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Fasts, Thanksgivings and Senses of Community in Nineteenth-Century Canada and the British Empire*

Biography

Joseph Hardwick is Senior Lecturer in British history at Northumbria University. He has published widely on imperial Anglicanism, the political significance of settler religion, and the culture of special worship in colonial societies. He is the author of *An Anglican British World: the Church of England and the expansion of the settler empire, c. 1790-1860* (Manchester, 2014).

Abstract

On at least eighty-seven occasions between 1789 and 1901 the Canadian state authorities made the dramatic move of setting aside days so that their populations could thank God for blessings, or implore His intervention and assistance in periods of crisis. Before Confederation every Canadian colony and province had developed a tradition of marking exceptional occasions with days of fasting and thanksgiving. After 1867 provincial governments, and then the Dominion government, would regularly call thanksgiving days for good harvests. Improvements in communication from the 1880s made the first genuinely empire-wide days of prayer possible.

This article considers why days of fasting, humiliation and thanksgiving were such an enduring aspect of nineteenth-century Anglo-Canadian life. Special acts of worship would change their character and purpose over the course of the century, but they survived because Protestant churchmen and civil officials continued to value their community-building potential. The doctrine of “national providentialism” – the idea that nations and peoples were rewarded or punished as a collective for their piety and sinfulness – nourished a range of community identifications in pre- and post-Confederation Canada. On the one hand the essay explores the varied senses of community that were stimulated by imperial, dominion, provincial and regional holy days; on the other, it shows how these occasions could expose

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fault-lines in Canadian society. Clergymen often struggled to make their congregations feel responsible for, and unified with, communities and sufferers elsewhere. And days that were intended to appeal to everyone were associated with Protestantism and a British reading of Canadian nationality.

Keywords

Special worship; community; providence; empire; fasts and thanksgivings; national days of prayer

There is a long tradition of the Canadian state authorities setting aside days for collective acts of worship in times of trauma and celebration. For much of the nineteenth century the civil authorities appointed fast days – or “days of humiliation” as they came to be known – on specific dates so that populations could reflect on their collective sins and implore God to end a chastisement or calamity, such as pestilence or war. Blessings, such as peace treaties, the end of epidemics or abundant harvests, were marked by thanksgiving days. Fasts and thanksgivings were usually called by proclamations issued by governors, and these orders – they gradually turned into invitations – were far-reaching and addressed to all inhabitants, of every ethnicity and religion. As most occasions fell on weekdays, the custom was for government to shut its offices, with shops and businesses usually following suit. There is evidence that observances, whether they occurred in public or private, were widespread. Indeed, for much of the nineteenth century Quebec’s Roman Catholics were commanded to worship for the same causes, and on the same days, as Protestants. The decision to appoint a special day of worship lay with governors and executives, though the initiative often came from church leaders or from delegations representing multiple denominations.

Though these were highly visible public occasions, Canada’s fasts and thanksgivings have been largely overlooked by scholars. One aspect of Canadian special worship that has received attention are the harvest thanksgivings that proliferated in English-speaking Canada from the late 1850s.¹ According to recent scholarship, the Canadian thanksgiving tradition demonstrates the mix of British and American influences that made up Anglo-Canadian identity: while much of what Protestant clergymen said on these occasions depicted Canadians as a loyal British people, the style and form of thanksgiving celebrations was

¹ Thanksgiving today is a regular holiday observed on a standard date in October. The early harvest thanksgivings are properly termed acts of “special worship” as they were standalone events that were set apart each year on varying dates.

distinctively American.² But not all days of prayer marked good harvests, and the British precedents for thanksgiving are equally important as the American. Indeed Canada's thanksgivings were extending a British tradition of special worship that stretched back to Tudor times. Recent research has shown that Canadians, like other inhabitants of empire, often observed special acts of worship that had previously been ordered in Britain.³ Eighteenth-century British governments frequently set aside special days during wartime, as well as for exceptional happenings such as epidemics and earthquakes. Cholera and the condition of the harvest were notable causes of special worship in the nineteenth century, and new styles of national worship associated with prayers for the monarchy proliferated at late century.⁴ The British occasions are important as they consolidated attachments to monarchy, institutional churches and a British national identity. And the way the tradition spread overseas to Canada and Britain's other overseas territories suggests that special worship was one of the webs that connected the empire and what became known as "Greater Britain".

Like the British occasions, Canada's fasts and thanksgivings were designed to bring together diverse and disparate populations for common causes. In many ways they were Canada's first "national days". Recent work on better-known Canadian holidays and celebrations has shed light on how national and subnational identities were constructed by civil and religious leaders.⁵ Fasts and thanksgivings were also moments for expressing, fostering and celebrating community attachments. The texts that accompanied days of prayer – proclamations, forms of prayer and sermons – were intended to broaden horizons and nurture a sense of shared experience and collective responsibility among colonists. Thanksgiving scholars are right that special worship for Canadian issues – notably good harvests – might nurture a colonial nationalism.⁶ But Canadian special worship had many strands, and different kinds of event connected colonists to different kinds of community.

² Peter Stevens, "'Righteousness Exalteth a Nation': Religion, Nationalism, and Thanksgiving Day in Ontario, 1859-1914," ed. Matthew Hayday and Raymond Blake, *Celebrating Canada, Volume 1: Holidays, National Days, and the Crafting of Identities* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 54-82.

³ *National Prayers: Special Worship since the Reformation. Volume 2: General Fasts, Thanksgivings and Special Prayers in the British Isles, 1689-1870*, ed. Philip Williamson, Alasdair Raffae, Stephen Taylor and Natalie Mears (Church of England Record Society/Boydell, Woodbridge, 2017), cxxxvii-cl. Also Joseph Hardwick, "Special days of worship and national religion in the Australian colonies, 1790-c.1914," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* (forthcoming), and Hardwick and Williamson, "Special worship in the British Empire: from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries," *Studies in Church History* (forthcoming).

⁴ Philip Williamson, "State Prayers, Fasts and Thanksgivings: Public Worship in Britain 1830-1897," *Past & Present* 200, no. 1 (2008): 121-74.

⁵ Hayday and Blake, *Celebrating Canada*, introduction.

⁶ Stevens, "'Righteousness Exalteth a Nation'," 59-70.

Days that were set aside for imperial causes might connect Canadians to empire, and prayer days organised at the dominion level could take on – like other national holidays – regionally specific meanings.⁷ By analysing the multiple senses of community that might be stimulated by special worship, this article illuminates the complex regional, colonial, national, continental and imperial identifications that developed among the inhabitants of English-speaking Canada.⁸

This article explores the development, character and significance of the special acts of worship observed in Canada between 1789 and 1900. It primarily focuses on the motivations, agendas and perspectives of the civil and ecclesiastical authorities who arranged special days. The article explains why the appointment of days intensified in certain periods and receded in others, and why some causes were marked with special prayers and others not. It shows how, as the nineteenth century progressed, regional and provincial days of worship gave way to new kinds of special worship organised at the dominion and imperial level. The movement towards national and imperial occasions was not, however, straightforward. Many politicians were hostile to national days of worship. And clergymen communicated a varied set of messages to the public on these occasions. Preachers expressed and celebrated regional, sectional and denominational identities, just as much as national and imperial ones.

The article offers just brief indications of how days were observed. Judging public receptions is difficult – newspapers often reported crowded churches, but descriptions were usually brief and formulaic. Reports of services and sermons are nevertheless useful, as they demonstrate that special worship could not always promote a sense of imagined community.⁹ The way early days of prayer were appointed and observed lends support to the view that nineteenth-century Canada was, as one scholar has put it, a “mosaic of diverse peoples” separated by the barriers of class, ethnicity, religion, geography and distance.¹⁰ Sermons also reveal much about divisions in colonial society. Churchmen may have wished to encourage national ways of thinking, but those who delivered fast and thanksgiving sermons were

⁷ Forrest Pass, “Dominion Day and the Rites of Regionalism in British Columbia, 1867-1937,” ed. Hayday and Blake, *Celebrating Canada*, 191-219.

⁸ Phillip Buckner, “‘Limited Identities’ Revisited: Regionalism and Nationalism in Canadian History,” *Acadiensis* 30, no. 1 (2000), 12; R. Cook, “Identities Are Not Like Hats,” *Canadian Historical Review* 81, no. 2 (2000), 260-65.

⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 7.

