The Private Faith and Public Lives of Evangelical MPs[1]

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In December 2006, the *National Post* newspaper attempted to survey the religious beliefs and habits of all 308 members of the House of Commons. (*National Post* 2006) 63 MPs answered with a wide variety of responses. Nearly half of all MPs did not respond - not surprising since MPs' offices receive all kinds of surveys. But perhaps most interestingly, 100 MPs specifically declined to answer the question, even anonymously. The House of Commons is the heart of the Canadian political system, but as the *National Post* survey shows, it is difficult to learn about the private faith of MPs. While a few MPs may be particularly outspoken about their religious beliefs, most take a more subtle approach and may or may not publicly discuss them.

This paper looks at evangelical Christian members of the House of Commons. While there is much speculation about a hidden social conservative agenda driven by evangelical Christians in the current government (Warner 2010; McDonald 2010), I am more interested here in exploring how MPs themselves present the relationship between their private faith and public lives. The paper draws from interviews with MPs – who are quoted anonymously[2] - and discusses evangelical institutions like the Manning Centre and the parliamentary prayer breakfast which attempt to link these private and public dimensions. The objective is not to nail down exactly what MPs believe or link these beliefs to their policy positions and actions. Instead it is to explore more broadly what their private beliefs mean to them in the context of their public lives.

The Religious Beliefs of Political Elites

How many MPs are evangelical? We don't know, and trying to answer this is even more difficult than the ongoing question of trying to count the overall number of Canadian evangelicals (Hiemstra 2007), though a reasonable estimate is 10-12% of the

1 This work has been supported by a standard research grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.
2 This paper draws directly from interviews with 10 current or recent evangelical MPs, one other MP, and other confidential interviews in relation to the parliamentary prayer breakfast. MPs are identified by number as MP 1, MP 2, etc.

Canadian population (Hoover 2002). It is always difficult to define "evangelical" through survey questions or to categorize the subtleties and complexities of any religious beliefs. And despite all the attention paid to evangelical politics in the United States, very few scholars have actually tackled basic questions such as how many members of Congress are or have been evangelical. Such deceptively simple questions can be very difficult to answer (see discussion in Oldmixon 2010).

Michael Lindsay writes that "information on evangelicalism as practiced by the masses is plentiful and accessible, but the same is not true for [evangelical] leaders.... National surveys do not interview enough of them to draw general conclusions, and most empirical studies have not examined their religious lives. When religion is considered, it is seen only as one box to be checked and has been glaringly omitted from discussions about the personal side of public leadership." (2007: 8) This lack of nuanced study means elites' beliefs are unexamined or perhaps caricatured and over-simplified. We lack understanding on how different individuals actually interpret or "live out" their beliefs.

Often, and especially in Canada, there is a consensus that religion is a private matter. Hence while John Turner and Paul Martin have been noted as faithful attenders at weekly masses, their faith has remained largely private and received little attention or discussion. The 2004 study of Pierre Trudeau's faith - perfectly titled *The Hidden Pierre Elliott Trudeau* (2004) - is the rare exception, and was posthumous. The faith of other party leaders and top politicians is also rarely discussed, either by others or themselves. While Preston Manning devoted considerable space in both his memoirs to discussing his evangelical faith, most major political leaders say very, very little about their religious beliefs, and especially their private spirituality.

The only recent prime minister to speak even vaguely of a personal deliberation over religious beliefs is the non-Catholic Kim Campbell (1996: 16-17), who discusses her religious experiences as a youth and concludes that she chose not to follow any organized religion. Brian Mulroney's 1100 page memoir makes only fleeting references to his Catholic background and service as an altar boy, and nothing about his adult beliefs. And Jean Chretien writes that " ..a prime minister has to leave his religion at home." (Chretien, 2007: 390). Chretien says "I have always made a sharp distinction between the role of religion and the role of the state...for me, the church is the church and the state is the state. The two are separate spheres of life and part of my job as prime minister is to keep them separate." Similarly, his rival Paul Martin says in his memoir: " I have not spoken much about my Catholic faith in this book for the simple reason that for the most part I do not believe that it is relevant. I am, and have been, a practising Catholic all my life, but I regard that as a personal matter."(Martin, 2008: 397-98)

