

Life Outside the Cloister: Some Reflections on the Writing of the History of the Catholic Church in English Canada, 1983-1996

Mark G. McGOWAN

Since 1983, the writing of the history of the Catholic Church in Canada has experienced significant change. Two distinguished scholars of Canadian religious history, John Moir and the late George Rawlyk, can be credited for their awakening of the historians of Canadian Catholicism, notably those in the Canadian Catholic Historical Association, to pursue new themes and greater methodological sophistication. John S. Moir's "Coming of Age, but Slowly," a paper delivered at the conference commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the CCHA in 1983, challenged member-historians to be open to new historical methods and be attentive to developments in other academic disciplines.¹ While cautioning historians of Catholicism about their traditional preoccupation with the history of institutions, Moir urged their greater involvement in microhistorical studies and in the development of Catholic archives. Three years later, in 1986, George Rawlyk lauded Moir's suggestions, but added that historians of the Catholic Church in English Canada had not risen to his challenge. Pulling no punches when he reviewed Volume 50 of the CCHA's *Study Sessions* (1983), Rawlyk asserted:

Moir's call for "openness" and "involvement" has largely gone unheeded by his fellow essayists. There is a sense, therefore, that most of these published papers reflect the historiographical realities of 1933 rather than of 1983. Apparently, unlike even the writing of Canadian Mennonite and Baptist history in the 1980s, most Roman Catholic historical writing is bogged down in a form of safe, parochial antiquarianism. ... Canadian Roman Catholic historiography, and this point needs to be emphasized, should be the engine of the new religious history rather than its caboose.²

¹ John S. Moir, "Coming of Age, but Slowly: Aspects of Canadian Religious Historiography Since Confederation," Canadian Catholic Historical Association, *Study Sessions* 50 (1983):11:89-98.

² George Rawlyk, Review, "Sessions d'étude 1983," in *Canadian Historical Review* 67 (June 1986): p. 269.

However blunt his comments were, and however pained historians of Catholicism in English Canada were to hear them, there was a measure of truth in what Rawlyk had to say. Now ten years distant from Rawlyk's biting criticism, the study of Canadian Catholic history among anglophone historians has flourished, appearing less as a caboose, but still not quite the little engine that could.

Before one can address general questions regarding survey and synthesis, as suggested by this roundtable, one should reflect upon the developments made by the contemporary historians who explore the history of the Catholic Church in Canada, and how their labours have affected or reflected the general trends in the writing of Canadian history itself. I would like to revisit the analogy of the "cloister" that I employed six years ago in an historiographical essay on the state of Canadian religious scholarship. At that time, I saw Canadian religious study emerging from what Roger O'Toole called the stale air of the cloister.³ Religious history, when practiced within the "cloister," was often cut off from the methodological and interpretive changes of Canadian historiography, particularly after the 1960s. In the "cloister," historians laboured away on a great variety of "Church" histories, narratives of institutional development, biographical studies, and positive reflections upon individual and community contributions to the Church and society. Comments by Moir and Rawlyk came at a time when historians of the Catholic Church in English Canada seemed prepared to pursue new questions, and adopt new research tools to find the answers. This paper will examine the contributions of some contemporary historians of Canadian Catholicism, particularly those affiliated with the Canadian Catholic Historical Association, and assess their impact on the Canadian historical "neighbourhood" in which they are currently engaged. How well have they made their presence known in the wider historical community? Quite clearly the last dozen years or so has been characterized by innovation, imagination and growth among these historians of Catholicism, although such "home improvements" have gone literally unnoticed by inhabitants of the broader historical neighbourhood.