¹⁰ Cole Harris, *The Reluctant Land: Society, Space, and Environment in Canada before Confederation* (Vancouver : University of British Columbia Press, 2008), 464-5.

worried that the feelings of compassion and responsibility that were supposed to connect their societies were weak or missing.

EARLY CANADIAN SPECIAL WORSHIP

Canada's tradition of special worship preceded British rule and British immigration. Prior to the 1750s French Canadians were asked to attend special services and offer special prayers in times of war, bad harvests, insect infestation, disease and royal illness.¹¹ These occasions were, however, not days set apart, and they were called by bishops, not the state. The British tradition of state-appointed fast and thanksgiving days appeared in Canada in the 1720s, when Nova Scotia – which France ceded to Britain in 1713 – called thanksgivings for two royal occasions.¹² Nova Scotia observed fasts and thanksgiving throughout the eighteenth century, though it was not until the French Revolutionary period that special days of prayer proliferated. Thanksgiving days were appointed after George III's recovery from illness in 1789, and fasts and thanksgivings were appointed nearly annually in the Atlantic colonies between 1793 and 1816 for the French Wars.

These occasions were repeats of special acts of worship that had been ordered in Britain. No orders came from the British authorities. Indeed it is striking how little London did to keep colonies informed of British occasions – throughout the 1790s senior colonial officials only learnt of British fasts and thanksgivings from English newspapers.¹³ Governors and executives were therefore left to arrange special days, and most in the Atlantic colonies did this enthusiastically. Such occasions might provide a rare moment of unity in a diverse, fragmented and ill-connected region. Days of prayer that repeated British events might also strengthen identifications with Britain and the British Crown – an important consideration in provinces where American influences were strong, and where most of the inhabitants had never set eyes on Britain.¹⁴ The wartime events served propaganda functions too. Surviving fast sermons are fiercely counter-revolutionary: colonists were told that religion was

¹¹ Henri Têtu and Charles Gagnon, *Mandements, Lettres Pastorales et Circulaires Des Évêques De Québec* (Quebec: Imprimerie Générale, 1888), 2: 29-30, 31-2, 34-6, 36-8, 43-5, 100-2, 103-5.

¹² *National Prayers*, ed. Williamson *et al*, cxliii.

¹³ *Ibid.*, cxlviii. From at least 1804 official arrangements were made to send copies of Anglican forms of prayer to the colonies.

¹⁴ Ann Gorman Condon, "1783-1800: Loyalist Arrival, Acadian Return, Imperial Reform," ed. Buckner and John Reid, *The Atlantic Region to Confederation: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 186-7, 192-3; Buckner, "Making British North America British, 1815-1860," ed. C. Eldridge, *Kith and Kin: Canada, Britain and the United States from the Revolution to the Cold War* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), 14-15.

necessary for good government, and that the French Revolution was a “visitation”, sent to punish all those – regardless of nationality – who defamed religion and agitated for political change.¹⁵

Special worship, then, was an aspect of the conservatism that characterised British rule in the aftermath of the American Revolution. The fasts and thanksgivings of the 1790s also fed into official attempts to extend Anglican influence and authority.¹⁶ Nova Scotia received a bishop in 1787, and the first incumbent, Charles Inglis, routinely asked colonial governments to repeat British fasts and thanksgivings. Inglis assumed that colonies that were an integral part of the British nation – and the Church of England – should observe orders for special worship issued by the British authorities.¹⁷ Proclamations in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick communicated the idea that colonies were constitutive parts of the British nation: orders followed the English style, with an instruction to the Anglican bishop to draw up a form of prayer “suitable for the occasion”. Lower and Upper Canadian proclamations omitted these instructions, as the large Roman Catholic and American presences in these provinces necessitated more inclusive forms of special worship. In all the Canadian colonies, inhabitants, regardless of ethnicity or religion, were “charged” and “commanded” to observe days. Those that refused were threatened with God’s “wrath and indignation”.¹⁸ Evidence that sanctions were applied has not been found.

Whether special worship did indeed nurture loyalist sentiments is hard to judge as newspaper reports were sketchy and diarists left only brief details on how they spent days. Ontarian diaries suggest that attendance at public worship was common on fasts and thanksgivings, but that the rhythm of everyday rural life generally continued as normal.¹⁹ It is also difficult to judge whether everyone heard about the early occasions. Government

¹⁵ S. F. Wise, “Sermon Literature and Canadian Intellectual History,” ed. A. B. McKillop and Paul Romney, *God’s Peculiar Peoples: Essays on Political Culture in Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Ottawa: Carlton University Press, 1993): 3-17.

¹⁶ Christopher Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780-1830* (London: Longman, 1989); Judith Fingard, *The Anglican Design in Loyalist Nova Scotia, 1793-1816* (London: S.P.C.K., 1972).

¹⁷ Inglis to governors, 13 May 1799, MG23-C-6, microfilm C-2227/3, f. 30, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa [LAC]; Inglis to Archbishop of Canterbury, 12 Nov. 1803, *ibid.*, f. 118; Inglis to John Wentworth, 24 Apr. 1797, *ibid.*, C-227/2, ff. 104-5.

¹⁸ *Saint John Gazette*, 3 Sept. 1804; *Royal Gazette* [Halifax], 9 May 1797. For Lower Canadian proclamations, see *Report of the Public Archives for the Year 1921* (Ottawa: Acland, 1922), 58, 76-77, 93, 156, 169-70, 183, 187-88, 192-93.

¹⁹ *Royal Gazette*, 26 May 1789; *Upper Canada Gazette*, 16 Mar. 1799. Benjamin Smith, a Methodist lay preacher in Ancaster township, recorded that he fixed a pig pen on the 1812 fast: Benjamin Smith fonds, MS-199, Archives of Ontario, Toronto [AO].

published proclamations in gazettes and posted notices in “conspicuous parts” of towns. The state also assisted bishops by providing clergy and heads of families with Anglican forms of prayer.²⁰ But it is likely many occasions passed by unnoticed, as even clergymen sometimes complained that news arrived late. There were also Protestant “dissenters” who refused to observe orders for special worship that came from states.²¹ But the view that Canadian religious holidays “divided communities or sub-cultures from each other” needs qualifying.²² Days of prayer – even these early ones – were flexible occasions that allowed religious groups to worship according to their own forms and style. There is evidence that Moravians, Methodists and Presbyterians of various types observed fasts and thanksgivings in the Canadian and Atlantic colonies before 1816. There were even moments when Methodists used Anglican forms of prayer.²³ Roman Catholic bishops in Quebec also routinely ordered hymns, special prayers and masses in conjunction with the state-appointed days. This practice – it continued up to 1857 – reflected the loyalty of senior French Catholics to a British monarchy that supposedly protected the distinctive religion and culture of French Canadians.²⁴

From the 1830s the Canadian colonies began to develop cultures of special worship that were independent of the British tradition. All the Canadian governments set aside fasts and thanksgivings during the two cholera epidemics that struck eastern Canada in 1832 and 1834, though here again the colonies followed Britain, as cholera had prompted the British

²⁰ RG1-E1, microfilm c-91/B, f. 461 and microfilm C-93/L, ff. 169-70, LAC; W. Stanton to JPs and sheriffs, 20 May 1812, RG7-G16-C, microfilm C-10788/6, f. 137, LAC.

²¹ For complaints about late notice, see John Burns, *True Patriotism. A Sermon, Preached in the Presbyterian Church in Stamford, Upper Canada* (Montreal: Nahum Mower, 1814), v; for “dissenter” refusal in a later period, see John Roaf, *Religious Liberty: Being a Letter to the Editor of the “Palladium,” upon the Thanksgiving Proclamation* (Palladium Office: Toronto, 1838), 4.

²² Richard Vaudry, *Anglicans and the Atlantic World: High Churchmen, Evangelicals, and the Quebec Connection* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003), 68.

²³ *Moravians in Upper Canada*, ed. Linda Sabathy-Judd (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1999), 306; Charles Ferguson, *The Diary of Simeon Perkins, 1790-96* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1961), 286, 342. For the use of an Anglican form of prayer, see 227.

