

## Protestants, the Liberal State, and the Practice of Politics: Revisiting R.J. Fleming and the 1890s Toronto Streetcar Controversy

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### Résumé de l'article

Par le prisme de R. J. Fleming, homme d'affaires méthodiste d'origine irlandaise, conseiller municipal et maire de Toronto élu à quatre reprises dans les années 1890, le présent article jette un nouveau regard sur les campagnes de réforme morale des protestants de la classe moyenne décrites par Christopher Armstrong et H. V. Nelles dans leur désormais célèbre étude *The Revenge of the Methodist Bicycle Company* (1977). Au lieu d'examiner la question de la circulation de tramways le dimanche du point de vue des défenseurs de cette idée et d'une attestation de la sécularisation, il fait une étude de cas du rôle conflictuel et controversé de Fleming à titre d'homme politique évangélique confronté à une pomme de discorde sur le plan moral et religieux dans l'État libéral de la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Les débats savants sur la sécularisation à la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle au Canada se sont peu intéressés à l'influence du moment et à la nature des arrangements politiques du pays et n'ont ainsi pas traité des contradictions et des tensions entre le nouvel État et l'ordre social avec lesquelles les hommes politiques dévots ont dû composer. Cet article avance qu'il faut faire une distinction importante, mais souvent négligée, entre la sécularisation politique et sociale. Avec le souci du détail, il examine Fleming sous l'angle d'un « modernisateur évangélique » qui, à titre de politicien, devait assurer la neutralité de l'État tout en tenant compte des préoccupations des électeurs religieux craignant qu'un vote favorable aux tramways du dimanche entraîne la sécularisation sociale.

# Protestants, the Liberal State, and the Practice of Politics: Revisiting R.J. Fleming and the 1890s Toronto Streetcar Controversy\*

MARGUERITE VAN DIE

## *Abstract*

*Through the lens of R. J. Fleming, Irish Methodist businessman, alderman, and four times mayor of Toronto in the 1890s, this paper re-examines the moral reform campaigns of middle-class Protestants described by Christopher Armstrong and H. V. Nelles in their now classic study, The Revenge of the Methodist Bicycle Company (1977). Instead of looking at the Sunday car issue from the perspective of the promoters and as evidence of secularization, it presents as a case study Fleming's conflicted and controversial role as an evangelical politician confronted with a divisive moral and religious issue within the late nineteenth-century liberal state. Scholarly debates on the process of secularization in late nineteenth-century Canada have given little attention to the influence of the timing and nature of the country's political arrangements and have thus neglected the contradictions and tensions devout politicians faced within the new state and social order. This paper argues the need to make an important but often overlooked distinction between political and social secularization. With close attention to detail, it examines Fleming as an "evangelical modernizer" who as a politician had to maintain the neutrality of the state and at the same time address the concerns of a religious constituency that feared a favourable vote on Sunday cars would lead to social secularization.*

## *Résumé*

*Par le prisme de R. J. Fleming, homme d'affaires méthodiste d'origine irlandaise, conseiller municipal et maire de Toronto élu à quatre reprises*

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*dans les années 1890, le présent article jette un nouveau regard sur les campagnes de réforme morale des protestants de la classe moyenne décrites par Christopher Armstrong et H. V. Nelles dans leur désormais célèbre étude *The Revenge of the Methodist Bicycle Company* (1977). Au lieu d'examiner la question de la circulation de tramways le dimanche du point de vue des défenseurs de cette idée et d'une attestation de la sécularisation, il fait une étude de cas du rôle conflictuel et controversé de Fleming à titre d'homme politique évangélique confronté à une pomme de discorde sur le plan moral et religieux dans l'État libéral de la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Les débats savants sur la sécularisation à la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle au Canada se sont peu intéressés à l'influence du moment et à la nature des arrangements politiques du pays et n'ont ainsi pas traité des contradictions et des tensions entre le nouvel État et l'ordre social avec lesquelles les hommes politiques dévots ont dû composer. Cet article avance qu'il faut faire une distinction importante, mais souvent négligée, entre la sécularisation politique et sociale. Avec le souci du détail, il examine Fleming sous l'angle d'un « modernisateur évangélique » qui, à titre de politicien, devait assurer la neutralité de l'État tout en tenant compte des préoccupations des électeurs religieux craignant qu'un vote favorable aux tramways du dimanche entraîne la sécularisation sociale.*

Few cities have debated the question of what constitutes urban well-being as ardently as Toronto “the Good.” Where today the discussion centres on such topics as public transit and gang-related violence, in the 1890s the red-hot issue that brought citizens to the polls in droves was whether or not the Toronto Railway Company should be permitted to run its cars on Sundays. As part of a larger citizens’ concern about municipal corruption and the need for reform, the story has been told by Christopher Armstrong and H. V. Nelles in their now classic and often entertaining study, *The Revenge of the Methodist Bicycle Company*. It arrays the supporters of Sunday cars, led by the city’s progressive businessmen and the Toronto Railway Company, against a self-righteous evangelical Protestant middle class, the “Saints,” alert to resist the march of progress and maintain their waning influence within an industrializing city.<sup>1</sup>

This article focuses on a member of the latter group, Robert J.

Fleming, who served as the city's mayor in 1892, 1893, and 1897 when successive plebiscites were held to decide the Sunday car issue. A Methodist and prohibitionist, Fleming has been depicted by Armstrong and Nelles as continuing the unpopular moralistic approach to civic reform of his predecessor William Howland, who served as mayor in 1886 and 1887. In keeping with the perspective of the *World* and *Saturday Night*, papers highly in favour of Toronto's "unbluing," Fleming, the son of poor Irish immigrants, appears in their account as "the people's Bob," a populist with dubious political credentials, who naively facilitated the 1897 plebiscite that resulted finally in the acceptance of Sunday streetcars. In so doing, he played a central role in what they consider a victory for secularization in a modernizing, industrializing city.<sup>2</sup> Drawing on some of their research, but also on Fleming's extensive collection of personal papers and such supportive newspapers as the *Globe*, the *Telegram*, and the *News* (until 1893), this article offers a different perspective. Instead of looking at the Sunday car issue from the viewpoint of the promoters, it presents as a case study Fleming's conflicted and controversial role as an evangelical politician confronted with a divisive moral and religious issue within the late nineteenth-century liberal state. Rather than an example of urban modernization resulting in secularization, Toronto's battle over Sunday streetcars is seen as a pivotal moment of negotiation in a liberal society in which church and state had become legally separate.

Until recently, discussions on the process of secularization in late nineteenth-century Canada have given little attention to the influence of the timing and nature of the country's political arrangements. The focus has primarily been on clergy and churches in promoting or resisting theological change and advancing moral issues such as Sunday observance and prohibition. Historians who have interpreted their efforts as evidence of religious decline have followed the classic secularization theory also used by Armstrong and Nelles, in which modernization, in the form of new scientific and biblical thought, and industrial capitalism and urbanization resulted in secularization.<sup>3</sup> Those challenging this reading have pointed to the ways clergy and theologians were able to re-articulate the faith in ways meaningful to a changed environment.<sup>4</sup> What remained a matter of debate, however, was the extent to which these efforts never-

theless ultimately helped usher in today's secular society. Commenting on the "somewhat strained and inconclusive" nature of this debate, Canadian historian Ian McKay has suggested that its focus be transformed from "secularization" to "liberalization" and be incorporated into a new analytical framework examining the gradual imposition of a "liberal order" in Canada from the 1840s to the 1960s.<sup>5</sup> A sustained analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of a liberal order framework for the historiography of religion in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Canada is beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>6</sup> Instead, as a preliminary probe, I follow the more modest proposal to move the discussion of secularization to that of liberalization. This suggestion dovetails well with current international historiography that has challenged the "modernization as secularization" thesis by placing religious change within the more long-term history of institutionalized Christianity or Christendom. Focusing on innovation as well as on resistance, these studies have underscored the important role of religious beliefs, practices, and institutions in the transition from a pre-industrial to a modern society. In Canada, where attention has been primarily on Quebec, historians have demonstrated that the Roman Catholic Church, assumed to be anti-modern, nevertheless maintained and extended its influence as a cultural institution from the 1840s to the quiet revolution of the 1960s through such liberal approaches as centralized administrative structures, economic investments, innovative personal devotional practices, and political arrangements with weak provincial governments.<sup>7</sup> In re-examining the multi-faceted engagement of religion with the state and the social order, such studies have provided at least an entry into the broader topic of the place of religion within a liberal order.<sup>8</sup>

With that in mind, this paper proposes that Toronto's controversy over Sunday streetcars and the role of its embattled mayor provide important insight into evangelical engagement with an urbanizing social order. Approached through the lens of Fleming's conflicted and controversial role as an evangelical politician facing a divisive moral and religious issue, the story becomes not one of secularization but of liberalization, of a pivotal moment when evangelicals were confronted with the constraints and the opportunities of the liberal state.

The *British North America Act* laid the foundation for a liberal state based on a constitution and laws that promoted, in the words of Janet Aizenstadt, “equality, nondiscrimination, the rule of law, justice, civil peace, and prosperity.”<sup>9</sup> In matters religious the state was to be neutral, protecting only the limited legal rights of religious minorities. In understanding the neutrality and impartiality of a liberal state with respect to religion, French sociologists of religion such as Micheline Milot and Jean Beaubérot make a helpful distinction between *laïcité* or political secularization and *sécularisation* or social secularization. Though the two do at times converge, *laïcité*, or the political process whereby the state affirms its independence from religion and protects individual freedom of conscience, has often been confused with *sécularisation*, the social process of the erosion of religion.<sup>10</sup>

*Laïcité*, in the form of church disestablishment, had been achieved in Canada by the mid-nineteenth century, and middle-class evangelicals had been among its most vocal and active supporters. As religious voluntarists they had helped dismantle an elite state-supported church in the 1840s and promoted the liberal principle that religion was a matter of personal spiritual experience and individual conscience.<sup>11</sup> The public role of religion, however, as part of a civil society ordered according to the precepts of liberalism, still waited to be defined.<sup>12</sup> As proponents of liberalism’s core principles — the primacy of the individual and the right to liberty, equality, and property — evangelicals in the late nineteenth century were deeply enmeshed in the cultural, political, and socio-economic construction of their society.<sup>13</sup> However, as discussions on a liberal order framework have noted, not all who claimed a liberal identity emphasized its tenets in the same way.<sup>14</sup> Evangelicals were a case in point. Though firm advocates of individual property rights, at times they did not hesitate to counter these with a concern for the common good, an approach that entailed both inconsistencies and ongoing updating.<sup>15</sup> Convinced of the destructive impact of alcohol consumption on the family, they had no hesitation, for example, in depriving the individual of his or her right to drink nor the distillers and tavern keepers of their right to profits; and by mid-century they were moving from personal temperance to promoting state-enforced prohibition.<sup>16</sup>

Confederation in 1867 offered new possibilities to create a liberal society considered to be truly Christian, which, given the perceived threat of Roman Catholicism to individual liberty, Protestants construed as a society in their own image.<sup>17</sup> To maintain and extend their ideals of communal and national well-being, they invested much time and energy into a host of benevolent societies and moral reform organizations and mounted extensive campaigns to raise awareness about their various causes. Where some historians have understood evangelical self-discipline and reform activities as a conservative form of social control, others have demonstrated their importance in shaping the cultural system of the Victorian middle class.<sup>18</sup> Far from resisting social and economic change, nineteenth-century evangelicals, in the words of American social historian Daniel Walker Howe, were “didactic modernizers and civilizers who embodied their values in such institutional monuments as schools, universities, hospitals, and insane asylums.”<sup>19</sup> They also moved into political action. In a more complex economy, trains, canals, steamboats, and postal services had created new “public abuses” that could not be countered simply by church discipline or prosecution by the local magistrate. In the industrializing Canada of the 1880s and 1890s, petitions to government at various levels and plebiscites on such moral issues as prohibition and Sabbath observance were prominent efforts whereby Canadian evangelicals as didactic modernizers constantly updated their methods to meet new concerns.<sup>20</sup>

In a liberal society where the principle of *laïcité* had replaced religious establishment, these efforts were the methods of a deliberative democracy. They were, however, also fraught with contradictions and tensions: between the rights of individuals and the concerns of communities, between the rhetoric and reality of political office, and between the needs of workers and corporations, to name but a few. In the firing line of all these contradictions stood the evangelical politician, the didactic modernizer who had successfully run for office. Elected to provide leadership in an industrializing and urbanizing society, and at the same time expected by his religious constituency to guard against social secularization, he found himself in a dilemma that has remained largely unexplored.<sup>21</sup> To examine it more closely sheds a different light from that offered in the account

of Nelles and Armstrong on the role of Toronto's mayor during the Sunday streetcar controversy, but also illuminates the place of evangelicals as didactic modernizers within the liberal state and social order.

