

St. Thomas United Church

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**“Faith and Politics: Reflections on the Roots of Canada’s Current Parliament”**

**By Bill Blaikie**

The title of my talk tonight has to do with the fact that the last federal election produced an historically unique situation in Canadian politics. For the first time the two parties facing each other as government and opposition, the Conservatives and the New Democrats, a government of the right and an opposition of the left, are parties which both historically and, to a varying extent, currently are shaped and informed by an explicit association with differing traditions of what a faith-informed politics should look like.

Observing this about the current Parliament is different than observing, for example, that persons with deep personal faith perspectives have been active in Canadian politics. Surely this is the case. But with the exception of the two traditions that now face each other, the tradition in Canadian politics has been a mix of discretion, silence, and privacy when it comes to the religious beliefs of political leaders and politicians in general. This approach is often characterized as the better part of valour in a country with a history of Protestant-Catholic political battles.

Indeed, long before 1960, when John F. Kennedy, addressing the anti-Catholic anxiety that his candidacy had given rise to, felt he had to assure the Houston Ministerial Association that he was “not the Catholic candidate for President, but the Democratic candidate who happened to be a Catholic,” Canada had had Catholic Prime Ministers,

and would have more, none of whom ever had to comment on their Catholicism, from Trudeau to Clark to Turner to Chretien and Martin. It was not until after Pierre Trudeau's death that his Catholicism became a topic for discussion, and books were written like *The Hidden Pierre Trudeau*, in which Trudeau's connection to social Catholicism and Christian Personalism were explored as sources of his commitment to the dignity of the individual and ideas of human solidarity. With Justin Trudeau's campaign for the leadership of the Liberal Party now underway it will be interesting to see what is said or asked of him in regard to his faith and his politics. An article by Jonathan Malloy in the November 2012 issue of *Christian Week* may provide an example of the speculation to come. One hopes they will all be as fair, to Justin and to his father, as Malloy was, but we already have the example of one Catholic Conservative MP who attacked a Catholic school board for inviting Justin Trudeau to speak at a high school in its jurisdiction. Perhaps there will come a day when a book entitled *The Hidden Stephen Harper* will be published, given the paucity of the Prime Minister's comments on his faith perspective, a paucity that gives rise to wondering whether, in spite of the religious roots of his political universe, Stephen Harper has adopted the older model of silence.

What is new in terms of Catholics and Canadian politics is that, for the first time, federally at least, the left is now led by a Catholic in the person of Thomas Mulcair. In a recent *Maclean's* article Mulcair is described by some who know him in Quebec as being variously associated with the Catholic left in Quebec, part of Quebec's distinctive sub-culture of Catholic centre-left progressives, and as someone who was mentored by Claude Ryan, who Mulcair is reported to have admired for his Catholic commitment to social causes.

In any event, my intention is to reflect on the roots and reality of the present situation, while also commenting on the larger context of the ongoing debate about the relationship between faith and politics.

The current government is arguably dominated at the top by at least a few persons who are either evangelical Christian or conservative Roman Catholic in their orientation. This has led not only to a unique relationship in Parliament, but also to a unique adversarial relationship between the government and church related organizations that are seen to be on the wrong side of the faith/political spectrum. Government cutbacks in funding for faith based development and social justice work that is seen to be on the wrong side have been extensive. It is a government prepared to go after its critics, or the differently minded, in the faith community in a way that more secular or religiously neutral governments would never have contemplated. The interference from the top to derail approved funding for KAIROS is only the most high profile of such behavior.

Facing each other in Parliament are political groupings which to some extent reflect the divide within the Christian community that American theologian and New Testament scholar Marcus Borg has referred to as not only deep, but “acrimonious.” According to Marcus Borg, in what he admits is a grand simplification, followers of one Christian vision, found predominantly among fundamentalists, conservative evangelicals, and some mainline Christian churches, regard many of their fellow Christians as being Christian in a way that could be characterized, in his words, “as a watering down or even abandonment of Christianity,” full of “too many concessions to modern thought, producing an anemic, politically correct, and vaguely theistic humanism.” On

the other side, the perception of the other camp is that it is “anti-intellectual, literalistic, judgmental, self-righteous, and uncritically committed to right-wing politics.”

