The New Mission Field: International Service Learning in Canada, a Socio-Historical Analysis

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ABSTRACT: The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) states that Canada, “has been a consistently strong voice for the protection of human rights and the advancement of democratic values” (DFAIT, 2011). In fact, volunteer initiatives based on social justice, social welfare, missionary, and civilizing agenda have a long history in Canada and are tied to nationalistic values growing out of a Christian heritage. Today, recognition for religious (as well as ethnic and linguistic) identity are embedded in the Constitution, laws, and institutions, including of course institutions of higher education. Even as Canadian society becomes progressively more sensitive to religious diversity and religion becomes increasingly privatized, much of our foreign policy “that gives Canadians this warm fuzzy feeling that Canada is a caring country” (Michaud, 2007, p. 347) can be traced to Christian origins.

This article provides a socio-historical analysis of the context out of which most international learning programs in Canada have developed. I argue that many institutions and participants continue to carry quasi-Christian or diffusely religious beliefs with them into the service learning environment and I call for greater clarity of purpose in how these programs are promoted and delivered.

Religion, Identity, and Canadian Values

Although religion in Canada is quite different today from the early days of European settlement when French and British colonizers established their religious institutions in the New World, it is clear that Christian institutions have strongly affected the development of Canadian society. Religion in New France and British North America was sufficiently integrated with all aspects of state and society that when French and later British colonizers established their authority

1 For a brief history of volunteer initiatives in Canada see http://volunteer.ca/nvw/timeline-history-volunteerism-canada
3 Religious alternatives have always been present in Canada (take for example Native Spirituality) however, they have not typically had the capacity to influence Canadian society on a national or even provincial scale (McRoberts, 1997).
over a region they naturally imposed their religious values on the cultural, political, economic, and social institutions that developed therein. As a result, from the 1700s to the late-1800s early institutions were clearly defined by the Christian values of those in authority. In regions under French control Catholicism dominated, while in English territories the Church of England was granted state-sanctioned authority that lasted until the mid-1800s (Murphy, 1996, pp. 113, 184-188). Ultimately, however, established church rule in Canada failed because, unlike in the home countries of France and Britain, church authority in the new territories suffered from lack of resources, competition from one another and other smaller sects, as well as having to struggle against the problems of a widely-dispersed population that was not always warmly inclined to Church governance of their frontier lifestyles (Clark, 1948). Nonetheless, the idea of a Christian Canada remained significant in both Anglophone and Francophone regions.

Between 1871 and 1911, Census figures show that almost 90% of Canadians affiliated with either the Roman Catholic (39-42%), Methodist (15-18%), Presbyterian (15-16%), or Anglican (13-15%) denominations (O'Toole, 2000, p. 43). The integration of religious and political values fostered a strong sense of national duty and situated the objectives of “nation building” in religious terms (p. 42) thus becoming an important project of the churches during that period. In this environment civic-minded groups across Canada were taking on various forms of activism based on their Christian faith to improve the conditions of others. Temperance and other social reform movements were part of a:

- general effort toward the improvement of the worth of the human being through improved morality as well as economic conditions. The mixture of the religious, the equalitarian, and the humanitarian was an outstanding fact of the moral reformism of many movements. Temperance supporters formed a large segment of movements such as sabbatarianism, abolition, woman’s rights, agrarianism, and humanitarian attempts to improve the lot of the poor. (Gusfield, 1955, pp. 222-223)

In Catholic circles, movements such as farming co-operatives, youth groups, institutions dedicated to health and education and labour unions, such as the Federation of Catholic Workers Canada, sought social justice reforms (Linteau et al., 1986, p. 94-99; Lemieux et al., 2000, pp. 27-40).

The perhaps surprising success of Canadian religious movements during the 18th and 19th centuries, despite some of the challenges noted earlier, was not to last in the face of hardships and uncertainty imposed by World War I and the Depression of the early 20th century. Nonetheless, the church-based activities of the time established social welfare services for all as an important

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4 Although Europeans were present in the region from the 1600s, no religious authority was established before the 1700s. Roman Catholicism was established first in 1774 in the Quebec Act and again, along with the Church of England (Anglicanism) in 1791 in the Constitution Act.

