

‘Do not ... do anything that you cannot unblushingly tell your mother’: Gender and Social Purity in Canada

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Social Purity was a multi-faceted campaign championing such causes as dress and dietary reform, temperance, abolition of the “white slave trade”, adoption of “a white life for two”, censorship of much of popular life culture, and sex education for young women and men. Recent analyses of Social Purity underline the importance of social control as a motive. However, much Social Purity literature had an evangelical basis; the gender and religiosity of the writers and audience are important factors in understanding the impetus and message of Social Purity in Canada during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

La pureté sociale était un mouvement aux multiples visages défendant des causes telles que la réforme vestimentaire et alimentaire, la tempérance, l’abolition de la prostitution, l’adoption d’une « vie pieuse à deux », la censure d’une bonne partie de la culture populaire et l’éducation sexuelle des jeunes femmes et des jeunes hommes. De récentes analyses de la pureté sociale soulignent l’importance, en tant que motif, du contrôle social. Toutefois, beaucoup d’ouvrages du mouvement avaient des fondements évangéliques; le sexe et la religiosité des rédacteurs et du lectorat sont d’importants facteurs à considérer pour comprendre l’élan et le message de la pureté sociale au Canada à la fin du XIX^e et au début du XX^e siècle.

DESPITE THE SIGNIFICANCE of Social Purity to the Canadian historical landscape, a scholarly examination of our Purity past has been a long time coming. Historians have avoided a comprehensive analysis of Social Purity for several possible reasons. The many-pronged Social Purity phenomenon encompassed dress and diet reform, temperance, abolition of the “white slave trade”, adoption of a “white life for two”, censorship of much of

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popular culture, and sex education. The fact that the movement was championed by temperance advocates and conservative, even reactionary religious leaders leaves a taint of naivete and repression in an age now priding itself for its liberalism, its secularism, and its support for almost unfettered self-expression. The fact that Social Purity also found much of its leadership and support in first-wave feminists who, in demanding protection of blossoming womanhood, often launched accusatory broadsides aimed at young and mature men has apparently convinced some observers that the movement was somewhat irrelevant and embarrassing in its hysteria. Not even the frankly terrorist approach taken by Arthur Beall to young men's sex education seems to have summoned continuing interest, apart from one engaging article written by Michael Bliss 25 years ago. If these factors were not enough, in recent years Social Purists have been labelled as a troupe of class-repressive and racially bigoted busybodies. Right in the vanguard of Canada's allegedly racist and elitist Purity "shock troops", however, was the largest non-denominational organization for women before the First World War, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union.

The WCTU and other women's groups of its kind interested in the promotion of Social Purity now stand accused of many sins. In Mariana Valverde's view, WCTU women were racist, classist, opportunistic, and condescending. First-wave feminists not only "failed to question the racist presuppositions of evolutionary thought, but produced a profoundly racist form of feminism in which women of 'lower' races were excluded from the specifically Anglo-Saxon work of building a better world through the freeing of 'the mother of the race'."¹ Christabelle Sethna concurs with this assessment, terming the WCTU-sponsored sex instruction programme an instance of "reactionary sexual politics" promulgated by an organization "committed to reforming society around white, middle-class Christian family values."² While such statements underline the Anglo-Saxon and middle-class identification of women in the WCTU and similar groups during an unstable period of industrialization and urbanization, they ignore the powerful, religiously based motive which impelled much of the multi-faceted programme of social reform. Without an understanding of the liberating force of evangelicalism, for example, one arrives at the easy but erroneous conclusion posited by Valverde that the WCTU saw black mothers as a group to be led and taught, rather than celebrated and supported as family

1 Mariana Valverde, "'When the Mother of the Race is Free': Race, Reproduction, and Sexuality in First-Wave Feminism" in Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde, eds., *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), p. 8. See also Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991).

2 Christabelle Sethna, "Men, Sex, and Education: The Ontario Women's [sic] [Christian] Temperance Union and Children's Sex Education, 1900-20", *Ontario History*, vol. 88, no. 3 (September 1996), p. 186.

and community leaders. Such anachronistic caricatures also unfairly denigrate Social Purity thought by suggesting that it was more monolithic in both its nature and uses than appears to have been true.

The evangelical basis of much, but by no means all female-produced Social Purity literature would indicate that the gender and religiosity of the writers and audience are important to any understanding of the message of Social Purity. One cannot deny that the Social Purity subtext in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Canada had much to do with issues of social control, nor that Social Purity thought, which was strongly impelled by religiosity, was also strengthened by the promise of social mobility. The movement in Canada, at least, was much more complex, however, than the simple promotion of a rhetoric and behaviour as a means to achieve social elevation and control.

Social Purity had two distinct phases. An early manifestation in Canada between the early 1870s and about 1890 was focused on personal programmes of dress reform, pure food campaigns, alcohol and tobacco abstinence, and, most notably, the reclamation of prostitutes and the ideal of a ‘‘white life for two’’, or a single standard for men’s and women’s sexual behaviour. This aggregate of issues was consistent with the dominant evangelical ethic of the day, which demanded that the individual take an active role in his or her salvation. The second phase, from about 1890 until the mid-1920s, was characterized by a multiple-pronged remedial public programme³ including, but by no means limited to, the elimination of prostitution⁴ rather than the rehabilitation of prostitutes, preventive medical and public health issues focused on adolescents rather than adults, and a repressive programme of censorship. Yet in the waning days of the conservative evangelical consensus,⁵ Canadian Social Purity thought continued to be defined less often in terms of public campaigns to declare various vices illegal, and more often as personal educational programmes to alter the attitudes of Canadian children and youths so they would choose not to participate in public vice. The emphasis in social issues usually remained on personal redemption rather than on public reform. Further, religious themes and imagery frequently appeared in female-generated Social Purity literature. The essentially religious lens that filtered the Canadian Social Purity message directed to women appears to have made it different from its British

3 David J. Pivar, *Purity Crusade, Sexual Morality and Social Control, 1868–1900* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973), especially chap. 4.

4 Like Mariana Valverde, Carolyn Strange in *Toronto’s Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880–1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995) inaccurately defines prostitution as ‘‘the social evil’’. There is no doubt that prostitution and its perceived deleterious impact on the community was an important component of Social Purity thought and activity, but it was by no means the only one.

5 William Westfall, *Two Worlds: The Protestant Culture of Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989).

and American antecedents. In Britain and the United States, it has been argued, Social Purity was largely secularized by the mid-1890s, operating almost entirely as a policy of social control.⁶ Central to Canadian materials produced by women and used to mould their attitudes was the image of Christian motherhood: selfless, saintly, and expecting all under her influence to choose the ethical rather than the dissolute path.