Robert Fleming, born in 1854 of recent Irish immigrants and raised in Toronto's working-class Cabbagetown district, was one of these didactic modernizers. Fun-loving and a self-styled "scrapper who could lick any kid on the block and was headed for serious trouble," he decided against his parents' wishes to leave school at age 12 for a job as a stoker in a nearby wood and coal concern.<sup>22</sup> By age 20, however, he had become a partner in the business and like many of his contemporaries had embarked upon a life-long pattern of self-discipline, keeping meticulous financial accounts and attending night school, as well as a variety of church-related organizations and such voluntary societies as the Mutual Improvement Literary Society.<sup>23</sup>

Death was a recurring presence during these years in the Fleming family, most notably in childbirth of three sisters, and, in 1883, of his own young wife.<sup>24</sup> For Robert these losses were counteracted by a practical Christianity, short on pious language but strong on purposeful living and tempered by a sense of humour. At some unspecified time around 1873, youthful attendance at Sunday School had led to membership in the Parliament Street Methodist Church, on the corner of Oak Street and Parliament. As is evident from a detailed diary he kept from 1875 to 1878, Sunday was the one day when as a young man he was able to relax his daily discipline of working from 6:00 in the morning to 9:00 at night. Instead, the day was devoted to attending church services morning and evening, acting as usher, teaching a Sunday School class, and visiting with the ministers who at various times were stationed in his congregation. With a number of these ministers he would form lifelong friendships, and in 1878 when he ventured into real estate they became his first clients, eager to help an ambitious young congregant and at the same time supplement their small incomes and meagre pensions.<sup>25</sup>

They also helped to raise his social awareness and political ambitions. Municipal politics formed a favourite after-church discussion topic, leading one minister to predict in 1877 that in 20 years young Robert would be mayor of Toronto, the one elected



office open to someone without private funds or patronage connections.<sup>26</sup> Practical Christianity in the form of lay leadership, ministry to the poor, and support for temperance was a long-standing tradition of the Primitive Methodists, the group to which his local congregation belonged before the unification of all Methodist denominations in 1884. Elected office offered an opportunity to work for social and moral reform, and a significant number of congregational members would involve themselves in Toronto civic life.<sup>27</sup> Fleming's contribution would be to find reform-minded ministers for the Parliament Street pulpit and conscientiously to look after their practical needs during their stay.<sup>28</sup> Beginning in 1878, the year the *Canada Temperance Act* was passed, he also became an ardent temperance worker and president of the newly formed East End Gospel Temperance Club, which soon began to play an important part in ensuring the election of aldermen favourable to the cause.<sup>29</sup>

After two failed attempts in 1881 and 1882, Fleming was successfully elected as alderman for the St. David's ward in 1886, thereby joining Toronto's moral reform forces under crusading mayoral candidate William Howland.<sup>30</sup> Serving two years under Howland and then another two under Mayor Ned Clark, he gained a reputation as a moderate reformer with a special interest in temperance and working class conditions. Both were informed by first-hand observation of the destructive influence of alcohol abuse and the high unemployment among workers in his ward.<sup>31</sup> The first concern led in 1887 to the passing of what became known as the Fleming by-law, which cut by a third the number of liquor licences to taverns and grog shops in the city.<sup>32</sup> A second major contribution, which won him the appreciation of the Trades and Labour Council, was his success in December 1889 after several earlier attempts to have the city council pass a by-law requiring all contractors working for the city to pay their employees a minimum "living wage" of 15 cents an hour.<sup>33</sup> Although he had been a supporter of Howland's moral agenda, Fleming shared the interest in financial and administrative reform of the new mayor, Ned Clarke. A vocal supporter of assessing property at its actual value and a strong critic of land speculation without development, he put his principles into practice in 1889 when he agreed to serve as chair of the Court of Revision.

Stoutly resisting all appeals for reassessment of land lying undeveloped in the hands of speculators, he made enemies, but also won high praise from council and from the *Globe*, which appreciatively noted that here his principles had gone against his own interests as a real estate man.<sup>34</sup>

These interests led him to throw his hat into the race for mayor in 1892. In 1883 the city had entered a period of growth through amalgamation and annexation that would see its size almost double in seven years.<sup>35</sup> Fleming had been in the midst of it, and in 1888, when the Investors Bank suddenly collapsed, he found himself deprived of a valued source of credit and greatly over-extended financially thanks to reliance on leverage in expanding his real estate holdings.<sup>36</sup> Much of his financial failure was the result of over-ambition, but the city had equally over-extended its debenture debt to pay for the local improvements accompanying the huge territorial expansion. In 1890, the year he left council, Toronto's economic boom collapsed; property was now generally considered to have been over-valued and taxes inflated.<sup>37</sup>

Like many other concerned observers, Fleming attributed the causes to municipal corruption, inefficiency, and reckless overspending and saw the office of mayor as the place to begin effecting change.<sup>38</sup> Municipal reform had become a widespread concern throughout major North American cities as they underwent massive social and economic change through industrialization.<sup>39</sup> Such basic issues as street cleaning, lighting, firefighting, and public conveyance became issues of heated debate and, as Michele Dagenais has observed, were ways in which Canadian municipalities were slowly becoming part of a civil society ordered on liberal principles.<sup>40</sup> In Toronto, the leading proponents of municipal reform, as described in the *Revenge of the Methodist Bicycle Company*, were among the city's élite, members of the Board of Trade and intellectuals such as Goldwin Smith and E. E. Sheppard, iconoclastic publisher of *Saturday Night*. Convinced that Toronto could no longer be run like a village, they decided the time had come to elect as mayor someone with corporate experience. "A businessman with a business plan," this individual would make sound financial investments, bring in drastic retrenchment in civic expenditure, and administer the city like an efficient corporation. As candidate for mayor in the 1892

municipal election, their choice fell on E. B. Osler, stockbroker, financier, CPR director, and member of an old and distinguished family of professionals. Reluctant to run but agreeing to serve the greater cause of civic reform, Osler assumed his candidacy would be uncontested, only to find himself unexpectedly confronted with three rivals, of whom the most formidable was Robert Fleming.<sup>42</sup>

Only 37 years old and, since 1888, happily remarried, Fleming had been encouraged to seek the position ever since Howland's retirement as mayor.<sup>43</sup> He realized that his previous association with Howland's moral crusades and his background in real estate and property assessment did not endear him to most of the city's élite, who, along with the *World* and the *Empire*, threw their support behind Osler. Though he high-mindedly refrained from attacking his opponents in person, the *Telegram* and the *News* were only too willing to point out the conflicts of interest into which Osler, as a director of the CPR, would inevitably be drawn if elected.<sup>43</sup> In contrast, as his main campaign theme, Fleming argued for honest, experienced, hardworking, incorruptible elected officials who carefully guarded the welfare of Toronto's citizens against the divisive and fraudulent influence of wealthy corporations and special interests.<sup>44</sup> Unlike federal and provincial politics, municipal government was to be kept free of party interests, a position solidly backed by the *Globe*.<sup>45</sup> Prohibitionists likewise emphasized the non-partisan nature of their movement and took the dim view that party politics only advanced the nefarious interests of the large liquor concerns.<sup>46</sup> The Methodist denomination, which since the mid-1880s had begun to show a new interest in moral reform through political action, was equally strong in its denunciation and distrust of corporations as it began to champion the threatened interests of workers.<sup>47</sup>

Fleming could, therefore, in theory, count on the support of a significant portion of Toronto's religious and working-class constituencies. Both were also, however, courted by another candidate, John McMillan, a strong sabbatarian and prohibitionist, and a member of the Knights of Labor. With the help of the *Mail*, McMillan challenged Fleming's solidarity with the working man as a former employer. Under attack as well was his credibility as a prohibitionist, given the prominent presence of several "non-temperance men" in

his campaign and the light sentences he had given inebriants the previous year as a Justice of the Peace.<sup>48</sup> As an evangelical, Fleming also did not fit the mould of the city's more militant Protestants.<sup>49</sup> In his years as alderman he had assiduously helped individuals in his largely Roman Catholic ward with job applications and in appealing minor misdemeanors. Though an Irish Protestant, he remained aloof from the Orange Order and outspoken in his defence of Roman Catholic rights.<sup>50</sup> In the final days of the election campaign, while expressing some caution about his earlier connections to the "Howland gang," the Roman Catholic *Irish Canadian* threw its support behind him on the basis of his strong record as alderman and his "promises of sweeping municipal reform in the future."<sup>51</sup> Though equally critical of the Howland regime, the press supporting Osler chose rather to draw attention to Fleming's humble origins, to the mud of Cabbagetown that "used to squirt through the toes of young Bob," and depicted him as the political pawn of the Liberal party and an economic lightweight of dubious business practices.<sup>52</sup> In short, despite claiming the high road of non-partisanship, Fleming quickly found himself embattled in a fractious campaign reflecting the electorate's different class and religious interests. Nevertheless, on 4 January, by a small majority of 350, he managed to win the election.<sup>53</sup>

Symbolic evidence of his decision to be the mayor of the people and not of party interests came at his inauguration ceremony in mid-January. To the consternation of the city's élite, instead of the customary top hat and tails, "the peoples' Bob" appeared bare-headed, wearing a simple black frock coat, an innovation applauded by the *News* as evidence of modesty and good taste.<sup>54</sup> One of the defining features of the Howland administration, Desmond Morton has observed, was to turn the position of mayor into one of unrelenting activism.<sup>55</sup> Fleming followed a similar pattern, but, where Howland had been strong on the didactic dimension of evangelical politics, Fleming chose rather to emphasize that of the liberal modernizer by presenting a businesslike approach to administrative, financial, and tax reform, all aimed at furthering the city's prosperity.<sup>56</sup> This included immediate financial retrenchment, an end to such wasteful expenditures as council members' trips at public expense, and dismissal of redundant or incompetent employees. Attention was also

paid to improving the city's infrastructure and to tax reform aimed at stopping the outflow of manufacturing industries.<sup>57</sup> These were all concerns that had animated the municipal reformers who had supported Osler, but, where they wished to model municipal government on an efficient corporation, Fleming's model was that of a community in which individual property rights were kept in check by collective needs. The man elected to be mayor of Toronto, he had noted in the opening address of his campaign, could not be "the creature of any political party, nor the exclusive representative of any corporation, except the great corporation of which every citizen forms a part."<sup>58</sup>

Serving two terms in 1892 and 1893, he ran but was defeated in 1894 and 1895 and then was again elected in 1896 and 1897. Throughout each of his campaigns and in his inaugural addresses, the words "honesty, efficiency, hard work and non-partisanship" became recurring tropes. These hallmarks of liberal discourse were important to evangelicals who, as "didactic modernizers," tried to counteract the divisive impact of new socio-economic and political forces by infusing them with shared communal values. They also appeared frequently in evangelical papers, including the Methodist press, as it showed a growing interest in public affairs and a concern to maintain harmonious employer and worker relations.<sup>59</sup> In a recent study of a select number of secular voluntary societies in nineteenth-century central Canada, Darren Ferry has noted a similar emphasis on inclusivity, honest industry, and the elimination of sectarianism and party politics, themes that he argues were aimed at creating a shared collective identity that fit comfortably into nineteenth-century liberalism.<sup>60</sup> Whether religious or secular, such efforts to form collective identities were, however, fraught with contradictions and tensions, which became more evident in the latter decades of the century with the growing penetration of industrial capitalism.<sup>61</sup>

As mayor, Fleming became all too familiar with the tensions of competing identities, and, as a politician who annually faced the verdict of the electorate, he soon learned that high-minded principles could be misinterpreted and clash with those of opposing interest groups. Of all the conflicts he encountered in his years in political

office none was as challenging as the city's debate on Sunday streetcars. It pitted Protestants against Roman Catholics, Protestants against Protestants, workers against the Toronto Railway Company, and at times, it seemed, everyone, including valued Methodist ministers, against the mayor. When it was concluded, no conflict exposed more clearly the place of religion within the liberal state.

