

Heroes and Hallelujahs — Labour History and the Social History of Religion in English Canada: A Response to Bryan Palmer

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The importance of religion to social and labour radicalism in English Canada has been identified by several scholars, but few labour historians have built on these insights. Some scholars who study labour or socialist leaders at least briefly assess the impact of their subject's religious background or their relationship to social gospel, while a few historians of working-class ethnic communities explore religion as a facet of their subjects' lives. Discussion of religion, however, is usually a small part of a larger project. On this theme, Lynne Marks replies to Bryan Palmer's critique of her book Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure and Identity in Late Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario.

Plusieurs universitaires ont conclu à l'importance de la religion pour le radicalisme social et ouvrier au Canada anglais, mais très peu d'historiens de la vie ouvrière ont donné suite à ces observations. Certains universitaires qui étudient à tout le moins brièvement les leaders syndicaux ou socialistes évaluent l'impact des antécédents religieux de leurs sujets ou leur rapport à l'évangile social, tandis que quelques historiens de collectivités ethniques de classe ouvrière s'intéressent à la religion comme à l'une des facettes de la vie de leurs sujets. Mais l'étude de la religion ne représente habituellement qu'un modeste volet d'un projet de plus grande envergure. Sur ce thème, Lynne Marks répond à la critique qu'a fait Bryan Palmer de son ouvrage Revivals and Roller Rinks : Religion, Leisure and Identity in Late Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario.

IN MANY SUBJECT areas English Canadian social history is as good as any written beyond our borders. This is certainly the case in women's history and gender history, where work of the last 15 years has been informed by

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and made significant contributions to the international literature. This has been less true in another field, the social history of religion. This field has developed considerable strength and sophistication in Britain, in the United States, and increasingly in Quebec. Historians study a range of topics, including church involvement and its relationship to social and economic change, the nature of popular spirituality, and the relationship between the church and the labour movement; in these and many other ways they explore the intersections of religion with race, class, and gender. English Canadian labour and social historians have rarely been interested in these topics, while only a minority of English Canadian religious historians have focused on them, preferring to address intellectual history or denominational subjects. This is starting to change, as over the course of the 1990s more religious historians have come to recognize the need for a social perspective in their ongoing study of religion and have produced important work.¹ This work does not, however, tend to focus on the working class.² Labour historians are not addressing this problem because, like their colleagues in social history and gender history, most continue to ignore or quickly gloss over the significance of religion in the past.

1 For recent work, see, for example, Marguerite Van Die, " 'The Marks of a Genuine Revival': Religion, Social Change, Gender and Community in Mid-Victorian Brantford, Ontario", *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 79, no. 3 (September 1998), pp. 524–563, and "A 'Christian Businessman' in the Eastern Townships: The Convergence of Precept and Practice in Nineteenth Century Evangelical Gender Construction", *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, vol. 10 (1999), pp. 103–127; Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, "A Full Orb'd Christianity": *The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada, 1900–1940* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996); Brian 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, 1993); G. A. Rawlyk, *The Canada Fire: Radical Evangelicalism in British North America, 1775–1812* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994). Despite these and other important works, as James Opp has noted, much of the religious history in Canada is still limited by a denominational focus and the fact that few scholars look at religion in social and cultural terms. See Opp, "Revivals and Religion: Recent Work on the History of Protestantism in Canada", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 32, no. 2 (Summer 1997), pp. 183–194. While most good work in the social history of religion is being written by religious historians, a few strong studies are appearing by those defined more as social, cultural, or gender historians. See, for example, James Opp, "Religion, Medicine, and the Body: Protestant Faith Healing in Canada, 1880–1930" (PhD dissertation, Department of History, Carleton University, 2000); Tina Block, " 'Boy Meets Girl': Constructing Heterosexuality in Two Victoria Churches, 1945–1960", *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, vol. 10 (1999), pp. 279–296; Hannah Lane, "Devouring the Mother? Gender, Piety, and the Religious Critique of Mid-Nineteenth Century Economic Life" (paper presented at the Canadian Historical Association meeting, May 1999); Cecilia Morgan, *Public Men and Virtuous Women: The Gendered Languages of Religion and Politics in Upper Canada, 1791–1850* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

2 An exception to this is Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, " 'The World of the Common Man is Filled with Religious Fervour': The Labouring People of Winnipeg and the Persistence of Revivalism, 1914–1925" in George A. Rawlyk, ed., *Aspects of Canadian Evangelicalism* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997).

The importance of religion to social and labour radicalism in English Canada was identified by scholars like Richard Allen and Ramsay Cook in the 1970s and 1980s, but few labour historians have built on these insights.³ Some scholars who study labour or socialist leaders at least briefly assess the impact of their subjects' religious background or their relationship to the social gospel, while a few historians of working-class ethnic communities explore religion as a facet of their subjects' lives.⁴ Even in such works any discussion of religion is usually a small part of a larger project, while much more commonly its role is mentioned in a paragraph or two or ignored altogether. Studies in which the religious dimensions of working-class life are the central focus are extremely rare in English Canadian labour history. Labour historians have in recent years begun to incorporate an analysis of gender and race into their work. This is a move in the right direction towards recognizing the complex and multidimensional nature of workers' lives. However, most labour historians have not moved beyond this "holy trinity" of gender, race, and class to explore potential religious facets of working-class life.