Both Chretien and Martin suggest that discussing their beliefs at length is tantamount to imposing them. Chretien writes that "...though I consider myself a good Roman Catholic, it would have been wrong for me to impose my beliefs on a multi-religious society." (297) And Martin, writing specifically in the context of same-sex marriage, says "...while I am a practising Catholic, I do not necessarily share the church's

view on every moral issue...[and] do not think it is necessarily wise to try to impose it on others."(399-400). Martin adds "...it is worth saying here, by the way, that some variation on this point of view was held by Prime Ministers Trudeau, Clark, Turner, Mulroney and Chretien - all of whom were Catholics."

In contrast, the evangelical MPs studied in this paper identify their beliefs as central to their identity and, to varying extents, part of their public identities. But it can be difficult to understand exactly what their beliefs *mean* to them - how they interpret them, how they follow them, and how they link them to the public aspects of their lives. We must also be careful not to assume they are all the same, or that their beliefs remain fixed over time.

Some MPs studied here are happy to identify as evangelical. But others avoid using the term. **MP 1** said that "I avoid the term evangelical in the public square...I'm simply someone who understands that I'm accountable to a higher source and in this case it's the God of Christianity." (interview). Similarly, **MP 2**, who is sometimes described as evangelical, declined to identify himself as one, saying "Canadians are extraordinarily cynical of professions of religious faith, especially Christian religious faith and political leaders; so therefore, I've always underplayed it [his religious faith]." (Interview). But **MP 3** was very clear on the subject: "I am an evangelical. I'm a born-again Christian, not just Christian." (Interview).

Evangelicals can also differ substantively in how they define and present their beliefs in public. While Preston Manning and Stockwell Day are both evangelicals, they discussed and displayed their faith very differently. Manning, as noted, discusses his beliefs at length in his books, but rarely or never referred to them in his public life and statements. Day, by contrast, spoke more openly of his beliefs and signalled their importance in the 2000 election with a pledge to not campaign on Sundays. In turn, Stephen Harper has said very little ever about his religious beliefs, despite the efforts of journalists to investigate his churchgoing. Non-evangelicals may dismiss distinctions such as those between Manning, Day and Harper as minor, and driven more by political savviness and calculation. But they may signal important distinctions in how evangelicals (or others) connect their private faith and public roles.

"Faith in the Public Square"

Before looking further at MPs, this section of the paper provides a brief overview of evangelical thinking about the relationship between religion and public life. The issue of "faith in the public square" (and the very phrase[3]) is a perennial topic discussed by evangelicals and other orthodox Christians in Canada and the U.S.. In this section, we will very briefly explore these debates and see how different evangelicals connect public roles and private faith.

[3] "The public square" is a very common phrase among evangelicals (and some other Christian traditions) - see Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square* and Stiller, *Jesus and Caesar: Christians in the Public Square.* Typing "the public square" into google.com yields mostly Christian references.

"Evangelicals" (originally "neo-evangelicals") rose in the 1940s in specific rebuttal to the "fundamentalists" that dominated American orthodox Protestantism in the early twentieth century. While holding similar orthodox beliefs, evangelicals argued that fundamentalists had become too withdrawn and bogged down in doctrinal struggles. Evangelicals were more willing to downplay theological differences (while remaining within an orthodox framework) for the purpose of converting non-believers and keeping existing believers in the fold. Hence evangelicals turned to the latest technologies and built increasingly large "megachurches" as they engaged more directly with mass culture in order to win souls for Christ.

This engagement did not spread substantively to the political arena until the 1970s in the United States, and later in Canada. The prevailing explanations for this are the important changes in reproductive rights and sexuality that shook the social conservative side of evangelicalism. In the United States, court rulings on school prayer and possibly pressure to integrate segregated schools also gave evangelicals a new interest in politics and public policy. Prior to these events, evangelicals seem to have had a limited interest in politics and the state. Or, it may be that evangelicals in politics became more and more visible as they fell out of step with changing social attitudes to sexuality and reproduction.

