, Edmonton’s population had increased six-fold from 1941 to 1981, and both Calgary and Edmonton had by this point outgrown Winnipeg – once the major metropolis of the Prairies (see Peter J. Smith, “Urban Development Trends in the Prairie Provinces” in *The Making of the Modern West: Western Canada Since 1945* ed. A. W. Rasporich (Calgary: The University of Calgary Press, 1984), 139–140). This growing population was relatively affluent given the province’s history of resource extraction.

²²⁵ I prefer the term “consumer culture” to “monoculture” in that the latter term neglects the degree to which consumerist “monocultures” employ regional myths and symbols as a promotion of their product.

²²⁶ A great example of this, that is somewhat banal, is a multinational company, PPG Paints, releasing a line of paints exclusively through McMunn & Yates Building Supplies stores that celebrate the Prairie landscape. This piece (of what appears to be native advertising) in the *Winnipeg Free Press* notes that “[o]ur region has a rich history... I think it’s great Manitoba’s landscape is being celebrated through colour. It’s about time it got some recognition for the beauty and drama that is the Canadian Prairies” *Winnipeg Free Press*, Apr. 23, 2016, p. 2 “Celebrate Manitoba’s Vibrant Colour Palette.” Grocery stores, such as Co-op, employ imagery and marketing reminiscent of the past of the agrarian past of the Prairies. For

Proud. The company describes its very identity as being founded in the Prairie myth. Cole Thorpe, the founder, says on the company's main page that "[h]istory is who we are. Never forget it. My Great Grandfather first settled on the Prairies back in the early 1900s... This concept is about being proud of our heritage while investing back in the areas we live & operate."²²⁷ The logo, composed of a pumpjack, crossed ears of wheat, and a bison, respectively represent Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. By including designs that celebrate the Prairies as a whole, as well as simply individual provinces, Prairie Proud's desire is to "provid[e] current and former prairie residents the opportunity to wear their pride in quality casual wear while investing back into the heart of the prairies through charity contributions."²²⁸ Thus, Prairie identity itself is articulated through the commodity: one's relationship to the region is crafted and represented, if not through activity within elements of life typically associated with the Prairies such as agriculture, then *through consumer choices*. Consumerism as such is one of the areas in which regional identity is reinforced, and the Prairie myth is renewed.

What must be kept in perspective is that businesses, regardless of their actual situation as "Prairie" businesses, also adapt themselves to their surroundings by decoration during major Prairie events, signs, murals, etc. – a phenomenon most obvious during ritualized celebrations such as the Calgary Stampede, frontier days, rodeos, and so on. Regardless of the cynicism with which audiences may respond to multinational companies

example, on the Sherwood Co-op website it beams about its history: "Co-operatives have a long history of serving members in Western Canada. In the early 20th century, people worked together to create retail co-operatives in many towns in the four western Canadian provinces (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia)." Sherwood Co-op, "About Us – History," accessed Sept. 28, 2018 <http://www.sherwoodco-op.com/wps/portal/crs/sherwood/aboutus/history>

²²⁷ Prairie Proud, "Prairie Proud," accessed Dec. 17, 2018, <https://prairieproud.ca/>

²²⁸ Prairie Proud, "Our Story," accessed Dec. 17, 2018, <https://prairieproud.ca/pages/our-story>

attempting to appear as cowboys/farmers, such a response is nonetheless a reinforcement of Prairie identity – “those aren’t *really* Prairie businesses.” The weight of history on the consciousness of the present, the weight of “real” events in the formation of Prairie identity, remains a factor in the way the region perceives itself.

One recent book that has documented the “weight of history” on the consciousness of the present is Frances Swyripa’s *Storied Landscapes: Ethno-Religious Identity and the Canadian Prairies*. Analyzing both the imaginative and concrete attachment to place on the Prairies, the book is an important contribution both to the history of ethno-religious groups on the Prairies as well as analysis of how the Prairies, as a place, are constitutive of group identity. Swyripa makes a penetrating observation about a particular initiative of an ethno-religious community seeking to preserve its heritage. At the ethnoreligious settlement of New Iceland, people began putting up signs evoking old place-names as a means of reawakening the original appellation of properties, to the point that over 200 such signs characterized the area of New Iceland. Swyripa argues that “[t]he necessity of signs also suggested that the names were being lost, involving the recovery of memory and feeding an urge to formalize and make concrete a once invisible but satisfactory system of mapping the land.”²²⁹ What I think is worth drawing attention to, here, that I argue is generalizable, is this idea of an invisible system being made concrete through a process of heritage preservation. This is a fundamental historical process that is, at present, underrepresented in Prairie histories: the correlation between the decline in the Prairie agrarian population and efforts at preserving such heritage is, in some fundamental sense,

²²⁹ Swyripa, *Storied Landscapes*, 194–195.

causal. One example of what *exactly* is being preserved in this heritage I argue in the following chapter.

Swyripa repeatedly draws attention in *Storied Landscapes* to ritualized celebrations amongst ethno-religious groups, particularly at important anniversaries and for special people or events in the group's histories. These cultures especially, though far from exclusively, were empowered to preserve important themes/moments, and histories, after the official policy of multiculturalism in Canada. Various ritual performances are one means of preserving the values constitutive of their heritage, as well as the Prairie myth by extension. The symbolic content ritual performances of Prairie identities celebrate ultimately inscribe *within the performers* the meaning of what they perform.²³⁰ What is interesting about the frequent ritualistic, symbolic, and mythic representations of the Farmer and Prairie culture more generally is the powerful nostalgia associated with such representations. Even where new identities are symbolically embraced,²³¹ the region

²³⁰ Certain performances on the Prairies serve such a function by calling forth symbolic identities associated with the region, and *performing* them. This can be said *especially* of events like Frontier Days, Harvest Festivals, Farm Fairs, rodeos, Winnipeg's *Festival du Voyageur*, Red Deer's Westerner Days and Exhibition, Lethbridge's Whoop-Up Days, as well as the massive Calgary Stampede. While most attendees are simply celebrating at the event, many people also perform certain identities. The inspiration for this analysis came from Albert Ascoli's analysis of a scene from Dante's Purgatory, Albert Russell Ascoli, "Performing Salvation in Dante's *Commedia*" *Dante Studies* 135 (2017), 92–93, albeit taking Ascoli's conclusion in a different direction for purposes of my argument.

²³¹ New identities in the sense of their being constructed *after* the most dramatic episodes of agrarian protest. One prominent example would be the Edmonton Oilers hockey team (the Edmonton Oilers, especially, celebrate Alberta's identification with oil through statements such as "This is Oil Country" and their previous tendency to skate onto the ice underneath an oil rig). Big Sugar has immortalized this "new" identity in their song "All Hell for a Basement." The embrace of resource extraction as the primary element of regional identity is, while strong in Alberta especially, nonetheless uneven within even specifically *Albertan* discourse.

nonetheless remain primarily bastions of such nostalgic representations of Prairie identities that reinforce the Prairie myth as it is centered around the farmer and the pioneer.²³²

In other words, I argue that the region's past as it is centered around the Prairie myth is not so much a specter, but something of a palpable hallucination that lingers on the region: it is tangible, but lies in the distance, beyond the immediate grasp of its inhabitants. Despite the fact that the Prairies can be argued to constitute merely a partially geographically distinct element of a growing transnational consumer culture, the Canadian Prairie identity nonetheless considers itself distinct and maintains symbols, ritual performances, and mythologies that embody this distinct identity. If the historian's job is not just to criticize the identities their subjects ascribe to themselves, but to make sense of *the ways* in which subjects ascribe certain identities to themselves, this should be an important feature of historical analysis of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century history of the region. If the Prairies remain useful as an academic 'region of the mind'²³³ if not a 'region in fact,' then the importance of heritage preservation, the consolidation of various immigrant group identities by symbolic modes of preservation, the growing influence of consumer culture and the urban environment, the increased rejection of traditional behaviors relative to institutions deemed religious, the continued mythologies

²³² We can think of the Brandon Wheat Kings hockey team, and the Calgary Stampeders football team; a high school in Calgary, built in 1961, is named for Henry Wise Wood, the influential leader of the United Farmers of Alberta; bands from the Prairies such as the Rural Alberta Advantage. The history of Western protest is commemorated in many dramatic ways – there are Batoche and Fort Carleton historical sites; a monument in Winnipeg was erected in memory of the Winnipeg General Strike in 2017. Monuments exist for the Territorial Grain Growers Association (in Indian Head, Saskatchewan), for Henry Wise Wood (in Carstairs, Alberta), and a variety of museums/public historical sites exist that preserve either grain elevators themselves (St. Albert, AB; the Ukrainian Cultural Village near Vegreville, AB; Nanton, AB; Inglis, MB; etc.) or the images of the grain elevators (Grenfell, SK; Stockholm, SK; Altamont, MB; etc.), evoking the Wheat Pools that developed across the provinces.

²³³ In the words of the oft-cited title of Richard Allen's edited volume, *A Region of the Mind*.

that dictate ethical/moral self-perceptions – all of these are important factors in analysis. Heritage preservation efforts and festival re-enactments of settler-era identities constitute among the most important symbolic and ritualistic activities on the region, and reinforcement of identities created by means of such heritage efforts are often also reinforced via consumer behaviors. If analysis of the Prairies as a region is helpful beyond the settlement period and the agrarian revolt, then the historian should consider both the ways in which consumer culture has affected and reinforced such a regional identity *and* the mythological, symbolic, and ritualistic means by which the ‘region of the mind’ persists.

Chapter Four – Reimagining the Rural Idyll: Prairie Culture and Social Transformations

“Ja, tænke det; ønske det; ville det med; - -
Men gjøre det! Nej, det skjønner jeg ikke!”
[“I might think of it – wish for it – want it badly....
But to *do* it.... That’s something I *can’t* understand!”]²³⁴
-Henrik Ibsen, *Peer Gynt*

Gerald Friesen succinctly summarized one of the most important transformations the Prairies have undergone when he said that “[t]he farmer’s replacement as the focus of prairie social mythology was the business leader.”²³⁵ The changes alluded to in this statement are a decrease in focus on agrarian co-operative economics and an increasing reliance on resource extraction, a decreased tendency of socialist thought to increasingly overt capitalist thinking, a decreased focus on ‘society’ and an increased focus on the individual. To employ the discourse of Prairie social gossips, the transformation may aptly be described as a transition from co-operation to competition – but aside from a decline in the social gospel’s influence, what other transformations in Prairie culture are included in this change?

In *Peer Gynt*, the context in which the above quotation is spoken is a scene where Gynt witnesses an individual mutilating himself to avoid being forced into the military. Like *Peer Gynt*, the Prairies seem unable to understand the idea of giving up the imagery associated with the rural idyll. Despite Friesen’s claim, the rural idyll remains on the Prairies a vibrant, nostalgic afterglow of the long-forgotten episode of agrarian revolt. I

²³⁴ Henrik Ibsen, *Peer Gynt* Trans. Peter Watts (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1970), 85.

²³⁵ Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 436.

argue that the business leader has not fully, or even significantly, replaced the farmer as the primary symbol of Prairie mythology. While other regions of Canada have given up some of their most influential social mythologies – Quebec has given up the hegemonic position the Catholic Church once had, Ontario has given up its proud and overt Britishness, and so on – the Prairies, much as they may think, or wish, or badly want to give up the rural idyll, can hardly even begin this process. Perhaps melodramatically, we can see the prospect of sacrificing the farmer as a kind of self-mutilation, a final expulsion of an old image that characterized the Prairies that has long been in decline – as evidenced by the slow withering of grain elevators, small farms, and the various United Farmers organizations. The Prairies seem unable to expel such an image from their social mythology. Seeing the opportunity to give up on this symbol, to fully sacrifice this increasingly distant memory from a past most Prairie citizens never experienced and are no longer directly involved with, there remains a mysterious inability to part with this symbol and fully embrace the business leader, as Friesen posits Prairie popular consciousness as doing. There seems to be no way to fully give up the farmer as a representation of Prairie culture – though what exactly lived Prairie society *is* has changed considerably.

The farmer-as-symbol has, however, illustrated and been part-and-parcel of the development of Prairie consumer-capitalism. To borrow a term from Stephen Jay Gould, the farmer-as-symbol, which was developed by publications such as the *Grain Growers' Guide*, the *Alberta Non-Partisan*, and the *United Farmers* as a symbol of co-operation, has undergone an exaptation that has assisted in the hegemony of consumer-capitalist

individualism.²³⁶ Most Prairie citizens probably know very little about the agrarian revolt, and certainly, most are familiar with certain institutions like the United Farmers of Alberta only through the various businesses the UFA brand is attached to. As such, the symbol of the farmer and the rural idyll more generally has undergone important change: where it was once primarily a symbol of co-operative socialism, it is now a symbol associated primarily with competitive and capitalist activities. This transformation of the farmer, and the broader rural idyll as a social mythology, has a lot to tell us about the linked process of the transition from a culture largely shaped by Protestant social gospel philosophy and the authority of churches to a culture increasingly characterized by Spiritual But Not Religious behaviors and a philosophy of individualism.²³⁷

One means of evaluating such a transformation is by focusing attention on important mythologies, symbols, and rituals that are possessed of a great degree of influence on the Prairies. As an *exempli gratia* to evaluate such change in the cultural and ideological milieu of the region, I will focus my attention on the celebration of the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede. I argue that the Stampede reflects a transformation in the region's culture that is mirrored in other aspects of Prairie life: that is, where the rural idyll

²³⁶ The term "exaptation" refers to a "change of function" of a particular thing (text, symbol, etc.), once used by one social group, to a new function for a different social group, and is familiar to me through Willi Braun's "When and Why Did the Gospel of Mark Become a Christian Text?". Here, Braun employs the term exaptation, most commonly used in biological evolutionary literature, to illustrate how the Gospel of Mark – originally a narrative used to meditate on themes such as "exile, identity, and belonging" – is used by Christians from the second century onward for a *distinctly* Christian agenda. Additions to the Gospel of Mark – especially in its introduction and conclusion, which are later additions to the Gospel – evidence a means of using this text for different social purposes than that in which it was created. Braun acknowledges a debt to Stanley Stowers in the use of this term. Accessed May 5, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2-tLAjLz4Mo>

²³⁷ There is a potential criticism that SBNR behavior is largely born of Protestant philosophy, but I am pointing to the fundamental difference between Protestant philosophy centered on adherence to Christian institutions (churches, Sunday schools, etc.) and a sense of duty/obligation attached to such adherence versus the emphasis on individual choice and a focus on the self, and self-fulfillment, fostered by an SBNR worldview.

the Stampede celebrates was understood at the start of the twentieth century as a reflection of co-operative ethics grounded in the social gospel, it has undergone an exaptation such that it now represents competitive individualism grounded in ethics predominantly associated with forms of religiosity that claim to reject “religion.” Put succinctly, I argue that the purpose of the rural idyll-as-symbol has changed dramatically over the twentieth century, and that this change has important implications for Prairie religious history.

I – The Rural Idyll, Christianity, and the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede

The farmer-as-symbol, and the rural idyll generally, has been elucidated by the work of many Prairie historians. Early in the history of expansion into Western Canada, the farmer had become the symbolic framework that characterized the region.²³⁸ This vision of the West, and its importance, would be buttressed by the ideology surrounding the rural idyll. David C. Jones has done much to develop the notion of the “rural idyll” as a significant element of Prairie history, particularly during the settlement period. Jones demonstrates that “[t]he settlement period accentuated the values of frugality, hard work, industriousness, improvisation, cleanliness, forbearance and perseverance.”²³⁹ Such values were positioned within a profoundly important Christian ethic, which not only underpinned the farmer’s sense of themselves but also the various social reform

²³⁸ As Doug Owrarn summarized, by the end of the 1850s, “[t]he West was no longer seen through the eyes of the fur trader or the missionary but through those of the potential farmer”, *Promise of Eden*, 65. Important for the early history of settlement on the Prairies, Clifford Sifton had a high opinion of the people rural society produced: “[Sifton] believed the agricultural life was the very basis of a stable, progressive society. The most solid citizens had their roots firmly in the soil” D. J. Hall, “Clifford Sifton: Immigration and Settlement Policy, 1896–1905” in *The Settlement of the West* ed. Howard Palmer (Calgary: Comprint Publishing Company, 1977), 84.

²³⁹ David C. Jones, ““There is Some Power About the Land” – The Western Agrarian Press and Country Life Ideology” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 17:3 (1982), 107.

movements with which the farmers became associated. A sentiment that pervaded the entire rural culture of the period was a sense that the farmers were possessed of a particularly virtuous moral code – as Jones summarizes, “God was in the land, and farmers were doing God’s work.”²⁴⁰ Various publications and organizations of the period were intent on producing such a symbolic farmer. Prairie traditions, such as the UFA Sunday and Grain Growers’ Sunday events, directly linked the mission of the farmer’s parties to the Christian ethic. These annual celebrations brought the locals of the UFA or the SGGA to a church service where the minister would speak to the important Christian character of the farmers as a class. Similarly, the Manitoba Grain Growers’ Association highlighted the fact that its self-understanding was based entirely on a belief in God: “While our movement continues to believe in God as the source and support of all that is right, while it can appeal to men to serve the highest interests of the community and the nation, and to oppose all that is selfish and crooked and unworthy – so long it will continue to widen the range of its operations and to draw into it the best elements of succeeding rural generations as they arise.”²⁴¹

Settlement on the Prairies, and the founding of a new society, accentuated the tendency towards utopian projects, many of which were oriented towards co-operative

²⁴⁰ David C. Jones, “The Zeitgeist of Western Settlement and the Calgary Stampede” *Alberta History* 60:3 (Summer 2012), 46. W. J. Tregillus, an eventual president of the UFA, tended to emphasize the masculinity of this symbolic figure – “He was gritty, tenacious, principled, a man of faith and action” Bradford J. Rennie, ““A Far Green Country Unto a Swift Sunrise”: The Utopianism of the Alberta Farm Movement, 1909–1923” in *The Prairie West as Promised Land* ed. Francis and Kitzan, 246–247. This discourse of the regenerating powers of the land would only increase after the initial success of the farmer’s parties. As Margaret Flatt, the (at that time) President of the Women’s Section of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers’ Association would state, “In this mighty work of building a new earth, we have every reason to believe that the host of men and women living nearest to the big, clean heart of nature, will be one of the chief agencies” “Minutes of the Twenty-First Annual Convention of the SGGA,” p. 21–22, B-2 I-1 “Convention Minutes, 1914–1926, 1922,” PAS, Regina.