²⁴ Quebec Roman Catholics were commanded to sing Te Deums, offer prayers, or fast on the same day as Protestants on the following occasions: for naval victories, 10 Jan. 1799; for peace, 12 Aug. 1802; for wartime fasts, 1 Feb. 1804 and 8 May 1812; for Peninsular War victories, Nov. 1812; for a fast day for war with the United States, 28 May 1813; for victories, 21 Apr. 1814; for peace with France, 13 Sept. 1814; for peace with the United States, 6 Apr. 1815; for the Treaty of Paris, 21 May 1816; to avert cholera, 4 May 1832; for the cessation of cholera, 6 May 1833 and 1 Nov. 1834; for the rebellion, 7 Dec. 1838; for the cessation of cholera, 3 Jan. 1850; for success in war with Russia, 18 Apr. 1855; for peace, 4 June 1856; and for the Indian insurrection, 27 Nov. 1857. Têtu and Gagnon, *Mandements*, 2: 516-7, 531-3, 536-7; 3: 105-8, 111-14, 121-3, 123-4, 132-4, 293-6, 305-9, 334-6, 392-3, 559-62; 4: 217, 277-8, 315-16.

government to order special prayers and days in 1831, 1832 and 1833. The special days of worship that Lower and Upper Canada set aside during the rebellions of 1837-38 were, by contrast, distinctively colonial occasions. The special worship of the 1830s is worth exploring in more depth, as in this period the civil and ecclesiastical authorities used fasts and thanksgivings to deepen attachments to Canadian provinces. Yet what emerges from the sources is that days of worship, even those called for colonial causes, were as likely to nurture regional and diasporic attachments as provincial and colonial ones.

The texts generated by the cholera fasts and thanksgivings – proclamations, Anglican forms of prayer and sermons – treated the province as a community with a single conscience. Cholera was blamed on “provincial and personal sins”, though denominations disagreed on what these sins were (while Anglicans emphasised the transgressions of individuals, marginalised nonconformists drew attention to the failings of politicians and institutions).²⁵ Thanksgiving texts also tried to nourish a sense of community and collective responsibility. English-speaking communities that escaped the visitation were told that they were “equally guilty” and had “contributed a portion to the mountain of national crime”. This sense of community transcended denomination and ethnicity. In 1834 the inhabitants of New Carlisle, Quebec, were instructed to give thanks for “the liberation of your Brethren of every denomination in the Province”, and on the same day an Anglican minister in Quebec’s Eastern Townships said cholera had nurtured a “sympathy” and “sensibility” that extended “itself beyond the narrow precincts” of the community’s “personal concerns”.²⁶ That Roman Catholics observed special masses on Friday 4 May – the day Protestants fasted in Lower Canada – added to the sense of community cohesion.²⁷

Special days of prayer promoted the idea that colonial provinces were not temporary or artificial political constructs, but were recognised by God as distinct communities. Provinces were subject to a “judicial providence” that rewarded or punished them depending on their aggregate piety or sins.²⁸ Such evidence might support Allan Smith’s claim that early

²⁵ *Nova Scotia and New Brunswick Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* 1, no. 2 (1832), 101; *Christian Guardian*, 9 May 1832; William Gray, *A Sermon Preached at Saint John Chapel, City of Saint John, N. B.* (Saint John: Henry Chubb, 1832), 5-8.

²⁶ John Bethune, *A Sermon, Preached on Wednesday, February 6, 1833* (Montreal: Armour, 1833), 7-8; William Brunton, *The Judgments of God a Call to Repentance* (Montreal: Starke, 1832), 25; Andrew Balfour, *A Sermon Preached in St. Andrew’s Church, New Carlisle, and in St. Peter’s Church, Paspébiac* (Miramichi: Pierce, 1834), 13-14.

²⁷ Têtu and Gagnon, *Mandements*, 3: 293-6.

²⁸ Nicholas Guyatt, *Providence and the Invention of the United States, 1607-1876* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 6.

nineteenth-century colonists thought of their provinces as communities with distinct characters, experiences and histories.²⁹ Sermons and newspaper editorials, for instance, supposed that the inhabitants of provinces were different to British subjects elsewhere, as they were guilty of distinct vices (intemperance was apparently a characteristic of Nova Scotians).³⁰ Though such views hardly amounted to an embryonic “colonial nationalism”, there is a sense that holy days – even those called for general causes like cholera – could bring out a sense of colonial distinctiveness.

As was customary, newspapers across British North America reported packed churches and devout observances for the cholera fasts and thanksgivings.³¹ A Nova Scotian Methodist newspaper doubted, however, whether the 1832 fast was “conscientiously observed as one of real humiliation and prayer”, and commentators elsewhere believed the public had not taken the right messages from the fasts. In 1833 Quebec newspapers reported that the previous year’s fast had been widely ignored as “too many thought little of the dangers”. A Scottish settler in London, Upper Canada similarly complained the 1832 fast was “littel (sic) regarded” in his area and “made but littel Reformmation amongst us”. The Anglican minister of Terrebonne, Quebec reported the “most solemn and attentive congregation” of his young career for the May 1832 fast, but he added that only Protestants observed the day.³² It is questionable whether these special days nurtured provincial frames of reference. One Anglican clergyman was unaware that Quebec’s 1832 fast was a provincial occasion called by a colonial authority: he thought Lower Canada was joining an empire-wide day of prayer ordered by the ‘King of Britain’.³³ And there is evidence that rather than nurturing cohesion, cholera – in Lower Canada especially – widened ethnic and sectarian divisions. The epidemic exposed French Canadian hostility towards British and Irish immigration, and there were accusations that imperial officials encouraged cholera to kill off

²⁹ Allan Smith, “Old Ontario and the Emergence of a National Frame of Mind,” in Smith, *Canada – An American Nation? Essays on Continentalism, Identity, and the Canadian Frame of Mind* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994), 253-80.

³⁰ Gray, *A Sermon Preached at Saint John Chapel*, 4; *Nova Scotia and New Brunswick Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* 1, 101.

³¹ *Montreal Gazette*, 7 Feb. 1833; *Nova Scotian* [Halifax], 24 May 1832.

³² *The Nova Scotia and New Brunswick Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* 1, 102; *Canadian Courant* [Montreal], 5 Feb. 1833; Henry Scott to James Scott, 18 Mar. 1833, “Letters to James Scott,” National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, Acc.11100; J. L. Milton to the Archdeacon of Quebec, 11 May 1832, C/CAN/QUE/5/392, United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Archives, Oxford.

³³ Brunton, *The Judgments of God*, 11.

Catholics. One French-speaking radical opposed state prayer days altogether, and tried to stop the provincial house of assembly from observing an 1833 thanksgiving.³⁴

Sermons might do more to deepen local and denominational attachments than provincial ones. In his 1834 thanksgiving sermon the Anglican minister at Waterloo in Quebec's Eastern Townships explained that the region had escaped the cholera as it was distinct and specially marked out by a "distinguished chain of providences". The "neighbouring mountains" that diffused "a salubrious atmosphere" separated the region from the rest of the province, and added to the sense that Township communities were a people apart. Revealingly, when the minister asked his congregation to turn their thoughts to "our less favoured brethren in different parts of the province", only Protestants and the 600 Anglicans who had died in Montreal were mentioned. Scattered evidence from other provinces indicates that attachments to smaller territorial units and denominations overrode provincial identifications. Mary Bradley, the New Brunswick Methodist, asked God to spare the city of Saint John – not the province – in the prayer that she committed to her diary for the 1834 fast.³⁵

Inhabitants of colonies possessed multiple identities, and for those of British descent, attachments to regions and denominations sat alongside identifications with Britain and an extended "nation" of British subjects. Indeed the cholera fasts and thanksgivings point to the strength of these imperial and diasporic attachments. One clergyman said it was appropriate that colonies should follow Britain in observing a cholera fast as the chastisement was general and everyone – metropolitans and colonists alike – were members of a "sinful nation".³⁶ In 1832, Nova Scotian Anglicans read prayers taken from the English form of prayer, and the New Brunswick form included a prayer for God's "gracious aid and protection, for that Nation of which we are part".³⁷ The idea that colonists, however distant, should shoulder a sense of collective responsibility for imperial calamities would reappear

³⁴ Fernand Ouellet, *Lower Canada, 1791-1840: Social Change and Nationalism* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1980), 138-40; *Quebec Mercury*, 7 Feb. 1833.

³⁵ George Salmon, *Exemption No Less Than Deliverance from Public Calamity, A Ground of Thankfulness* (Montreal: Bowman, 1835), 11-14; *A Narrative of the Life and Christian Experience of Mrs Mary Bradley of Saint John, New Brunswick* (Boston: Strong & Brodhead, 1849), 324-5.