Since the conflict has been examined in detail elsewhere, only the essentials as they pertain to Fleming will be repeated here.<sup>62</sup> During the two years he had been out of council, the city had resumed control over the horse-drawn Toronto Street Railway Company at the expiration of its 30-year lease. Recognizing the enormous costs involved in refitting the system into a modern electric railway, council decided in 1891 after lengthy public debate not to retain public ownership but to seek tenders. As the result of another drawn-out, corruption-driven process, admirably detailed by Armstrong and Nelles, the franchise was given to a syndicate headed by George Kiely and William Mackenzie, a western Canadian railroad builder. Included in the contract, as article 40, was an agreement that the city would allow a plebiscite on the introduction of Sunday cars if requested by 5,000 ratepayers. The question was of urgent financial interest to the new Toronto Railway Company, but it also represented a golden opportunity to bring about change for those chafing under Toronto's staid Sabbath and the general moral tone introduced by the Howland administration. With the generous financial backing of the company, the supporters of Sunday cars organized under the leadership of W. F. McLean, owner of the *World*, and in record time succeeded in presenting to council a petition with 14,000 signatures. In response and after lengthy stalling, council agreed to hold a plebiscite on the Sunday car question on municipal election day, 4 January 1892.

Council's response was highly unpopular among Fleming's religious constituency, and he made no mention of the forthcoming plebiscite in his campaign speeches. When McLean therefore asked him to state his position publicly, he simply responded that the Sunday car question was a matter for the people to decide. The response won McLean's approval, but it was also the proper approach in a society where church and state were separate. Since religion was

now a matter of individual conscience, Fleming had no hesitation, however, in adding that personally he did not consider Sunday cars to be in the citizens' best interest and would vote against their introduction.<sup>63</sup> In a brief exchange of correspondence with Phillips Thompson, who had fought hard for public ownership of the former Toronto Street Railway, he agreed that it had not been wise for the city to lose control of the railway for a 30-year period, but, since contracts had to be honoured, it would be his task as mayor to ascertain that the company live up to its terms.<sup>64</sup>

In the ensuing plebiscite, Sunday streetcars were soundly defeated.<sup>65</sup> Assuming the matter had been laid to rest forever, Fleming briefly noted in his inaugural address that the next step was to ensure the street railway system met the city's needs for the next 30 years as laid out in the contract. The reality turned out to be a good deal more complicated, involving one highly publicized battle after another between the mayor and the Toronto Railway Company and internally between the mayor and various members of council. Privately, it even penetrated Methodist ranks, for among the company's wealthy shareholders were fellow prohibitionists Joseph Flavelle and George Cox, both of whom had been major lenders to the insolvent Fleming.<sup>66</sup>

On 15 August 1892, after some debate over whether to run the cars on batteries, an option favoured by the mayor, or trolley, as advised by the city engineer, the first electric line was opened on Church Street. Two months later, concerned that it was not receiving its fair share of revenue as stated in the contract, the city turned to the courts to order the recalcitrant company to open its books. Then on 23 December, with the 1893 election just around the corner, McLean, ever the implacable foe of sabbatarian restrictions on streetcars, made public a conflict between Fleming and a bankrupt creditor, George Arkless Rundle, who allegedly had not been paid \$6,000 owed him by the mayor. Fleming, who had been dealing frantically with mounting personal debts throughout his year in office, was able, thanks to his meticulous record-keeping, to demonstrate the falseness of the accusation and charged Rundle with libel.<sup>67</sup> The incident did not appear to cost him support, and his record had been strong enough to result in a landslide victory over his opponent,

E. E. Sheppard. The campaign also gave him an opportunity to clarify in public the details of the Rundle affair and to apologize to all who had been affected by his financial losses and promise to repay everyone the minute this became possible.<sup>68</sup>

By the summer of 1893, however, thanks to yet another confrontation with the Toronto Railway Company, Fleming's reputation for honesty and incorruptibility had lost some of its lustre. In May, the company refused to extend its street lines any further until council made up its mind on the type of paving the city was willing to lay down to meet the new and heavier than anticipated railway tracks. While council members deliberated the paving question, rumours of the company's corruption and use of bribery abounded, implicating not only a number of councillors but the mayor as well.<sup>69</sup> Coinciding with the paving dispute, William Mackenzie, now the company's main director, together with the *World* (again with corporate financial help), launched a request for a second plebiscite on Sunday streetcars. Having learned by error, they asked that this one not be tied to a municipal election date but rather be held in the summer, when the benefits of Sunday excursions by streetcar were most obvious. In response to the city's refusal to spend its money on a special vote, Mackenzie offered to pay the necessary \$3,000 costs.<sup>70</sup> After considerable stalling, and to the great dismay of those against another plebiscite, council reluctantly set the date for 26 August 1893.

In early July, now even more determined than the previous year, both sides began vigorously to mount rallies and counter rallies. Though denominational pulpits, especially among Presbyterians, might and often did expound the biblical and doctrinal grounds for Toronto's quiet Sabbath, in a liberal society the public defence centred on freedom of conscience, civic pride, and workers' rights. To those who argued Sunday service was vital for a truly modern and progressive city to attract tourists and investments, the response was that Toronto's renowned Sabbath observance was its true source of pride. Both sides claimed concern for the working class, the one stressing their right to public transportation and the other the right of streetcar employees to a six-day working week and a restful Sabbath. Alarming news from Saint John, New Brunswick, revealed



that, as a result of Sunday cars in that city, company workers were now working seven days for six days' pay. Mayor Fleming was heard to warn that the same would happen in Toronto once Sunday cars were accepted.<sup>71</sup> There was also an immediate threat to civil rights. Because council had been forced to accept the summer plebiscite date when Mackenzie agreed to cover the additional costs of separating it from a municipal election, there had not been an opportunity to prepare an updated voters' list. This situation fuelled the anxiety that the Toronto Railway Company, given its reputation for corruption, would undermine the electoral process through impersonation, bribery, and liquor. Hence, once the date was set, Fleming immediately sought legal advice, only to learn that, except for elections and votes on by-laws involving financial expenditure, no clear rules existed against ballot irregularities at the municipal level.<sup>72</sup>

On voting day, there appeared to be ample evidence of such a need for regulations when the Toronto Railway Company distributed free tickets to voters, liquor was seen to flow freely, and rumours circulated of widespread voter impersonation.<sup>73</sup> Despite these machinations, Sunday streetcars were defeated, and, to a cheering crowd of young people, Hart Massey Jr. proclaimed the vote not only a triumph for the Sabbath but a defeat of immoral corporations.<sup>74</sup> The victory, however, was fragile, for this time its margin had shrunk to just under 1,000. In the 18 months since the first plebiscite, the franchise had been expanded from ratepayers to manhood suffrage. Seminal work by American labour historian Herbert Gutman and more recently in Canada by Lynne Marks and Melissa Turkstra has shown that, contrary to being uniformly opposed, a significant number of workers, especially among the more skilled sector, retained a Christian identity.<sup>75</sup> Their vote had been counted on in 1892, but this time the influx of new voters brought more diversity and greater resistance to such Protestant middle-class moralistic critiques as prohibition and sabbatarianism. Just before the plebiscite, the Knights of Labor had gone on record to favour Sunday service, and the Trades and Labor Council of Toronto had voted 30 to 16 to support Sunday cars.<sup>76</sup> Protestants were also divided, and among the signatories requesting a referendum had been the Roman and Anglican Bishops of Toronto. The fact that William Mackenzie, president of the Toronto Railway Company, was

Roman Catholic led to further divisions as Orange Toronto rumbled about investments in the company by his co-religionists.<sup>77</sup> Rather than dwell on the fractures in their ranks, the victors, however, chose to reassert a shared communal identity. “Thank God that Toronto is a city set upon a high hill,” had been Mayor Fleming’s response. William Caven, principal of Knox College, as a good Presbyterian divine of the modern era, had described the victory not in terms of “dogmatic theology” but as the preservation of the communal benefits of the Sabbath for all Christians, whether Protestant or Roman Catholic.<sup>78</sup>

Despite these proclamations of unity, the 1894 election held less than five months later would go down as one of the most bitterly partisan in memory. Much of the animosity was directed against Mayor Fleming: against the increase in property taxes resulting from his policy of paying for civic improvements by raising the mill rate to prevent further extending the city’s debt, against his decision to stand for a third term despite previous claims to the contrary, and against his handling of the Toronto Railway Company’s pressure for the summer vote on Sunday streetcars. The latter was fuelled with dark hints by at least one newspaper that Fleming’s impecunious circumstances made him vulnerable to the overtures of large corporations.<sup>79</sup> Opposed to him stood Warring Kennedy, a respected businessman, Methodist, and prohibitionist who, despite having no previous political experience, appeared to have a major following among Methodists and the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, Fleming’s usual constituency. Notwithstanding the public support of a number of leading Methodist clergy and such prominent laymen as Hart Massey, Newton Wesley Rowell, and Phillips Thompson, as well as warm accolades on his record by the *Globe* and the *Telegram*, Fleming went down to a resounding defeat of over 4,000 votes.<sup>80</sup>

Fleming was laconic about his defeat, commenting that he was as grateful to the voters who had released him from his duties as to those who had first elected him.<sup>81</sup> Then suddenly in October his political stock again rose. Rumours that a number of aldermen in the new administration had changed their votes in the awarding of a contract for new city lighting were sufficiently persistent for Warring Kennedy, the new mayor, to call a public inquiry to be conducted by