5 This authority was established in the Constitution Act of 1791 that, along with defining the regions of Upper and Lower Canada, established the “clergy reserves” allotted for the Church of England to finance its religious activities and pay its parsons. The Anglican Church, while legally established only in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island, maintained a prominent position in other English regions as well. It lost its preferred status during political reforms of the 1840s and 50s. Murphy, T. (1996). The English-Speaking Colonies to 1854. In R. Perrin and T. Murphy (Eds.), A Concise History of Christianity in Canada (108-189). Toronto: Oxford University Press.

6 The census information given is from censuses taken in the years 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901, and 1911 consecutively. I have rounded the figures up to the nearest whole number.
Canadian value and continued to influence the character of the nation (Baum, 2000, p. 150; Van Die, 2001, p. 4). Both Roman Catholic and Protestant churches during this period “pursued a moral and spiritual alternative to money, machinery, and materialism in a decidedly modern manner. By means of well-organized and highly efficient involvement in the secular world, religion assisted in the modernization of Canada” (O’Toole, 2000, p. 42). In fact, O’Toole (2000) insists that:

The persistently Christian character of Canada, in a broad sense, is an important legacy of this past century and a frequently underestimated fact of considerable sociological interest. Despite the impact of secularization, an apparent crisis of religious commitment and a rapidly expanding non-European presence, Canada remains decidedly Christian … Moreover, a recent expansion of numbers of those embracing religions other than Christianity together with an increase in those professing no religion has not altered this state of affairs to any significant degree. Canada remains a society where Christian traditions with historical roots in Britain and Western Europe dominate the demography of religious identity from Newfoundland to British Columbia. (p. 45)

In Canada today, 77% of the population continue to identify themselves as Christians of one denomination or another. The following table shows the percentage of Christians (Roman Catholics, Protestants and Other groups) by province and territory based on Canada Census reports: Canada Census 2001 (compiled from data available at http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/english/census01/Products/Analytic/companion/rel/provs.cfm)

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What predominates today in the public sphere is an unspoken secularism that does not exclude religion but does not promote it either. At solemn celebrations, such as Remembrance Day events, religious leaders from different faith groups are often invited to co-lead public ceremonies. At the same time, however, Christian privilege remains embedded in Canadian culture through statutory holidays associated with that tradition (Easter and Christmas for example) and the assumptions that underlie purported “Canadian values”. O’Toole (2000) emphasizes that religious groups (particularly Protestant Christians) in Canada have served as the “essential prerequisites of modernity, generating those values and norms vital to the structure and process of dynamic modern social systems” (pp. 37, 44). These values continue to inform the ways that organizations and institutions in Canada operate and interact with others around the globe. However increasing numbers of Canadians from non-Christian traditions and the growing numbers of individuals identifying themselves as having “no religion” on the census form, as well as individualized forms of belief require us to go beyond the numbers we see above. It is to that context that we now turn.

**Uncertainty, diversity, and shifting values**

In other research, I have argued that the term “religion” has come to be understood in association with formal institutionalized faith groups. For this reason the term and the subject are increasingly rejected by late modern individuals who prefer more idiosyncratic, and open-ended

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7 Original emphasis.
approaches to questions about life, death, truth, goodness, and other major existential concerns (Benham Rennick, 2011). These individuals prefer to describe themselves with Robert Fuller’s (2001) term “Spiritual but Not Religious” (SBNR). Apart from the formally religious and the spiritual but not religious, there are those who form their values and ethics on humanistic concepts of recognition, equality, and justice, among other things. Of course there are also numbers of Canadians that do not have any clear guiding sources for their values and are uncertain about what their values actually are. Regardless of their positioning on the spectrum, Canada Census and those doing research in the area continue to point to a Canadian interest in issues of an existential and spiritual nature. These concerns take on particular significance in the Canadian context where religious and national identities have been historically inextricable and where the meanings behind public dialogue on the “common good”, “Canadian values”, and “global citizenship” are not made explicit.