³⁶ Salmon, *A Sermon Preached at the Village of Waterloo, Shefford, L. C.* (Montreal: s.n., 1833), 14.

³⁷ *A Form of Prayer to be used in all the Churches and Chapels through the Province of Nova-Scotia, on Wednesday, the 23rd day of May, 1832* (Halifax: John Howe, 1832); *A Form of Prayer to be used in all churches, chapels and places of public worship, according to the usage of the Church of England, throughout His Majesty's Province of New Brunswick, on Wednesday, the 23rd Day of May 1832* (Fredericton: Simpson, 1832), 8.

during the Irish famine, the Crimean War, the Indian “Mutiny”, and, in some quarters, in the South African and Great Wars.³⁸

The special days of the cholera era reflected British North America’s lack of integration. They also support the view that identifications in early Canada were “limited, regional, and diasporic”.³⁹ The cholera days provided limited space for a discussion of the distinct characteristics and experiences of provincial communities: the visitation, after all, had a transatlantic reach. The rebellion fasts and thanksgivings also did little to nourish a sense of provincial distinctiveness. Sermons noted Canadian colonists enjoyed “great and peculiar” advantages and blessings; they also called the rebellion a visitation brought on by the “national sins” of a discrete colonial community. But it was the ties that bound the inhabitants of the Canadian provinces to British institutions, values and traditions that received greater emphasis.⁴⁰ Like the cholera occasions, the rebellion days exposed divisions in colonial society. Government had initially turned down requests for fasts from church leaders, as it was feared such an occasion would inflame tensions.⁴¹ The thanksgivings of February 1838 – they were ordered after the first rebellions collapsed – were also unpopular, as while government believed the threat was over, some communities felt they had nothing to be thankful for as fighting was still going on nearby.⁴² The problem of geography, and the difficulty of finding unifying causes, would recur in later decades.

SPECIAL WORSHIP AFTER UNION AND CONFEDERATION

In the early period executive figures in the colonial administration and the dominant churches worked together to set aside fasts and thanksgivings. From the 1840s a broader range of religions would request and arrange special worship. Civil authorities, by contrast, grew increasingly cautious about appointing days of prayer. Fast days became unfashionable and states were alert to growing religious pluralism. There was also an awareness that as

³⁸ Melissa Davidson, “Preaching the Great War: Canadian Anglicans and the War Sermon, 1914-1918” (MA diss., McGill University, 2012), 31-2, 39-40, 51.

³⁹ John Turing, “The Construction of Colonial Identity in the Canadas, 1815-1867” (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 2014), iii.

⁴⁰ Thomas Creen, *Two Discourses, Delivered in St. Mark’s Church, Niagara* (Niagara: Simpson and Menzies, 1838), 7; Robert McGill, *The Love of Country, A Discourse, Preached in St. Andrew’s Church, Niagara* (Niagara: Sewell, 1838), 21-22; Andrew N. Bethune, *National Judgments Provoked by National Sins* (Cobourg: Chatterton, 1838), 10-12, 22-3.

⁴¹ Bishop of Montreal to Francis Bond Head, 12 Dec. 1837, RG5-C1, microfilm C-13552/9, no. 1177, f. 4956, LAC.

⁴² *Montreal Gazette*, 24 Feb. 1838.

territories grew in size, and colonial societies became more diverse, it was unlikely that unifying causes could be found. But special days did not disappear. Thanksgivings for uncontroversial issues, such as good harvests and royal jubilees, came to dominate, and what had been a “mosaic” of days of prayer organised regionally and provincially would give way to dominion and imperial occasions.

The civil authority’s relationship with special worship changed after the union of the two Canadas in 1841. The first indication of this came in May 1847 when the Anglican bishop of Montreal recommended to Lord Elgin, the governor general, that the Province of Canada should observe a fast for the Irish famine, just as Britain had done earlier in the year. Imitating the British fast was, in the bishop’s view, both necessary and customary. The typhus that came to Canada on Irish immigrant ships showed that both Ireland and Canada suffered under a common visitation, and whenever fasts and thanksgivings had been “observed in the Empire at large”, the usual practice – the bishop said – had been for Anglican bishops to recommend a special day on behalf of the whole community. The request was refused by Elgin’s executive council as it did not recognise the Anglican Church’s right to speak for the community. When typhus spread, Montreal’s leading Protestant clergymen requested a fast, but this was also refused.⁴³ It was not that either cause was controversial; rather it was because the requests lacked Roman Catholic support. Fast days, modelled on British occasions and organised by Protestants, were deemed inappropriate in pluralistic societies; they also did not fit with Elgin’s policy of respecting French Canadian religion, “habits” and “prejudices”. When war broke out with Russia in 1854, Anglican leaders would again urge Elgin’s government to appoint a fast day in imitation of a British occasion, but again the request was refused.⁴⁴

Though special days declined in areas where Protestants were a minority, colonial states continued to call them, and they would survive, though in altered form, beyond the 1840s. Canadian special worship continued to be connected with the British tradition, and the causes that structured special worship in Britain – cholera, war and the condition of the harvest – also predominated in Canada. In 1842 Nova Scotia and New Brunswick went so far as observe thanksgivings for England’s harvest. The Maritime provinces continued to call days as they had Protestant majorities and executive governments that helped Protestants

⁴³ For the correspondence, see RG4-C1, microfilm H-2585/198, nos. 1267 and 2387, LAC (1267 is placed at 2387).

⁴⁴ Mason Wade, *The French Canadians, 1760-1945* (London: Macmillan, 1955), 260; Bishop Strachan of Toronto to the Bishop of Quebec, 26 Mar. 1855, Strachan Papers, Letterbook 1854-1862, f. 61, AO.

control civic calendars and public spaces.⁴⁵ But upholding Protestant ascendancy was not special worship's primary function; indeed such occasions remained a conventional response to collective trauma. The sense of crisis, unease and insecurity that marked British culture in the "hungry forties" reached the Canadian colonies and prompted fasts and thanksgivings there. The fasts that Nova Scotia and New Brunswick observed for the Irish famine in May and June 1847 came at a time of agricultural depression, economic distress and sectarian violence.⁴⁶ Newfoundland observed a fast in July 1847 after a year of fires, famine and storms, and Nova Scotia set aside fasts and thanksgivings when cholera reappeared in 1849 and 1854. Even Lord Elgin in Canada was prepared to appoint a thanksgiving for the passing of cholera in January 1850.⁴⁷ The transatlantic connections in special worship reflected the importance of British culture and immigration in mid-nineteenth century Canada, as well as the enduring British outlook of the Protestant churches.⁴⁸

Special worship changed markedly after 1850. Days of prayer were democratised, and proclamations were modified to suit an age of mass immigration and growing religious pluralism. The public was now encouraged or "exhorted" to observe, and proclamations ceased to name and privilege the Anglican Church.⁴⁹ Changes in church-state relationships, notably the move away from a privileged religious establishment, meant the responsibility for arranging days ceased to be monopolised by senior Anglicans. The Anglican bishop of Montreal, for instance, was upset that the Canadian authorities did not consult him when they appointed the January 1850 thanksgiving.⁵⁰ As Anglicans were pushed aside, so other Protestant denominations moved from merely observing days, to asking government to appoint them. In December 1849 the Presbyterian Church of Canada persuaded the Province of Canada to call a thanksgiving for the end of cholera, and Ontario Presbyterians would regularly ask government for days of humiliation and thanksgiving from the mid-1850s. The

⁴⁵ *Nova Scotian*, 20 and 27 Oct., 17 Nov. 1842. Scott See, *Riots in New Brunswick: Orange Nativism and Social Violence in the 1840s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 196-7, for the assistance the New Brunswick executive gave Orangeism.

⁴⁶ See, *Riots in New Brunswick*, 15-24. On the sense of gloom in pre-1850 Britain, see Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1785-1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

⁴⁷ *Morning Courier* [St. John's, Newfoundland], 10 June 1847; *Nova Scotian*, 3 Sept. 1849; *British Colonist* [Halifax], 22 Dec. 1849; *Morning Journal* [Halifax], 20 Sept. 1854.

⁴⁸ Bucker, "Making British North America British," 22-7; Todd Webb, "How the Canadian Methodists Became British: Unity, Schism and Transatlantic Identity," ed. Nancy Christie, *Transatlantic Subjects* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), 159-98.

⁴⁹ See *Canada Gazette*, 22 Dec. 1849 for the new style of address.