There was a seminar six years ago in Ottawa, called “Navigating the Faith-Political Interface,” sponsored by Trinity Western University’s Laurentian Leadership Centre, in association with the Manning Centre for Building Democracy, a centre established by former leader of the Reform Party and Leader of the Opposition, Preston Manning. I refer in my book to that evening in Ottawa, almost seven years ago now, by way of discussing a common criticism offered by the religious right of the religious left, an analysis put forward that evening by Preston, to the effect that folks like me are too preoccupied with the horizontal plane, with the world that is, and pay too little attention to the vertical, to our relationship with God. This way of thinking is arguably open to the charge of a certain spiritual hubris, in so far as it seems to presuppose that Christians on the left have a flawed or somehow inadequate spirituality, and that Christians on the right have a superior spirituality or relationship with God. No countenance is given to the possibility that the horizontal might flow from the vertical. Surely the biblical evidence seems overwhelming that one of the major signs, indeed one might argue, the major sign, of whether one’s vertical relationship is on the mark is precisely how much attention one pays to the world. As the pre-eminent Roman Catholic Canadian theologian Gregory Baum noted in his book *The Social Imperative*, over forty years ago, in 1971 the Third Synod of Bishops, convened at Rome, not only recognized the reality of “social sin,” it rejected any distinction between the vertical and the horizontal dimensions of the faithful life that reduced engagement with the struggle for social justice to a second class spirituality. But we need not rely on Episcopal authority in this matter. It

seems to me that in the scriptural account of the last judgment it is only so-called horizontal matters that are employed to separate the sheep from the goats.

The Ottawa seminar began with the viewing of a video entitled “The Social Gospel and the Public Good,” which compared and contrasted the religious and political work of J.S.

Woodsworth and William Aberhart, and the work and legacies of their respective principal disciples. Tommy Douglas and Ernest Manning, Preston Manning’s father. The viewing of the video was followed by a discussion between Preston Manning and myself.

The video lumped together the Aberhart-Manning tradition and the Woodsworth-Douglas tradition under the one umbrella term of the social gospel, yet it is clear from any reading of what was said at the time, or what has been said since about that time, that they understood and described themselves as two very different things. Indeed, apart from the aforementioned video, even Preston Manning himself refers not to two versions of the social gospel movement, but to the social gospel movement in western Canada and the evangelical movement in western Canada, two different movements, albeit with a shared geography and a shared experience of the Great Depression.

Lloyd Mackey, author of *Like Father, Like Son*, a book about Ernest and Preston Manning, suggests in his book that the fundamentalist school that Aberhart and the elder Manning belonged to, the Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute, was in part “a reaction to the social gospel” and of course the modernism that was also sweeping Protestant denominations in the 1910’s and 1920’s. According to Mackey, this school was “skeptical of pastors and teachers who tried to turn the Bible into a tool to address social issues.”

It is beyond the scope of this lecture to do so, but it would be interesting to know more about how the modernist-fundamentalist debate about the Bible effected, and perhaps even trumped in unseen ways, the not necessarily parallel but chronologically simultaneous debate about the practical political expression of Christianity. It is arguable that a similar question could be asked today.

Just as an aside, Lloyd Mackey incidentally provides a cautionary tale about reading one's view of the present into scripture, and particularly the Book of Revelation. According to Mackey, Aberhart interpreted the seven churches in Revelation to be various Canadian denominations. His favourite was the church at Ephesus, the Baptists in his view, followed by the Presbyterians who were seen as the church at Smyrna. The bad news for me is that Aberhart equated the United Church with the church at Sardis, which according to him was the most apostate church.

Plus ça change, plus la meme chose, you might say, given the attitude that Stephen Harper appears to have towards the United Church, and particularly the Rev. Bill Phipps from Calgary, who campaigned for a moral economy when he was Moderator of the United Church, and took that campaign into the political arena when he ran as the NDP candidate in the federal by-election that saw Stephen Harper return to Parliament as leader of the Canadian Alliance Party. It was not the first time that a United Church minister tried to get in the way of a newly elected leader on the political right. In 1983, The Rev. Roy DeMarsh was the NDP candidate in the Nova Scotia by-election that brought the newly elected Brian Mulroney to the House of Commons.