Why does this particular blind spot persist among so many social and labour historians in English Canada? For one thing, these scholars generally share a resolutely secular world view, which may make it difficult for them to recognize the potential significance of religion to earlier generations. In addition, some scholars have candidly noted that their own personal histories of an oppressive religious upbringing left them with a strong antipathy towards religion, past and present.⁵ Religion was something from which to liberate oneself, not a potential subject of study. These reasons help explain the common reluctance to study religion among many social, gender, and labour historians. However, I believe that among labour historians additional

3 Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914–28* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973); Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985). An early study of the social dimensions of religious involvement, by a sociologist, not a historian, can be found in S. D. Clark's *Church and Sect in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1948).

4 For examples of studies of labour and socialist leaders, see Ian McKay, "'By Wisdom, Wile or War': The Provincial Workmen's Association and the Struggle for Working-Class Independence in Nova Scotia", *Labour/ Le Travail*, vol. 18 (Fall 1986), pp. 13–62; Peter Campbell, "'Making Socialists': Bill Pritchard, the Socialist Party of Canada and the Third International", *Labour/ Le Travail*, vol. 30 (Fall 1992); Janice Newton, *The Feminist Challenge to the Canadian Left, 1900–1918* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995). For a more extended discussion of the role of religion, see Tom Mitchell, "From the Social Gospel to 'the Plain Bread of Leninism': A. E. Smith's Journey to the Left in the Epoch of Reaction After World War I", *Labour/ Le Travail*, vol. 33 (Spring 1994), pp. 125–151. For studies of working-class ethnic communities which incorporate religion into their analysis, see, for example, Franca Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992); Ruth Frager, *Sweatshop Strife: Class, Ethnicity and Gender in the Jewish Labour Movement, 1900–1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

5 Personal communications.

reasons fuel an unwillingness to engage in questions of religion and indeed to take religion seriously as a category of analysis. Ideological issues play a central role here, especially the influence of particular brands of Marxism. Many labour historians seem to have had a difficult time seeing religion as anything but the “pie in the sky when you die” that lures workers away from their true class interests. In challenging labour historians who have ignored religion in the American context, Jama Lazerow suggests, “Though Marx (and particularly Engels) understood the powerful strain of protest embedded in Christian theology and tradition, most American historians seem to have implicitly adopted a simplistic reading of Marx’s ‘opium of the people’ dictum.”⁶

In addition, most labour historians writing in the 1970s and 1980s very much admired their subjects, those working-class men (most studies focused on men) able to challenge the oppressive industrial capitalist system that was consolidating its power over the course of the nineteenth century. While these people were in many ways brave and admirable, this admiration led some historians to draw their heroes somewhat one-dimensionally, as the kind of rational, radical political actors that reflect a late-twentieth-century radical ideal. This ideal was in many ways a very masculine one. As a number of scholars have noted, such idealization led to serious blindness about the sexist and racist components of these activists’ lives.⁷ An admiration for their subjects may also have led to a reluctance among many labour historians to see these rational heroes as implicated in anything as irrational and ideologically suspect as religious belief.⁸

A reluctance to acknowledge the role of religion in the lives of past labour activists is vividly reflected in Bryan Palmer’s recent critique of my book, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, in the May 2000 issue of *Histoire sociale/ Social History*. This critique, by a senior Canadian labour historian, raises a number of serious issues, including misuse of evidence, flawed methodology, and misunderstanding of Marxist theory. None of these criticisms stands up to any careful reading of my book: in fact, many of his critiques are very carefully qualified or even retracted in footnotes. Nonetheless, a response is

6 Jama Lazerow, *Religion and the Working Class in Antebellum America* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), p. 8. Actually Marx’s phrase is “opiate of the masses”. Nonetheless, the point remains a relevant one, for either American or Canadian scholars.

7 For a few examples of a larger literature, see Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Joan Sangster, *Dreams of Equality: Women on the Canadian Left, 1920–1950* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989); Frager, *Sweatshop Strife*; David R. Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991); Karen Dubinsky and Adam Givertz, “‘It Was Only a Matter of Passion’: Masculinity and Sexual Danger” in Kathryn McPherson, Cecilia Morgan, and Nancy M. Forestell, eds. *Gendered Pasts: Historical Essays in Femininity and Masculinity in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1999).

8 William Sutton has also made this point in the American context. See William R. Sutton, “Tied to the Whipping Post: New Labor History and Evangelical Artisans in the Early Republic”, *Labor History*, vol. 36, no. 2 (Spring 1995), pp. 251–281.

obviously needed to set the record straight. An analysis of Palmer's critique also provides fascinating insights into the nature of a certain school of English Canadian labour history and can give us more clues as to why the social history of religion remains underdeveloped in English Canada.

While I was working on the project that became *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, I very much felt as though the study did not fit anywhere. Most of the religious history being written in English Canada emerged from a Christian denominational or intellectual history base, while the majority of those within the feminist and labour history community of which I was a part had at best a bemused response to the study of religion.⁹ My early interest in working-class women's culture and class consciousness nonetheless drew me into an exploration of the social dimensions of religion, which was clearly a significant piece of the puzzle. As a Jew for whom religion was culturally important, not personally oppressive, and a potential basis of progressive politics, I found the study posed no personal difficulties.