⁵⁰ Bishop of Montreal to Provincial Secretary, 19 Jan. 1850, RG4-C1, microfilm H-2620/270, f. 38, LAC.

Presbyterian takeover was such that some claimed that Canada's days of prayer were an extension of the ancient Presbyterian thanksgiving tradition.⁵¹ Individuals occasionally asked for special days, but government ignored such requests.⁵²

The 1850s also brought changes in what days were appointed for. After 1857 – the year fasts for the Indian “Mutiny” were observed – Canadian states, like their British counterparts, largely stopped setting aside fasts.⁵³ Underpinning the fast day was the belief that calamities, even those that struck isolated areas, were divine retribution for the accumulated sins of a larger community: the term “national sin” was used. But the notion of corporate sin, and collective responsibility, became hard to maintain as territories became larger and populations more diverse. The Province of Canada did not call fasts for regional causes, and those it did observe (for the Crimea in 1855 and the “Mutiny” in 1857) were for imperial causes. Smaller territories would continue to observe state fasts for regional causes in the 1850s and 1860s (Newfoundland appointed one in January 1865 after the fishing industry failed), though the tendency was for calamities to be observed locally. In 1854, for example, the mayor of Hamilton, Ontario appointed a fast day during cholera, and another was called three years later after a railway disaster.⁵⁴

State-appointed fasts also disappeared because Canada did not suffer the kind of prolonged and far-reaching calamities that affected other settler societies.⁵⁵ But the decline in general fasts also reflected shifts in religious belief that were common across the English-speaking world. Fasts became increasingly controversial as the old “theology of fear” gave way to a new religiosity that placed less emphasis on “special providences”. In the early nineteenth century a division had opened up between evangelicals who saw God as constantly intervening in human affairs through special judgments, and those who thought that providence mostly operated through “second causes”. In this view, dramatic special

⁵¹ *Ecclesiastical and Missionary Record for the Presbyterian Church of Canada* 6, no. 3 (1850), 39; Presbytery of Hamilton to Governor General, 10 Oct. 1855, RG7-G20, microfilm H-1364/58, no. 6280; Rev. Alexander Topp to Sir Edmund Head, 3 Nov. 1858, RG5-C1, microfilm H-2461/588, no. 2082; Rev. Barclay's sermon in *Globe*, 5 Dec. 1862.

⁵² In 1859 an “unemployed mechanic” thought the “fearful” commercial depression warranted a day of humiliation: W. H. Tattersall to governor-general, 25 Feb. 1859, RG7-G20, microfilm H-1368/75-76, no. 7284, LAC.

⁵³ In fact British governments backed away from all state holy days: Williamson, “State Prayers,” 149.

⁵⁴ *The Times and General Commercial Gazette* [St. John's], 21 Dec. 1864; *Evil in a City: A Sermon Delivered to His Congregation by the Rev. Robert Irvine, Minister of Knox's Church, Hamilton* (Hamilton: Nicholson, 1854), 21-22; *Globe*, 17 Mar. 1857.

⁵⁵ Hardwick, “Special days.”

providences, such as cholera, occurred only rarely. Through the nineteenth century the latter view won out, and a greater range of occurrences were ascribed to a “general providence” that worked through natural laws. As less scope was allowed to unpredictable special providences, the rationale for fast days and prayers for divine intervention was weakened. Calamities came about because humans had failed to understand and work with God’s natural laws, not because God had suddenly intervened.⁵⁶

After the 1850s the range of causes for which states appointed days of worship shrank considerably, with the result that special worship began to look the same across Canada. As others have pointed out, Canada lacked “a common and unifying traumatic experience” that might nourish a national sentiment among the diverse communities of European descent.⁵⁷ Unifying causes therefore had to be invented. The Province of Canada responded to pressure from Protestants and appointed a thanksgiving for the harvest in November 1859, presumably because there had been poor yields and an economic downturn in the previous two years. Civil war in the United States, and further good harvests, prompted Canadian thanksgivings in 1860, 1862, 1863 and 1865, and thanksgivings for peace and plenty spread to the Atlantic provinces in the same period.

Thanksgiving holidays broadcast the authority of institutional religion. They showed that Protestant churches, with the support of the civil authorities, could intrude into the civil realm and disrupt usual weekday activities. Peter Stevens points out that thanksgivings gave Protestant churchmen the chance to shape a Canadian nation and Canadian character that was in the process of formation.⁵⁸ This is a valuable argument, though it does not fully explain why the governments of large and diverse territories were prepared to set aside general days of worship. Harvest thanksgivings sat better with the new and sunnier religiosity; more importantly, they would have been familiar to many of Canada’s diverse population. Most American states had adopted seasonal autumnal thanksgivings long before the federal government appointed the first national occasion in 1863. The key elements of this American tradition – public worship, family dinners and communal festivities – would be carried to

⁵⁶ John Medley, *A Sermon Preached in the Cathedral Church, Fredericton, and in St. John’s Church, St. John, on the Occasion of the Late Calamitous Fire* (Fredericton: Cropley, 1877), 1. For theological changes, see Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, 13-16, and Christie and Michael Gauvreau, *Christian Churches and Their Peoples, 1840-1965: A Social History of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 43-4.

⁵⁷ J. M. Bumsted, “The Cultural Landscape of Early Canada,” ed. Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan, *Strangers Within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 392.

⁵⁸ For the confidence of late-Victorian institutional religion, see Christie and Gauvreau, “Secularisation or Resacralisation? The Canadian Case, 1760-2000,” ed. Callum Brown and Michael Snape, *Secularisation in the Christian World* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 57-9; Stevens, “‘Righteousness Exalteth a Nation’,” 56-9.

Canada.⁵⁹ But the Canadian occasions were also influenced by a British thanksgiving tradition. *Days* of thanksgiving for harvests were rare in Britain, though the “harvest home” festivals were ancient, Presbyterians had a long tradition of Thursday thanksgivings, and special *prayers* for good harvests had been ordered on seven occasions in Britain between 1801 and 1854.⁶⁰ The Canadian Roman Catholic Church had no tradition of prayers for harvests, though significantly the Archbishop of Quebec ordered thanksgiving masses for the abundant yields in November 1865.⁶¹

Churchmen occasionally asked states to set aside thanksgivings for causes other than the harvest, though such requests were refused as the issues were considered too sensitive and divisive. Anglicans asked for a special day to mark the end of the 1885 North-West Rebellion but their request was turned down because the authorities feared it would upset French-speaking Catholics. States also left it to churches to mark the end of epidemics with thanksgiving prayers.⁶² But even harvest thanksgivings could be problematic. The government of Canada did not order thanksgivings in 1861 and 1864, and no holidays were set aside in the years from 1866 to 1870. The Confederation government formed in 1867 would not appoint a harvest thanksgiving before 1879. Stevens suggests that governments were reluctant to appoint because they did not wish to alienate those Protestants who objected to state-appointed days of worship.⁶³ It is not clear, however, if this was really an issue. In Britain it was often the case that the loudest critics of state prayers ended up arranging special services on the same date as everyone else. The same was true in Canada. In 1859, for instance, secessionist Presbyterians in Ontario in 1859 decided to observe a state thanksgiving after lengthy – and well publicised – debates. And newspapers show that Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists engaged with the earliest thanksgivings.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ James Baker, *Thanksgiving: The Biography of an American Holiday* (Lebanon: University of New Hampshire Press, 2009), chs. 2-4.

⁶⁰ *National Prayers*, ed. Williamson et al, 671 (1801), 717 (1810), 734 (1813), 778 (1832), 816 (1842), 839 (1847), 781 (1854). The Anglican bishops in England and Wales adopted a form of prayer for harvest thanksgivings in 1862.

⁶¹ Têtu and Gagnon, *Mandements*, 4: 524.

⁶² Macdonald to Bishop Machray, 27 Aug. 1885, MG26-A, microfilm C-34, f. 262, LAC; *Form of Thanksgiving to Almighty God for Deliverance from the Epidemic with which the City of Montreal has Lately Been Visited* (s.n., 1886).

⁶³ Stevens, “‘Righteousness Exalteth a Nation’,” 60-1, 65.

⁶⁴ *Globe*, 5 Dec. 1862. For Presbyterian opposition and conformity to British state worship, see *National Prayers*, ed. Williamson et al, lxxxvii. See Stevens, “‘Righteousness Exalteth a Nation’,” 59-60, for Presbyterian debates.