Judge Joseph E. McDougall. As evidence of bribery and scandal grew, McDougall expanded the investigation to include the city's relationship with the Toronto Railway Company from the time of the granting of its franchise. Within a few months, with the help of his formidable counsel Wallace Nesbitt, McDougall uncovered alarming evidence of longstanding widespread corruption and graft involving the railway syndicate and a number of aldermen.<sup>82</sup> Among those called to testify was ex-mayor Fleming, who, along with giving testimony on his continual battles with the Toronto Railway Company, helped the court's memory several times by referring to his extensive scrapbook containing all the newspaper clippings of his time in office.<sup>83</sup> He also did not hesitate to agree to the court's request to make his financial accounts available; upon careful scrutiny, these revealed no evidence whatsoever of dubious transactions.<sup>84</sup> The McDougall report was released to the press for public consumption in November and December 1894. Coinciding with the informal start of the next civic election campaign, it vindicated Fleming completely and was promptly published in the *Globe*.<sup>85</sup> On 31 December, with only a week to organize his campaign, Fleming presented himself as a candidate. Drawing on his usual themes of sound fiscal management, the need for continued civic reform in the face of the recent scandals, and the importance of non-partisanship, he managed to come 45 votes short of winning a viciously partisan contest aimed at discrediting his candidacy.<sup>86</sup> Meanwhile, he had become actively involved in a nonpartisan citizens' reform movement brought about by public indignation at the findings of the McDougall inquiry and by allegations of impropriety also on the part of Mayor Warring Kennedy.<sup>87</sup> The reform movement eventually resulted in the introduction of a three-man Board of Control consisting of the mayor and two aldermen elected by council, a move strongly supported by Fleming.<sup>88</sup>

In the 1896 election Fleming again presented his candidacy and this time won against his contender, Alderman John Shaw. In the view of the *Evening Star*, the newly elected mayor's inaugural address had about it "a businesslike ring ... which was sensible and 'taking'."<sup>89</sup> The first few months were indeed a flurry of activity, but by mid-summer an issue not mentioned in the inaugural address had

again resurfaced. Several years had lapsed since the last plebiscite on Sunday cars, a delay mandated in 1893 by the provincial government's decision that there be a three-year interval between plebiscites. In the first week of August, just short of the three-year period, an influential deputation of citizens again approached the mayor and council demanding that the issue immediately be placed before the voters.<sup>90</sup> Carefully organized and again well-financed by the Toronto Railway Company, the request had the backing of 11,000 signatures and thus could not easily be ignored. Exactly as with the two previous plebiscites, Fleming responded affirmatively, but, as in 1893, he gave reasons for delay. Votes in plebiscites were limited to electors on the manhood franchise list that was two years out of date and would not be updated until the January 1897 election. More importantly, he considered it prudent, should the vote this time go in favour of Sunday cars, to postpone the plebiscite until the city had negotiated an agreement with the Toronto Railway Company to protect the rights of its workers.<sup>91</sup>

Agreement on the terms took much longer than anticipated, with the result that the vote did not take place until mid-May of the following year. Most contentious of the city's demands was its insistence that all company employees be entitled to a six-day work week of 60 hours with a 24-hour period of rest.<sup>92</sup> Efforts by employees to unionize in 1893 had been rejected by Mackenzie, who preferred to negotiate personally with his workers individually or in small groups, thereby making the company their spokesman.<sup>93</sup> To test the company's assertion that the city's demand was also unacceptable to the workers, since those who worked only a few hours a day would be ineligible to work on Sundays, Fleming arranged an unprecedented Sunday afternoon meeting in October with the employees. Having advised the workers to listen to the company spokesmen in silence for fear of reprisals, he proceeded, against the company's wishes, to put the question of the working hours to an immediate vote, with 224 of the 254 present overwhelmingly voting in favour of the city's proposal.<sup>94</sup> Two days later council's Committee on Sunday Streetcars presented its report. It included both a special Sunday fare of eight tickets for a dollar and a 60-hour six-day week for the company workers. Mackenzie rejected both as utterly unprofitable and

impracticable. Those who had deplored the prospect of another plebiscite rejoiced and assumed the matter had been forever laid to rest. Newspapers on the other side did not mince words in blaming the tactics and questioning the motives of those behind the city's unreasonable demands. "If the Sabbatarianists [sic] and opponents of Sunday cars have to adopt such low methods," the *Evening Star* scathingly asserted, "let them adopt them, as low people would adopt them, and not parade in the gowns of priests while they have the fingers of pickpockets."<sup>95</sup> Both sides considered the matter ended, and for the next few weeks the newspapers waged battles over two different moral issues: the question of maintaining tax exemptions for churches and charitable institutions in a financially starved city, and secondly a request by the equally cash-strapped mayor for an additional \$500 to cover in future the many charitable donations he paid out of pocket as mayor.<sup>96</sup>

Then suddenly, early in December, the Sunday streetcar plebiscite debate was revived with the news of an informal agreement negotiated behind the scenes between the mayor and the Toronto Railway Company. When the latter had turned down the city's conditions in October, it had asked its local organizer of the pro-Sunday car forces, George Bertram, to seek out Fleming privately and find out on what terms he would support and present to council an agreement that would revive a vote on Sunday cars. Those against Sunday streetcars had considered the matter closed when the city's conditions were rejected, but the mayor and council could not ignore a petition of 11,000 signatures and a requirement in the franchise contract for such a vote. Hence, as mayor, Fleming still needed to ensure the best possible agreement with the company before the city proceeded with the plebiscite. In conversation with Bertram, whom he knew well and who had supported him in the 1894 election, Fleming saw an opportunity to get an even better deal than the one previously presented. The 60-hour six-day work week remained non-negotiable, but he added a condition: regardless of the outcome of the Sunday car plebiscite, the company was to agree to extend its service to nearby Toronto Island, all for a single fare.<sup>97</sup> The latter was to happen as soon as council agreed to spend approximately \$100,000 to build a swing bridge at the foot of Bathurst Street, including con-

structing the necessary approaches and securing the right of way.<sup>98</sup>

By 4 December, a satisfactory agreement had been concluded with James Ross, vice-president of the Toronto Railway Company, and Fleming proceeded to place it and his correspondence with Bertram and the company before council and do his best to persuade acceptance. The information was, to put it mildly, received with consternation by council members and by those citizens who had assumed that the company's rejection in October of the city's conditions had once and for all ended the matter. The *World* immediately proclaimed itself for Fleming, the *News* considered the agreement to be a desperate plea for votes, and the distressed Methodist Ministerial Association at once sent off a deputation to council.<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, thanks in good part to the mayor's skills of persuasion, council agreed in late December to accept the terms he had previously negotiated with the Toronto Railway Company.<sup>100</sup> The decision coincided with the start of the municipal election and thus offered the press a golden opportunity to comment on the proposed Island railway, Sunday streetcars, and the mayor's record. The *News* strongly supported Fleming's contender, Alderman George McMurrich, who was known to favour Sunday cars; it satirized the *World's* new support for Fleming and chastised the mayor for his duplicity in tying the vote on Sunday service to a bribe of Island streetcars while proclaiming strong personal opposition to Sunday service. Considering it a calculated election appeal to voters on both sides of the issue, the *News* scathingly concluded, "No man in the city of Toronto ever took such a Machiavellian position."<sup>101</sup>

Fleming, on the other hand, in both his private correspondence and public pronouncements, emphasized that he considered this part of the deal with the company to be quite separate from the vote on Sunday cars and of considerable benefit to every citizen of Toronto.<sup>102</sup> Throughout his terms as mayor he had shown a special interest in acquiring parklands for future recreational use at a time when land remained undervalued.<sup>103</sup> Thanks to his experience in real estate, he was also aware of the development opportunities an Island railway would eventually offer the city, especially in terms of increased assessment. Appreciative of the way the streetcar had already improved life for the population generally, he now saw an opportunity for workers

and their families to travel to the Island on their day off for one single cheap fare, should the vote go in favour of Sunday cars.<sup>104</sup>

After embarking on yet another fractious campaign and encountering fierce denunciations from some of the city's pulpits, Fleming was re-elected by a margin of 1,600 in an unusually large voter turnout.<sup>105</sup> By late March, an agreement had been hammered out with the Toronto Railway Company for an Island service from April to November, pending the completion of the necessary bridge and approaches.<sup>106</sup> The costly implications for ratepayers, however, led to stiff opposition when the agreement was submitted for approval to the Private Bills Committee of the Ontario Legislature. After a sustained battle a compromise was reached that, when the money was required, a by-law would be submitted to the electors qualified to vote on money matters.<sup>107</sup> Since this issue was not tied to the proposed plebiscite on Sunday cars, Council continued to finalize the terms of the agreement it would submit to the Toronto Railway Company should there be a favourable vote.<sup>108</sup> Thereupon it set the date for the plebiscite as Saturday 15 May and agreed to have printed in the *Globe*, once a week for three weeks beginning 20 April, a proposed by-law authorizing the Sunday operation of streetcars. At the same meeting it also accepted a bill authorizing a new registration of manhood suffrage voters "for the purpose of the operation of a Sunday service of streetcars in the City of Toronto."<sup>109</sup>

Publication of the proposed by-law and voting date immediately propelled the pro and anti camps into action. Within less than a week the Citizens' Anti-Sunday Car Association had completed the important work of voter registration, and the Citizens' Sunday Car Association had inaugurated an equally well-organized campaign.<sup>110</sup> As had been the case in the previous campaigns, religion, political affiliation, and social class intersected in the leadership of both sides. Among the prominent supporters of Sunday cars was entrepreneur Edward Gurney who, like his co-religionist Robert Fleming, had in the past served as a lay delegate to the Methodist quadrennial General Conference.<sup>111</sup> Met with great approval by the assembled crowd was Gurney's plea that, while the wealthy could spend their Sundays at the ocean or in Muskoka, the men who worked for him had no alternative on their day off but the Horticultural Gardens or

Queen's Park, from which many were barred because of lack of public transportation. This argument, in its various forms, was one of the strongest suits of the supporters of Sunday cars and had become even more compelling with the increased use of the bicycle.<sup>112</sup> There were no evangelical restrictions on Sunday cycling, and so devout middle-class cyclists were confronted with the injustice of having an unfair advantage over their less affluent brethren, whose travels on the Sabbath were much more circumscribed.<sup>113</sup>

On the podium of the opponents of Sunday cars one found equally prominent Methodist businessmen, notably Timothy Eaton and Chester D. and Walter E. Massey, along with laity from other denominations including the fiery evangelical Anglican lawyer Samuel Blake. Clergy provided the overwhelming leadership, and the ardour of some in the pulpit fed the charges of religious fanaticism and intolerance made by those who supported Sunday cars.<sup>114</sup> As in the past, however, efforts were made to counter reason with reason. To claims that the lack of Sunday cars was holding the city back from its desired progress, opponents pointed out that the city's renowned Sabbath had motivated 24,000 young people of the Methodist Epworth League to select Toronto as the site for their forthcoming annual conference. Those for Sunday cars were no less emphatic about their Christian motivation. As their guest speaker pointed out on the last rally of the campaign, the change they were seeking was in fact in accordance with the spirit of Christianity since the founder of Christianity had himself been accused of breaking the Sabbath. With that in mind, their choice was to live "under a Christian dispensation of liberal Sabbath observance or the old Pharaical Sabbath." Streetcars would bring more people to church and free entirely 1,000 city men employed in the care of horses.<sup>115</sup> When all was said and done, however, each side had to accept that, in the liberal state, contested matters of religion and morals were to be decided through the ballot.