When it was published in 1996 reviewers acknowledged that *Revivals and Roller Rinks* made a significant contribution to the embryonic field of the social history of religion in English Canada.¹⁰ It was the first published work to combine quantitative and qualitative analysis in studying the social dimensions of religion and leisure and moved beyond existing studies of elite opinions about religious practice to look at what people were actually doing. This book focused on three small Ontario communities, Ingersoll, Thorold, and Campbellford, and included quantitative analysis of church records for the latter two. By focusing on the small-town context I was able to assess who among Protestant townspeople had made the major religious commitment of becoming a church member and who had not.¹¹ In incorporating both leisure and religion in the analysis, something rarely done even in the international context, I was able to sketch the complex cultural worlds of the townspeople I studied, looking both at those who accepted the Protestant framework for religious and leisure practice and at those who, to a greater or lesser extent, rejected it. As I explored these topics my background in women's history and culturalist Marxist labour history led me to questions of cultural world view and group identity. I did not start by assuming that one or another identity was paramount among the townspeople I

9 Craig Heron and members of my gender and women's history groups, especially Mariana Valverde and Cecilia Morgan, were rare exceptions.

10 See, for example, Opp, "Revivals and Religion" and other reviews of *Revivals and Roller Rinks* such as those by Scott Sandage, *Journal of Social History*, vol. 31, no. 4 (1998), pp. 964–967; Brian Clarke, *Church History*, vol. 67, no. 2 (1998), pp. 439–440; William Westfall, *American Historical Review*, vol. 103, no. 4 (1998), pp. 1358–1359; Peter Bailey, *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 78, no. 4 (1997), pp. 653–654.

11 Because the nature of Catholic records makes it much more difficult to determine levels of religious involvement among Catholics, this study focused primarily on Protestants, although where possible comparisons were made between Catholic and Protestant data.

studied, but sought to discover what an examination of people's religious and leisure activities could reveal.

What I found was an enormously complex picture, which can only be sketched here. *Revivals and Roller Rinks* is, among other things, a work of gender history, and it shows very clearly that religion, and the respectable Protestant leisure culture associated with it, was more important to women than to men. Working-class women were not always fully comfortable with the middle-class-dominated Protestant world, but most had at least some links to it. Many married men also had some allegiance to the churches and Protestant leisure culture, as part of their respectable role as responsible breadwinners. Most, however, also had at least one foot in a less respectable and almost entirely masculine leisure culture. This culture, which was largely closed to women, was central to the majority of single men, both working and middle class, who rejected the more feminized churches.

Gender, age, and marital status were thus clearly important in how individuals defined themselves and their worlds. Class divisions also existed within and beyond the churches, but such divisions became particularly apparent with the emergence in the 1880s of two working-class movements, the Salvation Army and the Knights of Labor, which I study in the larger Ontario context. The Salvation Army, which took on the trappings of working-class popular culture and attacked comfortable, soulless middle-class Christianity, attracted workers to its message of "blood and fire" revivalism and was particularly appealing to working-class women and to the unskilled. I argue in *Revivals and Roller Rinks* that the appeal of this movement reflected both the strength of a distinct working-class culture and identity among Ontario's working class and the continued power of evangelicalism for many. In contrast to the Salvation Army, the Knights of Labor was an explicitly activist, class-conscious movement that attempted to challenge the growing hegemony of capitalist labour relations across Ontario. Christianity proved to be a potent fount of opposition to the capitalist system for the Knights, who claimed that, if Jesus were alive, he would scourge the hypocritical church-going exploiters of labour. The Knights also used the churches to assert their own respectability. They asked ministers to preach labour sermons and, like local cross-class fraternal orders, marched in a body to the church to hear such sermons, further reinforcing their respectability in contexts where the working class was increasingly devalued.

The Knights and the Army, in very different ways, both demonstrated the importance of working-class identity and the significance of Christianity to Ontario's working class. By the early 1890s both the Knights and the Salvation Army had lost most of their popular support. *Revivals and Roller Rinks* concludes by looking in detail at a revival in Thorold, a former Knights of Labor stronghold, and finds that, in the early 1890s in the context of economic depression, revivalists Crossley and Hunter were able, at least temporarily, to bring the working- and middle-class women and men together by a common appeal to evangelical Christianity and a particular appeal to a cross-

class masculinity. This did not last long, however, particularly for working-class single men, who soon drifted back to the less respectable masculine leisure culture.

This study, then, explores the nature of group identity in late-nineteenth-century Ontario and argues that identities were complex and multidimensional, and they shifted over time in response to social and economic change. It also suggests that religion was one component of nineteenth-century identities and that religious involvement, or the lack of it, can help to illuminate the shifting nature of other identities.

This brings me to Palmer's critique. As an undergraduate and graduate student in the late 1970s and early 1980s, I, like many others, was drawn to social and labour history by the excitement and insights generated by Greg Kealey and Bryan Palmer's works of culturalist labour history, including their important book on the Knights of Labor, *Dreaming of What Might Be*. However, in my own work I have also been critical of their failure to deal with the potential significance of religion in workers' lives. Palmer's piece acknowledges that I was correct in this critique, noting that he and Kealey did "not deal seriously with issues of working-class religiosity". Despite this admission and his assertion that "all working-class historians will welcome thorough examinations of labouring people's religious lives", much of his critique of my work expresses a discomfort with incorporating religion into any analysis of the working class.¹² The result is that Palmer's criticisms seriously distort my work.

I will focus here only on the larger and more significant cases of distortion. While acknowledging that he and Kealey did not deal with working-class religiosity, Palmer goes on to say that "church attendance and religious belief were, however important, seldom the singular defining feature of nineteenth-century identity, being but one component of labouring people's subjective sense of themselves".¹³ This phrase suggests that I am a "single issue" scholar who focuses on religion as the defining feature of working people's identity; in fact the central argument of *Revivals and Roller Rinks* is that religion indeed was "one component of labouring people's subjective sense of themselves", a component that shifted in importance depending on the economic and social climate and the gender and age of the working people involved.