The wariness of officials probably had a political root, and presumably reflected a wider reluctance on the part of provincial and federal governments to interfere in sensitive issues, namely religion, that threatened to divide French Canadians from their English-speaking counterparts. Quebec officials evidently thought that state-appointed days of prayer were inappropriate in a multicultural society. While English-speaking Ontario observed state thanksgivings every year from 1871, Quebec batted off requests from Protestant ministers and would not appoint a thanksgiving before 1877.⁶⁵ There were also prosaic reasons why governments of large territories hesitated to set aside days for single causes. The government of the Province of Canada turned down a Presbyterian request for an 1864 day because the harvest had not been of “unusual abundance” everywhere. This issue was exacerbated by Confederation and the acquisition of prairie and northern territories. John A. Macdonald, prime minister from 1867 to 1873, refused several requests for dominion-wide thanksgivings because the land was too large and the population too diverse.⁶⁶

By the late 1870s politicians were more confident of thanksgiving’s nation-building potential. In 1879 Macdonald’s Conservative government appointed the first dominion thanksgiving, made Dominion Day a civil holiday, and used both to promote a “National Policy” of railroad development and westward expansion. Thanksgivings complemented a vision of Canada as a “unity in diversity” as they were undemanding and flexible: inhabitants could participate in a community-wide occasion while retaining their religious and cultural diversity.⁶⁷ Thanksgivings had displayed a “nationalist flavour” long before the late 1870s. Pre-Confederation thanksgivings had highlighted the commonalties between British North America’s English speakers: every province (apart from Newfoundland) appointed harvest thanksgivings, communities gave thanks for the same blessings, and the same nationalistic themes that featured in Ontario appeared elsewhere. But the thanksgiving sermons and services of the pre- and post-Confederation era warrant further analysis as they also point to the limits of national feeling. Townspeople had to be reminded of the common values, interests and experiences they shared with agriculturists. Denominational attachments exerted a powerful pull. And such occasions could not nurture ties between English- and French-speaking communities.

⁶⁵ Some Protestants considered such an occasion their “right”: see Rev. Potts, *Montreal Gazette*, 17 Nov. 1871.

⁶⁶ Provincial Secretary to John McFarish, 18 Nov. 1864, RG5-C1, microfilm H-2499/789, no. 1333, LAC; Joseph Pope, *Correspondence of Sir John Macdonald* (Toronto: Doubleday, 1921), 138-9.

⁶⁷ J. R. Miller, “Unity/Diversity: the Canadian Experience,” *Dalhousie Review* 63, no. 1 (1975), 65.

Protestant churches seized on thanksgivings as they wished to shape a new Canadian identity and invest the Canadian nation with a Christian character.⁶⁸ Not every thanksgiving sermon focused on the future of the Canadian nation: church leaders did not tell ministers what to say on these occasions, and sermons might cover a range of issues. The Anglican minister at Grimsby, Ontario used his 1860 thanksgiving sermon to criticise his congregation's "covetous & mean spirits".⁶⁹ Stevens is nonetheless right that nationalism was a dominant theme in the thanksgiving discourses that appeared in print in Ontario. These "nationalistic sermons" were not peculiar to one Protestant church or Stevens' Ontario case study. Sermons pointed out that Canada's distinct climate and environment was forging a people that possessed distinctive traits, a "national character", and a "national feeling". The myth that Canadians were essentially an agricultural people was expressed in Ontarian sermons in the 1860s. It also surfaced in the Maritimes.⁷⁰ A sense of Canada's providential mission – one that was semi-independent of Britain's imperial one – also runs through thanksgiving texts. In 1865, for example, a Montreal Presbyterian remarked that Canadians "were laying the foundation of an Empire, destined to be amongst the greatest and most prosperous in all the earth".⁷¹ Civil war in the United States and dearth and social unrest in Britain added to the sense of Canadian specialness.

Though thanksgiving addresses often depicted Canadians as a distinct and favoured people, preachers were unsure whether to emphasise Canada's British or North American origins and character.⁷² Canada's British heritage was celebrated in numerous thanksgiving sermons. These occasions also nourished a sense of continental unity as they drew attention to the commonalities between Canadians and Americans. Calls were even made for

⁶⁸ Stevens, "'Righteousness Exalteth a Nation'," 62-5, 67-70; Phyllis Airhart, "Ordering a New Nation and Reordering Protestantism 1867-1914," ed. George Rawlyk, *The Canadian Protestant Experience 1760-1990* (Burlington: Welch Publishing, 1990), 98-101; Preston Jones, "'His Dominion'? Varieties of Protestant Commentary on the Confederation of Canada," *Fides et Historia* 32, no. 2 (2000), 83-8.

⁶⁹ F. J. Lundy fonds, MS-3, reel 3, diary entry for 6 Dec. 1860, AO.

⁷⁰ *Montreal Gazette*, 8 Dec. 1860; *Globe*, 19 Oct. 1865; *Citizen* [Halifax], 27 Oct. 1875; *Halifax Daily Reporter and Times*, 22 Nov. 1871. For the place of agriculture in Canadian thought, see Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism 1867-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 177-83.

⁷¹ John Jenkins, *Canada's Thanksgiving for National Blessings in the Year of Our Lord, 1865* (Montreal: Dawson Brothers, 1865), 9; Smith, "American Culture and the English-Canadian Concept of Mission," in Smith, *Canada – An American Nation?*, 25-39.

⁷² Stevens, "'Righteousness Exalteth a Nation'," 60.

continent-wide thanksgivings.⁷³ The same themes of westward expansion and providential mission that coloured nineteenth-century American rhetoric appeared in Canadian thanksgiving addresses. There was, then, a sense that Canadians and Americans shared “a way of life invested with special, unprecedented, significance”.⁷⁴ The notion that Canadians and Americans shared a common “Anglo-Saxon” heritage would emerge particularly forcefully at the turn of the century and was reflected in special worship: in September 1901 Canadians would be instructed to observe a “fast day” to mark President McKinley’s death.⁷⁵

But thanksgivings, like the special days of earlier decades, invited inhabitants to imagine themselves members of various kinds of secular and religious community. Sermon-givers acknowledged this when they listed the things that churchgoers had to give thanks for as members of an empire, as inhabitants of provinces and a dominion, and as followers of a denomination.⁷⁶ For the imperial fasts, churchgoers had contributed to funds for distant British sufferers; for the later thanksgivings it was often denominational schemes – such as missions and church building – that predominated. Ministers also used thanksgivings to outline the progress and future potential, both in Canada and overseas, of their denominations.⁷⁷ These denominational identities sat alongside attachments to a broad-based Protestantism. Thanksgivings nourished a new spirit of interdenominational cooperation and Protestant consensus: Evangelical Alliance delegations asked the civil authorities to set aside days of prayer, and even Anglicans – the group often considered the most hostile to interdenominational cooperation – sometimes worked with other Protestants to organise community-wide days of thanksgiving when the state refused to do so.⁷⁸

While churchmen wished to emphasise the things that unified Canadians, other commentators focused on Canada’s diversity and particularisms. In the 1880s provincial newspapers sometimes overlooked the fact that thanksgivings were national occasions.⁷⁹ Thanksgiving editorials might celebrate the distinctiveness of particular provinces, though

⁷³ Horatio Hale to Governor-General, 25 Oct. 1866, RG7-G20, microfilm H-1375/114-15, no. 12679, LAC. Hale was the son of Sarah Hale, the woman who campaigned for national thanksgivings in the United States.

⁷⁴ C. Pitblado, *Our Heritage. A Sermon Delivered on Thanksgiving Day* (Winnipeg: Russell, 1882), 4-5. Smith, “The Continental Dimension in the Evolution of the English-Canadian Mind,” in Smith, *Canada – An American Nation?*, 42.

⁷⁵ *Mail and Empire* [Toronto], 20 Sept. 1901.

⁷⁶ Rev. Caulfield, *Montreal Gazette*, 15 Nov. 1872.

⁷⁷ Rev. Howard reported in *ibid.*, 8 Dec. 1860.

⁷⁸ Airhart, “Ordering a New Nation,” 100-1; *Globe*, 7 Nov. 1871; see *ibid.*, 26 June 1871 for Anglican ecumenicalism.