Danièle Hervieu-Léger’s (2000) definition of religion includes not only organized religion but also invisible (or private) forms. She argues that religion can be defined as an “ideological, practical and symbolic system” through which a sense of individual and collective belonging is established and maintained through a particular chain of religious belief stored in the memories and traditional associations of individuals (p. 82). Thus, despite decreasing numbers of participants in institutional religious congregations, “a sense of belonging, albeit derived, in many cases, from a passive, perceived identification with a particular organization, appears to be important in the Canadian context” (O’Toole, 2000, p. 46).

Furthermore, scholars attempting to identify trends are hindered by the recognition that religious and cultural identities and values in the West reflect a late modern tendency towards “fragmentation and diversity and homogenizing trends” that make it impossible to be precise about anything because while people pursue many of the same interests in the same ways, each individual interprets the world differently (Katerberg, 2000, p. 287). While in modern societies individuals may have defined themselves according to national or religious affiliations, those living in late modern societies might cite family ethnicity, gender, or sexual preference in addition to country of birth and place political and ethical interests on par with religious values. The result is that groups once considered homogenous might now be highly differentiated (e.g., not all Canadians are

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8 Robert C. Fuller states that spirituality and religion are essentially the same thing because they connote a belief in and a desire to connect with a Higher Power or reach a higher state of being. Confusion regarding these terms comes from the gradual association of the word “spiritual” with “the private realm of thought and experience while the word ‘religious’ is associated more with the public realm of membership in religious institutions, participation in formal rituals, and adherence to official denominational doctrines” and suggests that people who call themselves “spiritual but not religious” reject formal religious organizations in favour of “individualized spirituality that includes picking and choosing from a wide range of alternative religious philosophies” Fuller, R. C. (2001). *Spiritual but Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America*. New York: Oxford University Press.


11 Original emphasis.
Caucasian, Anglo-Saxon Protestants or French, Roman Catholics) and assumptions about shared values are likely to cause problems for everyone.12

Given the pervasiveness of this individualistic perspective, some argue that the uncertainties of the modern world have actually increased the demand for religion and religious guidelines13 because in this relocating and reshaping of the self, religion is both a product of modernity and a response to it that meets a social need.

Among those who continue in formal religious traditions in Canada as well as those who have individualistic or diffuse forms of spirituality, personal values are influenced by social context including our form and process of government, trade and national purpose. Paul Bramadat (2005) argues that “throughout Canada […], religion continues to have an influence on social, cultural, and even economic and political spheres, and as such is not, and never has been, a strictly private affair” (p. 6). Richard Johnston’s (1985) evidence that religious beliefs continue to be important for influencing Canadian political views and voting patterns (p. 99) as well as a recent study on faith and citizenship that points to the connection between faith, identity, and civic engagement in a variety of arenas confirms this (Bramadat, 2011).14

The inherited influence of religious, quasi-religious or diffusely spiritual values is not exclusive to individuals. Let us turn now to the institutions and programs that offer international experiences to Canadian students.

A Social Agenda for Citizenship

David Lyon (2000), in his introduction to Rethinking Church, State, and Modernity: Canada between Europe and America, writes that religion in Canada is “channelled and filtered by distinctive Canadian cultural and historical experiences” (p. 18). Of course this relationship is reciprocal and many Canadian institutions continue to reflect and promote, if only tacitly, the values upon which they were established.15