Palmer's critique also spends considerable space arguing that I state that there was a great deal of overlap in membership between the Knights of Labor and the Salvation Army. This seriously misrepresents what I actually say, which is that there may have been some overlap between the two

12 Bryan Palmer, "Historiographic Hassles: Class and Gender, Evidence and Interpretation", *Histoire sociale/Social History*, vol. 33, no. 65 (May 2000), p. 131.

13 *Ibid.*, pp. 131–132.

groups, as is acknowledged twice in Palmer's piece.¹⁴ Palmer also argues that "no membership lists have surfaced to tie members of crusading bodies of class and fervent religion together". I note the lack of such membership lists, but of course their absence does not prove anything either way, other than the need to turn to the other limited kinds of evidence available.¹⁵ Palmer's most egregious distortion here, though, was in turning my nuanced suggestions that there may have been some overlap into a statement there was dramatic convergence between the two groups. He argues that, rather than the "lumpish commonality" that he claims I find between the two groups, "it is more likely that the different bodies appealed to different kinds of workers". Exactly! I argue in fact that the two organizations would have appealed to different groups within the working class, with more unskilled and non-industrial workers, as well as more young people and women, being attracted to the Salvation Army, and more skilled workers being attracted to the Knights.¹⁶ Palmer once again appropriates my own arguments to counter what he claims I say.

The fact that Palmer's critique focuses on the issue of overlap is interesting in itself, since this was never the central point of my analysis of the Knights and the Army. I was much more interested in the quite different ways in which the two working-class groups used Christianity in class-specific ways. Palmer's reluctance to acknowledge any possibility of overlap in membership is consistent with his and Kealey's portrayal of the Knights in *Dreaming of What Might Be* as working-class heroes, untainted by the religious excesses of what Palmer disdains as the " 'Hallelujah' crowd".¹⁷

Palmer's refusal to consider the possibility of overlap between the two groups is also phrased in gendered terms. There were more women than men in the Salvation Army, while, despite the Knights' efforts to include women, the vast majority of Knights were men. At a more conceptual level, Christianity itself was gendered female at this time, given its association with "feminine" emotion and irrationality; for their admirers at least, the Knights, with their rational, powerful challenge to capitalist oppression, were gendered male. Palmer provides tellingly gendered comparisons of the Knights — "the chivalry of the nineteenth century" with their "solemn purposefulness, carefully evolved procedures and unmistakable commitment to the

14 Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure and Identity in Late Nineteenth-Century Small-Town-Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), pp. 144–145; Palmer, "Historiographic Hassles", p. 133, n. 68, p. 134.

15 Palmer's rejection of this evidence is particularly puzzling, given that in *Working-Class Experience* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1992) he accepts the same evidence regarding potential overlaps between the Knights and the Army in Belleville and Kingston that he challenges in this piece. In *Working-Class Experience* he tells his readers that "there is evidence that Belleville's iron worker Knights attended Salvation Army meetings" and that Kingston labourers attended Salvation Army prayer meetings and four years later "joined the Knights of Labor and went out on strike" (p. 130).

16 Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, pp. 144–145.

17 Palmer, "Historiographic Hassles", p. 138.

worldly transformation of material inequalities” — to “the disorderly street-ordered ‘church’ ” of the “ ‘Hallelujah’ crowd”. The dismissal of feminine religious irrationality by male labour historians is not limited to Bryan Palmer. In her critique of E. P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class*, Joan Scott notes the loaded gendered analysis by which Thompson juxtaposes the apparent feminine religious irrationality of the prophetess Joanna Southcott and her followers with Thompson’s rational, working-class male heroes.¹⁸ William Sutton provides a similar critique of the manner in which major American labour historians, in minimizing the significance of religion in the lives of workers, have characterized evangelical workers as emotional, weak, and feminized.¹⁹ The adoption of concepts of feminine religious irrationality and irrational, feminine religion, whether explicit or implicit, does not serve to further any serious analysis among labour historians of gender or of the role of religion in the lives of working people, male or female.²⁰

Palmer’s defence of the Knights against any hint of organized religion is also evident in other aspects of his critique of *Revivals and Roller Rinks*. In his challenge to my argument about the relationship between the Knights and the mainstream churches, he distorts both my arguments and his own. He states that he and Kealey did not argue that the Knights displaced the churches. However, in the page and a half in their book that touch on religion they say both that “there is evidence that in many communities the Knights of Labor usurped the traditional roles of the church” and that “the Order easily assumed a religious role, perhaps displacing the church”.²¹ If, as Palmer asserts, the quotation about “Well Wisher”, who rejected the middle-class-dominated churches, found brotherly love in the Knights but still sought “a warm, kindly Christ-like Church, a common place where we could

18 Palmer, “Historiographic Hassles”, pp. 132, 138; Joan Scott, “Women in *The Making of the English Working Class*” in Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 68–90.

19 Sutton, “Tied to the Whipping Post”, pp. 259–260.

20 Palmer’s defence of the Knights leads not only to a refusal to accept any taint of “irrational” religion, but also to a curious exercise earlier in his piece where he attempts to quantify the number of anti-Chinese statements in the *Palladium of Labor* in order to downplay the significance of this less-than-pretty aspect of the Knights. However, quantification does not work very well in this context. Hegemonic ideas do not need to be drilled home in every second article. We do not need to find 20% or 50% of articles on this topic to prove its significance. The fact that 2% of all articles in the *Palladium* focused on anti-Asian issues could indeed be evidence enough of the hegemonic force of racism in the Knights’ world view. This does not deny that the Knights also believed in many causes that are far more admirable from a twenty-first-century perspective. However, trying to downplay other aspects of their legacy does not serve the historical record well.