As abortion and other issues galvanized evangelicals into political action, new ideas arose to explore and strengthen the new mixing of faith and politics. A key thinker and text in these debates is Richard Neuhaus and his *The Naked Public Square* (1984). While not an evangelical, the Canadian-born Neuhaus argued that American politics had "exclud[ed] religion and religiously grounded values from the conduct of public business" leading to "the ideology of secularism."(vii) For Neuhaus and others, the absence of religion in public debates was itself an particular dogma and doctrine, often described by him and others as "secular humanism."

Unlike the "secularization" thesis held by social scientists that saw religion as naturally fading through increased education and prosperity, Neuhaus and others saw religion as under attack, pushed to the margins and belittled, particularly by intellectual and political elites. Canadian Brian Stiller argues that "Western governments operated within the framework that belief in God was okay for their people, but in their public discourse, only humanity was at the centre"(2003: 31). This is particularly a problem for evangelicals, who assume the inherently sinful and imperfect nature of humanity that can only be redeemed by divine grace.

"Secular humanism" is a common evangelical phrase, rejecting the idea of a public space that remains neutral while all forms of faith remain private. Instead, evangelicals generally see the privatization of faith as an ideological concept in itself. This then presents two "kingdoms in conflict," to use Chuck Colson's phrase (Colson 1987). In his book, which he presents as a more popular version of Neuhaus (373), Colson says "Men and women have always been spiritual beings. But modern culture, in its zeal to eliminate divisive influences and create a self-sufficient, "enlightened" society,

has ignored this fundamental truth."(49) Evangelical thinking emphasizes this diminution of public spirituality by the forces of "secular humanism," and they argue the need to push back.

For most modern evangelicals, there is a natural assumption that faith must have a public presence. However, they differ on what that means, and this is where evangelical distinctions become significant for our analysis of evangelical members of Parliament. Should there be explicitly evangelical political parties? Should evangelical politicians talk about their personal faith? On what issues should evangelical groups lobby - abortion? Sexuality rights? Social or foreign policy? The environment? Should evangelicals mobilize politically through churches and other established institutions (notwithstanding tax and charitable laws), or create distinct arms-length "political" vehicles? And in general, what does it mean to be a "Christian" in politics?

Kuyperian Thought

One Christian orthodox tradition - the Reformed Kuyperian tradition – has a distinct understanding of the relationship between faith and public affairs. Stemming from the Netherlands and Dutch immigrants to North America, this tradition argues strongly for separate "Christian" institutions that then engage in public life. Abraham Kuypers, an orthodox theologian who became Dutch prime minister in the early 20th century, promoted the notion of separate spheres in society for different faith traditions - most notably schools, but also media, hospitals, youth movements, unions, etc. This would allow each to flourish within a protected environment that respected particular beliefs and values.

Kuyperians do not always identify themselves as evangelicals, but they are similar in their basic adherence to orthodox Christianity. The Kuyperian approach is reflected especially among the Christian Reformed churches of North American and other smaller Reformed denominations. A high proportion of private Christian schools in Canada are linked with local Reformed churches, as are King's University College in Alberta, and Redeemer University College in Ontario. (Trinity Western University in B.C., however, does not have the same distinct Reformed origins.) Kuyperian ideas also underlie Canada's only Christian trade union, the Christian Labour Association of Canada, though it is not accepted as a union by other Canadian unions. Kuyperians also partly spurred the creation of the Christian Heritage Party in Canada in 1987.

As these names suggest, the Kuyperian tradition emphasizes maintaining an explicit "*Christian*" identity in the public as well as the private sphere, through these explicitly "Christian" institutions. Followers of this tradition speak openly and unabashedly about following a "Christian" approach in education, labour negotiations, and other functions - yet their institutions are not necessarily restricted to professing Christians. The CLAC says:

> The "Christian" in CLAC's name refers to the Christian social principles upon which the union is based. While the union is not affiliated with any

> church or religious group, it bases its approach to labour relations on certain key beliefs: that all human beings must be treated with dignity and respect; that workplace justice is vital; that workplace cooperation is better than workplace warfare; and that workers should have choices, even when it comes to union matters. (CLAC website)

In other words, one doesn't have to be Christian to join the CLAC or participate in many other Kuyperian-inspired "Christian" institutions. But this may puzzle others, Christian or not.