Social Purity has received some scholarly attention for its significance as a component in the developing feminist critique of American and British society in the late nineteenth century. In his analysis of the American movement, David Pivar suggests that Social Purity was “multidimensional, yet apparently unified”, and that as it “pressed in different directions and possessed various possibilities for potential development ... [it] underwent many changes as it was communicated through the women’s movement and applied locally.”⁷ Ian Tyrrell assesses British imperial and American Social Purity as “gradually constructed program[s] in which pragmatic political objectives and external cultural influences” competed for dominance.⁸ Barbara Epstein contends that the American movement pursued a symbolic crusade for sexual equality by “valorizing the moral role of women in family and society.”⁹ It is clear that there was no single phenomenon that can be termed Social Purity, nor a single group that championed it. Rather, Social Purity ideas were shaped and kneaded to fit the particular fears of most western societies between 1870 and 1930. Although Social Purity spoke to a deep anxiety about changing sex relationships in a secularizing and urban society that seemed to be witnessing the destruction of the family, there were distinct differences in interpretation and even causes depending on location, period, and leadership. Further, differences in interpretation arose from the religiosity and gender of writers and popularizers of the literature through which Social Purity issues were presented, and of the audience to which it was directed.

Canadian historiography associated with Social Purity was long dominated by Michael Bliss’s examination of the eight volumes of the best-selling sex manual in Canada between 1900 and 1915, the “Self and Sex Series”. His study of “Pure Books on Avoided Subjects”, while illuminating an important body of educational literature that had been ignored to that time, approached Purity tracts mainly from the male point of view.¹⁰ Although half

6 Pivar, *Purity Crusade*, especially chap. 4.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

8 Ian Tyrrell, *Woman’s World, Woman’s Empire: The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective, 1880–1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p. 193.

9 Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1981), p. 127.

10 Michael Bliss, “‘Pure Books on Avoided Subjects’: Pre-Freudian Sexual Ideas in Canada” in J. Atherton, J. P. Heisler, and J. Monet, eds., *Historical Papers 1970*, The Canadian Historical Association, p. 90.

of the sex manuals were directed to and written by women, Bliss treats the female literature primarily as a foil for advice given to men. Further, he ignores the issue of whether the authors' gender or religiosity might have influenced the advice proffered. In response to the charge that the "Self and Sex Series" was American in origin and distribution, Bliss asserts that "the few works by Canadians that do exist on the subject are both derivative from and in complete agreement with foreign writers." The gender and cultural blinkers are understandable and excusable in an article predating our sensitivity to such issues. When historians of the 1990s ignore the gender or religiosity of Social Purity representatives, however, they create misleading conclusions about this important social movement and reinforce the persistent disregard of religious content in secular materials.

Our understanding of Canadian Social Purity and its varied manifestations has been enriched by the work of Angus McLaren in *Our Own Master Race*,¹¹ by Mariana Valverde in *The Age of Light, Soap and Water*, and by Carolyn Strange in *Toronto's Girl Problem*. Valverde argues that Canadian Social Purity campaigns were shaped primarily by existing organizations which took up the work, since no effective central authority emerged. Social Purity rhetoric was utilized by women and men in these organizations, suggests Valverde, to advance their own prescriptions of middle-class and Anglo-Saxon race control in a society undergoing fundamental change in its demographic, economic, religious, and social structures. McLaren advances a similar argument, with particular attention paid to the contours and infiltration of eugenic discourse. Neither Valverde nor McLaren gives much credence to religious belief, as opposed to religious organization, as an important determinant of Social Purity's message. Valverde also largely ignores patterns based on gender that transcend organizational boundaries. Carolyn Strange, while granting the gendered nature of Social Purity policies, especially as they were directed towards working-class women, denies any significance to the religious underpinnings of this thought. She even asserts quite unconvincingly that, unlike other centres across Canada, Toronto somehow missed being influenced by the Social Gospel, taking its cues instead from American Progressivism.¹² All three authors use the term "evangelical" as if it were synonymous with "conservative bigot". Yet when one considers Social Purity educational materials and organizations, it is apparent that both religious and gender considerations were fundamental to the belief structure that developed and was promoted to children, youths,

11 Angus McLaren, *Our Own Master Race: Eugenics in Canada, 1885–1945* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1990).

12 Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem*, p. 102. "Elsewhere in English Canada, particularly in the west, attempts to humanize progress were cast in explicitly Christian tones; the 'social gospel' is a more appropriate term for that version of reform and social criticism. In Toronto, however, the civic administration looked for guidance to US cities where Progressives had introduced a social scientific discourse to discussions of city problems."

and adults. Differences in Social Purity thought arose at least partly because of the gender of the authors or sponsors of these materials as well as the audience to whom they were directed. The degree to which the originators identified with evangelical Protestantism also coloured the content of their educational writings.

Such differences can be illustrated by a comparison between the Social Purity educational literature of the male-directed lecture series by A. W. Beall and the British White Cross Society and that of several Canadian women's organizations: the evangelical Woman's Christian Temperance Union, and the non-evangelical Girls' Friendly Society and Anglican Church Mothers' Union. Local minute books, didactic pamphlets, fiction, song, poetry, lectures, and the Canadian "White Life Truths" series all serve to demonstrate that many of the differences in subject and tone arose from the gender and religiosity of the writers and their audience.

One of the Canadian groups most dedicated to education — of children, youth, and its own membership — in social and personal purity was the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. The WCTU had been founded in Canada in 1874 as an association to promote alcohol abstinence. Early in its history it expanded its activities to include, and indeed to focus upon, childhood education in temperance, anti-narcotics, and clean language (the targets of the so-called triple pledge), youth literacy, domestic and industrial arts training, and healthy use of leisure on the part of youths and adults. The WCTU instructed girls, boys, and young people through its network of youth groups, contests, and pamphlets; working-class mothers through its "Mothers' Meetings"; and its own members through lectures, readings, and discussion groups. By the end of the nineteenth century, except for the Women's Institute, the WCTU was the largest non-denominational women's organization in Canada with over 10,000 members, and it remained a potent force in the creation of middle-class community values well into the 1930s.¹³ Many women in the WCTU had also long held to an evangelical interpretation of Protestantism, in which adherents implicitly and explicitly accepted the tenets of "crucicentrism" or a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, conversionism, a deep and literal regard for the Bible, and active evangelism.¹⁴ Women in small-town and rural unions in Ontario embraced this interpretation well into the 1920s and even later. While by the 1920s evangelicalism had ceased to be the dominant form of religion amongst leaders of the Canadian WCTU, educational materials continued to be influenced by evangelical principles.

13 Sharon Anne Cook, *"Through Sunshine and Shadow": The Woman's Christian Temperance Union, Evangelicalism, and Reform in Ontario, 1874–1930* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995).

14 David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), pp. 2–3.

In Ontario, the largest and most robust of its Canadian organizations, the WCTU transmitted its Purity ideas through a vast literature to its local union members. A good deal of this material was produced by the American WCTU publishing house in Evanston, Illinois, but an increasing amount emanated from the Dominion and Ontario WCTU presses in London and Toronto. The literature included fiction and didactic columns in the American *Union Signal* and *The Woman's Journal* in Canada, instructional manuals for leaders of the Purity, Moral, and Mothers' Meetings Departments, youth-oriented song lyrics and poetry, and Social Purity leaflets that could be used for group study and discussion. The union minute books demonstrate how women in local settings received and understood some of this information.