In any event, at some point Aberhart was introduced to the theories of Major C. H. Douglas, a British teacher who was advocating something called social credit as a solution to the economic disaster of the Great Depression. The theory was based on the notion that the banking system was corrupt and that the role of banks should be bypassed by radical monetary reforms that would see governments able in some circumstances to issue credit, or social credit to be precise, instead of the traditional currency, as a way creating economic activity. Aberhart began to preach social credit alongside and within the sermons he offered on his radio programs and lectures.

To make a long story short, a Social Credit party was formed and in the election of 1935 it won power, over against a United Farmer government that was weakened by allegations of scandal. By the time Ernest Manning had become Premier and was running for re-election in 1944, what was unique about Social Credit had been tried and rejected by the federal government and the courts. Thereafter, as Lloyd Mackey says in his book, Ernest Manning managed to persuade his party that statism and class warfare were the real enemies and not the banks. During his years in the Premier's office, Premier Manning continued to broadcast his popular radio show called Back to the Bible.

The prairie populism that saw the banks and Central Canada together as the powers that needed to be challenged, was replaced with a party that was quiescent about capitalism and a cheerleader for a vision of free enterprise and individualism that blended well with a theology of focusing on individual salvation. Religion was something separate from politics, except in so far as it might produce ethical people to take their place in the dominant world order, or successful people whose success was, in the spirit of John Calvin, thought to be a sign of God's favour.

The attitude towards Central Canada would lie low until the National Energy Program of the early 1980's revived it and created the alienation in certain parts of western Canada that helped create the Reform Party. Looking at the current government as an emanation of this tradition, it would seem that loyalty to regional interests is stronger than any other belief, including the aversion to so-called statism, unless its only democratically accountable Canadian statism or Canadian public ownership that is to be avoided. Having more and more of our energy sector owned by foreign states, and even undemocratic state interests is just fine as long as it comes with the needed investment dollars. PetroCanada. Never. PetroChina. Well, maybe? At the very least it appears that if one's horizontal preoccupations are with a particular sector of the economy, rather than the poor or marginalized, that apparently is not something that calls one's vertical relationship with God into question.

The attitude toward foreign investment is ironic given that in the context of debates about tar sands and pipelines, the government has expressed a desire to suppress foreign funding of environmental NGOs that criticize government policy. Foreign ownership and investment from outside Canada are one thing. Contrary opinion and influence from outside Canada are a whole different story.

Returning to the historical narrative, at the same time as Aberhart and Manning's Social Credit, and also in western Canada, but not only there, there was the social gospel movement. The social gospel, like the evangelical movement, was not a homogenous movement, but it was united around the view, as Richard Allen put it in his classic work on the social gospel, *The Social*



Passion, that whatever else might be the case, Christianity was a social religion concerned with the quality of human relations on this earth, in the here and now. The social gospel held that God was as concerned about the world as he was about individuals, and that His concern for the world was a manifestation of His love for humanity, individually and collectively.

The most famous and influential theologian of the social gospel was Walter Rauschenbusch, whose theology was less open to the charge, often directed at the social gospel by its critics, of being too sanguine and optimistic about the human condition. Rauschenbusch, in his 1917 book *Theology for a Social Gospel*, sounds strangely acquainted with the present, whether we think of corporate globalization in general, the Enron and WorldCom scandals at the turn of this century, or the 2008 economic crisis, when he says, “Predatory profit, when once its sources are opened up and developed, constitutes an almost overwhelming temptation,” giving those who pursue such profit a cohesion that enables them, as he says, to justify their anti-social activities. He called for the creation of “righteous institutions” to prevent temptation and to redeem the sinfulness of the social order. One of the people his writings influenced was James Shaver Woodsworth.