Newer strands of thinking in this tradition have downplayed their "Christian" identity. Examples include Cardus and Citizens for Public Justice, two organizations with Christian Reformed backgrounds that do not proclaim their Christian identity at first glance. (See websites at http://www.cpj.ca and http://www.cardus.ca/organization/about/) They represent a more detached attempt for evangelical Christians to engage in public issues without necessarily identifying explicitly as Christians. (In this way they are closer to more liberal Roman Catholic groups and organizations that similarly attempt to maintain a core faith basis while not being seen as exclusively religious organizations.)

But most evangelicals are not Kuyperians. Evangelical theology emphasizes individual belief and one's personal journey and relationship with Christ, regardless of any institutional mediation. Hence most self-identified evangelicals do not emphasize the building of separate and parallel "Christian" insitutions, but emphasize some variation of acting as "salt and light" (see Matthew 5) within existing institutions. Kuyperians may argue that the lack of "Christian" structure or identity leaves individuals at risk of being lost or overwhelmed, and deprives individuals from growing a sophisticated Christian identity of their own. For this reason, they are the strongest supporters of Christian schools and universities. But most evangelicals emphasize the need to engage within existing institutions.

Preston Manning and the "Faith/Politics Interface"

For a somewhat different view of faith and public life, we can turn to Preston Manning. Manning is not a Kuyperian, though he may agree with many of the ideas above. But as a politician, Manning was somewhat careful about speaking about his evangelical beliefs – certainly more than his successor Stockwell Day. Manning wrote: "if a self-professed Christian politician, who relies openly and heavily on the Christian community for support and resources, makes errors in judgement, or takes foolish positions on matters of public policy, or, worse yet, is caught lying or cheating, he can not only damage his party and the country, but also damage the reputation and influence of the faith of which he is supposedly an example." (2002: 150)

In his political retirement, Manning has devoted more energy to exploring what he calls "the faith-politics interface" in public life. In his 2002 memoirs, he argues that "there is an open hostility on the part of many of our political and media elites to any

attempt to connect faith to public policy or faith perspectives to the morality of public policy." (149) He also states that "anyone who tries to related their personal religious faith to public policy or political action in Canada can expect to be grossly misrepresented and misunderstood. They will be accused of committing what has come to be regarded as the unpardonable sin - that of 'mixing religion and politics.'"(149)

Among the many projects of his Manning Centre for Building Democracy is an ongoing series of seminars on the "faith/politics interface" directed at those in or aspiring to public life. According to the Centre website, these events are "not designed to mobilize persons toward support of particular political issues, positions, or parties" but with a vision "to encourage and equip Canadians of faith to apply their faith-based values within the political arena." (Manning Centre 2010) The focus here is on individuals, rather than explicitly "Christian" institutions as in the Kuyperian tradition. The Centre describes its perspective in this way:

> Practitioners of politics in Canada, in an effort to maintain separation of church and state, have sometimes sought to keep faith and politics in separate, watertight compartments. We can and should keep the institutions of religion and those of state separate, but we cannot keep the perspectives, values and manifestations of faith separate from politics nor should we attempt to do so... (Manning Centre, n.d.)

The Centre goes on to assert:

> It is important then for Canadians to discuss the question, "to what extent should faith, whether in a personal or institutional form, play a role in the public life of our country?" And whether this question is answered generously or restrictively will very much be determined by how people of religious faith conduct themselves in the political arena. Democratic debate and decisions about the impact of faith and moral perspectives on politics are legitimate and necessary, but navigating this interface requires insight and graciousness.

The Interface seminars are designed to provide such "insight and graciousness" through "training for credible and effective political involvement." This typically involves some theoretical and theological reflection on the themes we have been discussing in this paper, along with studies and profiles of individuals like William Wilberforce. Wilberforce, a19th century British MP whose evangelical convictions drove his longtime participation in the anti-slavery struggle, is a particularly important figure for evangelicals who see his faith as fundamental to his values and politics. The seminars may also include MPs and other speakers who give more practical advice and discussions of how they approach issues of faith and the public arena. The Manning Centre stresses that its Interface seminars are non-partisan and not limited to Christianity, and it has presented some events with Jewish and Sikh involvement.