On Saturday 15 May, Toronto's voter decided by a small margin of 321 that the time had arrived for streetcars to run on Sundays. The following day being Sunday and Toronto being a church-going city, the press sent off its reporters to find out how the decision was being received in Toronto's pulpits. The *Evening Star's* reporter selected Methodist Broadway Tabernacle, where the Reverend James



C. Speer was preaching his final sermon before taking up a new post in Vancouver. The previous afternoon, as the bitter news had rolled in to the anti-Sunday car crowd, Speer had shared the podium with Fleming. That evening he had prepared a sermon that left no doubt on whose shoulders the defeat rested. Taking as his text the gospel account of Christ's betrayal by his own people and applying it to Saturday's plebiscite, he was unequivocal that none was more blameworthy than Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest and "Mayor of Jerusalem." Upon reading the account, Fleming, always a very early riser, promptly made use of his office's newly installed telephone, awakened the minister, and gave him a strong and public reprimand (courtesy of the newspaper's next day edition), in which he pointed out that the real sinner was Speer and not the misrepresented mayor.<sup>116</sup> Throughout the campaign he had received second-hand accounts of ministers using their pulpits to denounce his agreement with the Toronto Railway Company, and he had finally had enough. As he confided to one of his friends, an elderly Methodist minister, "no matter what a malicious newspaper may say of me, I never think it worthwhile to contradict ... but I do not expect an unjust and untrue reflection upon myself from those who should have the best interests of the City at heart."<sup>117</sup>

As is revealed in the testy exchange between the disgruntled cleric and the wronged mayor, in its small way, Toronto's six-year debate over Sunday streetcars was an important but misunderstood episode in an unfolding story of religion's place in a liberal society. It may have been with the intent to rectify such misunderstanding that, on the same day the *Evening Star* printed its sensational account of the Reverend Speer's sermon, the *Globe* offered a thoughtful editorial clarifying how the recent plebiscite had been an exercise in religious voluntarism. Though professing the highest respect for those who considered Sunday streetcars to be a breach of a divine command, it pointed out that religion was a matter of liberty, and no one could impose a sincerely held belief on another. The recent decision had not been forced on the community by the Toronto Railway Company but had "been brought about by the free votes of free citizens. We are fellow citizens and fellow countrymen, all alike interested in maintaining the good name of Toronto and in showing

that its moral fibre and tone will not be destroyed by the introduction of a Sunday car.”<sup>118</sup>

Here in a few words was a defence of the principle of *laïcité*, but also a reassurance to those who had lost the plebiscite that political secularization did not mean social secularization. Religion was a matter of individual belief, but in late Victorian Toronto it was also a way of life shaped by customs, childhood training, public opinion, and memories. Toronto in 1897 was an unusually homogeneous city, Anglo-Saxon in ethnicity, and largely Protestant in belief and practice.<sup>119</sup> Moreover, as J. M. S Careless has noted, its political power was shifting from “old families,” whose political prominence had been derived from land ownership and political patronage, to new men, whose power came from industrial and economic success.<sup>120</sup> Given the close fit that historians have noted between evangelical and middle-class identity, there was little possibility that the decision to run streetcars on Sundays would seriously undermine a shared morality in the coming decades. Indeed, on that fateful Saturday in May, when it was decided by vote that Sunday cars would come to Toronto, those who had won the battle had made every effort to reassure the other side that the victory was not one of moral licence and would not lead to Sunday desecration.

Those who had been defeated were resolutely committed to hold the victors to their word and to report all infractions on the Sabbath. The letters sent to Fleming in the weeks immediately after the plebiscite and passed on to the appropriate enforcement authorities attest to their resolve.<sup>121</sup> Though their side had lost on the Sunday car vote, they had not lost faith in political action. As one organizer pointed out, the campaign had “brought the young men and young women of the churches out in a battle for good citizenship and Christian citizenship.”<sup>122</sup> As had also been evident in the charitable remarks of the victors, good and Christian citizenship was an ideal they shared, and hence there was every indication that the aftermath of the battle over Sunday cars would not be Toronto’s slide into social secularization but would see continued civic action to ensure that evangelical values informed middle-class hegemony.

Electric streetcars had helped shape that hegemony, for, as Careless has also noted, they differentiated the expanding city by

allowing the more well-to-do who could afford the more expensive fare to move to the suburbs, leaving the areas within walking distance to become predominantly lower-class working districts.<sup>123</sup> The results of the 1897 plebiscite revealed that the vote in favour of Sunday cars had been heaviest in those areas furthest away from the Horticultural Gardens and High Park. Thanks to the hard-fought battle for a reduced fare negotiated by the mayor with the Toronto Railway Company, the workers of St. David's and other congested, smoke-filled wards could now on Sundays enjoy the middle-class pleasures of parks and gardens (though not yet, as the mayor had hoped, the idyllic setting of Toronto Island), and do so at a reduced fare.<sup>124</sup> On the other hand, the workers of the Toronto Railway Company had had to forfeit their right to some of those free Sundays.

In the liberal state, God's time and economic time were being reconfigured into a liberal order in which freedom of religion, technological change, and attendant concerns for social justice had become inextricably connected. With little guidance other than moralistic advice from clergy, the task of addressing the tensions, contradictions, and exclusions resulting from religion's engagement in the marketplace was left in large part to evangelical politicians like Robert Fleming.<sup>125</sup> They assumed this role as didactic modernizers who both welcomed economic change and at the same time tried to set communal limits. The result of the 1897 plebiscite was not what Fleming had wanted; as he told the saddened crowd assembled on 15 May, he especially regretted that "those growing up would have a different impression of the Sabbath than the present generation." However, he also reminded his listeners that they had fought the good fight and "although the cars had come they were not responsible for them."<sup>126</sup>

The introduction of Sunday streetcars in Toronto, despite the anxieties of its opponents, was not a victory for secularization, but simply an acceptance of the principle of *laïcité*. In late Victorian Toronto, the latter meant freedom to vote according to conscience, but it also meant moral responsibility to ensure, through tireless, well-organized, and disciplined activism, that a liberal society was a Christian society. Toronto's evangelical "Saints" in the twentieth century would reorganize institutionally as the United Church of

Canada, which, as its most recent historian has demonstrated, used every modern means to connect personal faith with civic engagement, thereby maintaining a prominent voice for religion in Canadian society until the 1960s.<sup>127</sup> A similar case has been made for the Roman Catholic Church in Québec. In both instances, not until the advent of the welfare state and growing religious pluralism did Christian institutions and beliefs lose their public voice and presence and could one confidently speak of social secularization.<sup>128</sup> That is another story, but only with greater attention to the historical influence of political secularization will its place in Canada's liberal order be made clear.

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### Endnotes:

- 1 Christopher Armstrong and H. V. Nelles, *The Revenge of the Methodist Bicycle Company: Sunday Streetcars and Municipal Reform in Toronto, 1888–1897* (Toronto: Peter Martin, 1977).
- 2 Ibid., 176–81.

- 3 A. B. McKillop, *A Disciplined Intelligence: Cultural Inquiry and Canadian Thought in the Victorian Era* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press 1979), especially 205–32; Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1985); William Westfall, *Two Worlds: The Protestant Culture of Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press 1989); and David B. Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith: Canadian Protestant Clergy and the Crisis of Belief, 1850–1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1992). A sociological concept, the classic secularization thesis has received extensive debate among western scholars. See, for example, Steve Bruce, ed., *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis* (New York: Oxford University Press 1992).
- 4 Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada 1914–28* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1973); John W. Grant, *A Profusion of Spires: Religion in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1988); Marguerite Van Die, *An Evangelical Mind: Nathanael Burwash and the Methodist Tradition in Canada* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press 1989); Michael Gauvreau, *The Evangelical Century: College and Creed in English Canada from the Great Revival to the Great Depression* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press 1991); Phyllis D. Airhart, *Serving the Present Age: Revivalism, Progressivism, and the Methodist Tradition in Canada* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992); Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada 1900–1940* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996). For a succinct analysis of the debate, see Richard Allen, *The View from Murney Tower: Salem Bland, the Late Victorian Controversies, and the Search for a New Christianity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), xv–xxxvii.
- 5 Ian McKay, “The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History,” *Canadian Historical Review* 81 (2000): 625, note 16.
- 6 For debate on the value of a liberal order framework, see R. W. Sandwell, “The Liberal Reconnaissance and the History of the Family in Canada,” *Canadian Historical Review* 84 (2003): 423–50; and Jean-François Constant and Michel Ducharme, eds., *Liberalism and Hegemony: Debating the Canadian Liberal Revolution* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009). Although the latter makes brief mention on p. 14 of the need to explore its religious dimension, it includes no contributing essay on religion. Two suggestive models that use a modified definition of a liberal order framework are Darren Ferry, *Uniting in Measures of Common Good: The Construction of Liberal Identities in Central Canada* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008); and Jarrett Rudy, *The Freedom to Smoke: Tobacco Consumption and Identity* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005). When translating such models into religion, however, one needs

to make a distinction between liberalism as a secular and as a religious ethos. Important also is how the latter expresses its own distinctive views of liberalism as a state system. See the thought-provoking comments of Talal Asad, "Thinking about Religion, Belief, and Politics" in *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, ed. Robert A. Orsi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 36–57.

- 7 See, for example, Roberto Perin, "Elaborating a Public Culture: The Catholic Church in Nineteenth-Century Quebec" in *Religion and Public Life in Canada*, ed. Marguerite Van Die (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 87–105; René Hardy, "Regards sur la construction de la culture québécoise au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Canadian Historical Review* 88, no. 1 (March, 2007): 7–40; Jean-Marie Fecteau and Janice Harvey, eds., *La régulation sociale entre l'acteur et l'institution* (Sainte-Foy: Les Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2005); and Michael Gauvreau and Ollivier Hubert, eds., *The Churches and Social Order in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Canada* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006). The latter in its introduction contains an excellent overview of recent historiography on Roman Catholic Québec, "Beyond Church History: Recent Developments in the History of Religion in Canada," 3–45. On pp. 8 and 9 the editors express concern that in a liberal order framework the Church and Roman Catholicism would again be seen as reactionary conservative forces, a perception they challenge in their historiographical survey.
- 8 In assuming the value of a modified liberal order framework to clarify the distinction between political and social secularization, this article questions the view of Gauvreau and Hubert that "McKay's positing of economic individualism as the motor of sociocultural change subscribes to the view of modernization that lies at the heart of the orthodox secularization thesis" ("Beyond Church History," 8).
- 9 Janet Aizenstadt, *The Canadian Founding: John Locke and Parliament* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 109.
- 10 Micheline Milot, *Laïcité dans le Nouveau Monde : le cas de Québec*, Préface de Jean Beaubérot (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2002), 7–11, 15–8. Suggestive also for my analysis is Jocelyn Maclure and Charles Taylor, *Secularism and Freedom of Conscience*, tr. Jane Marie Todd (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011). An example of aligning political with social secularization is Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith*, 21–4. A more nuanced perspective is Westfall, *Two Worlds*, 191–209.
- 11 Ferry, *Uniting in Measures of Common Good*, 9. For the move from religious establishment to voluntarism in Ontario, see Westfall, *Two Worlds*, 50–125.
- 12 I am grateful to Ian McKay for commenting on an earlier draft of this paper and for pointing out the need to make a critical distinction between a "liberal state," i.e. "the 'government' narrowly construed," and a "liberal order," i.e. "a civil society ordered according to the precepts of liberalism." Ian McKay to Marguerite Van Die, email, 12 January 2014.
- 13 Commenting on the comparatively low family size and high level of property