12 To confuse the matter further, even the label “postmodernity” is problematic as some scholars use the term to suggest that the current context is a new era in history, while others believe it is simply an extension of modernity. Because of this, a variety of labels are used to describe the current social milieu.
13 The growth in participation in highly-structured and rule-oriented traditions such as evangelical Christianity and Orthodox forms of Judaism and Islam appear to support this.
14 Similarly, an Angus Reid poll conducted in 1996 shows that while less than 25% of Canadians actually attend a place of worship regularly, nearly two-thirds retain a strong sense of conventional Christian commitment (Angus Reid Group, 1996). Further, Paul Bramadat and David Seljak (2005) argue that among many ethnic groups in Canada “religious communities provide a vital context in which the concerns of minority groups are expressed”.
15 Furthermore, because the Constitution Act decrees that higher education be administered at the provincial level in Canada, we must also consider the socio-historical development of the provinces when we attempt to understand the values and assumptions embedded in Canadian university and college objectives (Department of Justice Canada, 2011). See Table 1 for provincial statistics on religion.
University and college mission statements from around the country identify institutional objectives aligned with civic duty, global responsibility, and service. For example, the University of Guelph’s motto is “Changing Lives, Improving Life” (University of Guelph, 2012); the University of British Columbia purports a learning environment that “fosters global citizenship, [and] advances a civil and sustainable society” (University of British Columbia, 2011). The University of New Brunswick promises that their “graduates will be prepared to make a significant difference - creating opportunities for themselves and for others” (University of New Brunswick, 2011). In addition to being a “centre of excellence dedicated to the service of the people of Saskatchewan and Canada”, the University of Saskatchewan also aims to “help society become more just, culturally enriched, and prosperous” (University of Saskatchewan, 2011). There are many other examples that could be added to this list that shed light on the institutional values and assumptions inherent in higher education in Canada.

Many of Canada’s oldest colleges and universities started as parochial schools to train religious leaders and lay people belonging to one of the two nationally established religious groups: Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism. Canada’s oldest institution of higher education, Université Laval (Laval University) in Quebec City, was originally founded as the Séminaire de Québec in 1663 (Université Laval, 2011). In English Canada, Loyalist Anglicans established the University of King’s College in Nova Scotia (now affiliated with Dalhousie) in 1789 as the first university in British North America (University of King’s College, 2011). King’s College, the Anglican precursor to the University of Toronto and first university in Upper Canada was formed in 1827 (University of Toronto, 2011). Other Catholic and Anglican universities were started across the country and are the founding colleges of larger secular universities today.

In other regions of the country non-state established Protestant groups such as Baptists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and others, also made significant contributions to higher education in Canada. The values underpinning these institutions remain identifiable in mottos and coats of arms, if not directly in their mission. For example, the University of Alberta, founded in 1908 by the first premier of that province, Alexander Cameron Rutherford, a Baptist lawyer from Ontario (Babcock, 1989, p. 1-4), retains as its motto quae cumque vera meaning “whatsoever things are true”. The motto is based on “the Latin Vulgate version of the Bible, the Epistle of St. Paul to the Philippians, Chapter 4, Verse 8: ‘Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue and there be any praise, think on these things’” (University of Alberta, 2011).

Similarly, begun in 1925, under the headship of John Lewis Patton, the son of a Congregationalist Minister and a man who has been described as someone who “regarded his vocation as fundamentally a religious calling” (Carew, 1968), Memorial University in Newfoundland describes its coat of arms thus:

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16 In fact, higher education throughout history attests to these concerns. Starting with the Platonic Academy of Ancient Greece (c. 387 BCE) the tradition of groups of educated citizens thinking and learning together continued among religious orders from a number of faith traditions and eventually established itself to the “modern” university, beginning with the University of Bologna in 1088 (Pedersen, 1998).

17 Laval was not chartered as a public university until 1852.
The Arms of Memorial University have as their central element a cross, a symbol of sacrifice. Its anchor-shaped ends signify the hope that springs from devotion to a good cause. The wavy bars allude to our maritime setting, and the three books signify our educational role. White and claret, derived from the Cross of St. George, are the colours of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment: red for courage and sacrifice, and white for purity. Gold is associated with nobility and generosity. The colours remind us that courage tempered with mercy may be enlisted in the service of noble causes. (Memorial University, 2011)

The history of the founder of McGill University was also influenced by religion but unlike some of his compatriots, James McGill:

...shared the Enlightenment’s tolerance of confessional divergences; born into the Church of Scotland, he died an Anglican, and half-way through life married a Roman Catholic. He contributed to the support of both the Presbyterian and the Anglican churches at Montreal... His support of Roman Catholic causes has been noted in connection with his will. (Cooper, 2000)

His will also include an endowment to establish a college or university in Montreal.18 Today McGill University is one of Canada’s most prominent secular institutions of higher education. Nonetheless, it retains the heraldic crest of its founder including an open book showing the words Domino Confido (In God I trust).