21 Gregory S. Kealey and Bryan D. Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be: The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880–1900* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1987), pp. 311–312. Palmer presents the same argument in *Working-Class Experience*, stating, “There is evidence that in some communities established religion suffered setbacks and that the Knights of Labor usurped the traditional role of the church” (p. 128).

all meet on an equality”, was not intended to support this argument, then I have to wonder what evidence they had to support it. Of the 13 references I checked in the footnote directly following the assertion that the Knights usurped the traditional role of the churches, I was not able to find any evidence to support this claim.²² What I did find in these references was evidence of class-based critiques using Christian rhetoric and of sermons on labour-related topics that the Knights of Labor asked local ministers to preach in mainstream churches. The examination of these references was not “source mining”, as Palmer claims. Footnotes are tools of the historian’s craft for a reason, since they inform our readers of how we are supporting our conclusions. Professionally trained historians are taught that it is important to check footnotes, since, as most historians are aware, it is not uncommon for scholars to interpret the same evidence in different ways. The evidence provided in this footnote was particularly open to reinterpretation.

For those who assume that “pure” class-based radicalism must be untainted by mainstream Christianity, it would be very nice if the Knights had indeed replaced the churches. However, the story is more complex than that. The preaching of labour sermons, upon request — evidence of which I found in Kealey and Palmer’s footnote and in other sources — led me to argue that the Knights, rather than usurping the role of the churches, in at least some communities used the churches to help legitimate the Knights’ role. I am not saying that by asking local ministers to preach labour sermons the Knights blunted their radicalism. Instead:

The Knights’ march into the local church symbolized their links to the dominant respectable Christian culture.... But [it also demonstrated that the Knights] were part of an organization of working-class men and women who were asserting their class identity and their equal place in respectable culture. They did not want to reject Christianity, but they also no longer wanted to remain in the galleries of the local churches. In proclaiming themselves full and equal members of respectable Christian culture, the Knights could then go on to assert their rights....²³

My other source for the Knights’ continued links with dominant church-based culture was quantitative evidence of the extent to which individual Knights were church members. As noted in the book, this evidence is more limited and suggestive, given that we have very little information about individual membership in the Knights.²⁴ That at least some of the Knights’ lead-

²² I was able to check 13 of the 14 references in the footnote. Of these, two included no evidence relating to labour and religion at all.

²³ Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, p. 152.

²⁴ This evidence is not, however, as limited as Palmer suggests by his grouping of the data for Thorold and Ingersoll together. In Thorold 5 of 16 Protestant Knights who could be identified were church members before the revival. Four additional former Knights became church members after the

ers were church members is not surprising given the discussion (which Palmer's critique largely ignores) of how the Knights chose to use the churches for social legitimation through labour sermons and the fact that the Knights' leaders tended to be married older workers, who were generally more likely to be church members than younger, single men.²⁵ The Knights' presence in church does not undermine their radicalism, as implied in Palmer's remarks. In fact, it fits directly into Palmer and Kealey's own broader argument about the ways in which the Knights fashioned a movement culture from existing "residual" culture, of which church involvement was certainly a part. It is also important to recognize that the Knights were hardly the only labour leaders with links to the churches. Evidence of church membership, and indeed church leadership, among radical labour leaders has been found in both the American and British contexts.²⁶

The Knights used the churches to affirm working-class dignity and power, and at the same time used Christianity as a powerful source for challenging capitalist oppression. For example, *The Palladium of Labor* described Christ as "the greatest social reformer that ever lived. He had nothing but words of bitter scorn and scathing indignation for the idle and luxurious classes who oppressed the poor." A contributor to the *Palladium* attacked oppressive church-going employers whose "pretensions to Christianity [were] a blasphemy, their attendance at divine service a mockery".²⁷ Kealey and Palmer focus less on this rhetoric than on the Knights' challenge to the hypocrisy of the churches and the churches' indifference to class oppression. The Knights did indeed present such a challenge to the churches, as discussed in detail in *Revivals and Roller Rinks*.²⁸ The Knights' frequent use of Christian values and beliefs to attack the capitalist system more generally is much more lightly touched on by Kealey and Palmer, perhaps because it suggests the strength of Christian belief among the Knights, as well as their attack on the hypocritical churches. In many ways *Dreaming of What Might Be* presents a

revival. (These are small numbers, to be sure, but even before the revival they reflect a higher proportion of church members among male Knights than among Thorold working-class men in general.) In Ingersoll only 4 Knights out of 26 were identified as church members. However, as noted in my text, the small numbers here are partly explained by the fact that church records for Ingersoll were incomplete. Had complete church records been available for Ingersoll, it is more than possible that we would have found more Knights on the church rolls.

25 Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, p. 145.

26 See, for example, Lazerow, *Religion and the Working Class*; Ken Fones-Wolf, *Trade Union Gospel: Christianity and Labor in Industrial Philadelphia, 1865–1915* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989); J. A. Jaffe, "The 'Chiliasm of Despair' Reconsidered: Revivalism and Working-Class Agitation in County Durham", *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 28 (January 1989), pp. 23–42; Hugh McLeod, *Piety and Poverty: Working-class Religion in Berlin, London, and New York, 1870–1914* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1996).

27 *Palladium of Labor*, October 27, 1883; December 20, 1884. Cited in Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, pp. 150, 154.