⁷⁹ *Citizen*, 2 Nov. 1880, for a Nova Scotian example.

this was most evident in new territories, such as British Columbia. This region's distinctive culture of holidays and celebrations would continue when the province entered the Canadian confederation in 1871. The Fourth of July was widely celebrated and American thanksgivings appear to have attracted more attention than the Canadian occasions. The provincial government did not call a thanksgiving until 1877 and the first national thanksgivings were apparently poorly observed (the government was blamed for not publicising them properly).⁸⁰ When British Columbians did take notice of dominion thanksgivings in the later 1880s, thanksgiving editorials focused primarily on the province's, rather than the nation's, particular blessings and advantages. British Columbia was a "virgin Province" boasting "illimitable resources" and populated by an "enterprising, hard-working and God-fearing people".⁸¹ The regionalism and sense of pre-eminence promoted in the thanksgiving editorials may have been an early sprouting of the kind of celebration of "regional particularity" that Forrest Pass argues was such a feature of Dominion Day (1 July) celebrations in twentieth-century British Columbia.⁸²

Thanksgivings, and the national outlooks they tried to promote, might also be undermined by a weak sense of collective experience and responsibility. Ministers spent a lot of time convincing individuals that they were, as one Montreal Anglican put it, "personally concerned" in thanksgiving days. Throughout the 1860s and 1870s ministers had to remind urbanites that they should give thanks for good harvests because they shared a common interest with their rural counterparts.⁸³ And while thanksgivings conjured images of inclusive imperial and national communities, they only promoted one, British and Protestant, version of Canadian nationality. As the next section shows, the only events that achieved anything like a community-wide status were the royal occasions of the late-Victorian and Edwardian eras.

MONARCHY AND SPECIAL WORSHIP AT LATE CENTURY

⁸⁰ The dates of American thanksgivings were regularly noted in the press and sometimes led to government offices closing: *Daily British Colonist* [Victoria], 30 Nov. 1876. For poor observances of the first dominion thanksgivings, see *ibid.*, 8 Nov. 1879 and 27 Oct. 1881. For observances of Independence Day, see Pass, "Dominion Day," 192-9.

⁸¹ The editorials in Vancouver's *Daily World*, 6 Nov. 1889 and *Daily News-Advertiser*, 7 Nov. 1889 are typical.

⁸² Pass, "Dominion Day," 203-12.

⁸³ Dean of Montreal in *Montreal Gazette*, 8 Dec. 1860; Rev. R. W. Morgan in *ibid.*, 15 Nov. 1872; Rev Carmichael in *ibid.*, 17 Nov. 1871.

Dominion thanksgivings were Protestant, not national, occasions. Thanksgivings could stir sectarian animosities: Irish Catholics dismissed Ontario's 1871 thanksgiving as an "Evangelical holiday", and Protestants branded Catholics disloyal when they refused to participate.⁸⁴ Some French-language newspapers ceased publication on thanksgivings, and in Montreal, where Anglophones exerted considerable civic authority, Catholic businesses closed for the day. This rarely happened in Quebec City, and most French-language newspapers only mentioned thanksgivings in passing. French Canadians made their own bids to control civic calendars and public space. The late 1870s initiated a period when French Canadian leaders, both clerical and lay, began meshing older religious celebrations and processions with new commemorative events that celebrated Quebec's French and Catholic heritage and identity.⁸⁵

But English- and French-speaking Catholics did engage with the royal occasions of late century, though the wider political context was crucial in determining the extent of observances. In the late nineteenth century the civil and ecclesiastical authorities in Britain made more direct efforts to strengthen imperial attachments through acts of worship that were observed simultaneously across the empire. Telegraph made such events possible. For Queen Victoria's 1887 and 1897 jubilees the Colonial Office provided governors with the English orders and forms for special prayers, evidently in the expectation that colonies would appoint special days and prayers.⁸⁶ In both 1887 and 1897 Canada observed civil holidays on the same or proximate days to those in Britain, and messages from the Queen were read in thanksgiving services across Canada: in 1887 asking that her thanks to God should be expressed during the special services; in 1897 asking God to bless her 'beloved people'. These empire-wide days stemmed in part from contemporary enthusiasm for "Greater Britain". But they also reflected late-Victorian anxieties about the strength and future of empire.⁸⁷

English-speaking communities marked the jubilees in much the same way as they celebrated Dominion Day. Religious thanksgiving services were accompanied by military

⁸⁴ *Irish Canadian* [Toronto], 15 Nov. 1871; *Church Guardian*, 23 Nov. 1887.

⁸⁵ See *Le Franco-Canadien* [Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu], 23 Nov. 1877, and *Le Gazette de Joliette*, 7 Nov. 1879, for curt thanksgiving reports. The reburial in 1878 of Mgr de Laval – Quebec's first Catholic bishop – marked the beginning of an era of public commemorations in French Canada: Ronald Rudin, *Founding Fathers: The Celebration of Champlain and Laval in the Streets of Quebec, 1878-1908* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

⁸⁶ CO854/28/217 and CO854/33/300, The National Archives, London.

⁸⁷ Hardwick and Williamson, "Special worship in the British Empire."

parades, fireworks and sports.⁸⁸ These occasions made imperial ties more tangible. An earlier royal thanksgiving occasion, the 1872 day for the recovery of the Prince of Wales from typhoid, had fallen flat because the colonial occasions had not been coordinated with the British event. In 1887, by contrast, those who participated in festivals and church services knew that fellow British subjects would be doing something similar, around the same date, elsewhere in the empire.⁸⁹ Sermon-givers gave thanks for the blessings that Queen Victoria's reign had brought to the empire, colonial dominions, and to their denominations. The service that Toronto's Jewish population organised for the 1887 jubilee received particular press coverage. The synagogue services featured the national anthem, sung in Hebrew, and a sermon, in which the rabbi celebrated Victoria's reign for the protection and advancement it had apparently brought to the Jewish religion and people.⁹⁰

The French-speaking Catholic clergy similarly regarded the Crown as a protector of the rights, culture, language and religion of national minorities. This explains why French-speaking clergy had, ever since the 1760s, offered prayers for royal marriages, births, coronations and recoveries from illness. One historian has described French Canadian loyalty and enthusiasm for monarchy as "consistent". In reality it was conditional and fluctuated.⁹¹ The 1872 royal thanksgiving was observed at Quebec's Roman Catholic cathedral, but the bishops did not officially command observances among the clergy. Victoria's 1887 jubilee prompted loyalist editorials in the French Canadian press, but again no orders for special worship came from the Catholic hierarchy (indeed the Archbishop of Montreal refused to allow illuminations in his churches).⁹² This reticence possibly stemmed in part from the anger that French Canadians felt over the Canadian government's execution of Louis Riel, the Roman Catholic Metis rebel leader, in 1885. As Mark McGowan points out, the government's handling of the North-West rebellion tarnished the image of monarchy and a multicultural Canada, as it demonstrated that Canada's multiple religions and ethnicities did not enjoy equal status. The 1887 jubilee was also ignored by Irish Catholics who claimed that Victoria – or "Evictoria" as she was dubbed – had sanctioned famine and dispossession in

⁸⁸ Wade Henry, "Royal Representation, Ceremony, and Cultural Identity in the Building of the Canadian Nation" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2001), 133.

⁸⁹ *Montreal Gazette*, 15 Apr. 1872. See Archdeacon Lander in *Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 22 June 1887, for the sense of simultaneity.

⁹⁰ *Toronto Daily Mail*, 22 June 1887.

⁹¹ Henry, "Royal Representation," 300.

⁹² *Quebec Mercury*, 16. Apr. 1872; *Le Canadien* [Quebec], 21 June 1887; *Mandements, Lettres Pastorales, Circulaires et Autres-Documents Publiés Dans Le Diocèse De Montréal* (Montreal: Arbour & Laperle, 1893), 337-8.