Manning's concept of the "faith-politics interface" thus assumes that private faith impacts the public values and behavior of politicians and others in public life. But it

places more emphasis on individual choices and reflection. This is not incompatible with the Kuyperian ideas mentioned above. But it places more emphasis on individuals working within secular institutions, rather than setting up their own parallel institutions.

The above points are a mere sketch of a complex debate. But the Kuyperian and Manning perspectives illustrate some of the evangelical ideas about the relationship between private faith and public life. They lead us into discussion of an unusual parliamentary institution that tries to put some of these ideas into practice.

The Prayer Breakfast

More than party or caucus groupings, the most enduring evangelical institution on Parliament Hill is the Wednesday morning prayer breakfast, where every week a small number of MPs gather to talk and pray for an hour. Held more or less continually since the 1960s, the breakfast was originally sponsored by Conservative Walter Dinsdale and Social Credit leader Robert Thompson and inspired by the American prayer breakfast movement (see below).[4]

In recent years the breakfast attracts about 15-20 MPs a week, drawing from a larger group of perhaps 40-50 interested MPs. Nearly all are men, and most are Liberals or Conservatives. The format varies, but typically involves one MP speaking about his or her life, mixing their political and personal experiences and emphasizing the role of faith throughout. (Such "testimonies" are a familiar part of evangelical culture.) The breakfast may or may not include much actual praying, but there is usually discussion about faith and personal issues throughout the hour.

What the breakfast does not include is serious discussion of policy and politics. Jim Lee, a United Church minister involved in the group in the late 1990s and early 2000s, writes that "new MPs seem to misinterpret the purpose of the Prayer Breakfast as a lobby/support group designed to influence legislation on social issues." (Lee, 2006, 2) But, he says, "the Prayer Breakfast is not a Christian lobby group. Rather, it seeks to build interpersonal relationships." (2) This point was repeated and emphasized by participants - that it is not a political grouping or caucus, but primarily a safe gathering place to discuss faith and personal issues, particularly the stresses of elected office and its impact on family life.

However, the breakfasts have evolved over the years in their tone and content. A Liberal who attended both before and after the 1993 election said that the arrival of the Reform Party significantly changed the group: "I went a few times to the [prayer breakfast] after 1993 and Preston Manning was sort of holding court and I thought...I don't need to listen to him. I had trouble with the self-righteous element of it." Another MP said he no longer felt comfortable attending because of the emphasis on "personal piety." But in later years, things may have shifted. An MP from the Reform era told me that he stopped attending the weekly breakfast for a period because it was becoming too

4 Information about the prayer breakfast is drawn from its website (canadaprayerbreakfast.ca) and interviews with participants.

"small-c christian" - that is, not explicitly and exclusively evangelical.

The weekly MP-only prayer breakfast is associated with the annual Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast, a much larger event with hundreds of attendees that has been held since 1964 and in recent years even developed its own website (canadaprayerbreakfast.ca). This national breakfast invites all major political figures and commonly attracts one or more party leaders, including NDP leader Jack Layton and the speakers of the House and Senate, as well as a larger number of MPs who may not attend the weekly private gatherings. Invitations have been distributed widely to other political religious, business and other elites; in 2008 the breakfast was moved off Parliament Hill to the Ottawa Congress Centre and invitations are now openly available to anyone.

Separate but closely related, the weekly MP-only and the annual public breakfast have been loosely organized largely by people who are neither politicians nor ordained ministers, and often a married couple working full time and apparently compensated by private donations and supporters. The first such couple were Kent and Kay Hotaling, who according to the brief history on the prayer breakfast website:

> ...moved from Seattle Washington to Canada in 1968 to further encourage leaders to meet regularly. As a result of this effort, groups began to meet in many cities and Provincial capitals and consequently annual breakfasts began in most Canadian provinces.
>
> The Hotalings moved back to the United States in 1972 and Bill and Sandra Bussiere were asked by a group of men to consider leaving his business in Montreal in order to provide leadership to the Prayer Breakfast movement. Bill, his wife Sandra and their three daughters moved to Ottawa and Bill continued being available to Members of Parliament in Ottawa and to other leaders from across Canada.