- ownership among evangelical Protestants, Gordon Darroch and Lee Soltow conclude, “It seems the familiar twentieth-century culture of striving, individualistic liberalism had an auspicious ally in Ontario’s moderated evangelical Protestantism of the 1870s,” in *Property and Inequality in Victorian Ontario: Structural Patterns and Cultural Communities in the 1871 Census* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 97.
- 14 See Jeffrey L. McNairn, “In Hope and Fear: Intellectual History: Liberalism, and the Liberal Order Framework” in *Liberalism and Hegemony*, eds. Constant and Ducharme, 64–97; Bruce Curtis, “After ‘Canada’: Liberalisms, Social Theory, and Historical Analysis” in *Liberalism and Hegemony*, eds. Constant and Ducharme, 176–200; E. A. Heaman, “Rights Talk and the Liberal Order Framework” in *Liberalism and Hegemony*, eds. Constant and Ducharme, 147–75.
  - 15 For the engagement of evangelicals with liberalism in the pre-Confederation period, including their anti-Catholicism and attitudes to “religious outsiders,” see Marguerite Van Die, “Religion and Law in British North America, 1800–1867” in *The Cambridge History of Religions in America*, Vol. 2, ed. Stephen J. Stein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 46–65.
  - 16 Changing attitudes to temperance and prohibition are discussed in T. W. Acheson, “Evangelicals and Public Life in Southern New Brunswick, 1830–1880” in *Religion and Public Life in Canada*, ed. Van Die, 50–68; Jan Noel, *Canada Dry: Temperance Crusades before Confederation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994); Craig Heron, *Booze: A Distilled History* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2003); and Jacques Paul Couture, “Prohibition or Regulation? The Enforcement of the Canada Temperance Act in Moncton, 1881–1896” in *Drink in Canada: Historical Essays*, ed. Cheryl Krasnick Warsh (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993), 144–65.
  - 17 E. A. Heaman’s comments on the conservative use by liberals of “rights” discourse is especially pertinent to the controversy in the late 1880s in which militant evangelicals organized themselves into an “Equal Rights Association” to express their anti-Catholicism following the Québec Legislature’s restoration of Jesuit property. Heaman, “Rights Talk,” in *Liberalism and Hegemony*, eds. Constant and Ducharme, 153–9. The controversy is described in J. R. Miller, *Equal Rights: The Jesuit Estates Controversy* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1979). Other than this monograph and Miller’s “Anti-Catholicism in Canada: from the British Conquest to the Great War” in *Creed and Culture: The Place of English-Speaking Catholics in Canadian Society, 1750–1930*, eds. Terrence Murphy and Gerald Stortz (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993), 25–48, the role of anti-Catholicism in forming Protestant identity in Canada has received little sustained study. Informative approaches in the British and American context include Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (London: Pimlico, 1992), 11–54; and Elizabeth Fenton, ed., *Religious Liberties: Anti-Catholicism and Liberal Democracy in Nineteenth-Century U.S. Literature and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

- 18 For an informed analysis of the debate on “moral regulation,” see Alan Hunt, *Governing Morals: A Social History of Moral Regulation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1–27. Hunt’s view that moral regulation was not necessarily conservative is exemplified in Mariana Valverde’s analysis of social purity in *The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885–1925* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991). For the role of temperance societies in shaping cultural identity, see Ferry, *Uniting in Measures of Common Good*, 95–135.
- 19 D. W. Howe, “Religion and Politics in the Antebellum North” in *Religion and American Politics: from the Colonial Period to the Present*, 2nd ed., eds. Mark A. Noll and Luke E. Harlow (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 126.
- 20 For examples of their extensive organizational and multifaceted approaches, see Paul Laverdure, *Sunday in Canada* (Yorkton, SK: Gravelbooks, 2004), 1–25; Noel, *Canada Dry*; Grant, *A Profusion of Spires*, 170–203; Sharon Anne Cook, “Through Sunshine and Shadow”: *The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, Evangelicalism, and Reform in Ontario, 1874–1930* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995); Megan Baxter, “‘The Government Has Trifled With the Great Temperance Question’: Temperance Reform and the Clash with the State in the Dominion Prohibition Plebiscite, 1898,” paper presented to the Canadian Historical Association, 4 June 2013.
- 21 Long neglected, a Canadian historiography on the engagement of Protestant politicians with the public sphere is emerging. See Miller, *Equal Rights*; J. I. Little, *The Child Letters: Public and Private Life in a Canadian Merchant-Politician’s Family, 1841–1845* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995); T. W. Acheson, “Evangelicals and Public Life in Southern New Brunswick, 1830–1880” in *Religion and Public Life in Canada*, ed. Van Die, 50–68; Marguerite Van Die, *Religion, Family, and Community in Victorian Canada: The Colbys of Carrollcroft* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005), 149–80; Van Die, “Religion and Law in British North America, 1800–1867” in *The Cambridge History of Religions in America*, Vol. 2, ed. Stein, 46–65; and J. I. Little, *Patrician Liberal: The Public and Private Life of Sir Henry Gustave Joly de Lotbinière, 1829–1908* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).
- 22 Private Collection, Catharine Fleming McKenty, typescripts, “RJ Fleming-Obituary Book,” “Notes on RJ Fleming,” and “Family History,” 9–10.
- 23 CTA, Fonds 1105, Series 1091, File 19, R. J. Fleming Account Books, 1872–1873 and 1875–1879; File 15, Robert J. Fleming Diary 1875–1878. The construction of a middle-class male identity is examined in such works as Andrew Holman, *A Sense of Their Duty: Middle Class Formation in Victorian Ontario Towns* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000); and John Tosh, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999). Evangelical dimensions of masculinity and family life are discussed in Van Die, *Religion, Family and Community in Victorian Canada*, 83–100; and B. Anne Wood, *Evangelical Balance Sheet: Character, Family, and Business in Mid-Victorian*



- Nova Scotia* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006).
- 24 Credit for this change can in part be attributed to his half-sister, Polly Fleming Verner, who became the moral mainstay of the family after the death of their mother in 1871. A childless couple, the Verners opened their cramped home behind their Cabbagetown store to Robert and his widowed father and over the years to a growing number of children left motherless after the death in childbirth of three sisters and two sisters-in-law. Among the occupants in 1883 would be Fleming and two infant children, after Mary Ann Breadon, his wife of three years, died giving birth to their son. Catharine Fleming McKenty, *Polly of Bridgewater Farm: An Unknown Irish Story*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Cabbagetown Press, 2012), 199–213.
  - 25 CTA, Fonds 1105, Series 1091, File 15, Diary 23 July, 1876. The first was the Rev. Willam Bee, editor of the *Christian Journal*, General Secretary and Book Steward. Others include James Edgar, George Wood, J. C. Antliff, and A. C. Courtice. Until uniting in 1884 with the other denominations of Methodists, Primitive Methodist ministers did not have a pension. Mrs. R. P. Hopper, *Old-Time Primitive Methodists in Canada* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1904), 315. A pattern of financial help among evangelical businessmen is noted in David G. Burley, *A Particular Condition in Life: Self-Employment and Social Mobility in Mid-Victorian Brantford, Ontario* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 76–8.
  - 26 CTA, Fonds 1105, Series 1091, File 15, Diary, 17 December 1877, relates the prediction made by the Rev. George Wood. J. V. McAree (1876–1958), for many years an editorial columnist for the *Globe and Mail* and Fleming's nephew, offers this as the reason why so many impoverished municipal politicians came from the city's east end in *Cabbagetown Store* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1953), 97–8.
  - 27 Members of the local congregation included Francis Spence, who had recently assumed the leadership of the Dominion Alliance, a national movement aimed at achieving total prohibition through legislation and who also became an alderman and long-time member of the Board of Control; James Simpson, a member of the Board of Control, trade unionist, labour politician, and CCF mayor of Toronto in 1935; William R. Plewman, journalist and alderman; and Alex Lewis, MPP for Toronto Northeast from 1919 to 1926.
  - 28 See, for example, CTA, Fonds 1105, Series 1091, File 1, R. J. Fleming to the Rev. A. C. Courtice, 2 December 1885; and File 4, R. J. Fleming to the Rev. A. C. Crews, 6 November 1891. In so doing he also adroitly worked around the Methodist polity that ministers were not to be called by a local congregation but appointed by a district stationing committee. Crews became editor of the youth-oriented *Epworth Era* in 1898 and served as General Secretary of the Epworth League from 1902 to 1906.
  - 29 It became part of the Toronto Young Men's Prohibition Club, organized in 1886 with Howland as president, which for many years held large-scale Sunday afternoon temperance meetings and took an active part in municipal elections. Ruth E. Spence, *Prohibition in Canada: A Memorial to Francis*

REVISITING R.J. FLEMING AND THE 1890S TORONTO STREETCAR  
CONTROVERSY

- Stephen Spence* (Toronto: Ontario Branch of the Dominion Alliance, 1919), 58–9; “Aldermanic Day,” *Globe* (14 January 1889), 3.
- 30 For the two previous attempts to be elected as alderman, see CTA, Fonds 1105, Series 1091, File 1, notes listing electoral returns, p. 243.
- 31 As Gregory Kealey has detailed, in the 1880s and early 1890s Toronto’s new industrial capitalism ushered in a troubled period of political debate, conflict, and strike action among workers, resulting in Howland’s regular intervention on their behalf. Gregory Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Capitalism 1867–1892* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 199–212; Desmond Morton, *Mayor Howland: The Citizens’ Candidate* (Toronto: Hakkert, 1973), 43–56. As alderman Fleming’s involvement was more modest: writing numerous reference notes for job seekers, and successfully, along with other aldermen, urging Council to provide free evening classes in practical science for working men. *Toronto City Council Minutes* (1889, Vol. 1), 18 February 1889, no. 166. Employing carpenters to construct small houses on his rental properties, he had also gained experience in the hazardous construction industry and helped mediate a strike by city carpenters, and in 1889 chaired a committee on scaffolding regulations. *Toronto City Council Minutes* (1887, Vol. 1), 7 July 1887, no. 740; *Toronto City Council Minutes* (1889, Vol. 2), 17 January 1890, no. 2060, and Appendix no. 1864.
- 32 *Toronto City Council Minutes* (1887, Vol. 1), 14 February 1887, no. 149. M. P. Sendbuehler notes that a rift within Toronto workers on the temperance question in the 1870s had been healed by the time of the 1886 and 1887 elections, allowing labour to unite behind wider issues of urban reform under Howland’s mayoralty, “Battling ‘the bane of our cities’: Class, Territory, and the Prohibition Debate in Toronto, 1877,” *Urban History Review* 22, no. 1 (October 1993): 30.
- 33 “Trades and Labor Council,” *Globe* (3 August 1890), 20. For the passing of the motion, see *Toronto Council Minutes* (1889, Vol. 1), 23 December 1889, no. 1435 and no. 1466.
- 34 *Toronto City Council Minutes* (1890), 17 January 1890, no. 1551. “Many Candidates,” *Globe* (19 December 1891), 3.
- 35 C. S. Clark, *Of Toronto the Good: The Queen City of Canada As It Is* (Montreal: Toronto Publishing Company, 1898), 2, states the increase as 6,771 acres in 1883 to 11,889 in 1889. J. M. S. Careless, *Toronto to 1918: An Illustrated History* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1984), 109–47, examines the changes in the industrializing city from 1871 to 1895. Helpful graphs are given in Peter Goheen, *Victorian Toronto 1850 to 1890: Patterns of Process and Growth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Department of Geography, 1970), 156–217 *passim*.
- 36 CTA, Fonds 1105, Series 1091, File 2, R. J. Fleming to Joseph Chamberlain, 7 February and 10 August 1888.
- 37 Armstrong and Nelles, *Revenge of the Methodist Bicycle Company*, 22; Clark, *Of Toronto the Good*, 2.
- 38 CTA, Fonds 1105, Series 1091, File 4, R. J. Fleming to David Hastings [editor of the *Hamilton Herald*], 13 May 1891.