Among the few Protestant denominational women's groups not to affiliate with the Canadian WCTU were those of the Anglican Church. Anglican Women's organizations paralleled those within the WCTU, however, with sectors for single and married women, infants, small children, teenagers, and youths. At least two of these organizations, the Girls' Friendly Society (GFS) and the Mothers' Union, had a strong investment in Purity issues. Like the National Council of Women and the YWCA, the GFS and Mothers' Union were less evangelical than the WCTU, but firmly grounded in religious principle.¹⁵ The major difference between Anglican women's groups, the National Council of Women, the YWCA, and the WCTU was the lack of a dominating evangelical ethic after about 1885 in the former three, while the WCTU, particularly in local unions, retained its evangelical groundings well into the twentieth century.

The Girls' Friendly Society had been organized in 1875 and the Mothers' Union one year later, placing them in the same period as the WCTU. The educational materials of all three organizations are similar in many respects, with the differences mainly attributable to religious interpretation. Purity educational materials produced by the Girls' Friendly Society and the Mothers' Union were included in their journals, organizational handbooks and pamphlets, and study guides. As was the case in the WCTU, all of these ideas were processed through the minute books of individual groups and members' letters.

From the early 1870s until about 1890, there were few differences in men's and women's interpretation of Social Purity: dress reform, pure food campaigns, alcohol and tobacco abstinence, and sexual purity relating to male masturbation and female prostitution dominated the agenda. All of these issues were interpreted through the prevailing evangelical ethic of the day and were also championed in the cause of self-regulation and personal betterment as a means to middle-class status.

15 N. E. S. Giffiths, *The Splendid Vision: Centennial History of the National Council of Women of Canada, 1893-1993* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1993), p. 114.

Social Purists saw the decline in the simplicity of women's dress as emblematic of societal demoralization, "since it symbolized a loss of moral purpose and a loss of social function", underlining for Social Purists the twin dangers to women and society of their secularization and economic irrelevance.¹⁶ Thus, women were provided with a blueprint of how the advancing middle-class woman should behave: she should reject the indolence of the upper-class doyenne, should this be offered, and remember to keep her piety intact. The campaign for modest dress was taken up by several Purity advocates, including Anthony Comstock and Josiah and Deborah Leeds, as a route to defining acceptable, which is to say "improved", social behaviour. It was closely associated with later campaigns to suppress impure advertising and identify objectionable theatrical performances, ballet, social dancing, and especially "pornographic magazines" and "indecent art".¹⁷ Leeds's pamphlet on "Simplicity of Attire in Relation to Social Purity" so impressed Frances Willard, the indomitable president of the American WCTU, that she published it as an official WCTU tract. Willard's contempt for what passed as sophisticated socializing is fully consistent with the evangelical nightmare of self-obsessed, secularized society women wasting their energies on immoral leisure pastimes, as well as with the concomitant movement to distinguish middle-class improving activities from the debauched rituals of either the upper or lower social orders.

A number of articles in *The Woman's Journal* adapted the main precepts of the American WCTU literature on modest dress to the Canadian setting. Wool was recommended as the best possible fabric since it permitted the skin to perspire and thus keep cool in summer and warm in winter. Underclothing was to be kept scrupulously clean, tight lacing and garters were to be avoided, and women who bared "the upper part of their chests and the greater part of their arms" to "promenade in cold banqueting rooms" were to be pitied and disdained.¹⁸

That Willard's thoughts on dress reform found a ready audience in the Ontario WCTU is demonstrated by the following excerpt from the minute book of the Meaford Union. The Recording Secretary reported that "some particular subjects spoken of was [*sic*] being out In the Twilight, In the Evening. In the Dark hours of the night and dressing in Gay attire. Contrast last Chap. of Prov. Describing the virtuous woman and the busy woman."¹⁹

Social Purists searched for evidence of social disintegration, which they believed was rooted in moral contagion and expressed in dietary sloppiness.

16 Pivar, *Purity Crusade*, p. 159.

17 *Ibid.*, pp. 108–110.

18 Archives of Ontario (hereafter AO), WCTU Collection, *The Woman's Journal*, March 15, 1901.

19 AO, WCTU Collection, MU 8426, *Minute Book* of the Meaford WCTU, January 3, 1908.

Dr. J. H. Kellogg, health-food reformer and child literature expert, expressed this clumsily but succinctly when he wrote, “As a man eateth, so he thinketh.”²⁰ Because of their members’ domestic skills and fears, the WCTU organizations in both the United States and Canada seized the issue of diet with particular vigour. Along with many medical authorities of the nineteenth century, the WCTU argued that a “closed system” governed the human body with the resulting requirement for a balanced diet and careful life force expenditure. Overly spicy food, including pork and strong tea or coffee, alcohol, and narcotics such as nicotine first excited the body, then depressed it and finally deranged it, leading to compulsive excess.²¹

Furthermore, strong foods could, it was believed, create an appetite for stronger “stimulants”, such as alcohol and opium. As late as 1910, *The Canadian White Ribbon Tidings*, the new Canadian WCTU journal, reported to mothers that “Coca-Cola is a dangerous medical compound which will originate, engender, cultivate and inflame the desire for stimulants, opiates and narcotics.”²² This inexorable enslavement to one’s passions led to a loss of physical and, worse, of spiritual self-control. To achieve evangelical salvation, the sinner, whether male or female, young or old, must develop self-discipline to ward off the many temptations of daily life. This discipline was reflected in one’s diet, as controlled by the middle-class housewife who cooked and served that food. (WCTU women typically described themselves as running households without the help of domestic servants.) Through her privileged position as homemaker, mother would therefore nourish her family, both spiritually and temporally.

For the Girls’ Friendly Society and Mothers’ Union, the issues of dress²³ and dietary reform²⁴ (as well as personal sexual behaviour) also merged under the familiar rubric of “self-control”. Less evangelical than the WCTU in other respects, both the GFS and the Mothers’ Union were in full agreement with their evangelical sisters on the question of self-discipline. The same motivation to better themselves in class terms is also apparent. Loss of self-regulation in women was a cause for contempt more surely than in men, and particularly working-class men, from whom little could be hoped. As a writer of the GFS put the case:

20 Pivar, *Purity Crusade*, pp. 159–162.

21 See Bliss, “‘Pure Books on Avoided Subjects’”, pp. 99–101. For a WCTU-produced pamphlet reflecting this view, see AO, WCTU Collection, Mrs. Helen I. Bullock, “The Tobacco Toboggan”, National Leaflet No. 32.

22 AO, WCTU Collection, *The Canadian White Ribbon Tidings*, March 1910.

23 Dress reform as an issue was discussed frequently at the meetings of the Ottawa Girls’ Friendly Society, for example at its meeting on October 5, 1895. Anglican Diocesan Archives (hereafter ADA), Ottawa, *Girls’ Friendly Society Associates’ Minute Book and Diocesan Council*.

