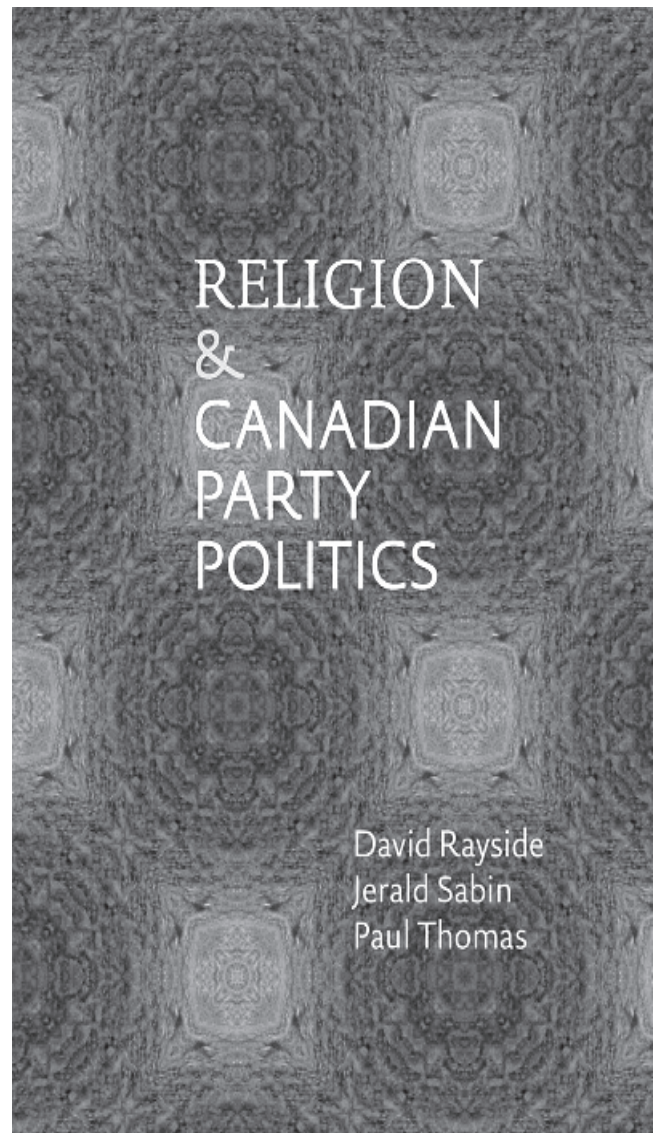


# *Parliamentary Bookshelf: Reviews*

**Religion and Canadian Party Politics, David Rayside, Jerald Sabin and Paul E.J. Thomas, UBC Press, Vancouver, 2017, 429 pp.**

In this monograph, the authors demonstrate that religious faith continues to be a relevant factor in Canadian party politics. They identify three major axes of religious contention: the historic division between Protestants and Catholics (especially English-speaking Protestants and French-speaking Catholics); the more recent division between moral conservatives and political and social progressives (especially over the issues of LGBT rights and the legality of abortion); and finally, the division between those willing to recognize minority religious practices and institutions in Canada (especially those of Canada's growing Muslim population) and those who fear that such recognition would undermine Canadian values. The authors then provide multiple case studies – federal, provincial and territorial – to illustrate how these axes of contention are evident in Canadian party politics, primarily over the past 30 years.

One of the many strengths of this study is its skillful exploration of the relationship between party leaders, elected officials, and ordinary Canadian voters. For example, the authors show that federal and provincial leaders of Canada's right-wing parties court socially conservative voters (including evangelical Christians, conservative Roman Catholics, and in some cases, recent immigrants). These leaders know that such voters are more likely to gravitate to right-of-centre parties (such as the federal Conservatives), especially as centre-left parties (such as the federal Liberals and NDP) have become wedded to progressive positions on sexuality and abortion. These leaders also know that many of their caucus members are religiously-motivated social conservatives. However, right-of-centre politicians know that most Canadians are not



social conservatives; and, although campaigning on a moral conservative platform (for example, to roll back LGBT rights or limit access to abortion) might play well to their party base, it could alienate potential support from other voters. They also know that Canadian courts have limited their ability to successfully enact the kind of legislation that might appeal to moral conservative voters. Consequently, the authors show that in recent years, right-of-centre politicians have chosen to walk a fine line between signalling their support for moral conservatism (so as not to alienate their party base and caucus members) while not signalling too much support (so as not to alienate other Canadian voters).