In the same vein that mission statements in institutions of higher education evolved from the social context out of which they developed, Canadian goals for international engagement are also inspired by our cultural past.

Mark Noll (1992) states that Canadian and American religious developments from their origins as European colonies were very similar as believers in both countries “linked the progress of Christianity with the advance of civilization” (p. 246). However, the power and influence retained by French Catholics in Québec and Acadian New Brunswick, ensured that “Canada was never to know the sort of unified vision of Protestant purpose for the nation that many evangelicals thought had been established in the United States” (Noll, 1992, p. 246).19 David Martin (2000) echoes this when he describes how the Canadian national myth of establishing God’s “Dominion from sea to sea,”20 never developed the influence of American millennialism because of a lack of “dynamic density” to support it (p. 29). Unlike Americans, Canadians retained their ties to Old World France and England and, as a result, “Canada was situated culturally between the United States and Europe” (Noll, 1992, p. 246).21

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18 McGill College was founded in 1821 and subsequently became McGill University in 1829.
19 There is significant literature on the contentious relationship between Protestants and Roman Catholics in Canada and the US at this time. For two brief examples, see Katz (1966) and Bordieu et al. (1985). For more on this relationship earlier in the history of Canada, see for example, Grant (1988), Murphy et al. (1996), and Noll (1992).
20 In 1867, Leonard Tilley, a Methodist politician, used Psalm 72:8 to describe the relationship Christianity was to have in the new nation according to the Protestant vision (Noll, 1992, p. 246).
21 Noll (1992) also remarks that the War of 1812 was a defining moment for Canada to establish itself as something “other than” American. He states “The War of 1812 thus resembled the American Revolution: it was an opportunity for Canadians to join the United States that they chose not to take” (p. 247).
However, ties to France and Britain, along with caution regarding relations with America resulted in “a pragmatic politics receptive to change, suspicious of any form of totalitarian democracy, and deeply concerned with the multi-racial and multi-cultural problems that have come to dominate the twentieth century” (Noll, 1992, p. 246). Moreover, these different loyalties and the unwillingness of Canadian politicians to retain an established church (or churches) after 1854 stopped either group from exercising a religious monopoly in Canada. David Martin (2000) describes the Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant churches in Canada as “shadow establishments” that have heavily influenced society through “a social gospel of international good works” despite having been disestablished by the state (pp. 26, 29).

Perhaps the most obvious example of the influence of Christianity on Canadian foreign policy is evidenced in the periods covering World War I and II when the Christian churches, particularly in English speaking Canada, overwhelmingly framed the military cause in religious language. For English Protestants, it was a natural extension of both the institutional and cultural sense of religious obligation and moral imperative as well as a continuing sense of patriotism towards Britain. Samuel Clark (1996) writes that:

Believing that they were fighting … to preserve Christianity itself, [clerics] saw the conflict as a holy war. Protestant clergy preached sermons urging young men to do their patriotic and religious duty by enlisting in the army; they threw their support behind conscription when the government introduced it in mid-1917; and, in the election that followed, they called on Canadians to vote for the wartime Union government in the name of God and Country. (p. 335)

Similarly, Roman Catholic bishops endorsed participation in what they viewed as a just cause and, despite a history of animosity towards Britain, both French and Irish Canadian Catholics and their priests rallied to the cause (Grant, 1988/1972, p. 113). Furthermore, in both Wars, hundreds of Roman Catholic and Protestant clergy with no military training enlisted as soldiers themselves in order to serve their fellow Canadians in the trenches (Reynolds, 2003, pp. 11-12; Clarke, 1996, p. 335).