- 39 John Weaver, *Shaping the Canadian City: Essays on Urban Politics and Policy, 1890–1920* (Toronto: Institute of Public Administration of Canada, 1970); Christopher Armstrong and H. V. Nelles, “The Rise of Civic Populism in Toronto 1870–1920” in *Forging a Consensus: Historical Essays on Toronto*, ed. Victor L. Russell (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 192–237.
- 40 Michèle Dagenais, “The Municipal Territory: A Product of the Liberal Order?” in *Liberalism and Hegemony*, eds. Constant and Ducharme, 201–20.
- 41 Armstrong and Nelles, *The Revenge of the Methodist Bicycle Company*, 68–81.
- 42 CTA, Fonds 1105, Series 1091, File 2, R. J. Fleming to Joseph Chamberlain, 2 December 1887; and File 4, R. J. Fleming to the Rev. George Wood, 9 January 1891. His second wife, Lydia Orford, shared his religious and political interests and, as a member of an old, modestly comfortable Toronto family, was able to give him some help financially.
- 43 See, for example, “Hundreds Turned Away,” *Telegram* (31 December 1891), 6; “Rough on Osler,” *News* (31 December 1891), 3. Fleming considered Osler’s position as a director of the CPR a strong disadvantage, given the city’s well-publicized battles with the company about its apparently insatiable land requirements and assertive tactics. CTA, Fonds 1105, Series 1091, File 4, R. J. Fleming to Francis Spence, 15 November 1891.
- 44 Private Collection, Catharine Fleming McKenty, “Toronto’s Need: Report of Speech delivered by R. J. Fleming in the Auditorium on the evening of Saturday, 13 December, 1891.”
- 45 For this distinction between municipal and provincial/federal politics, see also Jack Masson and James D. Anderson, *Emerging Party Politics in Urban Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972), 10–11. Known to vote Liberal in federal and provincial elections, Fleming had feared that his party affiliation could be a handicap in a city that federally voted Conservative. CTA, Fonds 1105, Series 1091, File 4, R. J. Fleming to the Rev. A. C. Crews, 14 November 1891. The *Globe* pointed out to readers that “the bent of his mind is less toward Provincial or Federal politics than toward municipal affairs, of which he has always been a close student.” “The Mayorality,” *Globe* (12 December 1891), 3.
- 46 Prohibitionists had, however, had a short-lived divisive flirtation with the party system by running as a single-issue Third Party in 1890. Spence, *Prohibition in Canada*, 141–58. Miller, *Equal Rights*, 65, 189. After initially allying themselves with political parties that promised to advance their cause, many Knights of Labor adopted a similar attitude to “partyism.” Gregory S. Kealey and Bryan D. Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be: The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880–1900* (Toronto: Hogtown Press, 1987), 204–76.
- 47 A. C. Courtice, a close friend of Fleming, in 1894 became editor of the denominational paper *The Christian Guardian*, where he played a key role in advancing a new Methodist social awareness. William Magney, “The Methodist Church and the National Gospel, 1884–1914,” *The Bulletin* 23 (1968), Committee on Archives of the United Church of Canada, 33–4.
- 48 “The Civic Contest,” *Mail* (30 December 1891), 5.

- 49 Unlike Fleming, McMillan was also a member of the anti-Catholic Equal Rights Association, formed in 1889 to resist Québec's passing of the Jesuit Estates Bill. Miller, *Equal Rights*, 76–102.
- 50 For examples of letters advocating for constituents, see CTA, Fonds 1105, Series 1091, File 2, R. J. Fleming to R. Christie, 28 January 1887; and R. J. Fleming to John Daly, 24 August 1887. McAree, *Cabbagetown Store*, 92, notes Fleming's opposition to Orangemen. In 1893, with George Munro Grant and several local Liberal politicians, Fleming warned against the anti-Catholicism of a newly formed nativist movement, the Protestant Protective Association. "The P.P.A. Condemned," *Globe* (16 December 1893), 25. On the *Globe's* position, see Richard Clippingdale, *The Power of the Pen: The Politics, Nationalism, and Influence of Sir John Willison* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2012), 115–6.
- 51 Private Collection, Catharine Fleming McKenty, Newspaper clipping, *The Irish Canadian* (31 December 1891).
- 52 "The Mayorality Campaign: Roasting Mr. Fleming," *World* (30 December 1891), 1.
- 53 "Without any organization, without an agent or scrutineer at the polling places, without a hack or a ward worker, without the expenditure of a dollar beyond ordinary expenses, Mr. Robert J. Fleming, as becomes a candidate of the people, has been elected," the *News* announced triumphantly. "Easily Done Up," *News* (5 January 1892), 1. His friends were not so sanguine, but when criticized about his poorly run campaign, Fleming gave as reasons the powerful party interests ranged against him and his own commitment to running a scrupulously non-partisan campaign. CTA, Fonds 1105, Series 1091, File 4, R. J. Fleming to David Hastings, 9 January 1892.
- 54 "The New Men Take Office," *News* (18 January 1892), 1.
- 55 Morton, *Mayor Howland*, 69–70.
- 56 William Howland was a leading force in the emerging pre-millennial movement within evangelicalism which, given the urgency of Christ's impending return, considered moral reform as an evangelistic tool to save souls. For Howland's work and that of his conservative colleagues, see Darren Dochuk, "Redeeming the City: Premillennialism, Piety, and the Politics of Reform in Late Nineteenth-Century Toronto," *Historical Papers 2000: Canadian Society of Church History*, 53–72. Fleming's wife, Lydia Orford, had strong ties to the evangelical Anglicans who shared Howland's piety. Fleming through his work in prohibition, his contacts at Parliament Street Methodist Church and his friendship with A. C. Courtice, editor of the *Christian Guardian* aligned himself with the liberal evangelical approach of Christianizing the social order.
- 57 "The Mayor's Inaugural Message 1892," *Toronto City Council Minutes* (1892), Appendix C, 1–5.
- 58 "*Toronto's Need*," 1.
- 59 Magney, "The Methodist Church and the National Gospel," 16–36, examines how these personal qualities became part of a corporate "Applied Christianity."
- 60 "While liberalism was an individualist ideology," Ferry notes, "its doctrines

- could also connect the category of ‘individual’ with cultural processes and institutions to form collective identities.” Ferry, *Uniting in Measures of Common Good*, 7.
- 61 Ibid., 18–19, 286–9; Miller, *Equal Rights*, 190–201; Allen, *The View from Murney Tower*, 202–71; Airhart, *Serving the Present Age*, 123–41.
- 62 For the background, see Armstrong and Nelles, *The Revenge of the Methodist Bicycle Company*, 27–67.
- 63 “It Was A Lively Meeting,” *World* (14 December 1891), 2. E. B. Osler, his main rival, was privately supportive of Sunday cars but in public equivocal.
- 64 CTA, Fonds 1105, Series 1091, File 4, Robert Fleming to Phillips Thompson, 17 December 1891.
- 65 The vote was 14,287 to 10, 531 with a majority in all six wards voting in the negative. Armstrong and Nelles, *The Revenge of the Methodist Bicycle Company*, Appendix D, p. 185.
- 66 R. B. Fleming, *The Railway King of Canada: Sir William Mackenzie, 1849–1923* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press 1991), 37; Michael Bliss, *A Canadian Millionaire: The Life and Times of Sir Joseph Flavelle, Bart, 1858–1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 61. Fleming maintained cordial relations with both in his correspondence.
- 67 Letters discussing the Rundle case, which began in February, 1892, and detailed account lists, are in CTA, Fonds, 1105, Series 1091, File 4, pp. 859, 863–5, and 932–44.
- 68 “Fleming Next Year ... The Mayor Makes a Personal Explanation,” *Globe* (24 December 1892), 17. Anecdotal evidence in the form of tributes at Fleming’s death in 1925 indicate that he did follow through, though it was not until after 1904 when he joined the Toronto Railway Company as manager that his finances significantly improved. McAree, *Cabbagetown Store*, 103–5; Private Collection, Catharine Fleming McKenty, typescript, “RJ Fleming-Obituary Book.”
- 69 After much acrimonious debate, the paving contract had not gone, as expected, to a local company, Trinidad Asphalt, which Fleming and others on Council later learned was actually a combine of various interests including the Toronto Railway Company. Accordingly, it was decided to use instead a highly recommended Detroit company, Otto Guelich. In retaliation, J. Fred Coleman, one of the proprietors of the rejected Trinidad Asphalt, tried to embarrass Fleming financially. Though unsuccessful, and privately strongly reprimanded by Mackenzie, he did manage to “shake down” various aldermen who agreed to change their votes on the paving contract. During these weeks Coleman had also been seen with Fleming several times in his city hall office. The optics were therefore not good when on 17 July the mayor, along with a number of aldermen, suddenly reversed the vote and decided to split the contract into several parts with only a quarter going to Guelich and the rest to local contractors. This clarifies Fleming’s role in Armstrong and Nelles, *The Revenge of the Methodist Bicycle Company*, 123–6; see also the more precise account in CTA, McDougall Report, Vol. 2, 471–9, 517–18, and note 84.

- 70 Armstrong and Nelles, *The Revenge of the Methodist Bicycle Company*, 105, and note 1, p. 197.
- 71 “Sunday Cars in St. John [sic],” *Globe* (18 July 1893), 1.
- 72 “Sunday Cars Mass Meeting,” *Globe* (26 July 1893), 2. Boyer, *The People’s Mandate*, 41, notes the uncertainty regarding the validity of municipal plebiscites prior to the Municipal Act of Ontario in 1903.
- 73 Armstrong and Nelles, *The Revenge of the Methodist Bicycle Company*, 118; “The End of Sunday Cars,” *Globe* (28 August 1893), 2.
- 74 “The End of Sunday Cars,” *Globe* (28 August 1893), 2.
- 75 Herbert G. Gutman, “Protestantism and the American Labour Movement: The Christian Spirit in the Gilded Age” in *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History*, ed. Gutman (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 79–117; Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 140–88; Melissa Turkstra, “Constructing a Labour Gospel: Labour and Religion in Early 20th-Century Ontario,” *Labour/Le Travail* 57 (Spring 2006): 93–130; Norman Knowles, “Christ in the Crowsnest: Religion and the Anglican-Protestant Working Class in the Crowsnest Pass, 1898–1918” in *Nation, Ideas, Identities* eds. Michael Behiels and Marcel Martel (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 57–72; Michael Gauvreau and Nancy Christie, “‘The World of the Common Man Is Filled with Religious Fervour’: The Labouring People of Winnipeg and the Persistence of Revivalism, 1914–1925” in *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience*, ed. G. A. Rawlyk (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), 337–50.
- 76 “Sunday Cars Mass Meeting,” *Globe* (26 July 1893), 2. The collapse of a united Knights of Labor identity in the 1890s is detailed in Kealey and Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be*, 248–76. For the Knights’ appropriation of Christian values and rhetoric in small-town Ontario, see Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, 149–56.
- 77 Fleming, *The Railway King of Canada*, 40, 42.
- 78 “The End of Sunday Cars,” *Globe* (28 August 1893), 2.
- 79 The accusation is countered in “June and December,” *Globe* (27 December 1893), 4, and “Mr. Fleming’s Future,” *Evening Star* (3 January 1894), 2. See also the indignant account, favourable to Fleming, in Clark, *Of Toronto the Good*, 7–8.
- 80 “Fleming Will Run,” *Globe* (22 December 1893), 1, for Thompson’s speech and a letter from Hart Massey, both endorsing Fleming. The *Telegram* never wavered in its unqualified support of Fleming throughout his years as mayor. See the summary of his accomplishments in “Well-Done,” *Telegram* (6 August 1897), 1.
- 81 “Fleming Steps Out,” *Evening Star* (13 January 1894), 1.
- 82 Armstrong and Nelles, *The Revenge of the Methodist Bicycle Company*, 126–7.
- 83 CTA, McDougall Investigation, vol. 2, 471–9; vol. 3, 907 and passim.
- 84 When Britton B. Osler, lawyer for the Toronto Railway Company, com-