The observations of Moir and Rawlyk coincided with an infusion of young professional historians into the CCHA who desired some measure of *aggiornamento* in the Association. They had by no means been the first – there had been efforts by a cadre of young historians in the late 1960s, and

³ Mark G. McGowan, "Coming Out of the Cloister: Some Reflections on Developments in the Study of Religion in Canada, 1980-1990," *International Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue internationale d'études canadiennes* 1-2 (Spring-Fall/Printemps/automne 1990): pp. 175-202, and Roger O'Toole, "Some Good Purpose: Notes on Religion and Political Culture in Canada," *Annual Review of the Social Sciences of Religion* 6 (1982): pp. 177-217.

there had also been notable individual forays into the Canadian historical neighbourhood in the 1970s. Such efforts, however, had not significantly transformed the CCHA in terms of scholarship or membership.⁴ A co-operative effort between longstanding members of the Association and the new younger members, in the early 1980s, however, engendered a transformation of the CCHA's English Section. Some of the changes are well known to members: the expansion of the executive (1991), the inclusion of semiannual executive planning meetings (1989), the creation of a semi-annual newsletter *The Bulletin* (1985), the transformation of *Study Sessions* into Canadian Catholic Historical Association *Historical Studies*, a fully refereed journal (1987), a broadening of the contributors to the annual bibliography of Canadian church history (1992), a serious effort to include sessions of interest to archivists (1994), the creation of a working rapprochement with the French Section of the association, and an intensive effort to recruit new members.

What is clear from the retrospective eye of 1996 is that these innovations transformed the face of the Association and broadened its constituent groups. Membership in the CCHA-English Section has increased exponentially since 1983, from less than 200 members to well over 300 active members in 1995. The membership still contains a blend of professional historians employed in the university networks of Canada, amateur and private historians, archivists and librarians, clergy, religious, and laity. Under the auspices of a Membership director and better recruitment at local meetings of the Learned Societies, the Ontario-centric nature of membership has given way to greater "openness" to all regions of the country. More important, diversity and inclusion, have been benchmark developments within the Association. In 1983 the five-person executive consisted of four male religious and one laywoman. Thirteen years later, the executive has expanded to seven executive members: two male religious and five laywomen; two women hold the chief executive positions of President and Vice-president.

Of greater significance than the administrative changes, however, has been the scholarly "openness" of the historical writing fostered by the Association. Clearly the most important development in this respect has been the

⁴ From 1967 to 1970, vols. 35-37, the CCHA *Study Sessions* departed from an exclusively Canadian focus. Volumes include papers on both Canadian and European themes, which may reflect the interests of the Executive and scholars in the Association at the time. Notable individual forays were made by L.K. Shook, *Catholic Post-Secondary Education in English-speaking Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), Paul Crunican, *Priests and Politicians: Manitoba Schools and the Election of 1896* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), and Robert Choquette, *Language and Religion: A History of French-English Conflict in Ontario* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1975).

success of CCHA *Historical Studies*. Initiated in discussions in 1987, and formalized under its pioneer editor, Dr. Terrence Murphy, CCHA *Historical Studies* has forced historians of Canadian Catholicism to meet every professional standard when undertaking their craft.⁵ Subject to peer review, both internal to the CCHA and externally from among the historical “neighbours,” *Historical Studies* has achieved a high degree of scholarly excellence in its recent incarnation and, in so doing, has reflected a growing maturity among historians of Canadian Catholicism. Recent issues of the journal reflect the way in which historians of the Church are grappling with the issues and questions germane to the Canadian historical “neighbourhood”: gender and power, higher education, aboriginal history, immigration and ethnicity, social history, and studies of material culture.⁶ Articles in the last eight years have also mined new sources, such as the Vatican archives, and broached new historical methods like feminist analysis and quantification.

The renovation of the Catholic Historical “house” over the past thirteen years has been assisted by the individual and co-operative scholarly ventures of members of the Association. The CCHA has increased its “involvement” by assisting dioceses in the preparation of their commemorative histories. In the case of Toronto in 1990, the CCHA was co-responsible for the CATO-150 Conference and its subsequent award-winning publication, *Catholics at the ‘Gathering Place’*.⁷ Individual members have also made significant contributions to scholarship: Raymond Huel’s directorship of the Western Oblate History Project, Luca Codignola’s, *The Coldest Harbour in the Land* (1988), Roberto Perin’s seminal *Rome in Canada* (1990), Brian Clarke’s acclaimed *Piety and Nationalism* (1993), Marianna O’Gallagher’s

⁵ “Editor’s Foreword,” CCHA *Historical Studies* 55 (1988): p. 5.