J.S. Woodsworth, who years later would become the founding leader of the CCF, the forerunner of the NDP, wrote a book when he was still a Methodist minister working at All People’s Mission in Winnipeg’s polyglot north end, called *My Neighbour*, which asked the ruling economic elite of Winnipeg, gathered in their splendid churches on the right side of the tracks, to imagine the immigrants on the wrong side of the tracks as their neighbour, instead of a labour force to exploit. They didn’t take the hint, and 12 years later the Winnipeg General Strike

ensued, in which Woodsworth was charged with sedition for quoting the prophet Isaiah. As Canadian social historian Ian McKay says in his book *Reasoning Otherwise*,

“To many people the realities of life in an individualistic, capitalistic order, and the ethics of Christ and His followers, no matter how flexibly interpreted, revealed a major contradiction. The mix of politics and religion on the left made for ways of speaking that would be easily misunderstood today. If these days someone said they belonged to something called the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order, I believe most Canadians would assume such an FCSO to be some kind of right-wing Christian organization. But the FCSO of the 1930’s was a group of distinguished academics who wanted to Christianize, and socialize the economic order by introducing policies based on the mutuality and solidarity with the oppressed that they found witnessed to in the teachings of the Hebrew prophets and Christ Himself.

This lecture is not the place to be able to go into the many details of the social gospel. Suffice for my purpose here today to note that Canadian social gospelers, of various kinds, were a major force in the creation of the CCF in 1933, and later the NDP, and that the CCF and the NDP were instrumental in the politics that created a mixed economy and the modern welfare state, which in the context of the post-Second World War era saw a Canada that was less and less unequal and more socially just, even though, unfortunately, aboriginal Canadians were not part of the success story. In this era, the left and right came to terms with a compromise that saw capitalism tamed in the name of the common good, by national governments that had much more power than they, by design, have today. It was a time of creating the righteous institutions that Rauschenbusch had talked about, institutions like Medicare, for example. And prominent advocates of such institutions were from the Christian left, people like Baptist Minister Tommy Douglas, United

Church Minister Stanley Knowles, and Anglican layman M.J. Coldwell, who succeeded Woodsworth as leader of the CCF. The era of dismantling righteous institutions had not yet begun,

In this same era, speaking broadly, the evangelical movement was content to stay out of politics and the public sphere, relying by default on old-line Protestant and Catholic communities to play the role of public religion, as Brian Stiller, former President of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada observes in his book, *Tower of Babel to Parliament Hill*. He attributes this attitude largely to a combination of a self-imposed isolation brought on by the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, the influence of pre-millennialism and dispensationalism, and evangelical shunning of universities, out of a suspicion of places that harbored theological liberals.

But the breakdown of the moral consensus or agreement on the boundaries within which the pursuit of individual good or individual self-fulfillment could take place within the liberal democratic state, a breakdown which accelerated greatly in the 1960's and 1970's, created the context for the evangelical return to the world. What Theodore Roszak called the counter-culture, and what Charles Taylor, in his book *Varieties of Religion Today*, calls expressive individualism, or even expressive spirituality, and soft relativism came to be seen by some as a development that needed to be turned back.

In the view of the evangelical community, again broadly speaking, the mainstream Protestant churches were not seen to be stoutly defending the eroding moral paradigm, and they felt a call to do something about that. This would have consequences, not just politically but also

for the larger church community as conservative churches grew precisely because, rightly or wrongly, they provided definitive answers to questions that were treated as topics for debate in the mainline churches.

The irony of course was that in doing so the more conservative Christian community came to the aid of the political forces that were uncritical of the very market forces that collaborated in breaking down the established moral paradigm, by inculcating a consumerist and hedonistic ethos of individual choice that blurred the distinction between needs and wants. It wasn't then, and it isn't now, the socialists who are responsible for the proliferation of advertisements that exploit sexuality and treat the traditional with disrespect as part of their marketing strategies.

The evangelical return to the world, and to the world of politics in particular, put an end in some ways to the view, often expressed in the past from the political right and centre, that religion and politics should not be mixed, something that was not an uncommon critical response to the mixing of politics and religion on the left. If it was okay on the right, then the left could hardly be criticized, at least in principle, for doing the same. Except of course when you wanted a faith perspective to inform how we organize our economic life, which of course is the real offense.

The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops found this out after their New Year's Day statement on the economic crisis in 1983, when they proclaimed that the needs of the poor had priority over the wants of the rich, and that the rights of workers were more important than the maximization of profits. They were told by none other than Pierre Trudeau to mind their own business.