²⁴¹ *Grain Grower’s Guide*, July 16, 1919, p. 12.

ideals.²⁴² The broader rural idyll whose primary symbol was the farmer, however, existed in a tension between acceptance and resistance to cowboy culture and its associated events, largely as a result of the prevailing notions of respectability²⁴³ and moral uplift that characterized the period. Cowboy events were frequently criticized during the early twentieth century,²⁴⁴ and certainly, rodeos themselves were often seen as barbaric, if not antithetical to the Christian civilization that was being developed.²⁴⁵ Behaviors associated with Christian moral uplift were crucial to attaining any degree of social capital in this period, and often, the violence of the rodeo could lead to a loss of such respectability. The United Farmers of Alberta, as has been elucidated elsewhere,²⁴⁶ articulated their platform on the basis of Christian ethics. The *Grain Grower's Guide* promulgated influential social gospel thought and was heavily centered on a symbolic idea of the “farmer” throughout its publication.²⁴⁷ Various other events, moreover, contributed to this idea of a symbolic farmer who lived by a particular ethic.²⁴⁸ What the historiography broadly agrees upon is

²⁴² See: Rasporich, “Utopian Ideals” 37–62; Rennie, ““A Far Green Country...” 243–258.

²⁴³ The Methodist Church in Calgary was intent on cultivating such a sense of “respectability.” See Eric Crouse, ““The Great Revival”: Evangelical Revivalism, Methodism & Bourgeois Order in Early Calgary” *Alberta History* 47:1 (Winter, 1999), 18–23.

²⁴⁴ Interestingly, one of the arguments before the first Stampede in 1912 that city officials made as to why it was not suitable for Calgary was the perception that “the day of the cowboy was a thing of the past; they claimed, in fact, farming was more important to the area than ranching.” Robert M. Seiler and Tamara P. Seiler, “The Social Construction of the Canadian Cowboy: Calgary Exhibitions and Stampede Posters, 1952–1972” in *Icon, Brand, Myth: The Calgary Stampede* ed. Max Foran (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2008), 304.

²⁴⁵ Donald G. Wetherell, “Making Tradition: The Calgary Stampede, 1912–1939” in *Icon, Brand, Myth* ed. Max Foran, 24–27; Jones, “Zeitgeist,” 48–49.

²⁴⁶ Clark Banack’s excellent recent writing on Henry Wise Wood’s thought in *God’s Province* clearly demonstrates the interweaving of Wood’s understanding of Christian ethics with economic, political, and social matters. See also Richard Allen, “The Social Gospel as the Religion of the Agrarian Revolt” in *Riel to Reform*, 138–147.

²⁴⁷ A good deal of Richard Allen’s primary source evidence in *The Social Passion* comes from this publication, as is the case with other historical writing on the social gospel.

²⁴⁸ One example of this was the Rural Leadership Conference, which was hosted in 1916 at the University of Alberta, where J. S. Woodsworth, Irene Parlby, and Henry Wise Wood spoke to “an audience consisting primarily of rural clergyman on the urgent need to educate farmers on the application of the principles of cooperation to economic and social life.” Christie and Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity*, 175.

the fact that the construction of a symbolic farmer was overwhelmingly concerned with social relationships and social ethics. The reform of society, and the relationships within which people were situated, was the focus of the reforms instigated by the social gospel and various other coincident reform movements. The idea of the rodeo was often seen as a vapid, if not morally corrupting, form of entertainment that directly contradicted the above goals.²⁴⁹ More than this, the individual farmer was understood to be the arbiter of a particular set of values and ethics on which others could model themselves – a distinctly Anglo-Protestant set of values that centered on industriousness, enterprise, hard work, and, most importantly, co-operation. It should be unsurprising that social gospel thinker, Protestant minister, and politician William Irvine, in the book *Farmers in Politics*, would declare the farmers as being the arbiters of values that can solve social problems:

It is the economic question which goes to the very heart of our national problems. These problems must be solved, and they cannot be solved by competition; the groups which make competition cannot be destroyed; if they could be abolished it would mean turning back the wheels of progress. These groups must learn to co-operate between themselves... This is what the laws of social progress say, and this is why we have a United Farmers' movement. But the farmers alone, of the economic groups in Canada, have discovered the higher law of co-operation... Co-operation is the gospel of the United Farmers and their leaders are the apostles of it. Natural law is on their side, and co-operation will win.²⁵⁰

It should not be forgotten that the victory of farmer's parties was perceived as being of the utmost significance for social development, and that the leaders of this movement saw the conflict between co-operation and competition as a struggle of "ultimate concern."²⁵¹ The resurgence of the Stampede after 1923, and its merging with the

²⁴⁹ Wetherwell, 24–27.

²⁵⁰ William Irvine, *The Farmers in Politics* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, Ltd., 1920), 147–148.

²⁵¹ UFA discourse during the period immediately before the 1921 election was emphatic in its assertion of a new era entering the province and, in varying degrees, the world. Rennie, "A Far Green Country...", see esp. 252–253.

Agricultural Exhibition, roughly coincided with the victory of the UFA in seizing political power in the province (1921), as well as the seizure by the United Farmers of Manitoba of political power in Manitoba (1922). The broad rural idyll that underpinned the culture of the period was enshrined in the (now) annual spectacle of the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede.

While the importance of the rodeo and the more extraordinary events at the Stampede were far from unimportant, what gave the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede its legitimacy and social capital was its pairing with the agricultural fair. As Donald G. Wetherell excellently summarizes:

While the Stampedes of 1912 and 1919 inspired rodeos in other parts of Alberta and confirmed the social and sporting legitimacy of rodeo, the 1923 Stampede gained further legitimacy by tapping into the historical traditions of agricultural fairs in Canada. This elevated it beyond mere spectacle enacted for the enjoyment of a crowd and the promotion of immediate local needs into an activity intimately connected with a venerable and deeply symbolic tradition in Canadian rural life.²⁵²

The increasing popularity of “cowboy sports,” and in particular the rodeo, led Albertan culture to embrace the image of the cowboy as a component of the rural idyll. This, I would argue along with Wetherell,²⁵³ reinforced the romantic and more generally accepted symbol of the farmer, as well as the already mythologized settler conquering the plains via hard work, industriousness, and masculine tenacity. Such a reinforcement was formally involved in the Stampede event via its combining with the Agricultural Fair – an important, existing Prairie tradition – which caused a dramatic increase in the event’s public image. These fairs, Wetherell argues, “symbolized ideals of rural collective

²⁵² Wetherell, 30.

²⁵³ Wetherell, 41: “the Stampede conflated farming and ranching pioneers into a common story of struggle and success.”

purposes, sociability, and community,” and were designed to gather farmers together for purposes of fostering a sense of community, for cultivating business relations, and to discuss methods of improving farming *and* society.²⁵⁴ The farmer and the cowboy were brought together in the Exhibition and Stampede as mutually reinforcing symbols of a mythologized Prairie culture, and this past was characterized by an Anglo-Protestant conquering and taming of the region.²⁵⁵ While wheat farming was not the focus of the Stampede’s imagery overall, certainly, the idealized Anglo-Protestant, white, masculine conquering of the Prairies nonetheless served to buttress the farmer’s position as the dominant figure of Prairie ideology.

The Stampede and Exhibition posters, themselves, offer an interesting look into this tension of the farmer and the cowboy as symbols. David C. Jones has already offered an interesting analysis of the Exhibition poster of 1908, which was symptomatic of the tension between the cowboy and the farmer – “in 1912 and throughout the war the *sodbuster* was the prime focus of attention throughout the plains, and so in southern Alberta too, *not* the cattleman.”²⁵⁶ Frequently repeated on the posters for the Exhibition throughout the rest of

²⁵⁴ Moreover, the event began to be referred to as “the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede.” Wetherell, 30–31.

²⁵⁵ A particularly telling example of how this mythologized Prairie past was presented at these events is documented by the *Stony Plain Sun*, July 9, 1925, pg. 6, where the Stampede’s historical pageant is discussed: “The plan for the Pageant involves the representation of twenty episodes which show in colorful detail the history of the West before and after the coming of the white man. There will be the pre-civilization Indian period, then the coming of the Explorers, Fur Traders, and Adventurers of the 18th century, the arrival of the Catholic Fathers, the lawless period of the first settlers, the coming of the mounted Police, the Riel Rebellion, the coming of the railway, the intensive development of the West, the Great War call to arms, and finally Calgary and the West as they are to-day, the Granary of the World.” Such a structure to the parade was quite similar to the structure of the first Stampede parade, suggesting a particular, ritualized mythic understanding of Prairie historical development.

²⁵⁶ Jones, “Zeitgeist,” 48. As Jones makes clear in the article’s thesis, “[i]t was this *Zeitgeist* or spirit [of Western settlement]... that set the scene for the first Calgary Stampede in 1912, and it was this same *Zeitgeist* that prevented a recurrence of the stampede *with the exhibition* until 1923” (43, emphasis mine).

the decade are declarations that “High Class Music and Attractions” would be present at the exhibition; that prizes for livestock, grain, and bread would be important attractions; the 1918 poster declares that exhibits would be “industrial and educational,” and were *combined with* “entertainment by the world’s best artists.” By the end of the decade, and certainly by the start of the 1920s, the imagery of the Stampede posters had changed markedly, focusing primarily on the wild cowboy hanging tenaciously to a bucking horse. Again, the symbolic cowboy became accepted as a focal point of the rural idyll.

This ritual celebration, which brought together the symbolic natures of the farmer and the cowboy in this period, held in tension two natures of Prairie self-understanding during the early twentieth century: the social gospel-inspired devotion to co-operation, moral uplift, community, and temperate demeanor, with the more tough, rugged, stubborn commitment to self-determination. What is interesting is the stress placed on the *legitimacy* extended to the event of the rodeo via its association with the tradition of the agricultural fair, which was deeply rooted in social gospel emphases refined by the United Farmers. While the decline in influence of the farmer-centered, social gospel ideology is well-documented,²⁵⁷ its ritualized annual celebration kept at least the symbol, the mythology, of the rural idyll alive, and would of course be among the primary influences on the affairs of the Prairies for decades afterwards.

²⁵⁷ Especially as the abandonment of farms became a major issue during the great depression. As Jones writes, “There seemed little point in lauding the virtues of the soil when the soil itself was aloft or in hallowing “the solitary figure in the distant furrow” when that figure had left the country,” “Zeitgeist,” 50. Carl Betke argues that the decline of the UFA as “actually [taking] place in the early 1920s, despite the persistence of a UFA government between 1921 and 1935.” Carl F. Betke, “Farm Politics in an Urban Age: The Decline of the United Farmers of Alberta After 1921” in *Essays on Western History* ed. Lewis H. Thomas (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1976), 175–176. Certainly, the successes of United Farmers movements elsewhere, along with the Progressive Party, had been stultified by the mid-1920s.

II – The Stampede, Consumer Ritual, and the Cowboy as Entrepreneur

Similar to other ritualized celebrations that bind an entire city's identity together, such as the *Palio di Siena* or the New Orleans' *Mardis Gras*, the Stampede cannot be understood, or analyzed, apart from the locale in which it is situated – so tremendous is its effect on the city. In recent decades, the Stampede is situated in a city that has experienced a spectacular rise in its population; a city that is increasingly dominated by office towers and consumer spaces; a city that is overwhelmingly oriented to the automobile and suburban environments. Moreover, the Stampede is situated in a relatively affluent part of the Prairies that celebrates mass cultural institutions and is increasingly non-church going.

What has been referred to as “the New West” is characterized by the affluence brought about by resource development. While the handling of the Exhibition and Stampede has essentially always been in the hands of the city's elite, the elite of Calgary (and the province) are quite often now a part of the city's business class.²⁵⁸ However, the rural idyll is kept alive as a symbol, most popularly on the Prairies, through the Calgary Stampede. The Stampede is, in terms of attendance, national attention, and sheer size, the largest single festival that is hosted on the Prairies. It is described through promotional material as follows:

For 10 days and nights every July, Calgary puts on its white hat and welcomes the world. The Greatest Outdoor Show On Earth is the most authentic, memorable western experience you could ever pack into a single vacation. You'll become a cowboy or cowgirl, witnessing the world's top rodeo, thrilling chuckwagon races, First Nations culture, Agriculture showcase, live music and much more. And because Calgary is located only

²⁵⁸ See, for example, Max Foran, “More Than Partners: The Calgary Stampede and the City of Calgary” in *Icon, Brand, Myth* ed. Max Foran, 151; 166–167; Colin S. Campbell, “The Stampede: Cowtown's Sacred Cow” in *Stampede City: Power and Politics in the West* ed. Chuck Reasons (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1984), 110–112.

one hour from Canada's majestic Rocky Mountains, the Stampede is the perfect place to kick off a true western vacation. Dust off your cowboy boots and put on your cowboy hat for an experience that is unrivalled for variety and excitement.²⁵⁹

What is highlighted about the festival is its potential quality as a vacation, the multiplicity of experiences available, and its convenience of location. The "authenticity" of the experience is also noted at several points, while at the same time reminding visitors of what they will *become* rather than what they *are*. The focus is not on any articulation of the values of the event (aside from the city itself being welcoming) but on the experience the spectator will be provided with.

Cities have frequently found themselves, thanks to increasing international travel, in the position of having to market themselves. Calgary is frequently referred to at both the official level as well as that of popular discourse as the "Stampede City."²⁶⁰ The Stampede, in the past several decades, has regularly drawn over a million spectators cumulatively,²⁶¹ and as such, has gone from being an important festival to one of the most substantial activities, in terms of impact on all sectors of the city and the Prairies, hosted in the region. Its celebration is one of the primary means by which Calgary is identified as a place.

It should not be neglected that the Stampede *organization* does much for the community of Calgary, and indeed, that it is committed to community involvement, heritage preservation, and education.²⁶² This is framed within the realm of the very identity

²⁵⁹ "Calgary Stampede: Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth," Visit Calgary, accessed Apr. 24, 2018, <https://www.visitcalgary.com/places/calgary-stampede>

²⁶⁰ The city's football team is also called the Stampeders, furthering the importance of this identification.

²⁶¹ "Attendance," Calgary Stampede, accessed Apr. 24, 2018, <http://news.calgarystampede.com/resources/guide/attendance>; Various documents, CS.99.26 Box 2 (Set 1) "Annual Reports 1980+" Stampede Archives, Calgary, Alberta.

²⁶² "About Us," Calgary Stampede, accessed June 25, 2018, <https://www.calgarystampede.com/stampede/about>

of what the Stampede organization refers to as its brand: “For more than a century, the CS brand has been a well-known symbol in our community. It may stand for Calgary Stampede, but it has also come to symbolize our Community Spirit, a belief that We’re Greatest Together.”²⁶³ However, it should be kept in perspective that the Stampede organization, despite overseeing the ten days of the Stampede itself, is distinct from the actual *celebration* of the Stampede. More than this, the discourse that circulates around the Stampede, the activities that are frequently related to it, are out of the immediate control of the Stampede organization and, as such, are treated for my purposes here separately from the Stampede organization’s broader goals outside of the event it shares its appellation with. The questions guiding my analysis, as such, have little to do with the Stampede organization: what does the change in how the Calgary Stampede (formerly the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede) is celebrated tell us about Canadian Prairie culture? What might this change in the culture of the Prairies tell us about the region’s religious history?

What is frequently featured about the Stampede is its effect on Calgarian business, as well as the abundance of vendors, food trucks, and nearby sites of consumption available. The morally uplifting, educational aspects of the Stampede are far from the highlight of the Stampede’s focus as far as the marketing of the event is concerned, and in terms of sheer actuarial facts, how it is celebrated.²⁶⁴ The 2018 Stampede website, for

²⁶³ Ibid. We are reminded to connect with the Stampede via a plethora of social media and internet platforms.