⁶ Some recent examples from the CCHA *Historical Studies* include: Mark G. McGowan, “‘The Catholic Restoration’: Pope Pius X, Archbishop Denis O’Connor and Popular Catholicism in Toronto, 1899-1908,” 54 (1987); Raymond Huel, “The Oblates, the Metis, and 1885: The Breakdown of Traditional Relationships,” 56 (1989); Rodney Arthur Fowler, “The Lemert Thesis and the Sechelt Mission,” 57 (1990); Philip McCann, “The ‘No Popery’ Crusade and the Newfoundland School System, 1836-1843,” 58 (1991); James D. Cameron, “Erasing forever the brand of social inferiority,: Saint Francis Xavier University and the Highland Catholics of Eastern Nova Scotia,” 59 (1992); Elizabeth Smyth, “Developing the Powers of the youthful mind’: The Evolution of Education for Young Women at St. Joseph’s Academy, Toronto, 1845-1911,” 60 (1993-1994); Victoria Bennett, “Early Catholic Architecture in the Ottawa Valley: An Initial Investigation of Nineteenth Century Parish Churches,” 60 (1993 1994); Elizabeth McGahan, “The Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception: A Canadian Case Study,” 61 (1995); and Sheila Andrew, “Selling Education: The Problem of Convent Schools in Acadian New Brunswick, 1858-1886,” 62 (1996).

⁷ Mark G. McGowan and Brian P. Clarke, eds., *Catholics at the ‘Gathering Place’: Historical Essays on the Archdiocese of Toronto, 1841-1991* (Toronto: Canadian Catholic Historical Association, 1993).

timely *Eyewitness: Grosse Ile* (1995), and Gerald Stortz and Terrence Murphy's *Creed and Culture* (1993), an anthology that included the efforts of eight CCHA members. It should also be noted that four of the five contributors, including both editors, to Oxford's *Concise History of Christianity in Canada* are active CCHA members.⁸

Clearly, since 1983 the character and content of anglophone Canadian historical writing on the Catholic Church has changed in this country. No longer primarily preoccupied with local, parochial, and frequently apologetic studies of the Church, the new scholarship has been open to new methods, new questions, and new partners in historical endeavour. Life outside the "cloister" has brought the new sense of openness, as advocated in 1983, and perhaps a new realization that involvement in the historical neighbourhood may, in fact, provide for more sophisticated work in the Catholic historical house.

One important question that still begs, however, is whether or not the Catholic historical life "outside the cloister" has had much of an impact on the historical neighbourhood. It is still perhaps too early to discern a clear answer to the question, given the rather short history of this historiographical renewal, and given that some of the most recent publications in the history of Canadian Catholicism have not been out in the neighbourhood long enough to garner attention. A preliminary observation, however, is warranted and may not be terribly pleasant. On the whole, I think that the growing maturity of Catholic historical scholarship in English Canada has gone pretty much unnoticed by most historians in the Canadian historical neighbourhood. In fact, if one examined the major historical journals in this country over the past 13 years, and surveyed the new texts and readers being used in Canadian universities and colleges, a neophyte might get the impression that nothing was happening in Catholic historiography, particularly outside of Quebec.