Following the War years, the framing of Canada’s destiny in religious terms remained in evidence through a number of prominent leaders. For example, this excerpt comes from Louis St. Laurent who was the son of devoutly religious French Canadian and Irish-Canadian Roman Catholic parents, and Canada’s first secretary of State for External Affairs. He delivered the Duncan & John Gray Memorial Lecture at the University of Toronto on 13 January 1947 as follows:

No foreign policy is consistent nor coherent over a period of years unless it is based upon some conception of human values. I know that we live in an age when it is fashionable to speak in terms only of hard realism in the conduct of international affairs. I realize also that at best the practice of any policy is a poor approximation of ideals upon which it may be based. I am sure, however, that in our national life we are continually influenced by the conceptions of good and evil which emerged from

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22 While the Church of England lost state power in 1854, numerous social services in Québec remained under the official jurisdiction of the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches until the 1960s.
23 This phenomenon is discussed in greater detail in chapter three.
Hebrew and Greek civilization and which have been transformed and transmitted through the Christian traditions of the Western World. These are values which lay emphasis on the importance of the individual, on the place of moral principles in the conduct of human relations, on standards of judgment which transcend mere material well-being. They have ever influenced our national life as we have built a modern state from east to west across this continent. I am equally convinced that on the basis of this common experience we shall discern the same values in world affairs, and that we shall seek to protect and nurture them. (Laurent, 1947)

Lester B. Pearson, the son of a Methodist minister carried this project forward in his role as Secretary of State for External Affairs during the infamous Suez Crisis of 1956 which was headed off by the creation of the first United Nations Emergency Force designated to keep the peace between Israel and its Arab neighbours. In fact, this seminal moment is widely attributed to Canadians’ strong support for and involvement in peacekeeping activities. David Bercuson (1996) writes that during this era, peacekeeping became so integrated in Canadian military operations that civilians “tended to forget that armies exist to fight wars” (p. 58-60). This value persists in what has been called by some “Canada’s national myth”. Eric Wagner (2008) goes so far as to argue that, “Canada’s image of itself as a peacekeeping nation has been cemented into the national consciousness. In the popular imagination, Canadian soldiers do not fight wars, they fight war itself” (Wagner, 2008, pp. 46-47).

This idealized national identity stems out of the political views of leaders of the Liberal Party such as Laurent, Pearson, and later Pierre Trudeau. These views established Canada as a “soft” or “middle” power between other highly militarized nations using diplomacy and policing rather than raw force. (Morton, 1990, pp. 240-242, 254-255). Like Laurent and Pearson before him, religious values and identity were highly influential on Trudeau’s decisions as a political leader (English, 2006). Apart from its clearly political agenda, this project continues to highlight Canada’s religious subtext. For example, Laurent saw Canada’s participation in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as a military alliance based on “the common belief of the North Atlantic union in the values and virtues of Christian civilization” (Morton, 1990, p. 233).

Interestingly, as noted earlier, during this era when churches were losing their influence and Canadians were opening themselves to numerous other alternatives, the Canadian national values were still distinctively framed by Christian values embedded in a Canadian social context. Thus as social movements inspired action around the world, we see Canada taking its place as a distinctively Christian nation, publicly supporting distinctively Christian goals including peace-building, aid, and service work. David Morrison (1998) describes the result as a “human

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24 For both Laurent and Trudeau Catholicism was the hallmark of their French Canadian culture and, in Trudeau’s case at least, a point of sharp contention with Pearson whom he understood to be grossly biased towards Anglo Saxon interests at the expense of a significant portion of non-Anglo-Saxon Canadians. Trudeau’s relationship to the Catholic faith was often conflicted. For more on this, see English, J. (2006). *Citizen of the World: The Life of Pierre Elliott Trudeau*. Toronto: Vintage Canada.