24 The members of the Ottawa Girls’ Friendly Society also heard “instructive” lectures on cooking and dietary reform. See ADA, Ottawa, *Girls’ Friendly Society Associates’ Minute Book and Diocesan Council*, September 6, 1894, and September 7, 1895.

We are ready to give our allegiance to courage and generosity and those virtues that have in our eyes heroic qualities; but self-control seems to wear a somewhat dull aspect among these brighter sisters. But the Society does wisely in insisting on this very quality of self-control as the ground-plan of a sane, consistent character. Until the foundations are firmly laid, it is in vain to think of building ornamental turrets or tapering spires. And a society that has set Purity as its aim is justified in recognizing self-control as one of the main conditions of its realization.²⁵

While the GFS came to support temperance, and even to include it within the Society's objectives, it considered intemperance to be yet another manifestation of poor self-mastery.

No one who has lived in close contact with working men and women can wonder that drunkenness should be looked upon by many as the parent of all vice and crime; but the root of the evil lies deeper yet. Self-control in *every* form needs to be inculcated upon our young people; self control in food, in dress, in gesture, in language, in amusement, as well as in drink.²⁶

Without any doubt, either, the Purity banner and its message of personal responsibility in all things would be carried forward by women, as had temperance. These were all "essentially a woman's question"²⁷ in the opinion of the GFS and Mothers' Union,²⁸ and "the battle for the purity of womanhood, for the possibility of virtuous Christian maidenhood" would be won only through God's intercession.²⁹ Further, self-discipline would allow its bearers to demarcate themselves through pure behaviours from working-class friends and family.

In the period before 1890, in addition to dress and food reform, Social Purity groups focused on the plight of the prostitute. Within the broader Social Purity movement, two distinct positions developed to combat prostitution. The new abolitionists concentrated on remedial strategies such as rescuing the "fallen woman" and closing brothels, while the moral education wing, heavily dominated by women, sought to eliminate prostitution through appropriate childhood education.³⁰ In its earliest years, the WCTU

25 Mary Heath-Stubbs, *Friendship's Highway: Being the History of the Girls' Friendly Society, 1875–1925* (London: GFS Central Office, 1926), p. 77.

26 *Ibid.*, pp. 77–78.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 78.

28 "The Mothers' Union affirms that the ideal of Christian men and women in this matter is self-control and urges the vital need of the training of the rising generation in self-discipline of body, mind, and spirit." *The Canadian Official Handbook of the Mothers' Union* (Winnipeg, 1953), p. 4. Mothers implored God to "teach us to train our children for Heaven". "The Mothers' Union Prayer", 1926.

29 Heath-Stubbs, *Friendship's Highway*, p. 8.

30 Pivar, *Purity Crusade*, especially chap. 3.

favoured the conservative and occasionally eugenic solutions of the new abolitionists,³¹ but increasingly it carved out a role in providing moral education — of mothers, youths, and children of the working and middle classes.³² By the early 1890s the Canadian WCTU had all but abandoned the former in favour of an emphasis on moral and health education, both in the schools through “Scientific Temperance” and in extracurricular youth groups. So, too, did the Girls’ Friendly Society and the Mothers’ Union, as well as groups like the YWCA, view the solution to prostitution to be moral protection and education of girls.³³ Angus MacLaren argues that typical female-directed childhood health instruction of the period denigrated parental authority through the widespread use of purported experts.³⁴ Yet, until long after the First World War, health instruction remained intimately associated with moral rectitude in childhood education, and particularly in educational programmes operating within a Christian context, as was the case with all of these women’s groups. The moral sphere remained woman’s domain. Thus, while the father’s role may well have been diminished, mother’s definitely was not.

A typical Canadian-produced WCTU fiction piece, dating from 1891 and representative of the new abolitionism, portrayed the troubled prostitute, reckless Belle, and her child out of wedlock, Nell. Belle, who is 20 “but looks 40 with make-up”, had tried to reform her life after her child’s birth, but discovers that no one seems willing to give her a second chance, so she returns to her “life of sin”. The portrayal of Belle’s sin is somewhat mitigated by the evil presence of her father, with whom a sinister relationship is hinted, and by the fact that she provides well and lovingly for her daughter, bringing bread, meat, and cakes for them to share, talking gently and caringly with the little girl, and guiding her as well as she can manage through a childhood of poverty. Eventually, though, Belle is sentenced to six months in jail for prostitution:

31 Christabelle Sethna in “Men, Sex and Education” identifies the WCTU agenda as “eugenic”. This is not supported by my reading of the WCTU records, in which an evangelically based discourse of salvation open to all persisted. See also Valverde, “‘When the Mother of the Race is Free’”; Carol Lee Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred? The Ideas of the English-Canadian Suffragists, 1877–1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), especially chap. 7.

32 The extensive WCTU-sponsored educational programmes in support of Social Purity were directed to working-class boys (e.g., the Bands of Hope), girls (e.g., Kitchen Garden Programme) and mothers (e.g., Mothers’ Meetings), as well as to the middle classes. Mariana Valverde is incorrect in suggesting that “it is clear that the mainstream women’s organizations (WCTU, NCW, YWCA) were generally aimed at preserving the purity and respectability of middle-class or respectable working-class womanhood.” Valverde, *In the Age of Light, Soap and Water*, p. 64.

33 The YWCA argued that young women drifted into prostitution because of loneliness and lack of suitable companionship and guidance. The YWCA seems not to have produced pamphlets for young women on this or other Social Purity themes, but may well have used materials produced by such groups as the WCTU. I am grateful to Diana Pedersen for this information.

34 See MacLaren, *Our Own Master Race*, pp. 69, 71.

It was a scene for a painter, a dingy court room, the blue-coated officers, the crowd of idlers, the bold-faced girl [Belle] who had preserved her air of bravado through it all, now holding in her arms the little child with its tangled hair and big, wild eyes. An officer attempted to take her away but the girl fought like a tiger cat.

A WCTU woman, “the angel of the court room”, arrives in the nick of time, convinces Belle to hand over little Nell, and takes the child to a WCTU kindergarten-home. Nell is stricken with consumption and “the angel of the court room” arranges for Belle to be released early to be with her child in her last days:

When Belle arrived they took her to the door and left her, and she opened it very softly. The light came in at the open window, the little white draped bed, the stand filled with fruit and flowers, the golden-haired child, were all covered with its radiance; much of the hard look had faded from Belle’s face, though the mouth still retained its proud, defiant curve, but at the sight of the little, helpless child, all the love (which is in every woman’s heart, even if the weeds do choke it out) sprang up as she threw herself on her knees by the tiny bed.