⁸ Luca Codignola, *The Coldest Harbour in the Land: Simon Stock and Lord Baltimore's Colony in Newfoundland, 1621-1649* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988); Roberto Perin, *Rome In Canada: The Vatican and Canadian Affairs in the late Victorian Age* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990); Terrence Murphy and Gerald Stortz, eds., *Creed and Culture: The Place of English-speaking Catholics in Canadian Society, 1750-1930* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993); Brian P. Clarke, *Piety and Nationalism: Lay Voluntary Associations and the Creation of an Irish-Catholic Community in Toronto, 1850-1895* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994); Marianna O'Gallagher and Rose Masson Dompierre, *Eyewitness: Grosse Isle 1847* (Ste-Foy: Carraig Books, 1995); and Terrence Murphy and Roberto Perin, eds, *A Concise History of Christianity in Canada* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

An analysis of the five prominent survey histories of Canada published between 1992 and 1996 (usually in complementary pre and post confederation volumes) and their supplementary volumes of readers, can be unnerving for one looking for references to the development of the Catholic Church in Canada, let alone Canadian religious traditions.⁹ Outside of the “Heroic Age of New France,” and perhaps general discussions of the society of the *ancien régime*, scant attention is paid to the Catholic presence in Canada, despite the fact that throughout much of our history Catholics constituted as much as forty per cent or more of the national population. Some texts are better than others, with mention of ultramontanism, and perhaps even the Church of the Quiet Revolution; yet, even in these volumes the references are dated and the only Catholic activity outside of Quebec seemingly worthy of mention is the Antigonish Movement. On the whole, Catholicism is rarely mentioned in most texts, Catholic scholars are even more rarely cited, and important monographs and anthologies on the history of the Catholic Church in Canada are not even referenced in bibliographies designed for “further reading.” In all of the texts and readers examined, never once was *Historical Studies* cited or even listed in the references.

A glimpse at the companion readers to these texts, perhaps, can be even more disheartening to scholars of the Canadian Catholic Church. Only Michael Cottrell’s recent article on St. Patrick’s Day celebrations in Toronto ranks as significant enough to include in contemporary Canadian history anthologies.¹⁰ It should be noted, however, that Jacques Monet’s “French Canadian Nationalism and the Challenge of Ultramontanism,” published in 1966, appears in three readers, and stands as the most referenced piece of Catholic historiography, despite the fact that it is over thirty years old!¹¹ The

⁹ The textbooks surveyed included Margaret Conrad, Alvin Finkel and Cornelius Jaenen, *History of the Canadian Peoples*, vol. 1 (Copp Clark Pittman, 1993) and vol. 2 by Conrad, Finkel and Veronica Strong-Boag; J.L. Finlay and D.N. Sprague, *The Structure of Canadian History*, 4th ed. (Prentice-Hall, 1993); R. Douglas Francis, Richard Jones and Donald Smith, *Origins: Canadian History Since Confederation and Destinies: Canadian History Since Confederation*, 3rd revised edition (Harcourt Brace, 1996); J.M. Bumsted, *The Peoples of Canada*, vols. 1-2 (Oxford, 1992); David Bercuson et. al. *Colonies: Canada to 1867* (McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1992) and J.L. Ganatstein, et.al. *Nation: Canada Since Confederation* (McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1990).

¹⁰ C.M. Wallace, R.M. Bray, and A.D. Gilbert, *Reappraisals of Canadian History: Pre-Confederation*, 2nd Ed. (Scarborough: Prentice Hall, 1996).

¹¹ Monet’s article is reprinted in Wallace et. al. *Reappraisals of Canadian History*, A.I. Silver, ed., *An Introduction to Canadian History* (Canadian Scholars Press, 1991); Carol Wilton, *Change and Continuity: A Reader on Pre-Confederation Canada* (McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1991). The article originally appeared in the Canadian Historical Association, *Annual Report, 1966*. Readers produced by Copp Clark Longman, Oxford University Press, Holt-Winston, and Ian MacKay’s *The*

one exception to this dearth of the history of Catholicism in mainstream anthologies of Canadian history is Carol Wilton's reader, *Change and Continuity*, published by McGraw-Hill Ryerson. It contains at least five selections that focus upon the history of Catholicism and its relation to developments in the British North American Colonies. By means of such inclusivity of the Catholic fact in early Canada, it stands as the only historical reader that offers entry level university students the impression that religion was an important variable in the lives of Canada's peoples.¹²