Ireland. Ontario's senior Roman Catholic, Archbishop John Lynch, refused to order special services.⁹³

Victoria's 1897 diamond jubilee was more enthusiastically received. By this time a Liberal government, one led by the French Canadian Wilfrid Laurier and committed to an inclusive Canadianism, was in power – thanks in large part to the votes of French-speakers in Quebec. Laurier's government renewed hopes that French-speakers could occupy autonomous spaces within Canada and the empire. It also triggered renewed enthusiasm for a monarchy that supposedly symbolised imperial and Canadian multiculturalism. The same French-speaking archbishops who had ignored the 1887 jubilee now ordered thanksgiving services, and Queen Victoria was widely depicted as the embodiment of liberty, tolerance and maternal virtue in French-language newspapers. The later French-Canadian engagement with Empire Day, which was celebrated in Canada from 1898, further illustrates how empire and monarchy could be celebrated as symbols of liberty and inclusion.⁹⁴ There was also widespread engagement among English-speaking Catholics. For McGowan, the enthusiasm of Ontario's Irish Catholics in 1897 reflected the community's changing composition and orientation. An older, Irish-orientated, generation was passing away, to be replaced by a younger one that identified with an independent Canada, and an empire of equal and autonomous partners. This heterogeneous empire would be tied together, not by a formal federation, but by loyalty to the Crown.⁹⁵

The royal occasions of late century were flexible and inclusive occasions because there was little direction from civil officials or dominant churches. It has been noted that Protestant clergymen lost control of thanksgivings towards the end of the nineteenth century. Governments, not churches, selected the dates for the holiday, and thanksgiving was divested of its religious associations as seasonal recreations and turkey dinners were popularised.⁹⁶ Churches also had little control over the royal occasions of late century. In 1887 and 1897 the federal government set aside civil holidays and communicated the Queen's thanksgiving

⁹³ Mark McGowan, "Canadian Catholics, Loyalty, and the British Empire, 1763-1901," ed. Frank O'Gorman and Allan Blackstock, *Loyalism and the Formation of the British World, 1775-1914* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2014), 216; *True Witness and Catholic Chronicle* [Montreal], 15 June 1887; McGowan, *The Waning of the Green: Catholics, the Irish, and Identity in Toronto, 1887-1922* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 10, 202-3.

⁹⁴ Têtu and Gagnon, *Mandements*, 8: 372; Henry, "Royal Representation," 300-3; Joel Belliveau and Marcel Martel, "'One Flag, One Throne, One Empire?'" Espousing and Replacing Empire Day in French Canada, 1899-1952," ed. Hayday and Blake, *Celebrating Canada*, 129-32.

⁹⁵ McGowan, *Waning of the Green*, 186, 202-4, 208.

⁹⁶ Stevens, "'Righteousness Exalteth a Nation,'" 70-7.

messages, but left it to municipal authorities to organise local celebrations. In some places managing committees tried to prevent churches from holding religious services on jubilee day. Opponents of religious services at Kingston, Ontario claimed that jubilee day was supposed to be a “joyous” occasion. Kingston’s religious ministers managed to resist this attack, but they could not prevent horse races from being included in the city’s 1887 jubilee day festival programme.⁹⁷

Though they could not guide public observances, Christian and non-Christian churches were free to observe these occasions on their own terms. Non-Protestants and non-English speakers could claim an “imperial citizenship”, and demonstrate their loyalty to an imperial and Canadian nation.⁹⁸ Of course expressing loyalty to monarchy did not mean giving up other cultural, religious and ethnic allegiances. Nor did it mean that Roman Catholics gave up observing special acts of worship for other, specifically Catholic, issues. Indeed late-century Roman Catholics were free to develop a many-stranded culture of special worship. One strand was connected to the state-appointed royal occasions and exhibited Catholic loyalty; another reflected the “ultramontane” character of Canadian Catholicism, with prayers and thanksgivings for Popes and suffering Catholic countries featuring prominently.⁹⁹

The jubilee thanksgivings could not forge one people, or one community, out of Canada’s multiplicity of ethnicities and faiths. Monarchy was integrative, not assimilative, and the royal occasions of late century emphasised Canada’s – and the empire’s – diversity. The appeal of monarchy should not be overplayed, however. French- and English-speaking Catholics would offer *Te Deums* and special prayers for royal funerals and coronations after 1900, but the lukewarm response that French Canadians showed towards ‘Victoria Day’ – a statutory national holiday from 1901 – points to the limits of royalism and imperialism.¹⁰⁰ Yet no other cause, not even war, could generate special acts of worship on anything like a community-wide scale. One Anglican bishop thought a “day of prayer and humiliation”, called after “Black Week” during the South African War, would be observed by all English-speaking Christians. But when the Church of England organised a “day of intercession” on a

⁹⁷ *Daily British Whig* [Kingston], 14 June 1887. Henry, “Royal Representation,” 132, for the lack of central government involvement.

⁹⁸ McGowan, “Canadian Catholics,” 202.

⁹⁹ Têtu and Gagnon, *Mandements*, 5: 86, 123, 263, 619. McGowan, “Canadian Catholics,” 201-22, for the flexibility of Canadian Catholics.

¹⁰⁰ Têtu and Gagnon, *Mandements*, 9: 259-60; Christ Tait, “The Politics of Holiday Making: Legislating Victoria Day as a Perpetual Holiday in Canada, 1897-1901,” ed. Hayday and Blake, *Celebrating Canada*, 83-108.

Sunday in February 1900, non-Anglicans refused to participate. Anglicans, it was argued, were trying to assume the status of a national establishment.¹⁰¹ Days of intercession were observed regularly throughout the Great War, and though these occasions were cast as “national days of prayer”, they, like thanksgivings, widened rather than bridged the differences between communities. Roman Catholics were ordered to observe wartime days of prayer in January 1915 and January 1916, but this practice (and French Canadian observances of Empire Day) ended when the toxic issue of conscription – which surfaced in the spring of 1917 – drove a thicker wedge between English- and French-speakers.¹⁰²

CONCLUSION

Special days of worship were remarkable occasions when civil and ecclesiastical leaders worked together to varying degrees to foster a sense of unity and community among large and disparate populations. It is true that special days of worship asked little of states. Indeed, it was not until the inter-war period that Canadian governments would take a more active role in organising public commemorations and celebrations.¹⁰³ Yet fasts and thanksgivings show that governments in earlier periods were concerned to inculcate national and imperial sentiments through public holidays and rituals.

Anglican leaders in the Napoleonic era had imagined days of prayer in which everyone attended Church of England services and followed a common form of prayer. This vision of a genuinely collective act of worship was unrealisable. Special days of worship were flexible occasions that permitted many different forms of observance among churches and individuals. The authorities could not enforce observances, and beyond setting aside a day, and recommending attendance at public worship, little was said about how individuals should make best use of days. Further research might shed light on how observances in civic and private spaces, and in town and country, conformed with or challenged the elite perspectives considered here. No doubt many treated these occasions as holidays. But when viewed from a top-down perspective it is striking that a broad religious public responded to

¹⁰¹ Bishop Dunn to Archbishop Temple, 1 Jan. 1900, Archbishop F. Temple Papers, vol. 42, Lambeth Palace Library, London. Gordon Heath, *War With a Silver Lining: Canadian Protestant Churches and the South African War, 1899-1902* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009), 65-9.

¹⁰² Têtu and Gagnon, *Mandements*, 11: 97-101, 210. Belliveau and Martel, “‘One Flag’,” 132-9, for declining French Canadian observance of Empire Day.

¹⁰³ Robert Cupido, “‘Sixty Years of Canadian Progress’: The Diamond Jubilee and Politics of Commemoration,” *Canadian Identity: Region, Country, Nation*, ed. Caroline Andrew, Will Straw and J.-Yvon Thériault (Montreal: Association for Canadian Studies, 1998), 19-33.

official summons. Marginal or minority ethnicities and denominations could assert a sense of patriotism and belonging through special worship, and in certain contexts unlikely communities – such as French-speaking Catholics – engaged.

Days of prayer show how the foundations of community attachments changed over the course of the nineteenth century. Days of prayer popularised the providentialist idea that communities were like individuals, in that they were spiritual bodies, sharing a conscience, a personality and character traits. Most occasions encouraged the inhabitants of Canada to regard themselves as members of an extended British nation that, in providential terms, enjoyed a special and privileged status. But holy days also legitimated communities at the provincial and regional level. Groups that conceived of themselves as a people apart might nurture a sense of togetherness by building providential narratives out of local events and experiences. Thanksgiving days continued to promote the idea that large territories, such as the Province of Canada, and the Confederation of Canada, were spiritual bodies sharing a common conscience and maybe a national character. But elements of the old belief in national providentialism broke down after the 1850s. In large and diverse countries it was hard to believe that distant disasters were the result of collective sins, and therefore everyone's responsibility. There were also too few unifying causes and experiences. Thanksgivings were increasingly given over to publicising the symbols, institutions and myths around which the inhabitants of the new Confederation could cohere. The only cause that possessed any kind of integrative force, and which could knit Canada and the empire together in collective acts of prayer, was monarchy.