Of course, in a Christ-like analogy of sacrifice for sin, the innocent Nell must die, and in so doing convinces or converts her errant mother to personal salvation and reform. After spending some months with a (middle-class) family many miles away to make a fresh start in life, Belle works with women amongst “the lowest and most wretched”, convincing them to choose a life of Purity and, presumably, refinement.³⁵ Here, women save other women in a chain of womanly evangelical passion. So, too, do they make it possible for women to improve the material and spiritual terms of their lives.

The second approach to prostitution and to Social Purity generally was that of moral education. This was far more common than the new abolitionism amongst the Canadian WCTU, the GFS, and the Mothers’ Union and was consistent with the emphasis on shaping youthful character. The GFS declared itself ready to “convey to young girls at the formative period of their characters the influence of earnest women, who through friendship, sympathy and prayer, help to keep them in touch with the best things of life”.³⁶ Similarly, in the “Battle Song of the Y’s”, the members of the young women’s sector of the WCTU, the YWCTU, celebrated their personal purity, in anticipation of the influence they would wield as mothers in their own homes:

35 AO, WCTU Collection, MS 883, Mindah E. Merrifield, “A Brand From the Fire”, *The Woman’s Journal*, January 1891.

36 ADA, *Annual Report of the Girls’ Friendly Society in Canada*, Toronto, 1924.

There's a shadow on the home, many hearts are sad to-day,
 It hushes e'en the laughter of the children at their play,
 At its coming want and sorrow across the threshold creep,
 And amid their broken idols the mourning mothers weep.

Chorus:

We are coming to the rescue; we are coming in our youth!
 The homes we build to-morrow shall be guarded by the truth;
 We are coming, coming to the battle of purity and right;
 And for a winsome token we wear the ribbon white.

There's a wrong in all the land and the beautiful are slain;
 Amid her graves the nation counts her revenue of shame,
 While the price of blood is taken in legislative halls,
 A smitten manhood crouches in the gloom of prison walls.

There's an evil in the land, and the kingdom of our Lord
 Is hindered in its coming; then arise with one accord!
 And put away the wine-cup that threaten love and home,
 For the judgment surely cometh, and God is on the throne.³⁷

Who can save “smitten manhood” and “mourning mothers”? Only young women “coming to the rescue” who wear the white ribbon and who engage in the battle for Purity education and the restoring of the Lord’s Kingdom. And how will this rescue be effected? By building homes that “shall be guarded by the truth” and that will stand firm in the final divine judgement. Women’s entitlement to leading civilization towards a purer and (class) elevated future is obvious. Yet this was never envisioned as an exclusionary process. Any woman willing to accept the challenge of saving her home and family had it within her power to improve her loved ones’ prospects — on this earth and beyond.

In this context, the assertion by Mariana Valverde that the evangelical women of the WCTU considered black mothers to be inadequate as “the mothers of the race” demands a response.³⁸ She finds in the WCTU records evidence of a denigration of motherhood as practised by non-Anglo-Saxon women: “It is clear that ... not all actual mothers qualify as ‘real’ mothers.” This reading of the documentary and organizational record seems unfair and ahistoric, based on an incomplete consideration of the WCTU’s motives and initiatives.

37 AO, WCTU Collection, MS 883, *The Woman’s Journal*, November 1890.

38 For another critical view of Mariana Valverde’s contentions that racist views were held by Protestant churchmen in early twentieth-century Canada, see Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada, 1900–1940* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), chap. 5.

The members of the WCTU, an organization characterized by a membership with little formal education, enduring loyalty to local interdenominational networks of men and women, and a strong social and religious ethic, were, above all, women of their time.³⁹ They did not pretend to understand the problematic of ‘‘race’’ any better than their national political leaders, who demonstrated considerable bigotry. But while they were by and large Anglo-Saxon women, devoted to the ascendancy of the British Empire, they were also and much more viscerally devoted to the welfare of the family unit. Their analysis of what had gone wrong with the burgeoning society of late nineteenth-century Canada had much more to do with its loss of morality than with any perceived threat to Anglo-Saxon dominance. The root of that morality — in the view of the WCTU, the GFS, the Mother’s Union, the National Council of Women, and a host of other women’s groups in this era — was realized in women’s mission: to save their families from destruction, and thus to save their society. As a means of supporting all mothers — Anglo-Saxon and non-Anglo-Saxon — the WCTU first solicited black women members at the Ontario provincial level in 1894 when Minnie Phelps established a ‘‘department of work among coloured people’’. The WCTU plan seems to have been to establish an independent department and sometimes black unions, much as it had done with outstanding success amongst young women through the YWCTU. The objective was clearly to give black women support in controlling alcohol consumption amongst their husbands and sons. While offering the possibility of leadership to black women in Ontario communities, the WCTU was careful not to create formal segregation, surely a decision far ahead of its time. The YWCTU model would have permitted independent projects where they seemed appropriate and cooperative effort by the entire organization when this seemed to be needed. The intention, then, was to incorporate black women into the organization by finding common ground as evangelical mothers.

Although the promise of large-scale black involvement in the WCTU was never realized, a good number of black unions and departments were founded and persisted into the 1920s. For example, in 1914 ‘‘coloured’’ unions or departments existed in Guelph, Stratford, Woodstock, Ingersoll, Windsor, London, Owen Sound, Brantford, St. Catharines, Sarnia, and Niagara Falls.⁴⁰ The suggestion that the WCTU was dismissive of the power and authority of black mothers is therefore belied by the organization’s evangelically grounded rationale and by its actions in encouraging black women to join.

If families were to be rescued, particularly working-class families of any race, their women must be protected. Many women’s groups of the era went to great lengths to pull young working-class women out of harm’s way. The Canadian WCTU and the YWCA had an active ‘‘Travelers’ Aid’’ programme from the 1880s until the 1950s. Young working women new to

39 Cook, ‘‘*Through Sunshine and Shadow*’’.

40 AO, WCTU Collection, *Annual Report of the Ontario WCTU*, 1915.

Canada were met at railway stations by volunteers who directed them to safe hostels until they could become established in the city. Similarly, one of the prime functions of the GFS was to refer young female emigrants through letters of introduction to trusted women in new locations to which they were travelling.⁴¹ In many cities, “Rest Lodges” were provided by the GFS as safe havens for young women travelling by workmen’s trains and arriving in towns or cities before the place of work opened. Lodges often had restaurants associated with them and convalescent wards for working girls in need of special care.⁴² Thus a supportive network was carefully created to prevent a young woman from “falling” into sin, since the family for which she would one day serve as moral compass was so dependent on her purity.