When one turns to the mainstream academic journals that help inform the Canadian historical neighbourhood, the situation is equally as bleak for the inclusion of studies of Canadian Catholicism, or religious history in general. From 1983 to the present, a survey of Canada's principal historical journals yielded few essays exploring the history of the Catholic Church in either English or French Canada: *Canadian Historical Review* (2), *Histoire sociale-Social History* (5), *Canadian Historical Association-Historical Papers* (4), and *Journal of Canadian Studies*.(1)¹³ It should be pointed out

Challenge of Modernity: A Reader on Post-Confederation Canada (McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1991) have included no articles reflecting the history of Canadian Catholicism, or its interplay with salient themes in Canadian history. Doug Avery and Roger Hall, eds., *Coming of Age: Readings in Canadian History Since World War II* (Harcourt-Brace, 1996) does include Michael Beheils, "Father George-Henri Levesque and the Introduction of Social Sciences at Laval, 1938-1955." Of the sixteen essays in Mark G. McGowan and David B. Marshall, eds., *Prophets, Priests and Prodigals: Readings in Canadian Religious History, 1608 to Present* (McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1992) five selections explore aspects of Canadian Catholicism and two touch on it as a part of a more general discussion of Canadian religion.

¹² Wilton's reader includes: Cornelius Jaenen's "The Role of the Church in New France," Marie de l'Incarnation, "Letter to a Lady of Rank," Jean-Pierre Wallot, "Religion and French-Canadian Mores in the Early Nineteenth Century," J.M.S. Careless, "The Gavazzi Riots," and that old chestnut, Jacques Monet, "French Canadian Nationalism and the Rise of Ultramontanism."

¹³ The CHA's *Historical Studies* later *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* included the following: Andrée Levesque, "Deviant Anonymous: Single Mothers at the Hôpital de l'Miséricorde in Montreal, 1929-1939," (1984); Wendy Johnston, "Keeping Children in School: The Response of the Roman Catholic School Commission to the Depression of the 1930s," (1985); Kerry Abel, "Prophets, Priests and Preachers: Dene Shamans and Christian Missions in the Late Nineteenth Century," (1986); and Mark G. McGowan, "The De-greeening of the Irish: Toronto's Irish Catholic Press, Imperialism and the Forging of a New Identity, 1887-1914," (1989). *The Canadian Historical Review* has included only Jan Noel, "Dry Patriotism: The Chiniquy Crusade," (1990) and J.R. Miller, "Anti-Catholic Thought in Victorian Canada," (1985). *Histoire sociale-Social History* has included several, on Irish and French-Canadian themes: Jean-Pierre Collin, "Vers un coopératisme sociale: la Ligue ouvrière catholique et la question du logement dans les années 1940," (1994); Michael Cottrell, "St. Patrick's Day Parades in Nineteenth-Century Toronto," (1992); Marie-Aimée Cliche, "Morale-chrétienne et 'double standard'

of the twelve articles included here only three were written by members of the CCHA-English Section and two by members of the French Section. Moreover, when one examines the programmes of the Canadian Historical Association's annual conferences over the same time period, it is evident that of the 120 and 150 papers that are presented annually, fewer than five papers directly relate to the history of Canadian Catholicism. In point of fact, the only time five such papers were delivered was in 1989, when the CHA met at Laval University in Quebec City, symbolically the historical heart of Catholic Canada.¹⁴