These passages gives us a number of interesting points. First, the involvement of couples is significant, signalling the focus on the personal and family aspects of political life and the impact on parliamentary spouses. Second is the reference to "the Prayer Breakfast movement" and the spreading of breakfasts across Canada, both small weekly gatherings and public annual events. These have been less continuous and even less noticeable than the national breakfast, but signal the idea of a loosely organized but cohesive gathering of political and perhaps other elites. Third, the vague reference to "a group of men" - apart from the gender implications - signals the unclear and highly informal organization that has organized and supported the breakfasts over the years, through a charitable entity, the Canadian Fellowship Foundation (CFF). This Foundation has a mailing address in Toronto and its chair is former MP and cabinet minister Paul Hellyer.

The official history goes on to say that "[f]rom the outset there have always been two unique aspects to the Prayer Breakfast. The first was that it should be a lay person who carries out the work. It was felt that lay people [rather than clergy] could better relate to leaders. The other aspect was (especially around politicians) that everything

should be done in a low-keyed [sic], behind the scenes manner. The main objective was to build relationships and this can be done most successfully in a personal, quiet, confidential way."

These aspects apply well to the weekly MP-only breakfast; less so to the annual event. The most recent breakfast in May 2010 was held at the Westin hotel ballroom in downtown Ottawa with several hundred attendees. It featured representatives from each party in the House of Commons, including NDP leader Jack Layton and Stockwell Day, and all four representatives read passages from the Bible. The head table included the Speakers of both the Senate and the House of Commons, Noel Kinsella and Peter Milliken, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, Beverley McLachlan, and Lt. Gen Andrew Leslie, senior army commander. The speakers were sisters Cindy and Lisa Klassen, who spoke about the importance of their religious faith in facing Lisa Klassen's near fatal accident and the trials of Cindy Klassen's athletic career. The tone of the event, while clearly religious and Christian, was on individual inspiration and character rather than politics or public policy. The entire event was recorded and later broadcast on CPAC.

For some evangelical activists, this lack of edge makes the breakfasts irrelevant; according to a press report, activist Charles McVety did not attend the 2007 national breakfast "in part because it's not political enough. He says he prefers to use his trips to Ottawa to directly lobby MPs on specific issues." (Greenaway 2007). Other evangelical activists, such as Evangelical Fellowship of Canada president Bruce Clemenger, regularly attend the breakfast but are not part of the organization or program. In turn, the breakfasts receive occasional – but not much – criticism from non-evangelicals. A former New Democrat MP invited to the national event attracted some attention in evangelical media by calling them part of a "Bushite crusade." (Weatherbe 200?). In general though, the national breakfast receives little media coverage or attention.

Like so many evangelical institutions, the prayer breakfasts have American counterparts. Prayer breakfasts among political elites emerged as early as the 1940s in Washington, with the first (American) National Prayer Breakfast organized in 1953 by Billy Graham and others. (Lindsay 2006). The movement then spread to Canada in the 1960s. However, rather than the single weekly meeting for MPs in Ottawa, there are a variety of American prayer breakfasts for congressional representatives, senators and members of the executive branch. The American annual national prayer breakfast attracts over 3000 participants, regularly including the President in power at the time, and is broadcast on C-SPAN. (These are separate from a similar group, the National Day of Prayer organization , which also receives presidential attention for its annual Day of Prayer event.)

As with Canada, the organization behind the breakfasts is informal and highly private. The American organization has long been known as "the Fellowship" (note the Canadian group is the "Christian Fellowship Foundation"). By its very name and its opaque nature, the Fellowship has attracted attention and suspicion over the years (Lindsay 2006, Getter 2002). And as with Canada, it's not always clear where the line is

between supporting elites in their personal and spiritual lives and influencing politics and public policy. Fellowship members stress their mission is only the former; but others argue that it works as an important evangelical and conservative political network, even it if does not pursue specific political and policy goals. In any event, the prayer breakfasts are an intriguing institution in which many MPs connect their private faith and their public roles.

Public and Private Roles

Some evangelical MPs emphasize that their private faith is only part of their public identity. **MP 4** said "it has never been my ambition to be known as the evangelical Christian on the Hill." And **MP 5**, used a phrase used by other members as well - "I don't think of myself as a Christian politician, but a politician who's a Christian."