²⁶⁴ See, for example, “Roping profits and fun: July blowout crucial to city’s tourism revenue” *Calgary Herald* June 21, 2001, D1: “All told, visitors to Stampede Park spent \$255 million in Calgary and \$42 million in the rest of Alberta, totaling \$297 million, tourism statistics show. That equates to about 34 per cent of Calgary’s entire 1999 tourism haul of \$855 million. Alberta’s total annual tourism income is \$4.2 billion.” The Stampede has presented statistics to Calgarians – its 2003 report showed that \$2.60 was spent throughout the City for every dollar spent at the Stampede. Calgary Stampede, *2003 Report to the Community* cited in Max Foran, “More Than Partners: The Calgary Stampede and the City of Calgary” in *Icon, Brand, Myth* ed. Foran, 150. Other news articles that are quite telling about this fascination with the

example, highlighted the Stampede Rodeo and Evening Derbies, but below that the Coca-Cola Stage is the next priority on the website. Below this are the Agriculture and Western Events, Stampede Music, Food, and other shows – which include dog shows and dirt bike competitions.²⁶⁵ Indeed, the pancake breakfasts celebrated throughout the period of the Stampede – themselves a longstanding alimentary practice related to the event – are now notably celebrated at shopping malls; among the largest pancake breakfasts is the one held at Chinook Centre, famously hosting an estimated 60,000 individuals each Stampede.²⁶⁶ Other shopping malls across the city and, indeed, outside the city host Stampede breakfasts of their own.²⁶⁷ Throughout Calgary, decorations related to the Stampede are omnipresent – perhaps most notably at sites of consumption, such as shopping malls, bars and restaurants, and concert venues. The importance of such sites cannot be understated for the celebration of the Stampede.

Over the last decades of the twentieth century, and the first (roughly) decade of the twenty-first, Alberta (and, to varying extents, the Prairies more generally) accepted and promoted a neo-conservative set of values, such that some scholars have referred to the Prairies as the “bastion of the right” during this period.²⁶⁸ Ralph Klein, for example, referred to his government as a “good old-fashioned, down-to-earth, common-sense, straightforward, no-nonsense government” – insinuating, thereby, that a neoconservative

numbers include “Measured in drinks and hotel rooms, business is back at this year’s Stampede” CBC News, last updated July 15, 2017, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/calgary-stampede-tourism-business-1.4207020>.

²⁶⁵ “2018 Stampede,” Calgary Stampede, accessed June 7, 2018, <https://www.calgarystampede.com/stampede>

²⁶⁶ “Chinook breakfast challenges record” *Calgary Herald*, July 9, 2000, F5; “Chinook Centre a Calgary icon and for good reason” *Calgary Herald*, June 27 2013, N2.

²⁶⁷ “Wrangle Up ‘Dem Pancakes” *Calgary Herald*, July 6, 2018, SW14.

²⁶⁸ Conway, *The West*, 302–383. The chapter is entitled “Bastion of the Right: 1993–2005.”

approach to governing was all of the aforementioned.²⁶⁹ Brad Wall, former leader of the center-right Saskatchewan Party, noted that the government must be forward-looking, that the party “believes in the future instead of looking to some dusty old manifesto from a time before Elvis” – referring, of course, to the CCF’s Regina Manifesto.²⁷⁰ Wall and Klein’s immense support from the rural vote reflects a transformation in the values of the farmers, and Klein’s symbolic evocation of the cowboy successfully captured this.²⁷¹

Entrepreneurs on the Prairies reflect and continue to cultivate these values. Friesen writes that entrepreneurs from the Prairies were typically proud of their Western heritage and adored by the media, “wearing cowboy boots and Stetsons with their three piece western-style suits.”²⁷² Peter Pocklington, among the most prominent Prairie businesspeople in its history, heavily valued individualist values and was quoted as saying

²⁶⁹ *Toronto Star*, Feb. 17, 2001 p. 1 “Klein country; Alberta’s premier is too popular to lose the coming election, and he’s spending plenty to keep it that way”

²⁷⁰ *Regina Leader-Post*, Mar. 16, 2004 p. A1 “A Wall of Support: Brad Wall Acclaimed as Sask. Party Leader”

²⁷¹ Interestingly, Klein’s behavior was frequently referred to admiringly as “cowboy politics.” Don Martin, *King Ralph: The Political Life and Success of Ralph Klein* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, Ltd., 2002), see 17, 75. This tendency towards a “cowboy” image may have gained Klein his hold over the rural vote – as Martin notes, when he became Premier, he had won a “rural landslide” in the vote (114–115). Newspapers of the time took notice of the degree to which the rural constituency responded to his image during his late 1992 rural tour: “Klein is not a city slicker putting on cowboy boots and an act to charm the rural community,” *Edmonton Journal*, Nov. 18, 1992, p. A1, “Candidate Klein a hit as he takes the rural route.” Klein would attempt to maintain this image late into his time as Premier – see the headline “Rodeo folk a Conservative crowd: Rural areas wearing Ralph Klein’s brand, straw poll reveals” *Edmonton Journal*, Nov. 14, 2004, p. A7.

I should note that the political situation in Manitoba was quite different, where the Province in the same period swung from the Progressive Conservatives (1977–1981) to the NDP (1981–1988) back to the Progressive Conservatives (1988–1999) back to the NDP (1999–2016) and, as of this thesis’ writing, back to the Progressive Conservatives. This fluctuation represents one of the assumptions I make – in line with the diagnosis of thinkers such as Slavoj Žižek – that left-wing politicians in North America overwhelmingly embrace the values and practices of neoliberal capitalism. In Žižek’s provocative phrase (stated in various lectures), “we are all Fukuyama-ists” (referring to Francis Fukuyama’s book *The End of History*) in that the framing of neoliberal capitalism surrounds all thinking about politics, which is essentially aimed at minor reforms of the system rather than any challenge to it. For the case of the Prairies, again, this is evidenced quite thoroughly – as reflected in Wall’s above quote.

²⁷² Friesen, *Canadian Prairies*, 445.

that Ayn Rand was “one of the great philosophers of our century,” and was apparently well versed in her work.²⁷³ While the rejection of the business leader, as exemplified in Peter Pocklington, should suggest the degree to which the business leader is not accepted as a symbol of the region’s social mythology, the individualist ethics Pocklington championed are a quite different matter. Indeed, Calgary media has reinforced such a sense that the transition to its status as a business metropolis on the Prairies is a simple fact of the land – as a 2008 article in the *Calgary Herald* writes: “If there is a symbol for Calgary’s transition from an agrarian centre whose economic leaders were ranchers, lumbermen, and land speculators to the modern petroleum era, it was the replacement of the Robin Hood Flour Mill on the CPR tracks by the Gulf Canada Square tower.”²⁷⁴ Indeed, other such symbols could certainly be procured from the vast archive of Calgary’s urban development history.

As church attendance has declined, this form of commitment has increasingly been replaced by Spiritual But Not Religious forms of belief and practice. Even amongst those who *do* attend the church (if only irregularly), what tends to be emphasized in the Canadian context is that “the individual, rather than one’s religious group, should have authority over shaping a person’s religious beliefs and practices.”²⁷⁵ This reflects the important social value placed on individual choice, on a sense of the individual finding their own way, rather than any sense of duty, obedience, or even – in a strictly *emic* sense – social creation of one’s ethics or values. What I mean by this last point is that referring to one deriving their opinions from some other authority is often met with a scornful reaction – “can’t you think

²⁷³ *Edmonton Journal*, May 2, 1993 p. D6 “A heroic philosophy; Ayn Rand pitted individualism against collectivism.”

²⁷⁴ *Calgary Herald*, Aug. 31, 2008, p. DD6 “Modern business greats”

²⁷⁵ Thiessen, *Meaning*, 91.

for yourself?” or some other such reply.²⁷⁶ A common refrain amongst individuals is placing importance on the cultivation of one’s belief and practices deemed religious at the *individual* level, and that respecting such individualism – by not “pushing one’s beliefs” on others – is a crucial element of how people live their lives.²⁷⁷

Rituals offer an important occasion for societal values to be renewed.²⁷⁸ In some ways, the evolution and growth of the Stampede can be seen as a distinctly consumer-capitalist form of ritual, the first being the importance of consumer choice in the way the Stampede is celebrated.²⁷⁹ While a variety of events have always been an aspect of the way the Stampede and Exhibition are celebrated, the glut of activities available to the individual attending the Stampede today is truly remarkable compared to the first few decades of its existence. Aside from more conscious efforts to incorporate a variety of events into the celebration, like other ritual behaviors, the Stampede has taken advantage of what Jonathan Z. Smith referred to as “accidents,”²⁸⁰ institutionalized them, and made them an important component of the Stampede, such as the Pancake Breakfast that is now an indispensable component of the celebration and reflects the value of Western hospitality.²⁸¹

²⁷⁶ In no way do I think this is how we should analyze this phenomenon from the viewpoint of the historian; even the value of “thinking for oneself” is, quite obviously, a product of social consensus, and the very ideology that supports this perspective is a social product.

²⁷⁷ Thiessen, *Meaning*, see esp. 3, 61, 73, 121.

²⁷⁸ As Bruce Lincoln succinctly put it, “ritual is best understood as an authoritative mode of symbolic discourse and a powerful instrument for the evocation of those sentiments (affinity and estrangement) out of which society is constructed” (*Discourse*, 53).

²⁷⁹ The more obvious ways (sponsorships from multinational corporations) need, I think, only underlining more than analysis.

²⁸⁰ Smith, *Imagining Religion*, 54. Smith does not mean just literal “accidents” but any event that is spontaneous, or appears spontaneous in its sense of not normally being part of the ritual.

²⁸¹ It is claimed that the first pancake breakfast was a result of a generous man sharing his breakfast. According to the Stampede’s own website: “During the 1923 Calgary Stampede, a grizzled young chuckwagon driver by the name of Jack Morton had, (due to lack of funds or accommodation), resorted to camping at the CPR train station in downtown Calgary. Jack, a likable character, was well-known in the area. Soon old friends began stopping by for a visit. One morning a number of cowboys were sharing

The Stampede is an event so heavily embedded in Prairie culture that to sever it from the cycle of the year would be a deep trauma. Even removing the “Stampede City” branding from the city was profoundly resisted – Sydney Sharpe, in writing for the *Calgary Herald*, argued that the attempt to rebrand the city as Calgary, Inc. “makes the city seem as if it’s all business, economics, and high finance... Don’t they get the whole point of the Stampede? It’s a celebration of the best of the West, a spirit that supports us throughout the rest of the year. It’s a unique blend of individualism and co-operation, taking when we need and giving to those in need.”²⁸² The claim the article’s headline makes, “We’re Cowboys and Don’t You Forget It,” is, of course, simply not a demographic fact, let alone fully a symbolic one, despite the writer’s appeal to the “noble yeomanship” and “the grit and tears of ranchers and farmers who refused to back down” which is claimed to form the basis of the city’s identity. The Stampede is not unique in the history of ritualized celebration for the temporary adoption of a new identity, but what it *is* symptomatic of – made more stark by the transformation of Prairie society from a predominantly rural to a predominantly urban culture – is the *temporary adoption* of an identity that is concretely available for consistent reinterpretation. The common sense of Prairie society, as in consumer-capitalist societies on a general level, is the constant reinvention of one’s identity.²⁸³ As such, the adoption of the identity of the cowboy is *not* analogous, for example, to the adoption of the inferior/superior role one briefly dons during the

Jack’s breakfast as Calgarians and visitors alike passed by. They were cordially invited to join the group. Thus began the tradition of friendly hospitality, which has made Calgary famous throughout the world.” Calgary Stampede, “Authentic Cowboy Hospitality,” accessed August 8, 2018, <http://caravan.calgarystampede.com/about/>

²⁸² *Calgary Herald*, July 7, 2000 p. A25 “We’re cowboys and don’t forget it.”

²⁸³ See, for example, Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), see esp. 49, 54–58.

celebrations of *Carnivale* in the European Middle Ages. Beyond some minor gestures and the wearing of unusual clothing, the adoption of the Cowboy identity does not fundamentally turn society on its head or reverse social hierarchies. Individualist ethics, especially those of the Spiritual But Not Religious variety, emphasize authenticity and being true to one's *self*.²⁸⁴ As such, the temporary assumption of the cowboy identity is a consumer choice rather than an ethical or moral one: it is the choice to attend the event, perhaps to purchase and don cowboy gear, and enjoy the festivities. The rural idyll, as celebrated at the Stampede, is a consumer choice one can *temporarily* adopt. The adoption of the Cowboy identity is primarily an action that celebrates celebration, as the increasing importance of the theme park components, corporate sponsorships and parties, concerts, and emphasis on consumption throughout the city evidence.

This ritualized celebration of a particular set of values has changed in its emphases markedly, and analysis should point to a development in the values of Prairie culture as a whole. This process was gradual, but the effect of mass consumer culture on the ceremony of the Stampede and how it was celebrated is readily apparent.²⁸⁵ Max Foran has aptly described the festival as an event that “transforms an energetic corporate metropolis into a relaxed, fun-loving “Cow-Town.””²⁸⁶ The subtext to this statement is, I argue, that a largely consumer-capitalist and corporate culture, via the ritualized spectacle of the Stampede, adopts an idealized vision of the rural idyll that reinforces the consciousness that this same

²⁸⁴ See the ethnographic research of Galen Watts in “On the Politics of Self-Spirituality: A Canadian Case Study” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 47:3 (2018), 345–372; “The Personal Politics of Spirituality: On the Lived Relationship Between Contemporary Spirituality and Social Justice Among Canadian Millennials” (MA Thesis, Queen’s University, 2016).

²⁸⁵ For example, during the 1980s and 1990s, Disney characters repeatedly visited the Stampede; Various documents, CS.99.26 Box 2 (Set 1) “Annual Reports 1980+” Stampede Archives, Calgary, Alberta.

²⁸⁶ Max Foran, “More Than Partners” in *Icon, Brand, Myth* ed. Foran, 148.

thing has escaped it. The Stampede is such a fantastic event precisely *because* of its unusual nature; outside of the Stampede, the presence of the Cowboy and/or the farmer borders on being phantasmatic for the urban Prairie citizen; the values recent performances of the Stampede celebrates are nebulous precisely because of the phantasmatic nature of the thing being celebrated.²⁸⁷ The business leader is not a suitable replacement for the farmer, but the symbolic farmer is nonetheless a ghost that, only by the weight of years, grows more important for Prairie culture as a means of remembering a past that is always being *forgotten*.²⁸⁸ In other words, the remembrance of what the rural idyll *meant* for generations past, and the social values that farmer's movements once represented, is continuously exalted at the Stampede event. There is certainly an awareness that the celebration of rural life is necessarily idealized at the Stampede, but the values that are celebrated there are undoubtedly transforming as well in conjunction with the changes in Prairie life. As Steve Allan, former chairman of the board and president of the Calgary Stampede, said in 2006:

²⁸⁷ The temptation to adopt the perspective of Jonathan Z. Smith on the ritual elements of the Stampede, that it "is a means of performing the way things ought to be in conscious tension to the way things are in such a way that this ritualized perfection is recollected in the ordinary, uncontrolled course of things" (*Imagining*, 63) may be an efficacious lens for certain aspects of the Stampede, such as the opening Parade, or the Pancake breakfasts. The spectacle of the Stampede at a general level, however, is *not* a "controlled" environment in the way Smith is discussing ritual behavior: the entire city of Calgary is subject to the spectacle of the Stampede. As such, the rural idyll – as I am discussing it above – is *not* controlled so as to effectively evoke "the way things ought to be": it is a diffuse discursive operation. Moreover, the infamous drunken decadence and revelry that accompanies the Stampede resists such an ability to conjure a sense of "the way things ought to be" in relation to the Stampede, let alone the symbol of the farmer or cowboy (this is not just an aspect of the Stampede that is enjoyed by the younger middle-classes, but the business elite of the City: in *Calgary Herald* July 8, 2001 p. A1 "Stampede Parties Seriously Fun Business," among the parties mentioned are Online Business System's Pancakes n' Caesars event, the annual Burnet Duckworth and Palmer event hosted at the Petroleum Club that exceeds capacity each year (the parking lot is converted into the VIP Corral), FirstEnergy Capital Corp's FirstRodeo day-long party, Peters&Co.'s "Firewater Friday", and Brookfield Properties Corp.'s several days of events, which include a "hangover patrol" equipped with an oxygen tank that assists the most enervated of revelers).

²⁸⁸ To put this same point another way, "*cogitation adaequata semper vitat eandem rem*" – a rough translation would be, "an adequate thought avoids the same thing." Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981), 49.

“This is a progressive city that is looking to the future but we can never forget our roots. We’re known for being friendly, honest, hardworking, entrepreneurial and that to me is what we come together to celebrate every July.”²⁸⁹ This comment emerges at precisely the same period the “Stampede brand” was revamped to drop the word “Exhibition” from the marketing and branding of the event.²⁹⁰ This focus on celebrating things like friendliness and entrepreneurship, while perhaps encapsulated in the very early settler prospect of attempting to craft a successful farm, should not blind us to the positioning of concepts like the “entrepreneur” and “hard work” within the Prairies’ most powerful bastion of neoconservative, individualist ethics.²⁹¹ The rural idyll is encapsulated in the symbol of the farmer and/or the cowboy, which has been co-opted on the Prairies from being a symbol of co-operation to one of competition.²⁹²

²⁸⁹ *Calgary Herald*, July 6, 2006, p. N1, “Calgary celebrates cowboy culture: Calgary’s gift to the English language – yahoo!” This emphasis on entrepreneurship is repeated in, for example, the annual reports on the Stampede: “When you boil it all down, the Calgary Exhibition & Stampede is really a celebration of our western heritage and values. Values like hard work, hospitality, friendliness and entrepreneurship” *Calgary Exhibition & Stampede Story – Report to the Community, 2004, CS.99.26 Box 2 File 14, Stampede Archives, Calgary.*

²⁹⁰ This was based on an apparently extensive period of market research. *Calgary Herald*, Mar. 22, 2007 p. B1 “Stampede simplifies brand to make firmer impression.”