Similar searches for evidence of "Catholic" historiography in the Canadian historical neighbourhood have been a little more promising. Since 1983, local academic journals that appeal to specific regionally-based historical specialists have been more inclusive of essays on the history of Catholic institutions and people in Canada. This greater success at the local level may indicate how the Catholic Church came to be regarded as an important social variable in regional development; the greater prominence of so-called "Catholic historians" at a local level; or, perhaps the manner in which archival materials relating to Canadian Catholicism – often in diocesan manuscript collections or the collections of provincial houses of religious orders – reflect the "regional" or local focus of Church activities in Canada. Whatever the reason, the numbers of journal articles specifically directed to the history of the Catholic people of a region are as follows: *Acadiensis* (3), *Prairie Forum* (3), *Ontario History* (5), and the *Nova Scotia Historical Review* (7). It is important to add that the authors of several of these articles are not, nor have been, members of the CCHA, nor do several of the essays deal with Church as the principal focus of their discussion. Just by way of contrast, the *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* contained fourteen articles on Catholic themes over the same period. This may reflect the centrality of the Church to the history of the Province of Quebec, the greater number of historical practitioners researching the historical development of the French Canadian Church, and perhaps the greater scholarly recognition accorded religion as a primary variable in the historical development of French Canada.

Certainly one burning question remains: How can we account then for the disparity between the major scholarly renovations done to the Catholic "house," and yet the minimal, if any, impact these changes have had upon

sexuelle.' Les filles-mères à l'hôpital de la Miséricorde à Québec, 1874-1972," (1991); Colin Coates, "Authority and Illegitimacy in New France," (1989); Murray Nicolson, "Irish Catholic Education in Victorian Toronto," (1984).

¹⁴ These figures are derived from an examination of the lists of papers included in the back of each issue of *Historical Papers*.

Catholic inclusion in the Canadian historical “neighbourhood”? I think, perhaps, there have been sins of commission and omission on each side of the question – both in the “house” and in the “neighbourhood.”

From the perspective of the “neighbours” it is fairly clear that Canadian historians have generally not concerned themselves with religious issues as being central in the history of our national development. Religion has become increasingly privatized as Canada has developed as a pluralistic, modern, and secular state.¹⁵ If religious variables are factored into the historical mainstream, they are likely easiest to fit into Maurice Careless’s idea of “limited identities” as a means to understand Canadian historical development.¹⁶ In other words, religion in general, Catholicism specifically, is merely one among a myriad of “identities” to be juggled by historians, and perhaps regarded ultimately – in the eyes of most scholars – as a minor “identity” at best. Rightly or wrongly, religious historians have been seen by the “60s” generation of historians as increasingly irrelevant, confessional, unsophisticated, and perhaps just missionaries in disguise within the academy. To attach the adjective “Catholic” to the themes and content religious history is often to conjure up yet another layer of images, largely fed by current societal perceptions of the Catholic Church that frequently are negative. Reasons for this are not hard to find: the Catholic countercultural “right” has offended a large segment of literate Canadian society with unpopular opinions on gender, sexual orientation, and moral issues. Similarly, the countercultural Catholic “left,” with its advocacy of social justice issues, has managed to frustrate and anger business and corporate elites. Add to this the media attention surrounding clerical paedophilia, abusive situations in residential schools, and sometimes rather superficial portraits of the Church offered in television documentaries, it is not surprising that the word “Catholic,” when attached to anything, renders indifference, if not hostility. Thus, despite the renovations to the “Catholic historical house,” and the increasing openness and involvement of its inhabitants, the historians of Catholicism in English Canada still look pretty much like the residents of the “cloister” to the untrained observer from the historical “neighbourhood.” Consequently, much of the development in the CCHA remains on the margins of the Canadian historical profession.

Historians of the Catholic Church in Canada may also be partially culpable for this continued marginalization. CCHA members, among other practitioners of the craft in English Canada, have to push to Moir’s idea of

¹⁵ Reginald Bibby, *Fragmented Gods: The Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Irwin, 1987).

¹⁶ J. Maurice Careless, “‘Limited Identities’ in Canada,” *Canadian Historical Review* 50 (March 1969): pp. 1-10.