MP 6 said that faith is only one part or one distinctive element of his life. "I'm very proud and open about the importance of faith in my life. But I'm also very proud to have been married to the same woman for 41 years. I'm very proud of having children and grandchildren. I'm proud of the presence and relationships I've built in my community. Those are all distinctions in my life and they are with me, they influence me." Nevertheless, MPs agreed that they could not separate their private faith from their public lives. **MP 4** went on to say "it's ludicrous to think I walk onto the floor of the House of Commons and park my beliefs and values at the door."

Still, evangelical faith emphasizes individual decision and commitment, and so it is not surprising that evangelical MPs consider their faith to be basic and essential to their overall character. This particularly comes out for some evangelical MPs when they contrast themselves with Roman Catholics. Several suggested that most Catholic MPs - unless they clearly followed church teachings, especially on abortion and same-sex marriage - were more able to separate their private faith from their public actions. One said: "I think that the Catholics...are much better at separating these things. As long as they go to mass, the rest of the week is golden, whereas as in our background it has to be a daily thing. And Catholics don't think that way and don't think that others don't think they way they do [i.e., separate their private faith from their public actions]." This view is reinforced by statements such as Jean Chretien's that "a prime minister must leave their religion at home" and Paul Martin's dismissal of his beliefs as "for the most part...irrelevant."

Whether or not this evaluation of Catholics is fair, evangelicals often contrasted these prominent Catholics with what they felt was a strong consistency between their private faith and public beliefs. **MP 7** said "I think we have to be continually vigilant so that we don't let it become something like former Prime Minister Martin, who claimed a strong faith. But then when it came to putting those principles into action, he separated those one to a personal private thing and wasn't willing to bring those beliefs into the public square." Many evangelicals seem honestly puzzled by how others of any faith can separate their religious beliefs from their public lives. The same MP above also noted his satisfaction with working with more orthodox Catholics and others: "I've been very

encouraged by the large number of Christian people that I work with and I use that term broadly and inclusively. There are some strong Catholic people here and other denominations that we may consider mainline. We have a close connection spiritually and I'm just thrilled whether it's meeting for a prayer group or any formal conversations really."

Still, evangelicals commonly argue that their faith does not necessarily determine their views on specific issues. Rather, it is a sense that their faith underlies their entire character and outlook, and particularly their personal integrity. **MP 8** said that "[In the 2006 election campaign] I was accused of being a moralist by folks in the community and even on the campaign trail. I said 'if that means I am a man of my word and integrity, you know I want to bring honesty back into government, then I am guilty as charged.'" And **MP 9** said "...when I go forward as a member of parliament I represent everyone equally no matter what their faith or secular beliefs or whatever their sexual orientation is, whatever. I will represent everyone equally. But how I do it is represented in my faith, and I don't think that is a bad thing."

In saying "represented in my faith", **MP 9** did not mean in this context his socially conservative views. Rather, it meant "to treat my [fellow person] as I would want to be treated, to be good, to be ethical, to be moral; those are all, I think, attributes of a person who would serve well." And **MP 1** used New Testament language to say:

> ...the best way to describe [my motivation as a politician] is the fruit of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, justice, mercy, to make sure, that this government is treating this people's, taxpayers', money in a honest fashion, in a transparent fashion. I think those are principles that come from the faith that I have, to guard the rights of individuals. The last interview I had here was someone asking for some help with human rights in other countries. So those are the kinds of things I think are important and I'm here for.

MP 8 said that political and public life "is very biblical, in the sense of treating others how you expect to be treated...I've sat at the table and gone for lunch with people in the community that I know are HIV positive or live an alternative lifestyle. We can agree to disagree, but I can sit and have a humane conversation. You know, I can't help to continue to live by the philosophy of what would Jesus do? The element of compassion and caring individual that he was. My goal is to have that message resonate [in my] day to day activities. I am far from accomplishing that, but it's my goal."

For many, this may sound disingenous - hiding a militant conservatism behind a benign and open face. Most or all of these MPs are opposed to abortion and same-sex marriage. But they may not consider these to be their central focus in politics. **MP 5** said "I didn't get involved [in politics] specifically to get involved with issues as a Christian," and that his priority issues were not about sexuality or reproduction, but taxes and accountability.