25 Canada’s military attempts to clarify the values that soldiers should carry with them in their duties through its publication *Duty With Honour*. See DND. (2003). *Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada, Canadian Defence Academy and Canadian Forces Leadership Institute*.

nationalism” based on “ethical responsibilities towards those …who are suffering severely and live in abject poverty”.

As with institutions of higher education and government policies on Canada in the world, international service learning in Canada follows a missionary agenda starting in 1958 with the Jesuit-founded Centre d'études missionnaires (CEM) in Quebec. CEM trained Catholic lay and religious people to serve as missionaries abroad. On the secular side of things, by 1960 Canada had an External Aid Office and by 1968 the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) was expanding aid to much of the developing world (Bergbusch, 1999). The same year, following the great laïcisation that occurred in Quebec during the Silent Revolution, CEM secularized, changed its name to the Centre d’étude et de coopération international (Canadian Centre for International Studies and Cooperation—CECI) and joined forces with CIDA.

Today CECI is a “not-for-profit organization fighting poverty and exclusion in the developing world” that describes itself thus:

As a pioneer of Canadian cooperation, CECI has broken new ground in many areas. For example, CECI laid the first foundations for international cooperation in Quebec, integrated human rights concerns into the bilateral programs of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), and instituted such important programs as Women’s Rights and Citizenship in West Africa, Leave for Change, and Uniterra – Canada’s biggest international volunteer program. (CECI, 2011)

World University Service Canada (WUSC), the national branch of World University Service International has a similar Christian heritage. In 1920 in Switzerland, the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) initiated the International Student Service (ISS) geared to helping students cope with turmoil in Europe. In 1939, students and faculty at the University of Toronto established the first Canadian chapter. In 1950 as the focus spread to other causes and regions of the world it was renamed World University Service International. The Canadian chapter, Word University Service Canada (WUSC) was established in 1957 (World University Service, 2007; WUSC n.d.).

Canadian University Service Overseas (CUSO) has been described as being the first secular organization for international development in Canada (Benning, 2008; Brouwer, 2010). However, in her description of its evolution Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman gives insight into the thinking that inspired it. She describes how one of the founders, Lewis Perinbaum believed that, Canada had a “unique role to play as a ‘city set on a hill’” (Hoffman, 1998, p. 81). This reference comes from the biblical book of Matthew chapter 5, verses 14-16:

27 Missionary type projects were occurring in Canada before this time, churches sent “missionary chaplains” to fight and support Canadian soldiers in WW I and II for example, but this project was the first training centre for such activities. For more on war-time missionary activities see Crerar, D. (1995). Padres in No Man’s Land: Canadian Chaplains and the Great War. Quebec City: McGill-Queen’s University Press.
28 This alliance was possible due to CIDA’s Non-Governmental Organization Division that for the first time allowed collaboration and funding opportunities between government and private agencies (CIDA, 1986).
29 The CUSO website states that, in 1961, the organization was founded “at McGill University in Montreal. Many university presidents attend, along with representatives of 21 organizations including COV, CVCS, WUSC, UNESCO and the Student Christian Movement” (CUSO, 2010).
You are the light of the world… let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Another of CUSO’s founding members, Keith Spicer, took his inspiration from Canadian missionary David Faris’ book *To Plow With Hope*\(^{30}\) (Hoffman, 1998, p. 84).

Despite the infusion of these ideas, CUSO was not linked to a religious or missionary agenda. In fact, like their American counterparts rushing to join the Peace Corps, in an era of decolonization and human rights, numbers of Canadian young people intentionally chose CUSO as a non-religious response to injustices around the world. Ruth Compton Brouwer (2010), writing about the United Church in Canada says:

> Despite the church's decidedly non-evangelistic approach to missions in this decade, globally minded young Canadians were not won over: they overwhelmingly chose to express their interest in development work through secular organizations like CUSO, even when … they had had a traditional church upbringing and sometimes youthful dreams of a missionary career. … Indeed, when circumstances brought development-minded volunteers their way as would-be missionaries, the church's missions officials frequently referred them to organizations like CUSO, viewing such organizations as acceptable alternatives for expressing a Christian compassion in the developing world. This perspective was not reciprocated. CUSO's organizers were prepared to accept practical, start-up help from the missions community, but like the majority of their volunteers they were anxious to avoid the taint of the M word and the distasteful associations with proselytization and colonialism that it evoked. (pp. 622-623)

Nonetheless, Benning (2008) writes that “Some of the traditional volunteer image, which includes sacrifice and personal hardship and the idea of service in remote villages, is still retained by CUSO” (p. 529).