Local GFS groups arranged connections for young working-class women who were relocating. For example, the Ottawa GFS noted in its minute book:

Another [letter] from Miss Turner, thanking us for kindness to Emily Eldridge, who has returned to her home in Brighton; from Winnifred Miles, who has joined the G.F.S. Montreal & from her sister, thanking us for looking after Winnifred, from Winnifred Meade, who is at the Golf Club, from the matron of the Cricceth House, asking us to take an interest in Sarah Abbott. Miss C. Luieth then reported the case of Alice Corker to whom the G.F.S. gave a grant of \$2.50 to help her to get to Gravenhurst Sanatorium.⁴³

To protect a woman’s purity further, the GFS set up employment registries for young women undertaking domestic labour. Should a young woman succumb to impurity, she immediately relinquished any privileges she may have had in the GFS: “No girl who has not borne a virtuous character to be admitted as a Member; such character being lost, the Member to forfeit her card.”⁴⁴ In all cases, however, women were seen as possessing a finer purity with a much greater capacity to shun sin than men. Thus women were seen to be more effective in saving other young women or men in danger. As one leader in the Ottawa GFS wrote in a paper to her associates: “So much might be said about woman’s sympathy and influence, for we all have so much more influence than we suspect.”⁴⁵

41 The Society’s third aim was “To provide the privileges of the Society for its members wherever they may be, by giving them an introduction from one Branch to another.” ADA, no author, *A Short Report of the Girls’ Friendly Society and Its Work in 1909* (London: Girls’ Friendly Society, 1909).

42 By the 1920s in Canada there were three lodges, in Montreal, Hamilton, and Toronto, and two holiday houses and camps in Hamilton and Winnipeg. ADA, *Annual Report of the Girls’ Friendly Society in Canada*, 1924.

43 ADA, Ottawa, *Girls’ Friendly Society Associates’ Minute Book and Diocesan Council*, March 14, 1907.

44 ADA, *A Short Report of the Girls’ Friendly Society*.

45 ADA, L. C. Wicksteed, paper read before the Annual Meeting of the Girls’ Friendly Society, St. George’s School House, Ottawa, 1890.

Similarly, the Mothers' Union produced large quantities of literature, including fiction pieces and plays to be acted out in study groups, portraying the influence of mature women on female friends, neighbours, and kin who appeared likely to stray from purity. In the sketch, "The Crawfords Keep Christmas", Molly Crawford's sister Gwen and her husband Bill arrive for a family visit. It is immediately clear that the marriage is troubled and that Gwen, childless and working, intends to separate from Bill. Gwen describes her unhappiness:

I never ought to have married, I'm just not the type. ... I love my independence too much. I love office life and my job, and I hate housework and cookery and all the senseless chit chat that goes on between women especially about their children. I like working with men.

Molly reminds her wayward sister of the necessity of keeping promises, a quality that had always distinguished her in the past, and supports her in her growing commitment to save her marriage. Gwen decides to give up her job, investigate adoption, and rededicate herself to "loyalty in thought and imagination". "I feel as though a running sore had been healed, or as though my stony heart had been turned to flesh," says Gwen.⁴⁶

In another Mothers' Union fiction piece, Mrs. Clifton, engaged in spring cleaning, is approached by a friend to save her marriage. Mr. Blackwood is preparing to leave his wife, who is frantic with worry. In this charming story through which Mrs. Clifton elicits the roots of the stormy relationship and gently counsels Mrs. Blackwood to see the dangers of her tendency to alter truth to her advantage, there is no suggestion on the part of any of the characters that Mrs. Blackwood requires professional help from the "experts". Instead, what is needed is personal reflection on moral principle, aided, of course, by the wise ministrations of a pure and intelligent woman friend.⁴⁷ In both of these stories there is a strong sense of women's culpability and power. The problems are largely the fault of the two wives, and the solutions lie within the women themselves. These two middle-class husbands are portrayed as baffled and unable to deal effectively with domestic crisis, but never malevolent; the WCTU was fond of depicting middle-class men in the same way. Husbands had much in common with household pets, it seemed: they should be pampered, well fed, and protected from the vagaries of domestic upheaval since their well-documented incompetence in these matters made them particularly burdensome at such times. In both cases, too, the wives' faults endanger not only their own and their husbands' happiness, but also that of their extended and nuclear families through a possible loss of respectability. Thus, class slippage and all its terrors are seen to be intimately associated with impurity.

46 ADA, "The Crawfords Keep Christmas", Mothers' Union Literature, n.d.

47 ADA, Helen McCabe, "A Bit of Spring Cleaning", Mothers' Union Literature, n.d.

Without any doubt, Canadian women's organizations directing Purity literature to other women found their most effective proponent in mothers. This message — one might almost call it a creed — of mothers' special role in Social Purity found expression in all such materials generated by the WCTU, the GFS, and the Mothers' Union. A version of the creed of motherhood also crept into more generic materials, such as the Social Purity lectures given by Arthur Beall as a travelling lecturer for the Ontario Department of Education. In these, however, mother's nature was more narrowly defined as self-sacrificing and patient. David Pivar notes of the American movement that "Motherhood was the social religion sanctified through self-abnegation."⁴⁸ This portrayal most closely reflects the male interpretation of the creed of motherhood in Canada. In women's literature, however, mother is most often presented as profoundly pious, wise, strong, and level-headed. Far more than self-denying, this mother had an active, intelligent, and central role in the campaign for Social Purity. The creed of motherhood was developed and sustained by women's organizations at least until the 1950s.

An article in *The Canadian White Ribbon Tidings* has a "noble" young lad assert, "'You may laugh if you want to ... but I've made up my mind never, as long as I live, to do anything I would be ashamed to tell my mother.' We need a thousand boys to talk like that."⁴⁹ A pamphlet produced by the Canadian Dominion WCTU intoned:

I wish that our youth would learn the beauty and charm of a pure life. No outward garb, however genteel or beautiful, can cover uncleanness in thought or in word or deed. The coarse jest, the vile story and unclean insinuations are certain evidences of depraved natures. A Good Rule: Do not listen to anything, say anything or do anything that you cannot unblushingly tell your mother.⁵⁰

Children competing in the Canadian WCTU Medal Contests were permitted to choose selections for recitation from poems and stories provided by the Dominion Superintendent for Medal Contests. The following item was made available for Canadian children between 1916 and 1922. It also underscores the importance of mother's purity in sustaining a son's resolve:

A Boy's Promise

The school was out, and down the street,
A noisy crowd came thronging,

48 Pivar, *Purity Crusade*, p. 170.

49 *The Canadian White Ribbon Tidings*, April 1910.

50 AO, WCTU Collection, MU 8396, Stella Blanchard Irvine, "Wish Bones", WCTU Canadian Literature Depository, n.d.

The hue of health and gladness sweet
 To every face belonging.
 Among them, strode a little lad,
 Who listened to another,
 And mildly said, half grave, half sad,
 "I can't; I promised mother."

A shout went up, a ringing shout
 Of boisterous derision,
 But not one moment left in doubt
 That manly brave decision.
 "Go where you please, do what you will,"
 He calmly told the other.
 "But I shall keep my word boys, still;
 "I can't; I promised mother."

Ah, who could doubt the future course
 Of one who thus had spoken?
 Through manhood's struggle, gain and loss,
 Could faith like this be broken?
 God's blessing on that steadfast will,
 Unyielding to another,
 That bears all jeers and laughter still,
 Because he promised mother.⁵¹

Intended as a performance piece for both girls and boys competing in Medal Contests, the poem bears the stamp of female-produced Purity literature from the period immediately following the Great War.