²⁹¹ The victory of the NDP in 2015 should certainly *not* be seen as a negation of this tendency – without doubt, the Alberta party is the most centrist NDP party in Canada, and even the party itself is reflective of the neoliberal values that predominate throughout Canada as a whole, with some minor reforms being their primary goal.

²⁹² It should be acknowledged that I have somewhat simplified this narrative; there are two major indicators that this tension between individualism and co-operation has been longstanding. For example, during the Great Depression and the Second World War, there was something of a sea change within mainstream Prairie Christian thought. After the victory of Social Credit in the province of Alberta, Clark Banack discusses the strong focus on the value of individualism on the part of the party’s leadership, noting that from William Aberhart and Ernest Manning’s “premillennial perspective, even attempting to construct [a perfect co-operative economic or political system similar to that of the United Farmers of Alberta] was considered beyond the proper aim of the state, that of simply ensuring that the freedom of the individual was protected.” Their “intense devotion to individual freedom” was rewarded by dramatically sweeping the UFA from power in 1935 (Banack, *God’s Province*, 150–151). More generally, the United Church of Canada radically shifted its focus during the 1930s to a spiritual revival of “intense inner piety,” rejecting social Christianity due to its divisiveness and instead refocusing on the individual. This renewed attention to the individual experience, and the assertion of “the primacy of personal evangelism and the essential experience of conversion”, resulted in significant increases in membership

III

The Calgary Stampede's increasing popularity, focus on the variety of experiences available, means of marketing/promoting it, and the growth of its economic impact on the City of Calgary correlates with the transformation on the Prairies from a predominantly church-going society to one that increasingly rejects the institution of the church. I do not intend to argue that these two things are directly associated. However, the embrace of a more individualistic ethic is nonetheless a fundamental component of both Prairie cultural and Prairie religious history. What should become obvious, in terms of how the Stampede is celebrated and in terms of why the church is less important as a community space, is an increasing tendency for citizens of the Prairie to place a high value on individualism and choice. The value of individualism is pervasive in Prairie society, and as Joel Thiessen's interviews with over ninety Calgarians demonstrates, a value of deep importance to those who maintain no or marginal adherence to a Christian institution, as well as some active affiliates to Christian institutions.²⁹³ Moreover, what Thiessen repeatedly highlights in the ethnographic data presented in *The Meaning of Sunday* is the extraordinary weight placed on the value of individual choice, and resistance to external authorities dictating one's beliefs.²⁹⁴ This makes it difficult for a celebration such as the Stampede (again, formerly

and attendance (see Christie and Gauvreau, *Full-Orbed*, 224–243). Needless to say, the dramatic successes of these individualistic Christian orientations drew from a well that existed even during the period of the social gospel's most substantial influence.

²⁹³ Thiessen, *Meaning*, esp. 166–168.

²⁹⁴ Thiessen identifies the following values as central to the beliefs of, especially, young people in Canada today: "young people of all religious backgrounds stress individual agency in their religious development, reject external authorities telling them how they ought to believe or behave, and resist forcing their religious views on to others including those closest to them" (*Meaning*, 158).

the Exhibition and Stampede) to promote any broad ethical statement or set of social values other than individual experience, choice, and enjoyment.

The culture of Alberta, and the Prairies more generally, has increasingly placed profound importance on individual enterprise, choice, and improvement. Farmers themselves, through the adoption of a greater business ethic, have contributed to this development.²⁹⁵ The proliferation of consumer spaces across the region, which have grown to characterize the landscape of not *just* urban centers but towns and even villages, have worked the Prairies into the neoliberal culture characteristic of North America broadly and made malls amongst the most important centers of community in the region – as exemplified in how important malls have become in the annual ritual of the Pancake breakfast. This cannot be described simply as a monoculture; such a characterization of spaces crafted by multinational corporations is a mistake. Capitalist spaces are perfectly capable of working “local culture” into their self-presentation, as the celebration of the Calgary Stampede example well demonstrates.

Collective experiences, understood as a moral – if not, in some sense, theological²⁹⁶ – moments, are now increasingly replaced by the idea of the wise consumer, the smart

²⁹⁵ Ian Macpherson and John Herd Thompson, “The Business of Agriculture: Prairie Farmers and the Adoption of “Business Methods,” 1880–1950” in *The Prairie West* ed. Francis and Palmer, 475–496. The nuanced analysis Macpherson and Thompson present notes the following: “Within the mainstream farm organizations – the Pools, the United Farmers of Alberta and of Manitoba – the more successful “business” farmers had come to dominate policies and to set direction. If they were not simply motivated by the “bottom line” and adopted “business methods” so as to mitigate the effects of change in order to ensure the survival of farming as a “way of life,” neither were they Luddites or socialist utopians. If they were anti-corporate and anti-monopoly, they were not anti-capitalist. If they rejected the absolute right of private property, they were all property owners to whom the concept of private property was the cornerstone of their rural world. They tried to regulate the marketplace so as to facilitate a reasonable return for farmers operating medium-sized farms on sound business principles, not to guarantee a minimum standard of living that would allow every farm family to survive on the land” (490).

²⁹⁶ As the platform of the United Farmers and other social gospel leaders demonstrates.

shopper. Farmer's markets encourage consumers to "buy locally" everywhere on the Prairies, but businesses themselves use the moral impulses of the consumer to buy particular products that do charity work, including the previously discussed Prairie Proud company, as well as multinational businesses such as Starbucks, TOMS, Timberland, and Tentree. These purchases become a direct reflection of one's ethical choices. But a neglected element of the change in Prairie culture is the increasing hold commodities have on what might be called the "religious imagination." Kathryn Lofton, in the recent book *Consuming Religion*, offers this comment on consumerism's relationship to religion: "the religious imagination is constantly, perhaps increasingly and inevitably, offering us dreams of the world based on our relationships with commodities... these dreams are constrained by the logic of neoliberal life, packaged and processed for the market."²⁹⁷ While Lofton only cites Slavoj Zizek in a single note in *Consuming Religion*, there is little doubt that Zizek was thinking along the same lines as Lofton when he wrote the following:

...there is a fundamental homology between the interpretative procedure of Marx and Freud – more precisely, between their analysis of commodity and of dreams. In both cases the point is to avoid the properly fetishistic fascination of the 'content' supposedly hidden behind the form: the 'secret' to be unveiled through analysis is not the content hidden by the form (the form of commodities, the form of dreams) but, on the contrary, *the 'secret' is the form itself*.²⁹⁸

I invoke these scholars to make what I hope is a straightforward point that these lines of analysis point to: neoliberal logic, of which capitalist/consumer ideology is a vital component, can be considered one of the transformative drivers of religious history. However, more specifically, what has perhaps been overlooked in this transformation are the ways in which commodities and products actively play a role in the imagination of

²⁹⁷ Kathryn Lofton, *Consuming Religion* (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 12.

²⁹⁸ Slavoj Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008), 3.

those who claim to reject religion (whether stating they have “No Religion,” or describe themselves as SBNRs), especially in varieties of belief and practice that place a high value on the self. If consumer spaces are places Prairie Canadians value, and increasingly seek out as a means of socialization and engage in fantasies of various kinds, then surely the commodities sought within these spaces play an important role within the lives and imaginations of these individuals.²⁹⁹

The ways in which the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede has changed in its celebration over time can serve as profound evidence for the broader transformation in Prairie society. I am not interested in arguing that these two observations have any direct connection in terms of intent on the part of the organizers. Nor am I arguing that there is any conscious effort on the part of practitioners to transform the image of the rural idyll to a “false” version of it. What I am arguing is that the rural idyll, as symbol, has been exapted over time to represent something new that it did not previously represent, and that given the Stampede’s influence on Prairie culture this exaptation is due to a broader transformation in Prairie society. This is a common aspect of ritual behavior that should be recognized about the Stampede not *just* for understanding the Stampede itself, but the broader culture of the Prairies as a whole that are evoked by the event. If we observe that

²⁹⁹ In the most straightforward sense, we can think here of a purchase of branded incense for meditation, or buying expensive yoga pants to do yoga. In a more thorny instance, we can look at a consumer product such as a ski jacket. The logo on the jacket has an intangible but powerful value to a particular consumer as a marker of a certain identity; the marketing of the jacket may associate it with adventures on a mountain in a far-away country; the jacket may be displayed next to fake rocks dusted with artificial snow; the jacket may be highlighted as having a particular temperature rating, thereby implying not only its utility but by implication the frigid temperatures the individual may venture into. If the individualist spiritual practitioner sees travelling as a means of capturing the essence of their “authentic selves,” suddenly this consumer product plays a vital role in preparing for a spiritual undertaking. The consumer culture of the Prairies plays a vital role in the practice of these kinds of SBNRs. This will be more thoroughly addressed in the following chapter.

certain Christian beliefs and practices that relied heavily on a particular mythology of the Farmer became less attractive over time, their comparison with transformations in the performance of the Calgary Stampede can serve as two *exempli gratia* of trends in the broader Prairie culture.

Chapter Five – Spiritual But Not Religious People and Prairie Religious History

Every social stratum has its own “common sense” which is ultimately the most widespread conception of life and morals. Every philosophical current leaves a sedimentation of “common sense”: this is the document of its historical reality. Common sense is not something rigid and static; rather, it changes continuously, enriched by scientific notions and philosophical opinions which have entered into common usage.³⁰⁰

-Antonio Gramsci

As I have argued in my previous chapter, with the decline in church adherence diminishing the influence of what had been the most significant arbiter of Prairie values, other mythologies have begun to assert a greater influence in the region and existing mythologies have evolved to reflect different social realities. In my final chapter, I will suggest that Prairie culture has become increasingly characterized by Spiritual But Not Religious [SBNR] behaviors and values, asserting two categorizations of SBNR individuals that may be helpful for purposes of historical analysis: individualist spirituality and mystical spirituality. After outlining what these two categories consist of as a means of differentiating what variety of spirituality is under discussion, I will focus my analysis on individualist spirituality, and particularly, its relationship to consumerism.

In recent years, religion as a category of life has tended, in Canada and elsewhere, to be associated with restrictive, morose, and at worst cruel institutions.³⁰¹ The rejection of

³⁰⁰ Antonio Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks Vol. 1* ed. Joseph A. Buttigieg (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 173.

³⁰¹ See my discussion, in chapter one, of social gossellers creating an opposition between “religion” and “Christianity,” or “Churchianity” and “Christianity,” and so on. The publishing success of Pierre Berton’s *The Comfortable Pew* suggests that such discourse was readily acceptable to English Canadians, with Berton arguing for a division between “Religion” and “Christianity”: Berton sees religion as “the cult of the establishment, with the denial of Christian radicalism, its alliance with the status quo and its awesome social power” being essentially, in his words, “the antithesis of Christianity.” Pierre Berton, *The Comfortable Pew: A Critical Look at the Church in the New Age* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, Ltd., 1965), 82. The chapter “Religion versus Christianity” runs from 82–89. See also Nancy Christie’s writing on

“religion” is the commonality that all varieties of SBNRs share. One of the most important aspects for understanding the SBNR phenomenon is the common parlance that underpins what “religion” means to these individuals. This normative understanding of religion is how historians *must* begin interpretation of the Spiritual But Not Religious phenomenon – the very thing called religion in the SBNR title is what is being responded to.³⁰² Why would “religion” become something not only worth rejecting, but something that people are *proud* to reject?

I have already attempted to address some of these questions in Chapter One. Some of the dichotomies that structure the contrast between religion and secularity, in particular as they serve what William Cavanaugh calls “the Myth of Religious Violence,” are employed directly in SBNR discourse. But more to the current subject, what does the term

the book, “‘Belief crucified upon a rooftop antenna’: Pierre Berton, *The Comfortable Pew*, and Dechristianization” in *The Sixties and Beyond: Dechristianization in North America and Western Europe, 1945–2000* ed. Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 321–350.

This type of discourse about the nature of “true religion” as opposed to its corruptions is, of course, far from new. What *is* new, or what I would argue needs to be understood about this, is the rejection of “religion” as a category as opposed to the older discourses about corruptions of particular traditions deemed religious. To put the matter quite frankly, this adherence to Christian behaviors in what edges towards a Spiritual But Not Religious fashion has very old precedents that have near perfect homologues from centuries ago. Larry Masters, one of the marginal affiliates interviewed by Joel Thiessen, claimed that “I don’t think God gives a toss whether I go and sit [in church] on Sunday or whether I say a nice quiet prayer running on Sunday in the half marathon” (*Meaning*, 81). Is this not the same logic as the followers of Peter of Bruys from the twelfth century, who stated that “God hears as well when invoked in a tavern as in a church, in a market place as in temple, before an altar or in a stable, and He hearkens to those who are worthy”? Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans, eds. and trans., *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 120.

³⁰² This conceptualization of religion is quite readily traceable as an element of British colonization and the Enlightenment. See, for example, the second chapter of William Cavanaugh’s *Myth of Religious Violence* for the concept’s utility in British colonization efforts. Cavanaugh’s book also points to a common reason as to why SBNRs reject “religion” – religions are claimed to be inherently, or more prone to being, violent and divisive than other areas of human life. Spirituality is said to pierce this cloud religion creates by getting to what they themselves see as the “authentic core” of religious belief. In Cavanaugh’s phrasing, “the attempt to create a transhistorical and transcultural concept of religion that is essentially prone to violence is one of the foundational and legitimating myths of the liberal nation state.” Cavanaugh, *Myth*, 4. See also Arnal, “Definition,” 21–34.

“spirituality” represent for its practitioners? There are two clearly different ways in which the word is used (among other possibilities). One is the noun itself that *names* the system of belief and practice – that is, one uses the term spirituality as a means of separating their practice from “religion.” The other way the term is employed is in a more general usage that even people who would normally be said to be religious ascribe to – that is, “I am practicing my spirituality by going to church,” or some other such use of the term. In the one sense, spirituality is a designation, or a title, that people ascribe to themselves, while the other is used to designate a broad practice.³⁰³

What Reginald Bibby has noted as the “respect” with which claims to being Spiritual But Not Religious receives³⁰⁴ suggests a common sense that has centered on a rejection of “religion” as it is normatively constructed in favor of an individualistic ethic that is represented, and encouraged, by a wide variety of institutions – including those considered in some way religious. This leads even active affiliates in religious institutions to reject the word “religion,”³⁰⁵ let alone the rest of the population, and as such it would seem we are left with three choices regarding the term Spiritual But Not Religious. We can accept the claim of “Spiritual But Not Religious” individuals that they are somehow *not* practicing what would ordinarily be called “religion” and begin analysis in such a fashion; we can, in a sort of Lincolnian³⁰⁶ manner, adopt the stance that we do not uncritically accept the claims of adherents and designate SBNRs as religious; we can understand religion as

³⁰³ As Thiessen’s findings indicate, people who are active affiliates in a Christian denomination (i.e. they are church going) reject the term “religion,” instead preferring terms *like* “spirituality,” “faith,” and so on, due to the “images of authoritarianism, dogmatism, legalism, and sexism” religion is associated with (Thiessen, *Meaning*, 34–35).

³⁰⁴ Bibby, *Resilient*, 143–144.

³⁰⁵ See note 303.

³⁰⁶ Bruce Lincoln, “Theses on Method,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* vol. 8 (1996), 225–227.

an emic category of analysis and analyze SBNRs as one aspect of the ideology/culture/system of belief and practice that characterizes the Prairie region, noting that, as has been done elsewhere in this thesis, some SBNRs may consider a particular special thing so special as to deem it – not necessarily “religious” – but sacred, or spiritual. Accepting the utility of Taves’ ascriptive model where we study how and why a particular quality – religious, sacred, spiritual – is ascribed to particular experiences and things, this third option is what will be pursued.

It is difficult to track this nebulous group in terms of sheer numbers. However, recent data has suggested that about 39% of Canadians would identify themselves as Spiritual But Not Religious,³⁰⁷ with other groups such as those claiming to have “No Religion” and “Christian not indicated elsewhere” (hereafter n.i.e.) on the Census probably containing SBNRs. Both of these groups are an increasingly influential element of Prairie culture. Alberta had the third highest amount of “no religion” respondents as a percentage of the population among the Canadian provinces and territories, with Manitoba and Saskatchewan fifth and sixth, respectively.³⁰⁸ Brian Clarke and Stuart Macdonald also make clear that this “no religion” category is composed of a variety of different groups of people – not just atheists or agnostics.³⁰⁹ Another significant trend representative of a turning away from “organized religion” is the fact that Canadians identifying as either simply “Christian” or “Protestant,” without specifying a denomination, increased from 1.3

³⁰⁷ Bibby, *Resilient*, 150. Bibby devotes a chapter to this category in *Resilient Gods*.

³⁰⁸ Clarke and Macdonald, 166. The percentage was reported at 31.1% of the Albertan population, behind British Columbia (43.6%) and the Yukon (49.2%).

³⁰⁹ The authors point out that, Canada-wide, those answering “No Religion” number about 7.7 million people, and if atheists and agnostics were included, this number would only increase to 7.8 million. *Ibid*, 163.

million to 2 million Canadians between 2001 and 2011.³¹⁰ The former group, categorized as “Christian not indicated elsewhere” individuals (or Christian n.i.e., the broad census group that is predominantly composed of those offering a generic “Christian” answer), numbered 256,895 in Alberta, 56,775 in Saskatchewan, and 91,775 in Manitoba in 2011.³¹¹ Clarke and Macdonald call the growth in No-Religion respondents “a profound and enduring trend that is nothing short of a deep change in Canadian culture,”³¹² and similarly, illustrate the strength of this generic “Christian” trend by noting that a greater number of Canadians indicated they were simply Christian than answered “Presbyterian, Lutheran, or Pentecostal.”³¹³ Christian n.i.e. individuals rank number one as a proportion of the population in Manitoba, second in Alberta, and fourth in Saskatchewan when compared to all Canadian provinces – something, at least, of a regional tendency.³¹⁴ In short, these trends are significant, and the Canadian Prairies have a high concentration of these No Religion and Christian n.i.e. individuals within their population.