But their faith shapes at least some MPs' views. When asked whether evangelicals were missing areas where their faith "should point them in a particular direction," **MP 7** identified criminal justice as an example:

> I had another murder in my riding last weekend...The whole youth criminal justice act and our approach to criminal justice...we need to really take a hard look at that. I really believe that, had we been informed with some biblical values - one of the things I did this morning is I read a chapter of Proverbs - had our lawmakers been more informed with some of the principles of scripture, we wouldn't be this far down the leniency path as it relates to criminal justice. I certainly don't want to come across as some vindictive harsh person. We need to find restorative answers as well, but I think we have erred on the side of leniency.

While the idea of having public policy "informed with some biblical values" may be alarming to some, we must be careful to understand the possible meanings behind it. The MP above appeared to mean that justice policy had to place greater emphasis on individual responsibility for one's actions. Remembering how several of the above MPs linked their religious beliefs to their personal sense of integrity and ethical behaviour, this MP drew naturally from his own private beliefs to find the values and ethics he felt should be implemented in public policy.

The same MP was asked whether he felt evangelicals were too focused on abortion and gay rights. He said "probably yes" and suggested other issues of importance: "economic policy issues as it relates to taxation and support for grassroots initiatives within local areas - for example creating low cost housing, affordable housing." Later he added: "[International development] is a biblical obligation we have. And as a global community, it shrinks in terms of our ability to contact and be aware of the issues, and I think it increases our responsibility too." For at least some evangelicals, religion underlies all their thinking – not just the bread-and-butter social conservative issues of sexuality and reproductive rights.

An inevitable common theme stressed by these evangelical politicians is that although they have a strong personal faith, they stress they don't want to use their public roles to "impose" it on others. **MP 10** said:

> I think it is important for people...who get into politics...[to realize] you cannot and should not use coercion to accept or practice your religious beliefs. I think it is extremely important for people to understand that, because the biggest fear of secular people and those from other faith-based communities is if they [evangelicals] got hold of the machinery of a state, if they got a hold of a government or a legislature, they would use that coercive power which is latent there and used for other purpose. (Interview)

But what does it mean to coerce or impose? Remember again Jean Chretien's

above statement: "...though I consider myself a good Roman Catholic, it would have been wrong for me to impose my beliefs on a multi-religious society." Chretien links this to his early resistance against anti-abortion activists in party nomination races, and later to issues of sexual orientation. In other words, he links "impose my beliefs" to specific issues - not, say, trying to convert others to the Christian or Catholic faith.

In contrast, when evangelicals refer to imposing their beliefs, they often think more in the latter sense of actual conversion, which is at the very core of evangelical thinking and identity. Evangelicals often display a kind of marketplace approach to religion, in which they assume everyone else is also potentially selling something. Consequently they see no problem in actively identifying and promoting their own faith with what they feel is a respectful approach to other's beliefs. To them, this is not imposing. **MP 8** said "I believe faith is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ for myself. For others, they have their own faith, and I'm there to share my own faith and the importance of my faith, especially if the opportunity arises. But I am also accepting that others believe in other faiths and its not something that I don't disagree with. One of the great things we have is that we do live in a pluralistic society with freedom of religion."

Instead, evangelicals see "secular humanism" as the real imposition. As discussed above, they do not see secularism as neutral ground, but rather as its own set of beliefs, and they express frustration when they cannot express the religious identities that are such a central part of their identity. **MP 7** said "I think people of faith tend to be - and I don't want to sound like a persecuted person here - but tend to be marginalized." This is a common feeling among evangelicals MPs as they struggle to reconcile their public and private roles.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to explore the role of evangelical religious beliefs among members of the House of Commons, emphasizing the relationship between private beliefs and public lives. It has turned particularly to the actual voices of MPs and how they characterize this relationship. Some observers may consider their assertions implausible or obscuring other more hidden attitudes – particularly a militant social conservative agenda. But there is little doubt these MPs want their religious faith to be taken seriously, and they believe it should have an impact on their public lives.

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