Which one might argue they increasingly did as divisions between them and the mainline churches over the aforementioned moral consensus fragmented the ecumenical unity that had been characteristic of the seventies around issues of economic justice, aboriginal rights, international development, human rights in Latin America. and peace, to name a just a few of the issues that led to at least a dozen ecumenical coalitions. Indeed, the era of the many ecumenical coalitions was a time of recovering the social gospel for Protestants, as they partnered with Catholics, many of whom were inspired by liberation theology and the general post-Vatican II environment to an ecumenical politics of justice that would have been inconceivable only a few decades previously.

This was the hopeful environment into which I graduated from seminary in 1977, the summer of the Berger Report on the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline, a report very much influenced by the input of the mainline Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church. It was both a high point, and the end of an era. In my view it was arguably the last time that the mainline churches had so much influence in a major national debate, although their influence lingered through the way the Berger legacy affected the debate about aboriginal rights just a few years later when the BNA Act was patriated. In those days, if there was a party to be associated with religion, it was the NDP, with MPs like Father Bob Ogle from Saskatoon, Father Andy Hogan from Cape Breton, three United Church Ministers, myself, Stanley Knowles, and Jim Manly, and Anglican worker priest Dan Heap from Toronto.

As the 1980's went on the Catholic community converged more and more with the evangelical community around issues in what came to be called the culture wars, as what were called family

values trumped issues of peace, justice, and the environment. This was all part of something that had begun in America in the late seventies, what came to be symbolized politically for so many years, in America in particular, by Gerry Falwell's Moral Majority. But unlike the influence that evangelical voters in America had as early as 1976 when they backed Jimmy Carter, and then, angry at him for going after the tax exemptions enjoyed by some of their educational institutions, went over to the Republicans for a generation, the smaller evangelical community in Canada would not be visible in the same way until the late eighties and early nineties when it came to be seen as a major component of the Reform Party.

The Reform Party was formed in 1987. Its first leader was Preston Manning, son of Ernest Manning. It began by catching a wave of regional alienation symbolized by the CF-18 decision in 1986, whereby a contract for new fighter aircraft went to Montreal instead of to the better bid in Winnipeg. Soon it would also ride a wave of populist anti-Ottawa feeling brought on by constitutional gridlock, and the already existing wave of unhappiness on the part of some Canadians about the previously mentioned changing moral consensus, including a focus on the perception that the justice system was too permissive, and a focus on the national fiscal deficit. It is likely that moral indignation alone, without the regional, constitutional, and fiscal additives, would not have been enough to fuel the launch of a successful new political reality, and make it the Official Opposition within ten years.

In his book, *The New Canada*, published in 1992, Preston Manning, in a chapter entitled The Spiritual Dimension, portrays the Reform Party as a populist party, as opposed to the NDP which he calls ideological, and the Liberals and Conservatives, who he calls pragmatic. He contrasts the

Christian left, arising as he says out of the social gospel, with the Christian right, which in his view is represented, conveniently, not by the Reform Party, but by the Christian Heritage Party. Instead of being concerned about social justice for the old, the sick, and the poor, like the Christian left, says Manning, the Christian Heritage party emphasizes protection of the unborn, the influence of secular humanism in education, and government intervention in family life. Both are value driven minorities that need to be held in check by good democratic process. In the same chapter, Manning makes the claim that secular fundamentalism is as much of a concern as religious fundamentalism. I might agree, except that he then goes on to say that the mark of such fundamentalism is uncompromising convictions on the role of women in society and environmental conservation.

In any event Preston Manning was very good at coming off as a populist rather than a preacher, preferring often to say that contentious moral issues should be decided by referendum. Indeed Manning's penchant for populism drew criticism in mid 90's from one Stephen Harper, who advocated a stricter conservatism for the party, and less attempts at being all things to all people.