Census categories can only tell us so much, but I suspect that a significant number of these individuals could be categorized as SBNRs, and will attempt to present some considerations to this effect. In the final chapter of this thesis, I will undertake an analysis of a particular disposition within the SBNR group: a category that some scholars have called Individualist Spirituality.³¹⁵ This group of people is distinct from other kinds of Spiritual But Not Religious adherents, and in particular, varieties of spirituality that could

³¹⁰ Ibid, 173.

³¹¹ Ibid, 174–177.

³¹² Ibid, 165.

³¹³ Ibid, 179.

³¹⁴ Ibid, 185–187. The data Clarke and Macdonald are presenting dates from the 2011 census.

³¹⁵ Jeremy Carrette and Richard King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2005).

be described as mystical. Keeping this in mind helps ensure analysis is not solely criticism of SBNR behaviors on the basis of a criticism of capitalism,³¹⁶ and aids in analyzing not just the phenomenal growth of this demographic but the reasons for that growth. The values of individualist spiritual practitioners reflect the values increasingly apparent in the public discourse of the Prairies in the past several decades, and Spiritual But Not Religious people at a general level are an important factor in recent Prairie religious history.

I – Categorization of Spiritual But Not Religious People

Existing categories of spirituality have not been the subject of much academic consensus, and there are a variety of reasons why new categorizations of spirituality are necessary.³¹⁷ The two primary issues for my purposes here include the fact that much of the existing literature on spirituality focuses on its relationship to “religion,” often assuming thereby that religion is the norm and spirituality is a lesser deviation from it.³¹⁸

³¹⁶ Such as: Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality*; Craig Martin, *Capitalizing Religion: Ideology and the Opiate of the Bourgeoisie* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016). These are important interventions on the matter of understanding the rise of spirituality, and certainly serve as theoretical material for how I understand individualist spirituality especially, but focus only on a particular set of characteristics of SBNRs.

³¹⁷ Among the most common issues would be the valorization of SBNR individuals through categories such as “seekers,” “explorers,” and “immigrants” (see Linda Mercadante, *Belief Without Borders: Tracing Religious Belief, Practice, and Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), esp. 53–63), as well as the dismissiveness of certain categorizations towards SBNRs through categories such as “hedonists” or “stalwarts” (Terms derived from J. Russell Hale and Brinkerhoff/Mackie, respectively, discussed in Mercadante, 50–51). In addition, these terms lack clarity in terms of *what* is being sought by seekers, explored by explorers, and so on. Moreover, terms such as “hedonists” carry with them more than the implication of a value-judgment by the scholar, and to put the matter somewhat glibly, if a future academic publication were to argue that “the majority of people claiming to have ‘No Religion’ on the Census could be categorized as Hedonists” it could be rightly criticized as lacking in an ability to take the category seriously.

³¹⁸ For example, Reginald Bibby discusses categorizations of spirituality along the lines of “conventional” and “less conventional” types, where he notes that “[t]he first refers to expressions of spirituality have fairly traditional religious connotations. The second refers to, well, essentially everything else... One searches largely in vain for threads of commonality” (Bibby, *Resilient*, 145).

The second is that much of the literature on spirituality's relationship to consumerism, while certainly offering some important considerations that will be employed in my analysis here, has assumed that spirituality can be successfully understood solely by critique of capitalism.³¹⁹ I argue that this is not the case – that what SBNRs share in common is a rejection of “religion,” but that there are multiple spiritual goals being pursued within this broad milieu.

As such, I propose two categories that can help us subdivide tendencies within the SBNR group: individualist and mystical spirituality. These categories subdivide SBNRs not so much on the basis of spirituality's relationship to “religion,” but on the basis of the beliefs and practices on which the practitioners focus. The first category, of individualist spirituality, I take from Jeremy Carrette and Richard King's categorization,³²⁰ though I intend to retool it for purposes of focusing primarily on the ethics regarding the self and consumer-capitalist attitudes towards the creation of identity. Individualist spirituality focuses on the ethics of navigating a neoliberal consumer-capitalist world, and in particular, the ethics of self-improvement and the authority of the self. This focus on ethical issues tends to downplay the supernatural, preferring instead a concentration on ethical behavior and, where a divinity *is* under discussion, a more nebulous nature is usually ascribed to it – which often takes the form of a single God. This category allows scholars of religion to actively engage a wide variety of individuals who ultimately share similar values: practitioners who may appropriate certain teachings from either Daoism, Confucianism, or Buddhism to capture the “truth of who they are;” those who believe in a

³¹⁹ See Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality*; Martin, *Capitalizing Religion*.

³²⁰ Carrette and King, 17–21.

moralistic, therapeutic deistic God whose primary concern is that people are good and kind;³²¹ businessmen who ascribe to an Ayn Rand-esque idea of the power of the individual and who use certain practices such as meditation and yoga to develop their most authentic/best selves.³²² What these individuals share is a focus on the self, and cultivating the relationship one has with themselves and what it means to be a “good person” in the context of a consumer-capitalist world, among other similarities.

Individualist spirituality reflects at its utmost the “ethic of authenticity,” which argues for the individual being true to themselves and authentic in their actions.³²³ This focus that individualist spirituality promotes means that, rather than the individual attempting to change their social context, what is instead often pressed for is a transformation of the self, a searching for their authentic elements, to accommodate to any circumstance they may find themselves in. Individualist spirituality is, in this sense, very strongly reflective of several prominent neoliberal, secular assumptions about the individual, whether the practitioner is conscious of it or not: that the individual has the right to choose, that the individual should act as an entrepreneur, that the individual should always be prepared to change, to transform, and to develop, all the while staying true to the “true” or “authentic self,” regardless of the adversities that may befall that individual. This also focuses the practitioner heavily on self-improvement, most readily apparent in growing one’s self in through ritualized behaviors, such as yoga and yoga retreats,

³²¹ The term “moralistic therapeutic deism” comes from Christian Smith and Melinda Lunquist Denton, *Soul Searching*, further discussed below (see footnote 338).

³²² While to some the reference to Ayn Rand and yoga in the same breath may seem unusual, in fact, lululemon stirred controversy by printing the famous “Who is John Galt?” quote on one of their bags. For a discussion of this decision, see Christine Lavrence and Kristin Lozanski, ““This is Not Your Practice Life”: lululemon and the Neoliberal Governance of Self” *The Canadian Review of Sociology* 51:1 (Feb. 2014), 83.

³²³ Discussed further below.

journaling, and dieting.³²⁴ What is important to note, however, is that these are far from the activities of unique individuals. There is a large community dedicated to these types of practices, and multinational brands that advocate for them. I will further elaborate on individualist spirituality and its influence on Canadian Prairie history below.

Mystical spirituality is, by contrast, focused on the belief in the power of experience. Particularly, what mystical spirituality is concerned with is the encounter with what the practitioner claims is a divine agent or power of some kind. What is often attested to in the discourse of mystical spirituality is that the experience transcends any ability to describe it – that the experience is, in some sense, “beyond religion” or “religious interpretation” of it. The utility of this category derives from the fact that the word “mysticism” has a strong usage in the field of Religious Studies and Histories of Religion that is already suggestive of the powerful quality of the kinds of experiences mystical spiritualists claim. The associations of the term mysticism with ecstatic experiences, and a strong personal interaction with spiritual beings, allow the scholar a means of positioning these types of spiritual belief and practice within a longer lineage of mystical behavior.

The second reason the term mystical spirituality may have a strong utility is the fact that mystical spiritual communities tend to be (though are not always) distinct from spiritual communities I am describing as individualist in nature. Mystical spirituality, because it is focused on experiences that others may find fantastic if not unbelievable, as a community does not often make many efforts to convert skeptics. Instead, there are many ritualized behaviors that involve storytelling, texts that recount such experiences, efforts to

³²⁴ Galen Watts’ terminology, “the ethic of productivity,” well summarizes this tendency.

prove the pervasiveness of such experiences, and so on. The mystical spiritual community in North America is perhaps most well-known for its communities surrounding near-death experiences, encounters with angels and deceased love ones, and claims to have experienced reincarnation. Other such claims may be included within the category of mystical spirituality, but these are some of the claimed experiences that are perhaps the most well-known.³²⁵

I will not focus, below, on mystical spirituality – though this is not because this group has had no influence on contemporary Prairie history. There are clear examples of workshops that are concerned with mystical spirituality,³²⁶ abundant literature documenting spiritual encounters with angelic beings,³²⁷ as well as events in political history that have been directly impacted by mystical spiritual experiences – Alberta New Democratic MLA Pam Barrett resigned from political life after a near-death experience, for example.³²⁸ However, it is important to distinguish between this group and the one that is my primary concern – that being individualist spirituality. This is because, I argue, the

³²⁵ I acknowledge the potential criticism that some of these experiences are claimed by religious people, and indeed, people who identify as being religious are included in some of these communities. However, what is important about this category is precisely the fact that people *have* these experiences *and* reject “religion” as a category, whether “religious” people participate in these communities or not.

³²⁶ Metro Continuing Education in Edmonton, Alberta, has frequently offered classes of the mystical spiritual variety (as well as practices that may fall more firmly into the individualist spirituality category). As of 2018, course offerings included “Channeling Guides & Angels,” and “Past Lives: Hidden Secrets.” Metro Continuing Education, “Mind, Body & Soul,” accessed Mar. 24, 2018, <https://www.metrocontinuingeducation.ca/adult-continuing-education/program-areas/mind-body-soul/>. Angel-related workshops are a frequent feature of the Body-Soul-Spirit Expo, see, for example, *Calgary Herald* Mar. 21, 2002 p. F3 “Holistic health expo on weekend”

³²⁷ See, for example, Pauline Newman, *HeartBeat Angels: True Life Spiritual Experiences of Personal Angel Encounters* (Carvel: Newman Publishing, 2001); angels are discussed in what I would describe as a mystical spiritual fashion at several points in Karen E. Toole, *Reflections: A Selection of Columns Written for the Faith Page of the Winnipeg Free Press, 1994–2001* (Winnipeg: City Press Ltd., 2016), 19–20; 172–173.

³²⁸ *Edmonton Journal*, Feb. 3, 2000, p. A1 “Barrett resigns... Again: ‘Near-death experience’ at dentist prompts ND leader to quit;” *Calgary Herald*, Jun. 4, 2000 p. A2 “Barrett Heads for the Coast to Flee Politics.”

beliefs and practices of individualist spirituality directly reflect the predominant values of the Prairie region's common sense, and directly exemplify some of the trends this thesis is concerned with. Mystical spirituality, while connected with developments in secular and consumerist understandings of the self, cannot be said to so directly reflect this tendency on the Prairies towards the valuing of consumerism and individualist ethics.

II – Individualist Spirituality and Canadian Prairie History

What is important to reiterate at the outset of this discussion is that consumer logic is a fundamental component of the common sense of the Prairies. It has left sedimentary deposits in nearly all groups and ideologies that characterize the region. As I have noted in chapters three and four, the ways in which commodities influence spiritual practice may be an important element of spiritualities that focus on the individual and “the ethic of authenticity.”³²⁹ Galen Watts notes that the individuals he interviewed in regard to their spirituality, which could be called individualist spirituality, see an “authority of the self” as the paragon of the spiritual life – “my participants seemed to be in unanimous agreement about what their ‘spirituality’ orbits around, and where they look for guidance – that being, the self (or the true self) within.”³³⁰ Watts also highlights the stress placed by his participants on authenticity – especially in the idea of being true to oneself. Symptomatic of both the anxious narcissism such practices engender *and* a growing search for one’s

³²⁹ A term Galen Watts derives from Charles Taylor, but develops relative to SBNRs in the article “On the Politics of Self-Spirituality,” 345–372. Scholars have increasingly argued that consumers *themselves* become commodities in neoliberal societies, or address themselves with the logic of commodities, through processes of selling oneself through – most basically – being hired on an open market, selling their labor to employers, through the resumé and now LinkedIn, and even “socially” selling themselves through social media (see, for example, Bauman, *Consuming Life*).

³³⁰ Watts, “On the Politics,” 350.

authenticity in a world where one's profession is rarely the basis of their identity, and where identity is fundamentally crafted by consumer choices, Prairie society (like other regions of North America) has increasingly rejected institutions deemed religious that are said to inhibit freedom of choice, or are even *perceived* as inhibiting freedom of choice.³³¹ An important characteristic of what is often analyzed as a broader ideology of neoliberalism, it can be argued that “[t]o define freedom by the terms of neoliberalism is to summarize the way it focuses individuals on their individuality without highlighting the sense that this individuality may derive from a larger normalizing corporate system of beliefs.”³³² The identification of the populace as “voters” or “consumers” is far different than the identification of Prairie people as “Grain Growers” or as “Labour.” What is supposed of the public in the latter designation is a group with common interests (leading to Wheat Pools, or labour unions, for example); the former are hermetic islands pursuing what is understood to be individual self-interest or impulses.

What this downplays is any explicit sense of duty or obligation beyond the individual. While Watts' interview data complicates this picture in some fashion in relation to social justice concerns, it is difficult to deny the degree to which individualist spirituality maintains the status quo of consumer-capitalist logic and behavior, whether “resisted” at the individual level or not. However, Watts rightly notes that this variety of spirituality is

³³¹ Thiessen notes of his data that “the leading reason for why interviewees set aside religious involvement or affiliation altogether is because they believe religious groups adopt attitudes and behaviors that are too exclusive and that separate “us” from “them”” (*Meaning*, 129–131). Moreover, Thiessen notes that he mentioned to interviewees who suggested they may desire more involvement in the future that “there are many congregations that are theologically liberal relative to the exclusive claims that they so vehemently oppose, particularly on issues of gender and sexuality... nearly all interviewees confess that their desire for more involvement is not that great and that they do not envision putting in the time and effort to change their religious activities” (153).

³³² Lofton, *Consuming*, 211.

fundamentally grounded in broader Euro-American common sense, derived from writers like Rousseau and Ralph Waldo Emerson and the European Romantics, such that “there is no need for proponents to evangelize; self-spirituality is written into the very fabric of North American culture.”³³³ This could be further nuanced by recognizing the *secular* roots of this understanding of the self: as Asad has argued, “not only was the idea of being true to oneself conceived of as a moral duty [by modern Romanticism], it also presupposed the existence of a secular self whose sovereignty had to be demonstrated through acts of sincerity.”³³⁴

The Canadian Prairies serve as a particularly striking example of how consumerist senses of identity can evolve over time. While the rapid growth in Prairie cities over the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries shows how cities, even at this time, were characterized by consumer spaces, the economic downturn of 1907, the relatively devastating depression of 1913, and the Great Depression all obstructed the growth of a large consumer culture until well after the Second World War. Moreover, some scholars have argued quite convincingly that mass consumer culture was not a major factor in Canadian life until well after the 1930s, and that entertainment before this period was largely produced by clerical leaders.³³⁵ However, post-war affluence brought on in part by the resource extraction occurring in the region meant that the development of consumer spaces, and a consumer culture, would rapidly accelerate.

³³³ Watts, “Politics,” esp. 358–359.

³³⁴ Asad, *Formations*, 52.

³³⁵ Christie and Gauvreau, *Full-Orbed Christianity*, 44–47. The authors argue that prior to World War II “the production of culture remained diffuse and local,” and as such, Christian leaders were able to control a great deal of what entertainment was available.

Consumer culture reinforces the importance of individual choice and self-development as social values, and individualist spirituality tends to engage how individual choice and self-development should be understood relative to the authentic self. The presence of products and stores across the Prairies that vigorously encourage self-improvement, both in major cities as well as smaller centers,³³⁶ reinforce this individualistic spiritual ethic and ensure its presence within the common sense of the region.³³⁷ Traditions deemed religious can often be seen as an inhibitor to one's self-realization, this being framed in fact as an inhibitor to participation in a consumer-capitalist society – the “normal” against which behaviors deemed religious are measured. While the ritualized effort to “improve one's self” and/or “connect with one's true self” is commonly not deemed religious, if one's effort to “improve one's self” and/or “connect with one's true self” is done in relation to a religious institution, and/or through religious ritual that interferes with the day-to-day demands of a consumer-capitalist society, it is often labelled as extreme behavior.³³⁸

The ethic that individualist spirituality encourages is, perhaps foremostly, one of authenticity. A frequent search within this discursive milieu is for the “true self,” and for the ability to be honest with oneself. Practices such as journaling, promoted by various

³³⁶ Camrose, Red Deer, Prince Albert, Swift Current, Brandon, Steinbach, among others, all have such stores.

³³⁷ One can think of, especially, fitness products, but especially activity trackers and wearable technology designed to track one's progress in terms of fitness. Discussed further below.