The creed of mother's power in female-generated Social Purity literature was reinforced amongst Anglican women through the aegis of the Mothers' Union. This group was representative of many denominational organizations for mothers and of the WCTU "mothers' meetings" held across Canada. They had a double mandate: to reinforce mothers' purity, and to educate and monitor the next generation in the development of pure behaviours. In the case of the Anglican Mothers' Union, the objectives were to unite women in prayer and dedication to the sanctification of marriage and to "awaken all mothers to a sense of their responsibility of training their children" in purity and holiness.⁵² The Anglican Mothers' Union was far less evangelical than either the GFS or the WCTU. Florence Puddicombe, longtime president of the Ottawa Diocesan Mothers' Union, sent the following acrostic message to the membership in her 1949 Christmas letter:

51 AO, WCTU Collection, MU 8285, Mrs. Colbec, ed., *The Canadian W.C.T.U. Medal Contest Book*, No. 4, n.d.

52 ADA, *Minute Book* of Ottawa Diocesan Mothers' Union, October 16, 1946.

Motherhood is a Mission:

Mission of Mercy	M
Mission of Obedience	O
Mission of Trust	T
Mission of Honour	H
Mission of Endeavour	E
Mission of Reward	R

... we remember all those virtues are incorporated in the name we are privileged to hear, "Mother".⁵³

The post-1890 Social Purity campaign waged by the WCTU in Canada was devoted to ferreting out impure literature and public entertainment, having it eliminated, and educating working-class mothers about a wide range of Purity issues through Mothers' Meetings (including infant and child care, sex education, nutrition, and pure food preparation).⁵⁴ The GFS, alerted to the many "dangers of circulating bad literature", went further in providing appropriate reading materials for its membership by organizing two "reading unions".⁵⁵ The Mothers' Union established a "Watch and Social Problems Committee" which concerned itself with such issues as "Harmful Publications, Cinema Clubs, Accidents in the Home, and Instruction on Marriage in the Schools".⁵⁶ Most importantly, however, the WCTU, GFS, and Mothers' Union all focused their energies on educating children and youths about the dangers of impurity and the rewards of a pure life. Produced by women largely from outside formal institutions of power, religious or secular, and imbued with a strong sense of Christian responsibility for oneself, ultimately all of these Social Purity materials were designed to convince the individual woman, man, girl, or boy of personal sinfulness, to present the alternate moral route to Purity, and to encourage individuals to embark on that path. Mass campaigns were supportive in this personal struggle, but the weight of responsibility to lead a pure life rested most heavily on an individual's soul, not the collective unit. Women were educated in Social Purity through the WCTU, GFS, and Mothers' Union journals, as well as entertainments and lectures at their meetings. Children, both male and female, were educated through the Purity pamphlet series produced by male and female organizations to reach a varied public. A sample of these materials from the period between 1890 and 1930 illustrates the contrast between the Social Purity educational message as propounded by Christian

53 ADA, letter from Florence Puddicombe to "Friends and Fellow Members", Ottawa Diocesan Mothers' Union, December 30, 1949.

54 See, for example, the Kingsville WCTU Mother's Meetings as reported in *The Canadian White Ribbon Tidings*, January 1910.

55 *Ibid.*

56 ADA, "The Church's Home Guard", The Mothers' Union, n.d.

women's organizations for female readers and that produced for a Christian male audience.

The central image of mother as an exemplar of Purity became a mainstay of the lectures given by Arthur W. Beall, the Ontario WCTU's "Purity agent" between 1905 and 1911 and, thereafter through the 1930s, a Purity lecturer employed by the Ontario Department of Education. Beall's position on Purity education had been shaped by his early association with the WCTU, yet he presented women less as agents of change and more as sentimentalized martyrs for young men. This was a paler, more circumscribed role than appears in women's Social Purity literature. His remarks to the women of the Richmond Hill WCTU in 1927 were interpreted in this bland way by the local Union's Recording Secretary:

In introducing the subject of social hygiene, Mr. Baele [*sic*] said that the name often antagonized people who thought that it was merely combatting social diseases, but means the best methods of giving to the community moral and mental health ... as mothers we should safe guard our families against it by knowledge of the care of the body ... the duty of every mother is to teach obedience, truth and self respect which is the basic principle of good citizenship.⁵⁷

Beall expanded on this theme in his 1933 handbook on Social Purity, a set of ten "lessons" that closely followed the lectures provided to thousands of Ontario schoolchildren. For example, in lesson 8, delivered to boys after the girls had been dismissed, Beall proclaims "for on the day that you were born your mother went down into the Valley of the Shadow of Death so that you might live.... Your mother A-L-M-O-S-T went."⁵⁸ To both boys and girls, Beall asks: "Look here, girls and boys, if such a picture is not fit for your mother to look at, is it fit for you to look at? No, indeed! And you won't dream of doing so."⁵⁹

One of the reasons that Arthur Beall dismissed girls from some of his lectures was that issues thought to be peculiar to male personal purity, such as masturbation, needed to be given dramatic exposition. The arguments against self-abuse were frankly terrorist. Examples were colourful and disturbing, much in the tradition of early temperance stories in which subjects quickly descended into unspeakable personal agony, losing ability, family, fortune, and public respect. There was the infamous and pathetic boy from Perth County who

57 AO, WCTU Collection, MU 8428, *Minute Book* of the Richmond Hill WCTU, October 4, 1927.

58 Arthur W. Beall, M.A., *The Living Temple: A Manual on Eugenics for Parents and Teachers* (Whitby: A. B. Penhale Publishing Co., 1933), p. 53.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 33.

couldn't keep his hands off the MALE PART of his body — a half dozen times a day he was playing with it, and bleeding away the precious LIFE FLUID, until one day the doctors came along and cut off the two LIFE GLANDS, just to keep the miserable dregs of a miserable existence from all being frittered away. And there [in the asylum], after all these years, useless to God or man, he still exists as a bit of mental punk, a scrap of rotting refuse on life's highway.⁶⁰

Nothing in female-produced or directed Purity literature comes close to this level of exaggerated expression. It deals not only with a topic which authorities thought was utterly outside female experience, but in a manner consistent with male-focused Purity educational works.