- plained about the investigation's "impertinent" prying, Wallace Nesbitt, McDougall's counsel, retorted, "There is a gentleman sitting in the Court-Room, Ex-Mayor Fleming, who is in a position to tell what sort of prying was done into people's affairs, into his own affairs. I was able to say and said that Ex-Mayor Fleming came out with an absolutely clean record; and I am also able to say that I have made more enemies over that statement than almost any other, simply because I did justice to one whom I considered to be a man who in public life had acted financially straight; and I am glad to say it under oath." CTA, McDougall Investigation, vol. 5, 1637.
- 85 "A Verdict Asked," *Globe* (27 December 1894), 5 and 6; "A Roll of Dishonor ... Mr. Fleming Vindicated," *Globe* (4 January 1895), 1–4.
- 86 On the partisan nature of the attacks on Fleming, see Clark, *Of Toronto the Good*, 7–8.
- 87 The reform movement is described in Armstrong and Nelles, *The Revenge of the Methodist Bicycle Company*, 129–43; John Weaver, "The Meaning of Municipal Reform: Toronto 1895" in Weaver, *Shaping the Canadian City*, 41–54; and Patricia Petersen, "The Evolution of a Board of Control" in *Forging a Consensus*, ed. Russell, 181–91.
- 88 Petersen, "The Evolution of a Board of Control" in *Forging a Consensus*, ed. Russell, 189. The *Evening Star* credited Fleming's role in the provincial legislation that established a Board of Control by calling it "the Fleming-Hardy bill." "City Hall Gossip. How the new Municipal Act Has Been Received," *Evening Star* (28 March 1896), 7.
- 89 "Called On the Mayor," *Evening Star* (January 21 1896), 1.
- 90 "A Sunday Car Vote," *Globe* (4 August 1896), 6. The third plebiscite, but with a different understanding of Fleming's role, is examined in Armstrong and Nelles, *The Revenge of the Methodist Bicycle Company*, 144–67.
- 91 "Still a Deadlock," *Globe* (28 August 1896), 6; *Toronto City Council Minutes* (1896), 21 August 1896, no. 344 and 356; "The Mileage Controversy," *Globe* (11 September 1896), 6. For Fleming's concern to protect the workers' rights, see CTA, Fonds 1105, Series 1091, File 15, R. J. Fleming to [the Rev.] John Potts, 20 April 1897.
- 92 Memories of the highhanded treatment of workers in 1885 and 1886 by Senator Frank Smith, owner of the Toronto Street Railway Company in the final years of its franchise, had made clear the need to ensure protection of workers' rights. On Howland's battles with Smith and his support of the workers' strikes in 1886, see Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Capitalism*, 199–212.
- 93 Fleming, *The Railway King of Canada*, 46–7.
- 94 "They Want One Day Off," *World* (12 October 1896), 4; and "Sunday Cars," *Globe* (12 October 1896), 6. Mackenzie had no use for unions and favoured negotiating privately with his workers, either individually or in small groups. Fleming, *The Railway King*, 46.
- 95 "Tricky Piety," *Evening Star* (17 October 1896), 4.
- 96 With a mayor's annual salary of \$3,600, supplemented by a much criticized

- \$700 supplement as a member of the Board of Control, Fleming remained strapped financially and was still trying to pay back his creditors and support a growing family. The charity grant, which he turned down almost immediately, also brought to an abrupt close a lawsuit against him on 6 November by real estate developer, former alderman, and former supporter Ernest Albert Macdonald, who alleged the money to have been a personal reward for past, unspecified services. "The Mayor Backs Down," *Evening Star* (11 November 1896), 2.
- 97 He also was willing to ask Council to change the original demand for a special Sunday streetcar fare of eight tickets for a dollar to seven, and to allow for some leniency with the labour hours during a few times of unusual demand such as the annual Exhibition. For Council's response and his correspondence with Bertram and the Company, see *Toronto City Council Minutes* (1896), 7 December 1896, nos. 885–90; Appendices, "Mayor's Message, 7 December 1896, and Copy of Correspondence Between His Worship the Mayor, Mr. George Bertram and Mr. James Ross, Re Sunday Car Agreement," pp. 535–42.
- 98 Copy of Correspondence Between His Worship the Mayor, Mr. George Bertram and Mr. James Ross, Re Sunday Car Agreement," p. 542.
- 99 "Mayor Fleming's Statement," *World* (7 December 1896), 3; "Ministers on the Mayor's Flop," *News* (9 December 1896), 2.
- 100 *Toronto City Council Minutes* (1896), Appendices, Report no. 2 of Special Committee Re Sunday Car Agreement, 26 December 1896.
- 101 "The *World* is for Fleming," *News* (31 December 1896), 1.
- 102 CTA, Fonds, 1105, Series 1091, File 15, R. J. Fleming to [the Rev.] John Potts, 20 April 1897.
- 103 *Toronto City Council Minutes* (1893), Appendix C, Mayor's Inaugural Address, 5. This interest continued after he resigned in August 1897 to take on the position of Assessment Commissioner. See, for example, "A Parks Addition," *Globe* (13 November 1897), 10, which cites his recommendation to buy land to extend Riverdale Park.
- 104 *Toronto City Council Minutes* (1896), Appendices, Mayor's Message, 7 December 1896, 535–6.
- 105 "The Answer of Toronto. The Campaign of Slander Proved Unavailing," *Evening Star* (5 January 1897), 1.
- 106 "The Island Railway," *Globe* (25 March 1897), 7; "Approved the Agreement," *Globe* (26 March 1897), 9.
- 107 "The Legislature," *Globe* (29 March 29 1897), 7.
- 108 It included, with a few minor adjustments, the safeguards of a 60-hour, six-day work week, a stipulation that cars were to run on all tracks on Sundays, a reduced Sunday fare of seven tickets for a dollar, and detailed requirements of reduced speed and no bells when cars were within a stated proximity of churches. The Island railway was not included in the agreement presented to the public on 20 April 1897. "A By-Law," *Globe* (20 April 1897), 9. Following the plebiscite on 15 May, the agreement was passed on 14 June 1897 as By-law 3484, *Toronto City Council Minutes* (1897), Appendix B,



- 119–29.
- 109 *Toronto City Council Minutes* (1897), 12 April 1897. no. 356, and No. 3479 By-Law, Appendix B, 109.
- 110 “Preparing for Battle,” *Globe* (19 April 1897), 2; “The Sunday Car Vote,” *Globe* (26 April 1897), 5. The latter article clarified that “the male franchise covers all men who register and are a British Subject age 21 and over who have lived in Ontario since April 27 1896 and in Toronto since January 27, 1897.”
- 111 Both were Toronto Conference lay delegates in 1886, and Gurney also in 1890. *Journal of Proceedings of the General Conference of the Methodist Church* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1886), 3, and (1890), 4.
- 112 Armstrong and Nelles, *The Revenge of the Methodist Bicycle Company*, 171, note the Toronto Railway’s wooing of cyclists prior to the plebiscite. For evangelicals’ reliance on and attitudes to bicycles, see Phillip B. Mackintosh, “Imagination and the Modern City: Reform and the Urban Geography of Toronto, 1890–1929” (PhD diss., Queen’s University, 2001), 299–351.
- 113 The *Globe* had previously surmised that in this plebiscite the deciding votes would be cast by bicyclists. “A Sunday Car Vote,” *Globe* (4 August 1896), 4.
- 114 See, for example, “As the Fight Goes On,” *Evening Star* (14 May 1897), 1.
- 115 “Massey Hall Was Packed” and “Mr. Osler Satirizes Counsel for the Opposition. The Auditorium Meeting,” *Globe* (14 May 1897), 4.
- 116 “Rev. Mr. Speer Sheds a Tear,” *Evening Star* (17 May 1897) 1; and “Fleming Hits Back,” *Evening Star* (18 May 1897), 1.
- 117 CTA, Fonds, 1105, Series 1090, File 15, R. J. Fleming to the Rev. George Wood, 29 May 1897.
- 118 “Sunday Cars,” *Globe* (17 May 1897), 6.
- 119 In 1891 65 percent of the population was Canadian and 30 percent British by birth; Protestants comprised 71.8 percent. Careless, *Toronto*, 201.
- 120 *Ibid.*, 124–5.
- 121 See, for example, CTA, Fonds 1105, Series 1090, File 15, R. J. Fleming to Chief Constable, 26 May 1897, on complaints that two Avenue Road drug-stores were selling cigars and candies on Sunday; and R. J. Fleming to Chief Constable, 22 May, on complaints of bicycles on sidewalks on Sundays.
- 122 “Meeting of the Antis,” *Globe* (17 May 1897), 9.
- 123 Careless, *Toronto*, 138.
- 124 Concerned to provide a living for his growing family, Fleming resigned as mayor on 5 August to assume the recently vacated position of Assessment Commissioner. His successor, Alderman John Shaw, had not been in favour of the Island railway. The last reference on the matter I have been able to uncover is a notice of motion on 10 January 1898 by Alderman John Dunn that the Board of Control prepare a report on the cost of building the needed bridge. This was followed on 31 January 1898 by a successfully passed motion, presented by Aldermen J. K. Leslie and W. P. Hubbard. No subsequent report was found, and it may be assumed that under the new mayor the matter was dropped. *Toronto City Council Minutes* (1898), 10 January 1898, no. 26, and 31 January 1898. Fleming’s resignation and appointment

- were surprisingly well received by the press, but resulted in a drawn-out lawsuit by former ally and mayoral candidate ex-alderman E. A. Macdonald. Fleming saved the extensive press coverage until the dismissal of the charge on 12 December 1897. CTA, Fonds 1105, Series 1090, File 20.
- 125 James Hudnut-Beumler, *In Pursuit of the Almighty's Dollar: A History of Money and American Protestantism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 47–75, notes the emphasis clergy placed on fundraising. Upon surveying ante-bellum sermon and tract literature, Mark Noll concluded that Protestant ministers “regularly, consistently, and without any sense of contradiction” made exhortations about careful stewardship and “took for granted the workings of an expanding commercial society.” Noll, “Protestant Reasoning about Money and the Economy, 1790–1860: A Preliminary Probe” in *God and Mammon: Protestants, Money, and the Market, 1790–1860*, ed. Mark A. Noll (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 271.
- 126 “Meeting of the Antis,” *Globe* (17 May 1897), 9.
- 127 Phyllis D. Airhart, *A Church with the Soul of a Nation: Making and Remaking the United Church of Canada* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014).
- 128 Michael Gauvreau, *The Catholic Origins of Quebec's Quiet Revolution, 1931–1970* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005). For the structural changes of the 1960s that severed religion's engagement with the state, see also Catherine Gidney, *A Long Eclipse: The Liberal Protestant Establishment and the Canadian University, 1920–1970* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004); and Gary Miedema, *For Canada's Sake: Public Religion, Centennial Celebrations, and the Re-making of Canada in the 1960s* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005). Although not always explicitly, all of these are in agreement with the view advanced by British and European scholars that secularization was not a sudden process brought about by modernization, but a very slow decline in the cultural influence of institutionalized Christianity or Christendom, a decline that reached a crisis in the 1960s because of the convergence of a host of different forces. See the superb analysis by Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) and the comparative analysis of Western European countries in Hugh McLeod and Werner Ustorf, eds., *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).