³³⁸ See Martin, *Capitalizing*, 68–74. Martin here, comments a good deal on the research of Christian Smith and Melinda Lunquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), where it is pointed out that “[a]n important category for [the] teens [interviewed in Smith and Denton's study] was the category of people who are “too religious””. Martin notes that, when one teen in Smith and Denton's study claimed that following religion too closely leads him to ask “when are you finally going to live your life?”, the conclusion must be that “live your life” implies living life as a consumer in late capitalism – anything else would amount to *not* living one's life” (71).

spiritual leaders such as, most famously, Oprah Winfrey, are explicitly focused on this search for the true self.³³⁹ Nonetheless, this focus is ultimately said to be an individual quest, a journey within the self and effected by the individual: as Lofton summarized about Oprah's constant encouragement to create a better life for oneself, "[o]nly you can make you what you deserve to become."³⁴⁰ This search for a true self is seen, often, as being inhibited by "religion," and even by external authorities at a more general level. For example, one of the "religious nones" in Joel Thiessen's study found that despite his devout Mormon upbringing, "I just found that there was limitations, that there was a lot of conflict in the world between... There was always arguing between religions." What this individual instead emphasized was his independent spiritual development, brought about by exploring "different religions" and "ask[ing] questions."³⁴¹ This attitude is, of course, not unique to this person but is instead among the most common attitudes of individualist spiritual people. What is important is not any detailed theology, but the *ethical* stance towards various elements of one's life – including what are called "religions."

The ethics of individualist spirituality are actively being incorporated into important institutions on the Prairies. The inclusion of spirituality in the workplace is quite a common consideration, as the office grows in its import as a place that many Prairie citizens find themselves. As early as 1998, the Banff Centre hosted a conference on the

³³⁹ "Oprah's Web site includes extensive descriptions of the journaling process that might assist this discovery. There, women can read how to get started, what to write about, how often to write, and the benefits of journaling. As women follow Winfrey's writing assignments, they are told that they will "find" themselves on the page and discover their truest selves. Winfrey recommends writing as a central motif in the interrogation of the spiritual self", Kathryn Lofton *Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 92. Interestingly, Watts found this practice amongst his own respondents; "On the Politics," 352.

³⁴⁰ Lofton, *Oprah*, 107.

³⁴¹ Thiessen, *Meaning*, 103–108.

matter, “Balancing Success and Spirituality,” which focused on developing the spiritual dimension of the region’s “managers, senior executives, and entrepreneurs.” The tendency to combine considerations of the spiritual dimension, and spiritual ethics, with one’s work is noted by the organizer of the conference as growing: “[Margot] Kitchen believes there is a critical mass developing around the idea of spirituality and the workplace. There are several popular books being published that talk about making life simpler and establishing the spiritual connection.” Moreover, Kitchen’s husband was a former senior executive for the Royal Bank of Canada, meaning that the ethic of “balancing success” was a part of her personal life. The teachers at this retreat attempt to reform the workplace via primarily individualized practices, such as breathing techniques, visualization, and meditation. Bo Lozoff, another person working on the retreat, emphasizes the values of “being compassionate, aware, involved, disciplined, adaptable, courageous, patient – all the classic spiritual values of every ancient tradition.”³⁴² Religion is rejected in favor of grasping at the ethics of *every* ancient tradition, without – from an emic perspective – the ephemera that surrounds these deeper truths.

Annette Aubrey and Pat Quigley undertook an effort to create a greater space for spiritual practices in businesses. To accommodate the problem of “finding inner peace and combating the increasingly high levels of stress” that characterize the workplace, Aubrey and Quigley created a business that sought to promote practices such as meditation in the workplace. The program – called “Razor’s Edge” – combined an attentiveness to the body with the goal of “better understand[ing] life’s meaning and individual spirituality.”

³⁴² *Calgary Herald* July 4, 1998 p. G10 “Success is hollow if the spirit is starved.” The cost of the class was \$1,500 for an individual, or \$2,000 for a couple.

Similarly, the owner of Boss Consulting, Wayne Boss, sought to bring spiritual practices into the workplace as a means of emphasizing “the power of consciousness and choice,” all the while making a concerted effort at “distinguishing religion from spirituality.” Boss emphasizes the importance of “exploring the inner self,” at which point the worker can begin to give up pressure and stress and thereby integrate this inner self into their work.³⁴³ This effort to include spirituality in the workplace, like the wider category of individualist spirituality in general, integrates the importance of the “true” or “authentic self” (characterized by Boss as the “inner self”) into work life.

This connection of spirituality and the workplace, and the focus on the ethical behavior of the individual, has recently entered the mainstream through the medium of mindfulness.³⁴⁴ Mindfulness encourages a variety of individual ritualized behaviors that attempt to wrest the authentic individual from their emotions. One recent example:

These programs [mindfulness training programs] offer employees several techniques on how to implement mindfulness, including using the acronym RAIN to a situation. In this case, the "R" directs individuals to recognize when a strong emotion is present. The letter "A" is used to acknowledge that an emotion does indeed exist. The "I" is used to investigate and bring self-inquiry to the body, feelings, and mind. The letter "N" stands for non-identifying with your emotion. In other words, recognizing that the emotion is simply a state of mind and does not define the person. Training course participants are taught to stand back and view their emotions as if they were seeing a movie, watching the actors at play.³⁴⁵

³⁴³ *Calgary Herald*, Feb. 26, 2000, p. W1. “A Call for Peace: Spirituality Entering the Workplace.” In a Saskatoon case, Tannis Helliwell similarly leverages the experience gained in the corporate world – at businesses such as Royal Bank, IBM, and the Banff Centre for Management – as a means of integrating spirituality into the rest of life. In Helliwell’s own words, the problem is “How can we take spiritual principles and put them in the mainstream.” *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, Feb. 3, 2001, p. E16. “Spiritual component to corporate structure”

³⁴⁴ Exemplified, for example, by the 2016 *TIME* Special Edition issue “Mindfulness: The New Science of Health and Happiness,” which was reprinted in 2018.

³⁴⁵ *Winnipeg Free Press*, Sept. 20, 2014 A1, “Work smarter, not harder”

This understanding, from the standpoint of mindfulness practices, encourages harmony in the workplace by a process of discouraging emotional behavior. Interestingly, however, the question is not whether or not the emotion is rational, whether the emotion is predicated on just grounds, but on whether the emotion defines the person – that is, in the classic spiritual ethic, whether it defines the “true” or “authentic” self. The ethics that underpin individualist spirituality are vital to this understanding of the self. At a Calgary seminar in 2005, John Kabat-Zinn lectured to a group of business leaders on how vital mindfulness could be: “If you’re going to lead in business, you have to be in the business of awareness... Mindfulness is about creating an environment where everybody would be honoured . . . and are invited to bring their whole self to work.”³⁴⁶ What is meant, however, by this idea of the “whole self?” According to some mindfulness practices, the self has to be tempered, trained, to accommodate to the workplace.

This appreciation of a practice called mindfulness has become an important element of the Prairie marketplace. When Kathryn Lofton describes how the marketplace became the arena in which debates over ritual were situated,³⁴⁷ there is a subtler way in which this is true and a far more direct way in which this is true. The Prairies are a region in which both are the case, but to take for the moment an eloquent exemplification of the latter – the Prairie Love Festival. This festival is an annual event that sees different interpretations of a single ritual – yoga – which is offered up to the consumer to choose which is the most useful method of ritual for them. Moreover, the organizational team hosts other events

³⁴⁶ *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, July 9, 2015 p. F12 “‘Mindfulness’ keeps workers, boss on track”

³⁴⁷ Lofton, *Consuming*, 64.

year-round, including a winter festival, showing the growing popularity of this festival that celebrates individualist spiritual beliefs and practices.

In the first place, the yoga practiced under the Prairie Love Festival umbrella tends to be portrayed in a classic individualist spiritual fashion – connecting with one’s authentic self, reflecting on one’s self, healing from within, and so on.³⁴⁸ Certain yoga instructors focus on the value of many different methods centered in a single class, such as one that “integrate[s] therapeutics and mindfulness into creative sequences that enliven your body, while also allowing for deeper self-reflection”;³⁴⁹ others are known for a more intense form of yoga class – such as the “notoriously challenging Heart Core yoga class”;³⁵⁰ others will offer a more safe, peaceful space that “offers challenge and ease in balanced amounts” and allows one to “enjoy the peaceful place within us” – as the instructor states, “[i]t is my dream that you leave feeling more fully you than when you walk in the door.”³⁵¹ It is, in other words, up to the student to decide which way of connecting with themselves is the most efficacious – and certainly, as the Prairie Love Website reminds the attendee, “[t]here is no greater investment than an investment in yourself.”³⁵²

What is interesting, from the perspective of the regional historian, is the usage of the Prairie identity to distinctly identify the practitioners in this festival. The time at which the Prairie Love Snowflake Winter Wellness Festival takes place is specifically identified

³⁴⁸ One teacher describes this as “mindful self compassion.” Prairie Love Festival, “Talents – Amanda Carson,” accessed Dec. 12, 2018, <https://www.prairielifestival.com/talent?lightbox=datapitem-jorrd551>

³⁴⁹ Prairie Love Festival, “Talents – Emily Gill,” accessed Dec. 12, 2018, <https://www.prairielifestival.com/talent?lightbox=datapitem-jorrd54z>

³⁵⁰ Prairie Love Festival, “Talents – Sam Squire,” accessed Dec. 12, 2018, <https://www.prairielifestival.com/talent?lightbox=datapitem-jorefic2>

³⁵¹ Prairie Love Festival, “Talents – Amanda Coe,” accessed Dec. 12, 2018 <https://www.prairielifestival.com/talent?lightbox=datapitem-jore2d7p>

³⁵² Prairie Love Festival, “Tickets,” accessed Dec. 12, 2018 <https://www.prairielifestival.com/tickets>

with the Prairie cycle of the year: “[t]he conditions of a prairie winter can be especially hard on our bodies and minds. Psychologists have deemed the third week of January to be the most depressing time of year.” As such, the timing of the festival is set specifically to coincide with one of the darkest times of the year, as a means of bringing some warmth to that particular season that residents of the Prairies dread.³⁵³ Moreover, the festival is meant to showcase what they call “prairie yogis;” the Prairie Love Festival itself is said to have brought together over 2,000 yogis as a means of creating a community centered around these kinds of practices.³⁵⁴ This festival, by its very name, conjures up images of the region and its history, but also attempts to make the region known for practices that promote precisely the tenets of individualist spirituality.

The spirituality discourse is also starting to have a more formal presence in Canadian Prairie education. Metro Continuing Education in Edmonton has, for almost two decades, offered courses on spiritual matters that would be considered in the individualist spiritual realm, such as meditation and mindfulness, as well as those of a more mystical nature such as near-death experiences and reincarnation. Such courses have been said to “consistently rank in the top third in terms of popularity.”³⁵⁵ What is noted about these courses by instructors Irene Martina, who was formerly a Roman Catholic and United Church adherent but became spiritual, was that there was “a great spiritual hunger among her students.” Similarly, instructor Prem Kalia said that he “found many students have lost interest in organized religion, but still consider themselves spiritual.”³⁵⁶ Again, “organized

³⁵³ Prairie Love Festival, “Create Space in 2019 for Self Care,” accessed Dec. 12, 2018 <https://www.prairielifestival.com/blog/create-space-in-2019-for-self-care>

³⁵⁴ Prairie Love Festival, “About,” accessed Dec. 13, 2018 <https://www.prairielifestival.com/about>

³⁵⁵ *Edmonton Journal*, Oct. 3, 2002, “Exploring the Spiritual World,” B8.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

religion” is rejected and, instead, certain practices are offered as classes that consumers are able to select, pay for, and learn from. Practices such as reincarnation and meditation are made into a course to those who seem to be seeking, based on the testimony of instructors, knowledge that is free from the context of a particular religion.³⁵⁷ Similar classes are also offered through the Centre for Continuing Education in Regina – its 2019 course listings include a class entitled “Meditation: Ancient Practices for Modern Times,” which is said to combine “ancient techniques with leading research.”³⁵⁸ This demonstrates the ways in which appeals to science influence spiritual practice, as well as the appeal to the authority of tradition.

Again, many of the beliefs that make up the philosophy of individualist spirituality can be observed in the omnipresent consumer culture that currently characterizes the Prairies. While the examples are innumerable, among the most clear and direct are those surrounding fitness, where the improvement of the self, and the connection with the authentic self, is fostered via the relationship with the commodity. Activity tracker company FitBit has used the motto “[e]veryday is an opportunity for a life better lived” as a means of introducing new trackers, which have heart rate, sleep, multi-sport, and cardio tracking capability, as well as guided breathing sessions and connectivity to one’s text messages and calls.³⁵⁹ The interesting thing about this commodity, and its assertion that

³⁵⁷ As of 2018, course offerings include “Channeling Guides & Angels,” “Healing with Himalayan Singing Bowls,” and “Past Lives: Hidden Secrets.” Metro Continuing Education, “Mind, Body & Soul,” accessed Mar. 24, 2018, <https://www.metrocontinuingeducation.ca/adult-continuing-education/program-areas/mind-body-soul/>.

³⁵⁸ University of Regina, “Meditation: Ancient Practices for Modern Times – 8120,” accessed Dec. 14, 2018, https://ca.apm.activecommunities.com/uregina/Activity_Search/3209

³⁵⁹ Fitbit, “Introducing Fitbit Charge 2™,” accessed Nov. 25, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PxxRoWmjQ8> Breathing sessions are a widespread practice within the individualist spiritual milieu – many of the corporate workshops emphasize controlled breathing.

“everyday is an opportunity for a life better lived” is that a life better lived involves relentless communication and connectivity, as well as a meticulous tracking and improvement even on how one sleeps.

Some of FitBit’s products that focus on breathing exercises are also supported by other brands as effective mindfulness techniques, and as seen above, breathing exercises are a common element of workplace spirituality practices. Lululemon, similarly, encourages breathing as one technique to bring the individual back to the present moment.³⁶⁰ Lululemon is intent on encouraging a focus on the self, similar to FitBit, though with a decidedly more overt spiritual message to their brand identity. Much of their branding is obvious in its Orientalism, but provides a means of allowing the consumer the ability “to succeed through both capitalist accumulation and spiritual depth.”³⁶¹ This alignment between spiritual messaging serves a classic negotiation of the dilemma of supporting capital accumulation while asserting the superiority of the spiritual:³⁶² while lululemon’s famous “manifesto” bags contained messaging such as “friends are more important than money,” another lululemon bag also caused a stir by quoting Ayn Rand’s *Atlas Shrugged*: “Who is John Galt?” donned one of their bags. Again, this reflects the individualist ethics, if not “hyperindividualism,” lululemon supports.³⁶³ Lululemon employs individualist spiritual discourse throughout its corporate culture, and considering

³⁶⁰ Lululemon, “lululemon | #givepresence,” accessed Dec. 15, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=86qAkvaCgso>

³⁶¹ Lavrence and Lozanski, 87–90.

³⁶² I say “classic” in that there are many examples of this that other scholars have addressed. An important instance would be Osho Rajneesh who, prior to the bioterrorist incident of 1984 carried out by some of his adherents, was perhaps most famous for owning over ninety Rolls-Royces. See Carrette and King, 153–158.

³⁶³ Lavrence and Lozanski, 83.

its success on the Prairies,³⁶⁴ it should be understood as another driver of this spirituality's ascendancy within the region.

Similarly, The North Face takes the same approach in its advertising, explicitly seizing on the ethic of authenticity that is such a fundamental component of individualist spirituality. In one of their advertisements for a particular clothing line known as the "Summit Series," The North Face notes that "We believe the truest version of ourselves stands well beyond comfort's perimeter... Most people prefer comfort in their lives, forgetting that difficulty is actually what nourishes the human spirit... It's not necessarily the way everyone would choose to live. But it's our way."³⁶⁵ The implication here is not so much, of course, that it is *any* kind of difficulty (though certainly, this may be the argument), but given that The North Face's advertising is suffused with images of people hiking mountains, training physically, engaging in winter sports and so on, that it is a particular kind of difficulty that this commodity is offering a dream about.³⁶⁶ The belief that vigorous self-improvement of the body is likewise a self-improvement of the spirit, of the true self, is an individualist spiritual position: the consumer-capitalist world enables, through the availability of particularly efficacious commodities, an ability to discover the authentic self.

³⁶⁴ All five major cities in the region have locations, as of this thesis' writing, as well as Red Deer, Banff, Fort McMurray, and Grande Prairie.

³⁶⁵ The North Face, "The Jøq̄O Way," accessed Nov. 25, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yyz49tt1pKw>

³⁶⁶ Moreover, The North Face explicitly uses the language of spirituality to help sell its products; Timothy Olson is described in one of its videos "His running was on a, kind of, spiritual level," and ultrarunning more generally is believed to offer this connection with the spirit via connection with the earth and the body. The North Face, "Curiosity," accessed Nov. 26, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GNWkehVuO84>

More examples could well be offered, and given that multinational and national stores that engage such dreams abound on the Prairies, this ethic is cultivated at a broad level in the region. I am not arguing that this is unique to Prairie history, but that the dreams surrounding such products are a crucial component of the region's religious history. The logic of individualist spirituality leads to perpetual self-discovery. Like onion peelings, there is a search for the core of the self, for the authentic self. Individualist spirituality directs the individual to be attentive to their emotions, to their thoughts, to the ethics of their decision making, while at the same time crafting a discourse that sees the self as somehow separate from all of these elements of the person. The true self is, to some degree, indescribable to the adherent – it is asserted as a deeply true fact of how the person is understood. Whether the person's spirit, soul, or authentic self, this supposed individualism is undoubtedly, and foremostly, a position accepted *by a large social community*. Workshops, seminars, festivals, popular books, commodities, and workplaces/consumer spaces themselves are sites where this individualist spirituality is being fostered – and this is a component of Prairie religious history that has, as of yet, not been thoroughly understood.