It really wasn't until 2000 when Stockwell Day defeated Preston Manning to become the leader of the Canadian Alliance Party, the successor to the Reform Party, that the mix of religion and politics on the political right became an issue in a way that it had never been before. Day was not Manning, who even today counsels conservative Christians, indeed trains some of them, to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. And the Canadian Alliance was now in a position to be the next government. It had yet to merge with what remained of the now decimated traditional conservative party, the Progressive Conservatives, who when they did merge with the Alliance to

form just the Conservative party provided a form of reassurance that helped make them electable. But in 2000, this was not yet the case, and the arrival of the former Pentecostal pastor and Alberta cabinet minister on the federal scene sparked a debate about religion and politics in Canada.

I did more interviews on the subject of religion and politics after Day arrived in Ottawa than I had in the twenty years before his arrival, sometimes musing with curiosity as to why left wing Christians like myself had provoked so little debate. Indeed, a few years later a United Church minister, Lorne Calvert, would become Premier of Saskatchewan without any controversy related to his religion whatsoever. It is more complicated than this, but it was certainly the case that the controversy about Stockwell Day's religion was abetted by the simultaneous ascendancy of George W. Bush and his association with the religious and political right in America, and by the fact that the media stereotype of religion and politics was by that time so fixed on the political right that the presence of counter examples was ignored.

Day very quickly lost an election called by then Prime Minister Chretien in the fall of 2000, in which the Liberals very successfully portrayed Day as someone who was a religious fanatic and biblical literalist with a hidden and unacceptable agenda on abortion, gay rights, and other issues. The fact that he would not campaign on Sunday was even used against him, something I thought was completely unfair. Indeed, although it was successful in the short run, it could be argued that the Liberals so overplayed the "religious as scary" card that they contributed to their eventual decline. Day lost the leadership of the Canadian Alliance to Stephen Harper in 2002.



Stephen Harper belongs to the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church. He has, as I indicated earlier, been much more circumspect in public about his religious beliefs. What can be said is that he probably does not agree with my view that the free market fundamentalism and capitalist triumphalism that characterized the neo-conservative era has been an occasion for a certain idolatry of the market, and the consequent social sin of greater and greater inequality. For Stephen Harper, who is reported in a biography of him to have cut his philosophical teeth reading William F. Buckley, Hayek, and Malcolm Muggeridge, the market is only to be seen as an instrument of human freedom. I see the market mentality as a reductionist way of thinking about human life that should be of concern to people of faith, and this puts me on the left, with others who come to their critique of the market ethos from other traditions.

Prime Minister Harper's first years as Prime Minister were constrained by the limitations of minority government, but even in that context a book could be written in 2010 like Marci McDonald's *The Armageddon Factor*, which goes to great lengths to prove that there is what she calls a Christian nationalist theocratic agenda at work on and in the Harper government which sees secularism not as a context for interfaith neutrality but as a competing religion. McDonald devotes only a few paragraphs to the Christian left, but in what she does say it seems that in addition to a practical concern about the Christian right, she has a generic concern about the role of religion in public life that amplifies her opposition to the Christian right.

In an article this spring, and subsequently in his new book *The Energy of Slaves*, subtitled *Oil and the New Servitude*, respected Canadian journalist Andrew Nikiforuk, himself a self-described Christian and social conservative, has argued that the Harper government's rejection of

the Kyoto Accord, and other environmental policies, are strikingly similar to a particular evangelical view associated with what is known as the Cornwall Alliance, known for its skepticism about mainstream science, climate change, and environmental regulation. I was unaware of the Cornwall Alliance, and do not know whether it is in fact as influential as Nikiforuk makes out. But when I googled it, one of the first things I noticed was a positive review of a book that claims environmentalists are little better than transparently closet Marxists, using the fact that Lenin set up nature preserves as evidence. I was reminded that at one time the current Prime Minister referred to Kyoto as a socialist plot.

Fortunately there is diversity within the evangelical community, and changes are occurring. In a recently published book, *The New Evangelicals – Expanding the Vision of the Common Good*, written and researched by a person named Marcia Pally, a shift in the political culture of evangelicals in the United States is identified. Pally, who spent seven years visiting churches from California to tiny rural congregations in the deep south, claims that when she was doing her field work she could not find a church that was NOT doing an environmental or economic justice project.