Ideas about education, volunteering, and Canada’s role in the world are a reflection of broader trends happening in Canada and elsewhere. These trends are founded in the changing tides of modernity that allow for a greater interchange of ideas through the movement of peoples and access to information through the media. Like the cultural shifts that happened throughout Canada, we see certain values long-held as religious being shifted to the secular context. Even though a sense of individual and collective belonging to a shared set of values is maintained through a religious “chain of memory” (Hervieu-Léger, 2000, p. 82) the context and application of these values is subjectivated to personal experience and infused with a number of other possibilities and alternatives for engagement. With the international development movement, an attempt is made to extract the values of charity, service, aid, and solidarity from its neocolonial and missionary framework and reshape it into the language of “development”. If we return to Grace Davie’s (1994) concept of “believing without belonging” we can see a number of similarities between what is happening in churches and international development projects in Canada. Many of the values remain the same while the projects, the language and the context change.\(^{31}\)


Conclusions

Service learning in Canada is strongly tied to provincial and national values based on historical Christian ideals of service, responsibility, social justice and accountability.\(^{32}\) Too much of the service learning occurring in Canadian institutions of higher education has been forwarded without recognition of our national context including the religious and the cultural. Furthermore, the late modern tendency to subjectivize interests while picking and choosing ones’ values from an array of consumer-style options makes the assumption that all stakeholders will share an understanding about terms such as “Canadian values”, “global citizenship”, and the “common good” highly problematic. Those of us working in international programs in higher education are caught between the quasi-religious aims of students wanting to “do good”, “help”, and “make a difference” alongside corporate-style institutional goals for internationalization of education, and national aims of promoting Canada in the world. Lack of clarity around student experience and institutional goals for international education in Canadian institutions of higher education has the potential to perpetuate neocolonial practices that carry a subtext of “saving”, “helping”, and even “civilizing” to partners in the Global South. This is an approach that flies counter to Canadian Constitutional concerns for human rights, recognition, and multiculturalism. All Canadian programs running international experience programs for Canadian students should clarify their goals in succinct language that explicitly establishes the goals and purpose of their projects. Furthermore, students, faculty, and staff involved in these programs should be encouraged to examine the values they impose on these undertakings.

The Canadian national agenda has been a missional one for most of its history. This venture has been successful in some areas and a devastating failure in others. It has also been challenged on numerous fronts and will continue to be challenged both in the public forum and in the courts. At the same time, the underlying values that have inspired Canadian development have laid a foundation for important national projects tied to social justice, social welfare, openness to diversity, acceptance of differences, and a culture of national reflexivity and reevaluation. As universities and colleges increasingly face challenges of corporatization and pressure to conform to political mandates, a new opportunity arises to stop and reflect on what we really intend when we establish international experience programs as well as the language we use to frame such programming. Much more attention is needed in this area and students, faculty, and staff involved in these initiatives should be expected and encouraged to identify the assumptions and values they bring with them to these programs as well. Perhaps we are approaching a new horizon leading to true global solidarity rather than another chapter of domination, exploitation, and discrimination that marks our past; but if we are to pursue that objective, we must elucidate our values and clarify the terms of engagement so that we can meet our global partners, particularly those who do not share our heritage, culture, or religious values on equal terms.

\(^{32}\) This is not to suggest, of course, that the Christian churches have always succeeded in these ideals, simply that the influence of these values is embedded in our national identity through the powerful role that the churches have long held in Canadian society.
References