III – Other Considerations Regarding Spiritual But Not Religious People

At present, SBNRs and the ways in which decreasing formal association with Christianity have transformed the Prairie social mythology and its related symbols and rituals have not received much attention. While the declining attendance at institutions deemed religious is an important element of understanding the region's history, the

relatively high concentration of individuals claiming to have No Religion or a generic “Christian” identity on the Prairies requires explanation. In this chapter, I have focused on a particular variety of SBNR behavior known as individualist spirituality, though I want to emphasize again that this cannot be taken as representative of SBNR discourse as a whole: other forms of SBNR behavior are also a factor in Prairie religious history.

While spiritual leaders such as Oprah clearly have an important influence on the Canadian Prairies, as exemplified by the omnipresence of the products that she endorses and has created within the stores of the region, leaders identified as religious have seen a sharp decline in their authority.³⁶⁷ This is in stark contrast to the region’s history at the start of the twentieth century. To return to Oprah’s spiritual leadership, Kathryn Lofton has argued that “[i]t is Winfrey’s spiritual non-discrimination, not her spiritual peculiarities, that have made her successful in the broad marketplace.”³⁶⁸ This approach that Oprah takes to spiritual/religious matters is not only readily accepted by citizens of the Prairies, like much of contemporary North American consumer culture, but is among the most important values to which they ascribe.³⁶⁹ Spiritual leadership that emphasizes a non-discriminatory approach, that places no great weight upon critiquing experience or perspectives on the authentic self, but instead accepts its power for the individual, is a fundamental component of SBNR behavior. Based on the available data, it seems to be increasingly influential in

³⁶⁷ Another set of statistics from Reginald Bibby, which suggest that, of the religious middle (of which Bibby finds 59% consider themselves SBNRs (*Resilient*, 73)), a mere 21% claim to “have a high level of confidence in religious leaders” (*Resilient*, 68). In light of Thiessen’s interview data, the stigma attached to the word “religion” – of being a “religious” leader – is a palpable influence on the answers people are giving to such a question.

³⁶⁸ Lofton, *Oprah*, 80.

³⁶⁹ “[T]he leading reason for why interviewees set aside religious involvement or affiliation altogether is because they believe religious groups adopt attitudes and behaviors that are too exclusive and separate “us” from “them”” (Thiessen, *Meaning*, 129).

Prairie religious history. Similarly, the emphasis individualist spiritual belief and practice tends to place on consumption as a ritual of self-improvement and self-realization³⁷⁰ is also quite apparent as Prairie consumer culture becomes one of its defining features.

All this is to argue that, whatever else one says about the history of the Prairies in recent years, culturally it is more and more deeply influenced by consumerism and the value of pluralism. I am not arguing that the Prairies are especially influenced by consumer culture, or Oprah's style of spiritual leadership, compared to other regions of North America: I am arguing that in order to understand Prairie religious history in the late-twentieth and early-twenty first centuries these things are necessary to take into account. The understanding of identity that consumerism tends to produce discourages inhibitors to normal participation in consumer society – something often attributed to “religion” insofar as it demands disciplined abstention from particular consumer behaviors. This, combined with the stigmatization of religion encouraged by secularist thought, makes traditions deemed religious unattractive to would-be adherents. Nonetheless, behaviors *scholars* may identify as religious remain pervasive on the region. Large regional festivals, educational institutions, businesses within the region, literature, major political news stories all evidence the ways in which what adherents call “spirituality” influence historical events and cultural transformations on the Prairies.

³⁷⁰ See, for example, Lofton, *Oprah*, see esp. 20–50, though this analysis pervades the book.

Final Considerations

The apotropaic function the category “religion” has, in recent years, served in the popular consciousness and political discourse³⁷¹ has been confirmed dramatically by the K’tunaxa–Jumbo Glacier ruling the Supreme Court of Canada brought down in 2017. The inability to protect land that is necessary to practice ceremonies and behaviors the K’tunaxa claimed in the case as a right under freedom of religion reinforces the public understanding that religion is primarily defined by “irrational” beliefs that one may privately ascribe to, but which cannot be used to inhibit “rational” behavior such as the development of land for purposes of vacationing and consumer-capitalist enjoyment. This quality of irrationality that is attributed to religious beliefs is further reinforced at a popular level by the activities of communities such as Spiritual But Not Religious people who, whatever their sympathies to the claims of people such as the K’tunaxa, nonetheless confirm the qualities “religion” has come to be associated with in the Canadian popular consciousness.

This implicit or explicit way in which religion as a category of life is understood in Canada has a long history that has begun to be explored by historians,³⁷² but which in Prairie religious history has received little attention. Because the Canadian Prairies have been recognized by historians as an effective region of the mind, the ways in which religion as a category of human life have come to be understood in the region – within and between immigrant groups, historical periods, and political, social, community leaders – is a worthwhile project. The shared regional mythology, history of massive late-nineteenth and

³⁷¹ The considerations in William Arnal, “The Segregation of Social Desire” and the writing of Talal Asad, among others, have informed this understanding throughout my thesis.

³⁷² By books such as Janet Epp Buckingham’s *Fighting Over God*.

early-twentieth century immigration, of the agrarian revolt, of broader Western protest, of self-designation, among other things, gives credence to the claim that the Prairies remain a distinct region within Canadian life. Thus, writing the history of religion on the Prairies remains a valuable pursuit.

There have been several primary questions that have occupied the writing of this thesis. Perhaps the foremost is explaining the decline in traditional Christian behaviors, sometimes phrased as a “decline in religion.” This transition of church-centered Christianity from an undoubted central importance in Prairie life to an increasingly peripheral position has been taken for granted in this thesis, and I have attempted to present some theoretical considerations that may help explain this shift. Some of these considerations include a greater valuation of individualism and choice, along with an increasing rejection of institutions deemed religious – and churches themselves universally are – which are often claimed to inhibit individualism and choice.³⁷³ This is reflected in emerging forms of religiosity, particularly the Spiritual But Not Religious community. The negative connotations the word “religion” has in popular discourse means that a distrust of “religious” authorities and “religious” institutions may be one of the foremost reasons for this decline in church attendance, and this is a good argument for treating the word “religion” as an emic category – as I have tended to do in this thesis.

Other questions that have guided this thesis’ research include how or why certain things are deemed religious while others are not either historically and at present. This

³⁷³ I want to make clear that the story of Christianity on the Prairies in the twentieth and early twenty-first century is much richer than solely the story of declining church attendance and membership. However, because the concerns of this thesis have been concerned with Prairie religious history and culture at a broad level, and addressing the issue of declining church attendance, I have emphasized this story of decline.

relates directly to the above point regarding the transition Christianity is undergoing, but this process of deeming things religious is a more general consideration. In this thesis, I have studied religion as an academic category of analysis and as a political category in chapters one and two, focusing especially in the second chapter on how religion is understood in relation to politics. My conclusion from these two chapters is that religion is not only an important political category, but that it is often selectively used to cordon off certain behaviors from public space. It is also used by historians in relation to politics inconsistently, where the separation of religious matters from politics, or the claim that political actors are *really* expressing religious behavior, is not of any clear analytic value. This attentiveness to how or why things are deemed religious was continued in chapter five in my tracing of some of the history of Spiritual But Not Religious people on the Prairies. The response to the word “religion” in the very appellation these people give themselves is suggestive of a normative understanding of what “religion” means, and it sets up a clear dichotomy that sees religion as oppressive while spirituality is liberating.

The question of how consumerism shapes behaviors that are typically deemed religious has been another concern that has guided my analysis of more recent Prairie history. While the influence of consumer culture on religious history has been an area of concern for the academic study of religion in Canada, and certainly for the field of Religious Studies generally, it has not been a major area of concern for Prairie historians. Considering the powerful consumer culture that characterizes the Prairies, as I sought to demonstrate in the last three chapters of my thesis, this is a major gap in the literature at present. After suggesting that Prairie identity is maintained in part through acts of consumption in chapter three, I continued this line of analysis through my fourth chapter

by analyzing the largest annual festival on the Prairies – the Calgary Stampede. By looking at some of the ways social gospel ethics and theology influenced the early celebration of the Stampede, I compared this to the predominantly consumer activity that it has now become, suggesting ultimately that the change in its celebration is perfectly symptomatic of the broader transformation in the Prairies: that is, it has become integrated into a North American consumer culture that highly values individualism and choice. Other major festivals that may be understood under the rubric of religion from the academic perspective, such as the Prairie Love Festival discussed in chapter five, further speak to the ways consumerist values are influencing Prairie religious history. The fact that these values have been infused in these festivals, or rituals, has also transformed the meanings of the social mythology they invoke, largely erasing the Christian social gospel ethics they once incorporated. Chapter five looked further at some forms of contemporary belief and practice on the Prairies that are directly engaged in this consumer-capitalist behavior as a matter of its religiosity – most especially, individualist spirituality. Individualist spirituality reinforces the importance of the self, and ethics that focus on improving on the individual, navigating the world in an ethical way such that one can remain true to oneself, and making choices that allow for such things. Because this form of religiosity appears to be growing in prominence, I argue that these types of values are an important component of recent Prairie religious history.

My engagement of the question of declining church attendance within the Prairies, tied into the other cultural transformations within the region, is inseparable from the question of the Prairie myth and what it tells individuals living within the region about themselves. Whether the Prairie farmer is imagined as a Christian figure cultivating the

land and thereby doing God's work, or is imagined as an entrepreneurial lone individual connecting with the truth of who they are on *their* plot of land, this mythology will help determine the historical trajectory of the region. R. Douglas Francis wrote of his experience arriving on the Prairies from Ontario, and adjusting to and understanding the mindset of the region. Ultimately, Francis writes, "their [Westerners'] ideas or images of the West shaped the region as much as, if not more than, the decisions of politicians, the intricate workings of the economy, and the daily activities of its people."³⁷⁴ This circulation of the Prairie myth – that is, as I argued in chapter three, the assumption that the hardiness and determination of the agrarian settler has left distinct sedimentations in the personality of the Prairie citizen, whatever else the myth may be – is circulated by a variety of institutions. Ritualized behaviors on the Prairies tend to reinforce this identity that is argued by Prairie citizens to be distinct, and are heavily focused on the settler era – these include heritage villages, annual celebrations and festivals, educational tours, and so on. The larger Prairie myth, while strengthened by at least some of these celebrations and ritual behaviors, is circulated through a variety of discourses, including at least some of the histories written by professional academics, and certainly by popular writers up to the twenty-first century. The study of these rituals, myths, and symbols swiftly reveals that where, at the start of the twentieth century, the attitude towards agriculture was predominantly associated with explicit Christian overtones that painted the farmer-as-symbol as a moral figure by virtue of his devotion to God, it has now become commodified such that the belief in being a Prairie person – while certainly associated with family history, personal connection to landscape, and so on – is often expressed principally through consumer behavior. One's

³⁷⁴ Francis, *Images*, xvi.

belief in being a Prairie person is frequently displaced onto consumer products rather than created through any other concrete action. The individualist ethic that has become important in the region's recent history, and which is concomitant with consumerism, makes Spiritual But Not Religious behaviors one of the most overlooked recent factors in Prairie religious history.

Like sunrays that pierce stained glass without breaking it, the predominant mythological image in today's supposedly "post-Christian" Prairie Canada remains that of the Christian settler – the Prairie mythology still passes through this image, even if these rays fall less frequently across the floor of a church, and perhaps onto the grasses that have overtaken some of these abandoned structures. As such, in the current heated debate over whether or not Canada is "post-Christian," what should be kept in mind is the fact that its culture is still very much Christian-normative, much of its imagination still revolves around Christianity, and its conception of religion and what religion entails still takes Christianity as its model. An eloquent Prairie example of this fact is the continued production of Christian memorials around the provinces: the "Madonna of the Wheat," erected in dedication to all pioneer women in Alberta, is a striking example that weaves together Christian imagery and the Prairie mythology.³⁷⁵ While the "content" of this symbol may be very different, along with social responses to it, the "form" of this symbol very much remains.

³⁷⁵ Discussed in Swyripa, *Storied Landscapes*, 173–174. While not so explicitly associated with the Prairie myth as concerns the farmer-as-symbol, the monuments erected in the past several years to Catholic women religious – the "Service Through Christ" monument near the steps of the Alberta Legislature, the "Legacy of Care, Courage, and Compassion" monument in Winnipeg, and the "Called to Serve" monument in Regina's Wascana Park speak to the continued engagement of Christian settlement as part of the imagining of Prairie heritage.

The religious history of the Canadian Prairies requires further research. If the Prairies are to remain a viable region of academic analysis, the recognition of what the Prairies are at present aside from its nature as a region characterized by resource extraction must be appreciated. The transformations in the systems of belief and practice that prevail upon it must be understood. To repeat the nearly aphoristic assertion of the historiography, the history of the region cannot be fully understood simply by reference to economic and political factors. The tapestry of culture is composed of many threads. Above all, like the mythical images of the farmer carving furrows in the field, we must appreciate the stories yet untold, the field behind the field, and behind that another field, and another field...

2017–2019

Regina, Saskatchewan

Bibliography

Primary Sources

ARCHIVES

- Glenbow Archives, Calgary, Alberta
 - Calgary Unitarian Church fonds
- Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta
 - William Irvine fonds
- Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan, Regina, Saskatchewan
 - Anglican Church of Canada fonds
 - Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association fonds
 - Hon. William Melville Martin fonds
 - United Church of Canada, Saskatchewan Conference
 - Women's Christian Temperance Union Annual Reports – reproduced from the originals, held at the Glenbow Archives
- Stampede Archives, Calgary, Alberta
 - Annual Reports
 - Calgary Stampede Archives digital collection, hosted by the University of Calgary online
- University of Regina Archives, Regina, Saskatchewan

BOOKS

- Berton, Pierre. *The Comfortable Pew: A critical look at the Church in the New Age*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1965.
- Collins, Robert. *Prairie People: A Celebration of My Homeland*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 2003.
- Irvine, William. *The Farmers in Politics*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, Ltd., 1920.
- Martin, Don. *King Ralph: The Political Life and Success of Ralph Klein*. Toronto: Key Porter Books, Ltd. 2002.
- Newman, Pauline, ed. *HeartBeat Angels*. Carvel: Newman Publishing, 2001.

Toole, Karen E. *Reflections: A Selection of Columns Written for the Faith Page of the Winnipeg Free Press, 1994–2001*. Winnipeg: City Press Ltd., 2016.

FILMS

Wagoner, Nick. *Jumbo Wild*. Sweetgrass Productions, 2015.

NEWSPAPERS

The Brandon Mail

The Calgary Herald

The Edmonton Journal

The Grain Growers' Guide

The Regina Leader-Post

The Saskatoon Daily Star

The Saskatoon Star-Phoenix

The Stony Plain Sun

The Winnipeg Free Press

WEBSITES

Calgary Stampede

CBC News

CrossIron Mills

Metro Continuing Education

Prairie Love Festival

Prairie Proud

South Edmonton Common

SouthGate Centre

University of Regina

West Edmonton Mall

YouTube

Secondary Sources

ARTICLES, BOOK CHAPTERS, EDITED VOLUMES

-includes edited volumes where no specific chapters are cited in thesis.

Allen, Richard, ed. *A Region of the Mind*. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1973.

---. "The Social Gospel as the Religion of the Agrarian Revolt" in *The West and the Nation: Essays in Honour of W. L. Morton* ed. Carl Berger and Ramsay Cook. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1976. 174–186.

Altglas, Véronique. "Spirituality and Discipline: Not a Contradiction in Terms" in *Bringing Back the Social into the Sociology of Religion: Critical Approaches*. Ed. Véronique Altglas and Matthew Wood. Leiden: Brill, 2018. 79–107.

Arnal, William. "Critical Responses to Phenomenological Theories of Religion: What Kind of Category Is "Religion"?" in *Religion, Theory, Critique: Classic and Contemporary Approaches and Methodologies* ed. Richard King. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017. 421–434.

---. "Definition" in *Guide to the Study of Religion* ed. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon. London: Continuum, 2000. 21–34.

---. "The Segregation of Social Desire: "Religion" and Disney World" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69:1 (Mar. 2001), 1–19.

Asad, Talal, "Thinking About Religion, Belief, and Politics" in *Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies* Ed. Robert A. Orsi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 36–57.

Beaman, Lori G. "Aboriginal Spirituality and the Legal Construction of Freedom of Religion" in *Religion & Canadian Society Second Edition: Contexts, Identities and Strategies* ed. Lori G. Beaman. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc., 2012. 235–248.

Betke, Carl F. "Farm Politics in an Urban Age: The Decline of the United Farmers of Alberta after 1921" in *Essays on Western History in Honour of Lewis Gwynne Thomas* ed. Lewis H. Thomas. Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1976. 175–189.

Bramadat, Paul. "Beyond Christian Canada: Religion and Ethnicity in a Multicultural Society" in *Religion and Ethnicity in Canada* ed. Paul Bramadat and David Seljak. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009. 1–29.