On the basis of much less research, I have a similar hope for the evangelical community in Canada, that some of them will, in effect, possibly be the spiritual capital of a new social gospel movement. As a new generation of evangelical Christians focuses on questions of poverty or of the environment, as they move from questions of charity and individual environmental responsibility to the advocacy of justice and long term sustainability for the sake of future generations, realizing that the market is incapable of taking future generations into account, they

will have stepped into the social gospel, whether they call it that or not. This would certainly be the case if they were to take seriously the teachings of Pope Benedict on the global economy.

Indeed the Pope's 2009 encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* seems to take dead aim at free market fundamentalism. Calling for the strengthening of unions and lamenting the downsizing of social security systems, the Pope says that

“the conviction that the economy must be autonomous, that it must be shielded from influences of a moral character, has led man to abuse the economic process in a thoroughly destructive way.”

Another thing worthy of note is a re-emergent Christian left, after years of low profile, a low profile due in part to the overwhelming political and media narrative about the religious right, but also to a deference to secularism and pluralism that perhaps went beyond what was appropriate. This was part of a vicious circle created when some elements of the religious right are felt to be such a discredit to religion in the public realm that others hide their faith under a bushel when they actually need to let it shine, while at the same time calling on the larger progressive community to abandon its sometimes elitist and intellectually patronizing attitude towards religion.

Whatever might or might not come together to create the ingredients of a bridge, created perhaps out of the convergence of a more broadly politically engaged evangelical community, a rediscovery of Catholic interest in economic teaching, and a re-emergent Christian left, any new social gospel will be different than the social gospel of the 1930's, or the 70's, or even the older social gospel of the Hebrew prophets.

The social gospel of the future will not be able to take for granted a certain affinity with, or knowledge of, its religious tradition. Both Aberhart and Woodsworth, Douglas and Manning, could assume a certain biblical literacy and public affinity when making their faith based pitches to what was in their view a wayward Christendom that needed to better heed its own message. The social gospel of the future will want to connect with the prophetic tradition in all the world's religions, most if not all of which now have a presence in Canada.

Yet a post-Christendom context is certainly not necessarily a post-religious context. Despite a renewal of militant atheism, it is pretty clear that God has survived the secularization narrative. Indeed, a casual look at book titles from *God is Back* to *God's Century*, the 21<sup>st</sup> that is, to Reg Bibby's recent book about the persistence of religion in Canada, points to the ongoing and resurgent reality of religion as a component of the political that we are arguably ill prepared to deal with. Instead we are too often treated to competing nostalgias. As Miroslav Volf says in his book *A Public Faith*. "A modernist longing for a secular world is bound to be just as disappointed as someone longing for Christian America or Christian Europe."

Religion has for so long been the elephant in the room that many did not want to acknowledge. Charles Taylor does talk about the elephant in the room, and it is with his observations that I would like to briefly touch on by way of concluding remarks. Charles Taylor is Professor Emeritus at Montreal's McGill University, probably Canada's most globally renowned philosopher and thinker, and co-author of the Taylor-Bouchard Commission on Reasonable Accommodation in Quebec. Taylor argues that one can be a critic of certain kinds of secularism

without adhering to a competing theocracy, as Marci McDonald suggests of the Harper government. Taylor advocates what he calls an inclusive secularism, in which no one particular religion is favored over another, but also in which unbelief is not privileged over belief. Even unbelief represents a particular worldview that should not be imposed on those who do not subscribe to it, particularly in a democracy. He sometimes refers to this as the reality of multiple modernities.

According to Taylor, the challenge for democracies today is how to maintain or create a needed solidarity amid a diverse and diversifying population. It is a challenge unprecedented in our history, the need to create, as he calls it, “a powerful political ethic of solidarity self-consciously grounded on the presence and acceptance of very different views.” In meeting this challenge, political parties that are tied to what has been called the politics of communities or countries with a shared perspective, as opposed to the politics of multiple communities within the larger one, have particular challenges. To some extent both the government and the official opposition come out of traditions that sought to create a shared Canadian perspective based on their values. Each of them is in the process of coming to terms with the likely impossibility of such a project. The truly important project will be creating that powerful political ethic of solidarity that Charles Taylor talks about.