Literature produced by the White Cross Society provides a further contrast to female-generated and directed Social Purity writings. The Church of England had initiated the White Cross Society in 1883 "to promote social purity and to assist young men in their resistance to illicit sexual relations".⁶¹ It soon gained status as a church organization and was extended throughout the British Empire.⁶² Two years later a White Cross Army was established as a secular organization in New York, and by the early 1890s Social Purity had become a mass movement across the United States. Firmly entrenched in the Anglican Church, Social Purity was adopted by most Protestant denominations by the late 1880s and by liberal Catholics in the mid-1890s. By 1895 the YMCA, too, had become an enthusiastic supporter of White Cross Leagues, as had the Epworth League.⁶³ A comparable girls' association, the White Shield Society, was created by Frances Willard under the auspices of the American WCTU.⁶⁴ But where the male leagues were usually connected to municipal reform,⁶⁵ female Social Purity was expressed through the women's movement and religiosity. David Pivar sees Social Purity after 1890 operating as a control mechanism in moulding the new citizen; no longer did religious precept serve as a primary motivator, he argues. Instead, Social Purity can more accurately be viewed as a social hygiene movement which utilized religious imagery to reach a broader audience. "By injecting the religious factor into popular health movements, hygienic and dietary reforms acquired eschatological meaning and became

60 *Ibid.*, p. 65.

61 Pivar, *Purity Crusade*, p. 111.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 111. In the mid-twentieth century, the White Cross Society became incorporated into the Church Boys' League.

63 Pivar, *Purity Crusade*, pp. 186–190.

64 Frances E. Willard, *Glimpses of Fifty Years: The Autobiography of An American Woman* (Chicago: Woman's Temperance Publication Association, 1889), p. 429.

65 Carolyn Strange predicated her discussion of Social Purity in Toronto on the assumption that it was rooted in urban reform initiatives, a view which my reading of Social Purity educational materials suggests is incorrect.

pregnant with moral purpose.’’⁶⁶ This may well have been true for young men, caught up on the urban reform movements of the “city beautiful”, but many women found religious precept satisfyingly supportive of current notions of female moral superiority. For such women, including those of the WCTU, GFS, and Mothers’ Unions, an appreciation of the distinctions between male and female Social Purity ideas must include religious principle as an important and enduring factor.⁶⁷ As a further demonstration of these varying life-views, the White Cross Series entitled “For Men Only”, probably produced between 1895 and 1914, differed dramatically in tone and subject from other female-produced Social Purity materials.

The White Cross Pamphlet Series presented the problem of impurity as one largely created by women’s intellectual and physical weakness, with the concomitant solution resting entirely with the strengthened male. A natural expression of “muscular Christianity”, the imagery tended to be medieval or militaristic, with archaic language used to give an extra flourish. In Ellice Hopkins’s pamphlet, for example, “My Little Sister”, young men are told that “if you look at the best and highest men, the men who are touched to fine issues, you will find them knightly men, thoroughly chivalrous in their conduct towards women.”⁶⁸ Women are weak and dependent on men to correct injustice: “Young men, I write unto you because you are strong; use your strength to protect our dear girls from the devils in human form that lie everywhere in wait for them. Never was knight of old more needed than you are to take up the cause of the wronged, the helpless, the unprotected.”⁶⁹ Impurity, like other historical evils such as witch-burning, duelling, and drunkenness, “each in turn has been conquered by brave Christian men daring to resist them.”⁷⁰ Women are naive and childish, “having none to care for them; some flung out by the hand of the very man they loved and trusted, some drugged and trapped; some leaping down of their own free will on that fatal stage of death in pursuit of some childish bauble, unknowing of the bitter end till it is too late to escape.”⁷¹ Women had significance only in the private sphere; men had significance in both the private and the public: “impurity in the woman destroys the family, but impurity in the man destroys the wider family of the nation.”⁷²

To convince young men to take up this noble work, the White Cross Series, like Arthur Beall’s lectures and the “Self and Sex Series”, endeavoured to frighten recalcitrant male youths into compliance. Young men were

66 Pivar, *Purity Crusade*, p. 171; see also pp. 169–175.

67 This is in contrast to simply considering the denominational association of various Social Purity advocates, as Mariana Valverde has done.

68 AO, WCTU Collection, Ellice Hopkins, “My Little Sister”, The White Cross Series, n.d.

69 *Ibid.*

70 AO, WCTU Collection, Rev. A. G. Butler, “An Evil Tradition”, The White Cross Series No. 6.

71 *Ibid.*

72 AO, WCTU Collection, Ellice Hopkins, “What Can We Do?”

told that self-abuse took hold gradually but steadily with the inevitable end being the ruin of one's constitution. Physical and mental powers atrophied, with the victim suffering from weakness and disease, a failing memory, and a loss of interest in nature, athletics, society, and "good" books.

Contrast this approach with the Canadian WCTU Social Purity literature series called "White Life Truths". Probably dating from the early 1920s, the message and connotations were very different from the White Cross Series, and even from Arthur Beall's message to Ontario school children. For example, "A Schoolroom Story" tells of the problems faced by a Sunday School teacher when reading with her class of Christ's conception. A shame-faced grin makes the rounds of her mixed class. The female teacher protests, "We never treat other verses in this way. When from other passages you have taken a low thought it was never allowed to pass until a higher thought had been given to crowd out the lower." The teacher is offended. "All God's works are beautiful and good. Yet some of us are so separated from God by sin that in our ignorance and folly we think meanly of that which in itself is good." She proceeds with the class through an object lesson of ways that mother beans or mother birds protect and nurture their young; the class is encouraged to discuss the natural hierarchy of life, with a bean worth less than a bird, a bird less than a child. "The shame-faced look was gone and now thirty pairs of bright, frank, sympathetic eyes were looking straight into mine." The teacher follows up this breakthrough with the questionable promise that God has ensured that none of us come into this world without two strong, loving parents to guide and protect us. But her clinching notion is reminiscent of Beall's lectures about the special nature of mother love:

"There is just this about it all, boys, whenever I think of your mother and mine I think of Christ. He gave His life for us. Mother has gone to the very border of the grave to give us life...." The eyes that looked into mine were dimmed with tears. Heads were slowly bowed. After a short silence some mothers' hearts would have bounded with joy *could* they have heard the tone in which one boy said, "My, we ought to be good for our mothers!"⁷³

Where the British White Cross series glorified man's pugilistic and moral might, the Canadian "White Life Truths" mirrored a large body of female-generated Social Purity literature which honoured a mother's purity and sturdiness, selfless love, and Christly example as the signposts for young men and women seeking the path to Social Purity. Without doubt, the "White Life Truths" series was also intended for WCTU members' study in Mothers' Meetings. The sample story's last sentence seems aimed at hopeful mother readers.

73 AO, WCTU Collection, MU 8288, F. A. Danard, "A Schoolroom Story", White Life Truths Purity Pamphlet (Toronto: Henderson & Co., n.d.).

Social Purity programmes and literature were often distinct to culture and gender. There can be no doubt that men and women understood the principles of Social Purity differently, and that educational materials intended for boys and girls, youths and adults reflected these differences. It ought not surprise us that literature purporting to inculcate the same information and principles actually presents two differing accounts of power and responsibility. So it was with Social Purity materials: they remind us that women and men did perceive social ills differently, that religiosity remained a vibrant and living faith for many, particularly for many women, as they approached problems under the banner of Social Purity, and that these religious understandings were applied to social ills in an effort to avert the horrors of an irresponsible and self-absorbed society.