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

- Braun, Willi. "Religion" in *Guide to the Study of Religion* ed. Braun and McCutcheon. 3–18.
- Butcher, Dennis L. et. al., eds. *Prairie Spirit: Perspectives on the Heritage of the United Church of Canada in the West*. Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 1985.
- Calderwood, William. "Pulpit, Press and Political Reactions to the Ku Klux Klan in Saskatchewan" in *The Twenties in Western Canada: Papers of the Western Canadian Studies Conference, March 1972*. Ed. S. M. Tofimenkoff. Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1972. 191–229.
- Christie, Nancy. "'Belief Crucified Upon a Rooftop Antenna': Pierre Berton, *The Comfortable Pew*, and Dechristianization" in *The Sixties and Beyond: Dechristianization in North America and Western Europe, 1945–2000*. Ed. Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013. 321–350.
- Crouse, Eric. "'The Great Revival': Evangelical Revivalism, Methodism & Bourgeois Order in Early Calgary" *Alberta History* 47:1 (Winter, 1999), 18–23.
- Dwayne, Donald. "Edmonton Pentimento: Re-Reading History in the Case of the Papaschase Cree" *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies* 2:1 (2004), 21–53.
- Engler, Steven. "'Religion,' 'The Secular' and the Critical Study of Religion" *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 40:4 (2011), 419–442.
- Finkel, Alvin, Sarah Carter, and Peter Fortna. "Introduction" in *The West and Beyond: New Perspectives on an Imagined Region* ed. Alvin Finkel, Sarah Carter and Peter Fortna. Edmonton: AU Press, Athabasca University, 2010. xi–xxv.
- Fitzgerald, Timothy. "Experience" in *Guide to the Study of Religion* ed. Braun and McCutcheon, 125–139.
- . "A Response to Steven Engler, "'Religion,' 'The Secular,' and the Critical Study of Religion'" *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 40:4 (2011), 443–455.
- Foran, Max. "More Than Partners: The Calgary Stampede and the City of Calgary" in *Icon, Brand, Myth: The Calgary Stampede* ed. Max Foran. Edmonton: AU Press, 2008. 147–174.
- Francis, R. Douglas. "In Search of a Prairie Myth: A Survey of the Intellectual and Cultural Historiography of Prairie Canada" in *Riel to Reform: A History of Protest in Western Canada* ed. George Melnyk. Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishers, 1992. 20–42.
- . "'Rural Ontario West': Ontarians in Alberta" in *Peoples of Alberta: Portraits of Cultural Diversity* ed. Howard and Tamara Palmer. Saskatoon: Western Producer. 1985. 123–142.
- Friesen, Gerald. "Critical History in Western Canada 1900–2000" in *The West and Beyond* ed. Finkel, Carter and Fortna. 3–12.

- Gagnon, Anne. “‘Qui perd sa foi, perd sa langue’?: The Birth and Decline of a French Protestant Community in Alberta, 1916–1940” *Prairie Forum* 37 (Fall 2012), 1–26.
- Goldenberg, Naomi R. “The Category of Religion in the Technology of Governance: An Argument for Understanding Religions as Vestigial States” in *Religion as a Category of Governance and Sovereignty* ed. Trevor Stack, Naomi R. Goldenberg and Timothy Fitzgerald. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2015. 280–292.
- Guenther, Bruce L. “Populism, Politics, and Christianity in Western Canada” *Historical Papers 2000: Canadian Society of Church History* (May, 2000), 93–113.
- Hall, D. J. “Clifford Sifton: Immigration and Settlement Policy, 1896–1905” in *The Settlement of the West* ed. Howard Palmer. Calgary: Comprint Publishing Company, 1977. 60–85.
- Hannan, Kelly. “The Non-Partisan League in Alberta and North Dakota: A Comparison” *Alberta History* 52:1 (Winter, 2004), 13–23.
- Hart, Edward J. “The Emergence and Role of the Elite in the Franco-Albertan Community to 1914” in *Essays on Western History* ed. Lewis H. Thomas. 159–174.
- Hopkins, Jeffrey S. P. “West Edmonton Mall: Landscape of Myths and Elsewhereness” *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe canadien* 34:1 (1990), 2–17.
- Hryniuk, Stella. “Pioneer Bishop, Pioneer Times: Nykyta Budka in Canada” in *Prophets, Priests, and Prodigals: Readings in Canadian Religious History, 1608 to Present* ed. Mark G. McGowan and David B. Marshall. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited. 1992. 148–166.
- Huel, Raymond J. A. “French-Speaking Bishops and the Cultural Mosaic in Western Canada” in *Religion and Society in the Prairie West* ed. Richard Allen. Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1974. 53–64.
- . “Gestae Dei Per Francos: The French Catholic Experience in Western Canada” in *Visions of the New Jerusalem: Religious Settlement on the Prairies* ed. Benjamin Smillie. Edmonton: NeWest Press. 1983. 39–54.
- . “J. J. Maloney: How the West was saved from Rome, Quebec, and the Liberals” in *The Developing West: Essays on Canadian History in Honor of Lewis H. Thomas* ed. John E. Foster. Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1983. 219–242.
- Jackson, Edgar L., and Denis B. Johnson, “Geographic Implications of Mega-Malls, with Special Reference to West Edmonton Mall” *The Canadian Geographer* 35:3 (Fall 1991), 226–231.
- James, William Closson. “Dimorphs and Cobblers: Ways of Being Religious in Canada” in *Religion and Canadian Society Second Edition: Contexts, Identities and*

- Strategies* ed. Lori G. Beaman. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, Inc., 2012. 55–68.
- Jones, David C. ““There is Some Power About the Land” – The Western Agrarian Press and Country Life Ideology” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 17:3 (1982), 96–109.
- . “The Zeitgeist of Western Settlement and the Calgary Stampede” *Alberta History* 60:3 (Summer, 2012), 43–52.
- Kerr, Donald C., ed. *Western Canadian Politics: The Radical Tradition*. Edmonton: NeWest Institute for Western Canadian Studies Inc., 1981.
- King, Richard. “The Copernican Turn in the Study of Religion” in *Religion, Theory, Critique* ed. King. 1–20.
- Kitzan, Chris. “Preaching Purity in the Promised Land: Bishop Lloyd and the Immigration Debate” in *The Prairie West as Promised Land* ed. R Douglas Francis and Chris Kitzan. Calgary: University of Calgary Press. 2007. 291–312.
- Lai, David Chuenyan, Jordan Paper, and Li Chuang Paper. “The Chinese in Canada: Their Unrecognized Religion” in *Religion and Ethnicity in Canada* ed. Bramadat and Seljak. 89–110.
- Laroque, Emma. “For the Love of Place – Not Just Any Place: Selected Metis Writings” in *Place and Replace: Essays on Western Canada* ed. Adele Perry, Esyllt W. Jones, and Leah Morton. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2013. 179–185.
- Lavrence, Christine and Kristin Lozanski. ““This is Not Your Practice Life”: lululemon and the Neoliberal Governance of Self” *The Canadian Review of Sociology* 51:1 (Feb. 2014), 76–94.
- Loewen, Royden. “On the Margin or in the Lead: Canadian Prairie Historiography” *Agricultural History* 73:1 (Winter, 1999), 27–45.
- Macdonald, Robert J. “Hutterite Education in Alberta: A Test Case in Assimilation” in *Western Canada Past and Present* ed. A. W. Rasporich. Calgary: McClelland and Stewart West, Ltd., 1975. 133–149.
- Marshall, David. “Out of the Cloister But Still on the Margins?: Recent Publications in Canadian Religious History” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 35:3 (Fall, 2000), 292–305.
- Martin, Luther H. “Comparison” in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, ed. Braun and McCutcheon. 45–56.
- McGowan, Mark G. and David B. Marshall. “Introduction: Writing Religious History in Canada” in *Prophets, Priests and Prodigals* ed. McGowan and Marshall. xi–xxi.
- Medwidsky, Bohdan. “Three Types of Ukrainian Folk Tales in Canada” in *Continuity and Change: The Cultural Life of Alberta's First Ukrainians* ed. Manoly R. Lupul.

- Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta. 174–182.
- Morton, W. L. “A Century of Plain and Parkland” *Alberta Historical Review* 17 (Spring, 1969), 1–10.
- . “The West and the Nation, 1870–1970” in *Prairie Perspectives 2: Selected Papers of the Western Canadian Studies Conferences, 1970, 1971* ed. A. W. Rasporich and H. C. Klassen. Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada Ltd., 1973. 8–24.
- Olender, Vivian. “The Cultural Implications of Methodist Missions” in *Continuity and Change: The Cultural Life of Alberta’s First Ukrainians*. Ed. Manoly Lupul. Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, 1988. 221–232.
- Palmer, Howard and Tamara Palmer, eds. *Peoples of Alberta: Portraits of Cultural Diversity*. Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books. 1985.
- Phillips, Paul. “Canada and the West: Then and Now” in *The Prairie Agrarian Movement Revisited* ed. Murray Knuttila and Bob Striling. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 2007. 9–19.
- Rasporich, A. W. “Utopian Ideals and Community Settlements in Western Canada: 1880–1914” in *The Canadian West* ed. Henry C. Klassen. Calgary: University of Calgary, Comprint Publishing Company. 1977.
- Rea, J. E. “The Roots of Prairie Society” in *Prairie Perspectives: Papers of the Western Canadian Studies Conference* ed. David P. Gagan. Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada Ltd., 1970. 46–55.
- . “Images of the West” in *Western Perspectives 1: Papers of the Western Canadian Studies Conference, 1973* ed. David Jay Bercuson. Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada Ltd., 1974. 4–9.
- Rees, Ronald. “Nostalgic Reaction and the Canadian Prairie Landscape” *Great Plains Quarterly* 2:3 (Summer, 1982), 157–167.
- Rennie, Bradford J. ““A Far Green Country Unto a Swift Sunrise”: The Utopianism of the Alberta Farm Movement, 1909–1923” in *Prairie West as Promised Land* ed. Francis and Kitzan, 243–258.
- Seiler, Robert M. and Tamara Palmer Seiler. “The Social Construction of the Canadian Cowboy: Calgary Exhibition and Stampede Posters, 1952–1972” in *Icon, Brand, Myth* ed. Foran. 293–323.
- Sheehan, Nancy M. “The WCTU on the Prairies, 1886–1930: An Alberta–Saskatchewan Comparison” in *Women’s History: History of the Prairies West Series, Vol. 5* ed. Wendee Kubik and Gregory P. Marchildon. Regina: University of Regina Press, 2015. 11–30.

- Smith, Jonathan Z. "Religion, Religions, Religious" in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* ed. Mark C. Taylor. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998. 269–284.
- Smith, Peter J. "Urban Development Trends in the Prairie Provinces" in *The Making of the Modern West: Western Canada Since 1945* ed. A. W. Rasporich. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1984. 133–144.
- Stanley, G. F. G. "The Western Canadian Mystique" in *Prairie Perspectives* ed. Gagan. 6–27.
- Stark, Rodney. "Rationality" in *Guide to the Study of Religion*. Ed. Braun and McCutcheon. 238–258.
- . "Secularization, R.I.P." *Sociology of Religion* 60:3 (Autumn, 1999), 249–273.
- Thiessen, Joel and Lorne L. Dawson. "Is There a "Renaissance" of Religion in Canada? A Critical Look at Bibby and Beyond" in *Religion & Canadian Society* ed. Beaman. 91–114.
- Thomas, Lewis H. "Saskatoon, 1883–1920: The Formative Years" in *Town and City: Aspects of Western Canadian Urban Development* ed. Alan F. J. Artibise. Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1981. 237–258.
- Voisey, Paul. "Rural Local History and the Prairie West" in *Prairie West* ed. Francis and Palmer, 497–509.
- Watts, Galen. "On the Politics of Self-Spirituality: A Canadian Case Study" *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 47:3 (2018), 345–372.
- Wetherell, Donald G. "Making Tradition: The Calgary Stampede, 1912–1939" in *Icon, Brand, Myth* ed. Foran. 21–45.
- White, Clinton O. "The German Catholic Parochial Schools of Saskatchewan's St. Peter's Colony, 1903–1934: Their Teachers, Curriculum and Quality of Instruction" *Prairie Forum* 24:1 (Spring 1999) 65–90.
- . "Pre-World War I Elementary Educational Developments Among Saskatchewan's German Catholics: A Revisionist View" *Prairie Forum* 18:2 (Fall 1993). 171–196.
- Wiseman, Nelson. "The Pattern of Prairie Politics." *Queen's Quarterly* 88:2 (Summer 1981), 298–315.

MONOGRAPHS

- Allen, Richard. *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914–28*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973.
- Anderson, Alan B. *Settling Saskatchewan*. Regina: University of Regina Press, 2013.

- Archer, John H. *Saskatchewan: A History*. Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1980.
- Asad, Talal. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.
- . *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.
- . *Secular Translations: Nation-State, Modern Self, and Calculative Reason*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018.
- Banack, Clark. *God's Province: Evangelical Christianity, Political Thought, and Conservatism in Alberta*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Consuming Life*. Cambridge: Polity, 2007.
- Berger, Peter L. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. New York: Anchor Books, 1969.
- Bibby, Reginald. *Fragmented Gods: The Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada*. Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 1987.
- . *Resilient Gods: Being Pro-Religious, Low Religious, or No Religious in Canada*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017.
- Braun, Willi and Russell T. McCutcheon, eds. *Reading J. Z. Smith: Interviews and Essay*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Bruce, Steve. *Secularization: In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Buckingham, Janet Epp. *Fighting Over God: A Legal and Political History of Religious Freedom in Canada*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014.
- Cavanaugh, William T. *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Carrette, Jeremy and Richard King. *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion*. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Choquette, Robert. *Canada's Religions*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2004.
- Christie, Nancy and Michael Gauvreau. *A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada, 1900–1940*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996.
- Clarke, Brian and Stuart Macdonald. *Leaving Christianity: Changing Allegiances in Canada Since 1945*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017.
- Cook, Ramsay. *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985.

- Conway, John F. *The West: The History of a Region in Confederation* 3rd. ed. Toronto: James Lorimer & Company Ltd., Publishers, 2006.
- . *The Rise of the New West: The History of a Region in Confederation*. Toronto: James Lorimer & Company Ltd., Publishers, 2014.
- Crunican, Paul. *Priests and Politicians: Manitoba Schools and the Election of 1896*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974.
- Emery, George. *The Methodist Church on the Prairies, 1896–1914*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001.
- Finke, Roger and Rodney Stark. *The Churching of America 1776–2005: Winners and Losers in our Religious Economy*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2005.
- Fitzgerald, Timothy. *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity: A Critical History of Religion and Related Categories*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Francis, R. Douglas. *Images of the West: Changing Perceptions of the Prairies, 1690–1960*. Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1989.
- Friesen, Gerald. *The Canadian Prairies: A History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987.
- Gibbins, Roger. *Prairie Politics and Society: Regionalism in Decline*. Toronto: Butterworth and Company Ltd., 1980.
- Gramsci, Antonio. *The Prison Notebooks Vol. 1*. Ed. and Trans. Joseph A. Buttigieg. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.
- . *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. Ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. New York: International Publishers, 1971.
- Grant, John Webster. *The Church in the Canadian Era: The First Century of Confederation*. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1972.
- Green, Anna and Kathleen Troup. *The Houses of History: A Critical Reader*. 2nd ed. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016.
- Janzen, William. *Limits on Liberty: The Experience of Mennonite, Hutterite, and Doukhobor Communities in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990.
- Lacan, Jacques. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981.
- Lincoln, Bruce. *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification*. 2nd Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Loewen, Royden and Gerald Friesen. *Immigrants in Prairie Cities: Ethnic Diversity in Twentieth-Century Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011.
- Lofton, Kathryn. *Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon*. Berkley: University of California Press, 2011.

- . *Consuming Religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017.
- Lupul, Manoly R. *The Roman Catholic Church and the North-West School Question: A Study in Church-State Relations in Western Canada, 1875–1905*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974.
- Mann, W. E. *Sect, Cult, and Church in Alberta*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1955.
- Mardiros, Anthony. *William Irvine: The Life of a Prairie Radical*. Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, Publishers, 1979.
- Marshall, David B. *Secularizing the Faith: Canadian Protestant Clergy and the Crisis of Belief, 1850–1940*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992.
- Martin, Craig. *Capitalizing Religion: Ideology and the Opiate of the Bourgeoisie*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016.
- McCutcheon, Russell T. *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- . *Studying Religion: An Introduction*. Sheffield: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2007.
- McNaught, Kenneth. *A Prophet in Politics: A Biography of J. S. Woodsworth*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959.
- Mercadante, Linda A. *Belief without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but not Religious*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Mills, Allen. *Fool For Christ: The Political Thought of J. S. Woodsworth*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991.
- Morton, W. L. *Manitoba: A History*. 2nd ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967.
- Owram, Doug. *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856–1900*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980.
- Palmer, Howard and Tamara Palmer. *Alberta: A New History*. Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1990.
- Schmitt, Jean-Claude. *The Holy Greyhound: Guinefort, Healer of Children Since the Thirteenth Century*. Trans. Martin Thom. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Smith, Jonathan Z. *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- . *Map is not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- . *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- . *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

- Stark, Rodney. *The Triumph of Faith: Why the World is More Religious Than Ever*. Wilmington: ISI Books, 2005.
- Swyripa, Frances. *Storied Landscapes: Ethno-Religious Identity and the Canadian Prairies*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2010.
- Taves, Ann. *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011.
- Thiessen, Joel. *The Meaning of Sunday: The Practice of Belief in a Secular Age*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015.
- Walsh, H. H. *The Christian Church in Canada*. Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1956.
- Zizek, Slavoj. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso, 2008.

THESES

- Tischler, Kurt. "The German Canadians in Saskatchewan with Particular Reference to the Language Problem, 1900–1930." MA Thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1978.
- Watts, Galen. "The Personal Politics of Spirituality: On the Lived Relationship Between Contemporary Spirituality and Social Justice Among Canadian Millennials." MA Thesis, Queen's University, 2016.