28 Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, pp. 153–156.

complex and multi-faceted picture of the Knights in relation to the dominant culture. However, when it comes to links to organized religion, complexity is largely abandoned, making it much less possible to consider a relationship, however nuanced, between Christianity and Knightly heroes.

Unease with any hint of a relationship between working-class consciousness and Christianity may also explain the most serious misrepresentation of my work in Palmer's commentary. He claims that I see the class consciousness of the Knights and the Army as practically identical, and thus that I have no understanding of the meaning of class consciousness. Palmer claims that "in equating identity and class consciousness, Marks glosses over fundamental features of difference between two working-class bodies and manages, as a consequence, to produce a strikingly ahistorical meltdown".²⁹ This is simply not the case. As scholars have noted, there can be various levels of class consciousness among the working class, ranging from a sense of group identity as workers based in a common culture to a clearly formulated oppositional consciousness in which workers have developed an alternative social and economic vision for society.³⁰ It is made crystal clear in *Revivals and Roller Rinks* that any sense of class consciousness among Salvationists was very different from the class consciousness of the Knights. Workers who chose to join the rowdy Army, which reflected forms of working-class popular culture, were revealing a sense of working-class identity and pride, as distinct from the middle class, while the Army's hostility to the middle-class churches may have reflected and reinforced working-class hostility to middle-class forms of religiosity and respectability.³¹ *Revivals and Roller Rinks* reveals numerous ways in which the Salvation Army reflected a distinct working-class identity, pride, and culture. For example:

The periodic "Trades Meetings," in which all soldiers marched in their work-day clothes, visually demonstrated how the Salvation Army provided a space for workers to assert their distinct identity. So did advertisements that officers with names such as "Billy the Tinker" [and] "The Happy Shoemaker"... would be featured at various Army events.... Working-class pride was also evident among officers who flouted the middle-class standards of respectability that marginalized the language of working-class Ontarians....³²

At the same time it is made very clear in various contexts that the Salvation Army did not reflect class consciousness in the sense of an active, politicized, class-based critique of the socio-economic system. For example, I state:

²⁹ Palmer, "Historiographic Hassles", p. 137.

³⁰ E. P. Thompson's own work suggests this. See E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage, 1963). Also see Anthony Giddens, "Class Structuration and Class Consciousness" in Anthony Giddens and David Held, eds., *Classes, Power and Conflict: Classical and Contemporary Debates* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

³¹ Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, pp. 158–161.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 160.

The Salvation Army's class-based critique of the churches in some ways echoes that of the Knights, particularly its attacks on the churches' emphasis on money and appearance to the exclusion of both the true word of God and the honest working man. However, for the Salvation Army the true sin lay in the churches' neglect of the souls of the poor, whereas for the Knights it was the churches' refusal to speak out for workers' social and economic interests.³³

Palmer's claim that I elided the two forms of consciousness is not borne out by my text. It is also dramatically undermined by a footnote in his critique that admits that, in discussing the Salvation Army, I am not referring to a politicized oppositional consciousness but to the "large middle ground of culture/identity/status/experience".³⁴

Making claims that seriously misrepresent my work, then retracting or substantially qualifying such claims in a footnote, is a deeply troubling practice that occurs several times in Palmer's piece. For example, he claims that I argue that workers had "free choice" in making decisions about religion and leisure, and he accuses me of "a conceptual act of privatizing the mind".³⁵ In the accompanying footnote he acknowledges, however, that I point out in the next paragraph that such choices about religion and leisure were actually not "made completely freely", recognizing my detailed discussion of how such choices were seriously constrained by a range of social, economic, and cultural forces. In fact, my argument here parallels his own assertion that "all human activity [takes] place with boundaries of determination".³⁶ Palmer's acknowledgement of what I actually say is rendered strangely irrelevant by his subsequent assertion that, despite my discussion of social, economic, and cultural constraints, "the voluntarist tone of her text is established and is never entirely overcome".³⁷

Palmer also questions my book's small-town focus, which he judges to result in insufficient numbers of church records to sustain analysis. This critique does not take into account the complexities of doing quantitative work on church involvement or the nature of community studies. Before the publication of my book most English Canadian historians had avoided the topic of church involvement, in part because of the methodological difficulties it presented.³⁸ I explain very clearly in my methodological appendix why the small-town focus was essential to answering the questions I was posing:

33 *Ibid.*, p. 159. Also see pp. 160, 161, 165, 167.

34 Palmer, "Historiographic Hassles", p. 136, n. 72.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 131.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 131, n. 63.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 131, n. 62.

38 Doris O'Dell is the only other Canadian scholar who had previously examined these questions. Because she looked at Belleville and did not have complete church records for the community, she could identify some of those who attended church, but not the non-churchgoing group. O'Dell, "The Class Character of Church Participation in Late Nineteenth-Century Belleville, Ontario" (PhD thesis, Department of History, Queen's University, 1990).

Since, in exploring church participation, I sought to identify both those townspeople with church affiliations and those without these affiliations, it was necessary to study communities where the records of all the churches had survived. Only in this way could it be assumed that individuals who did not appear in any church records had not been closely affiliated with any churches. Only in very small communities of two to three thousand people was it possible to assemble relatively complete church membership records for all the churches in the community.³⁹

To study both who was in the churches and, as importantly, who was not, I found a small-town focus the only option. Not surprisingly, this meant that one could not have huge numbers, although the 276 Protestant church members in Thorold and the 436 Protestant church members in Campbellford did provide the basis for significant analysis.⁴⁰ Also, since I had complete membership records for two towns of very different occupational structures and histories of labour activism and found quite similar patterns of church involvement and non-involvement in both, I believed, as have reviewers of the book, that I could make convincing arguments on this basis. There are definitely very real problems involved in using small numbers when one is dealing with random samples of larger populations. The use of complete populations, as is the case in these community studies, is a far more methodologically sound approach, even if the numbers involved are not as large as one might ideally wish.