“openness” and “involvement” to its logical limits. In the immediate future, this may be attempted in three ways. First, historians of Catholicism in English Canada must continue to learn from other disciplines and methodologies – and from our French Canadian colleagues – to improve our research and writing of the history of Canadian Catholicism. In this case I think we have been attentive to innovations and questions generated within the Canadian historiographical neighbourhood, but I think we must make more concerted efforts to tie our efforts into a more international context, seeing the Canadian experience as part of a history of Catholic communities internationally. We must ask our Canadian questions, but also be observant and challenged by the questions asked by historians of the Church, culture, gender, etc. elsewhere. The bigger and more challenging the questions, the greater the possibility of more sophisticated and pithy history. Our reach must exceed our grasp.

Secondly, if historians of Canadian Catholicism are to influence and contribute to the historical debates and questions of the Canadian historical “neighbourhood,” we will have to be more active in that neighbourhood. Yes, the cloister is comfortable, as is the friendly comradeship of the people in the CCHA’s “house.” But if we truly believe we have a contribution to make to the whole, we must go forth into the neighbourhood. As religious historians, we must also step forward more readily to engage in the historical haggling of the marketplace. Annual joint sessions between the CCHA and CHA are just a start; publishing and engaging in fora other than our own may help solve our lack of visibility in the neighbourhood.

Finally, we ought to acknowledge that in the renovations of the last thirteen years we have, in many ways, been a mirror of the compartmentalization evident in the Canadian historical profession generally. Region, class, politics, ethnicity and gender have become subspecies of our work as religious historians. We have been grappling with the same “limited identities” as secular historians in the neighbourhood. In 1983, John Moir suggested that the fragments be gathered into a meaningful synthesis – a general survey to prompt further questions and research. To date this has not happened. Canada’s largest religious group still lacks a general historical survey that could prompt new scholarship, challenge older assumptions and fill the gaping lacunae – quite simply, a text that could serve notice to the neighbourhood that there are some interesting things happening in the study of the history of Canadian Catholicism.

The effort to gather the fragments is essentially two-fold; here one should distinguish between a survey and a synthesis. In terms of the former, there definitely is a need for a historical narrative, chronologically structured, and drawn from secondary sources, that provides an overview of the salient themes, events, and personalities in the development of the Catholic

peoples of Canada. There are excellent models from other Canadian denominations from which one could work. Yet this is not enough. The second kind – synthesis – moves beyond this, with less a concern for narrative than for argument. This is a work driven by a different set of assumptions; it draws upon primary works in addition to the secondary, but poses much more wide ranging questions than a monograph; here observations regarding the Church nationally can incorporate local elements and, at the same time, transcend “the local” by posing broad questions and creative matrices through which the history of the Church may be better understood. Historians of Canadian Catholicism will have to grapple with Careless’ idea of the “limited identities” – not just Catholicism as a limited identity within Canadian history, but an attempt to grapple with the limited identities by which Catholicism came to be identified, and how such identities were marshalled to construct images of “Church” in Canadian society. Here we have profound parallels to the fragmentation witnessed historically and historiographically *a mare usque ad mare*.

There are many matrices upon which Catholic development’s here could be charted – ethnicity, language, or the Augustinian dilemma of living in this world yet not being entirely of it – are but a few. Despite a variety of differences among Catholic communities central issues of “the Catholic Faith and the drama of living it” link many of the varieties of Catholics throughout Canadian history – regardless of the “limited identities” Catholicism has assumed. Even though it is often perceived and lived differently, and varies according to the rhythms of the regions, *the shared faith* of Catholic Canadians does make the act of historical synthesis possible. Some say this type of history cannot be done, nor should it be done in the neighbourhood, and that may be true as far as Canadian religious history itself is concerned; but the articulation of a “synthesis” in Canadian Catholic history may be a most useful way of helping us to understand our own “house” better, while we wake up the “neighbours.”