In recent research for the Canadian Families Project on church involvement in four small communities in Ontario and Nova Scotia at the turn of the century, I have found similar patterns of involvement by class, gender, and marital status to those detailed in *Revivals and Roller Rinks*. In a related study of church involvement in British Columbia, also for the Canadian Families Project, I have found quite different patterns. In at least some regions of British Columbia labour militancy led to religious indifference, and often atheism, for many workers.⁴¹ In some contexts working-class radicalism can indeed lead to a rejection of the churches and of religious belief.

39 Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, p. 219. Palmer criticized me for not providing quantitative data for Ingersoll ("Historiographic Hassles", p. 129). As I stated in the appendix, "Ingersoll was studied primarily in qualitative and not quantitative terms because of the larger size of the community and the resulting greater number of churches: it was not possible to assemble complete church membership records for all Ingersoll churches for the late nineteenth century" (p. 219).

40 Palmer claims that *Revivals and Roller Rinks* does not include a clear definition of church affiliation ("Historiographic Hassles", pp. 130, 135). Both on pp. 24–25 and again in Appendix A (p. 220), I explain that church membership was my primary index of church involvement and clearly define what was meant by church membership in late-nineteenth-century Ontario.

41 Lynne Marks, "A Godless Province? A Gender, Class and Race Analysis of Unbelief in Turn-of-the-century British Columbia" (paper presented at the Social Science History Association Conference, Pittsburgh, October 2000).

It just does not appear to have happened, at least for most of the workers I studied, in Ontario of the 1880s and early 1890s.

The complex, multifaceted, and ever-shifting nature of the relationship between religion and the working class has been a subject of study in the international context for over 20 years. It is troubling that Palmer's critique does not demonstrate any familiarity with this important and fascinating body of literature. This is seen most obviously when Palmer chides me for not using E. P. Thompson's "chiliasm of despair" argument in discussing the relationship between the Knights of Labor and the churches and in assessing the Thorold revival.⁴² In 1963 Thompson presented this important argument as part of his serious analysis of the role of religion in working class life in *The Making of the English Working Class*. Thompson argued that "religious revivalism took over just at the point where 'political' or temporal aspirations met with defeat".⁴³ In other words, workers became swept up in religious revivalism in response to their despair over the failure of more secular political hopes. A large body of British and American literature has emerged over the last 20 years, some of which explicitly challenges Thompson's argument, while a great deal of the rest more broadly argues, as do I, that serious religious belief could and often did co-exist with and indeed reinforce radical labour politics and activism, rather than being merely a culture of consolation when radical politics failed.⁴⁴ While some of these historians emerge from social history or religious history, a number of labour historians, particularly in the United States, have also made this argument. In an important article in *Labor History* in 1995 William R. Sutton takes to task scholars of the American New Labor History, such as Sean Wilentz and Bruce Laurie, arguing that they were unable to take religion seriously and as a result have "obscured efforts to explore the totality of opposition to larger social transformations, and contributed to the anachronistic illusion that evangelicalism and social radicalism are mutually exclusive".⁴⁵ Sutton traces this problem largely to the influence of E. P. Thompson. He argues that Thompson's study of Methodist influence on workers, while in many ways very useful, was "flawed by his reliance on dated Freudianism and his

42 Palmer, "Historiographic Hassles", p. 134, n. 68, p. 135. Palmer's critique of my study of the revival misreads the argument. While not adhering to the "chiliasm of despair" argument, I did note that economic factors probably played a role in the revival's success (*Revivals and Roller Rinks*, pp. 195–200). I did not "[read] the revival's meaning in almost entirely gendered terms", as Palmer claims ("Historiographic Hassles", p. 134, n. 68).

43 Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 388, cited in Palmer, "Historiographic Hassles", p. 134, n. 68.

44 See, for example, Jaffe, "The 'Chiliasm of Despair' Reconsidered"; Fones-Wolf, *Trade Union Gospel*; Lazerow, *Religion and the Working Class*; Theresa Murphy, *Ten Hours' Labor: Religion, Reform, and Gender in Early New England* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992); William Sutton, *Journeymen for Jesus: Evangelical Artisans Confront Capitalism in Jacksonian Baltimore* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998).

45 Sutton, "Tied to the Whipping Post", p. 256.

personal distaste for anything smacking of the Methodist influences of his youth”, leading him to the “evocative but ultimately misleading ‘chiliasm of despair’ ” interpretation. Sutton suggests that Thompson’s “reputation in academia, especially within the labor history community, exalted his personal pique to canonical heights, thereby discouraging an important debate concerning the influence of Methodism on British worker militancy”.⁴⁶ The fact that Thompson’s interpretation can still be cited as gospel in 2001 points to the force of Sutton’s argument in the Canadian as well as the American context.

Palmer states that religion was “but one component of labouring people’s subjective sense of themselves”. This echoes what I say in *Revivals and Roller Rinks*. Palmer, however, proceeds to assert that “this was especially true of working-class settings where the nature of class formation was such that the institutions and rudimentary forms of consciousness associated with the labour movement had taken some root”.⁴⁷ The clear implication here is that religion becomes less significant when class consciousness emerges. In the American context Herbert Gutman, Jama Lazerow, William Sutton, Theresa Murphy, Ken Fones-Wolf, and others have suggested that in both small towns and large cities religious practices and religious belief were very important to many workers and that such belief could reinforce or fuel a powerful class-conscious critique of the capitalist system.⁴⁸ Palmer does not deny this, and he and Kealey very briefly acknowledge the Knights’ Christian critique of capitalism. However, what appears to be a distaste for religion, and a shrinking from any recognition of significant links between a politicized working class and religion, permeates this piece. Religion can certainly promote not only resistance, but also accommodation, to existing class and economic structures. In *Revivals and Roller Rinks* I demonstrate that, despite its ability to appeal to working-class pride and identity, the Salvation Army ultimately played just that role. However, any study of the past that takes evidence seriously needs to recognize that religion could promote both accommodation and resistance.

Rather than fighting battles on this issue that have been clearly resolved in other contexts, we should move to more important work. Recent exciting work on “lived religion” from the United States, which looks at how religion is interpreted by people on a day-to-day basis, argues that we need to move beyond dichotomies like accommodation/resistance and sacred/secular if we really want to understand how religion is understood and has been under-

46 *Ibid.*, pp. 256–257.

47 Palmer, “Historiographic Hassles”, p. 132.

48 Herbert Gutman, “Protestantism and the American Labor Movement: The Christian Spirit in the Gilded Age” in Gutman, ed., *Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History*, 5th ed. (New York: Random House, 1977); Fones-Wolf, *Trade Union Gospel*; Lazerow, *Religion and the Working Class*; Murphy, *Ten Hours’ Labor*; Sutton, *Journeyman for Jesus*.

stood in people's everyday lives.⁴⁹ The best work in this new field is Robert Orsi's brilliant *Thank You, St. Jude: Women's Devotion to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes*. In this study Orsi reveals how American immigrant daughters used devotion to St. Jude to cope with the difficulties of their lives: among other strategies they constructed supportive female communities through telling stories about the saint, developed their own subjectivities through prayer, and cultivated subtle but effective challenges to family pressure and to an overwhelming health establishment that enmeshed both themselves and their loved ones. At the same time Orsi paints a powerful picture of the oppressive, misogynist nature of Catholic discourse within which these women had to operate and shows how worship of St. Jude could lead to accommodation to patriarchal norms. His work demonstrates clearly and subtly how religious belief can simultaneously involve both accommodation and resistance to oppressive religious discourses in the socially and psychologically complex and contradictory way in which people actually live and interpret their lives.⁵⁰

When I was asked by the editor of the Canadian Historical Association's newsletter to write about what I considered to be the five most important books of the twentieth century, both Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* and Orsi's *Thank You, St. Jude* were on the list. I believe that we need to continue to ask important questions about the significance of class in the past, both in itself and as it relates to gender, race, sexuality, age, marital status, and most definitely religion. Among his many other criticisms, Palmer states that my critiques of his and Kealey's work, particularly my arguments about their "inattention to religion" and "neglect of gender difference", reflect David Bercuson's anti-Marxist critiques of the early 1980s.⁵¹ While such a comment might be seen as a challenge to my political legitimacy, I am proud that in these critiques I am also in the company of a most impressive cohort of feminist and labour historians, who have recognized that we must explore gender and religion, as well as a range of other categories of difference, if we are ever to move towards a fuller understanding of the complexities of working-class experience.⁵²

49 See, for example, David Hall, ed., *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997); Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995); Robert Orsi, "The Religious Boundaries of an In-between People: Street *Feste* and the Problem of the Dark-Skinned Other in Italian Harlem, 1920–1990" in Robert Orsi, ed., *Gods of the City* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

50 Robert Orsi, *Thank You, St. Jude: Women's Devotion to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996).

51 Palmer, "Historiographic Hassles", p. 129, n. 59.

52 Feminist scholars who recognize the importance of incorporating gender into an analysis of the working class can be found in both Canada and internationally, while, as noted previously, labour historians who recognize the need to incorporate religion into their analysis are found primarily beyond English Canada. Palmer also claimed that I paralleled Bercuson's arguments in my challenge to

Palmer, while acknowledging that he and Kealey “did not deal seriously with the issues of working-class religiosity”, explains this omission by stating that “their focus was elsewhere”.⁵³ This is not good enough. In contexts where religion is not significant to the questions being explored, it can be safely ignored, but religious belief and practice did play a significant role in the past. This was often true in relation to class consciousness, as well as to a range of other issues of interest to social, gender, and labour historians: for example, morality, sexuality, social welfare, women’s culture, racism, imperialism, immigration, and parenthood. Scholars of these and other topics who ignore religion risk skewing and distorting our understanding of past events and the motivations of those they study. As a new generation emerges, perhaps with less personal baggage of hostility to religion and more curiosity about it, we may see this topic further integrated into the otherwise excellent social history being written in English Canada.

Kealey and Palmer’s “overemphasis on the class meaning of fraternalism”. Despite his suggestion that I was not familiar with the recent literature on this topic (“Historiographic Hassles”, p. 140), as the bibliography of *Revivals and Roller Rinks* indicates, my work was very much informed by the studies of a number of noted American historians, including Mary Ann Clawson, *Class, Gender and Fraternalism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989) and Mark Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), as well as Darryl Newbury, “‘No Atheist, Eunuch or Woman’: Male Associational Culture and Working-Class Identity in Industrializing Ontario, 1840–1880” (MA thesis, Queen’s University, 1992).

53 Palmer, “Historiographic Hassles”, p. 131.