On the issue of minority religious rights, the authors find that most Canadian politicians have not been eager to exploit popular fears over minority religious groups (notably Muslims), and the perceived threat that minority religious faith practices and institutions pose to “Canadian values.” The authors highlight two notable exceptions: the debate in Quebec over public accommodation of minority religious groups; and the positions articulated by Stephen Harper’s Conservatives during the 2015 federal election campaign. The authors contend that the outcomes of the 2014 Quebec provincial election, and the 2015 federal election, suggest that there is only limited support for policies designed to limit minority religious rights.

This is a solid monograph, based on an impressive array of sources (including extensive use of polling data). It is also very readable, and mercifully free of jargon, making it accessible for undergraduates and interested lay readers outside academia. It is recommended to anybody seeking to understand the role of religion in the recent Canadian political landscape. It is also an important contribution to the ongoing debate over “secularization” in Canadian society. Recent scholarship has presented us with a more nuanced understanding of the meaning and workings of secularization; *Religion and Canadian Party Politics* is consistent with this recent scholarship. Its authors demonstrate that faith is an integral part of Canada’s political party landscape, and in spite of a secularizing society, we shouldn’t expect it to disappear any time soon.

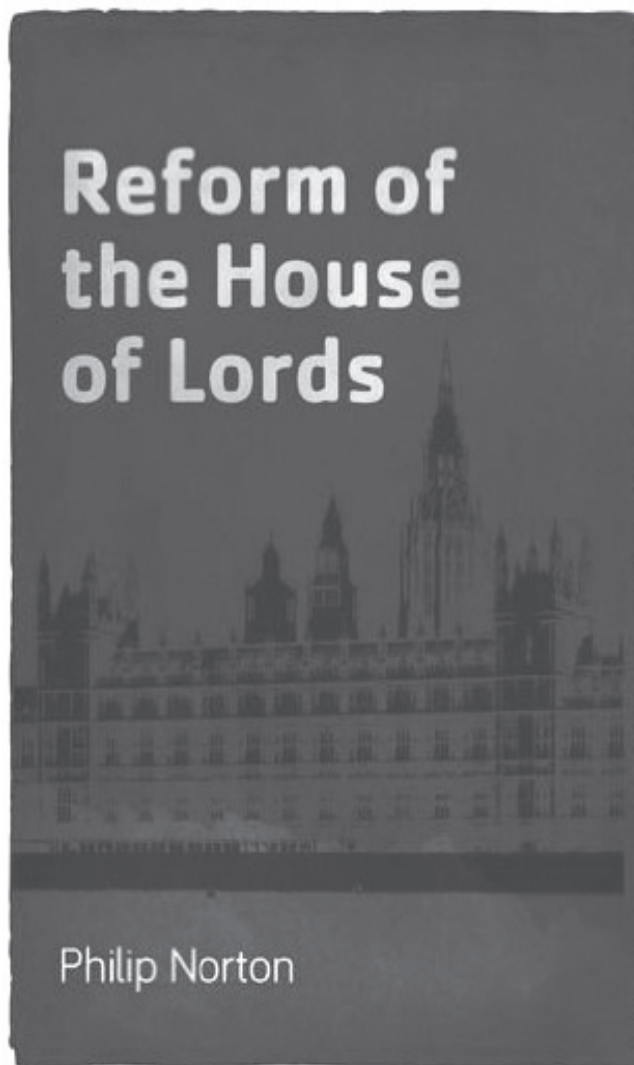
**Bruce Douville**

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**Reform of the House of Lords, Philip Norton, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2017, 96 pp.**

During recent hearings by the Senate Modernisation Committee witnesses like Senator Peter Harder and Professor David Smith made the point that Canada has nothing to learn from the House of Lords. Be that as it may, no one would ever suggest we have nothing to learn from Philip Norton.

A professor of Government at the University of Hull, he is perhaps the leading expert on Westminster-style government, having written dozens of books and articles over a 40-year period since his classic work



on Intra-party dissent in the House of Commons was published in 1975. In 1998, he was appointed to the House of Lords as Lord Norton of Louth. He now brings a practical and academic perspective to his subject.

This small book, more an essay than an academic treatise, focuses on attempts to reform the House of Lords. Norton has been a central figure in many of the debates.

He identifies four distinct opinions regarding what to do about the British Upper House. Three of these will be familiar to Canadians: “Retain” (by which he means the status quo of a wholly appointed Chamber), “Replace” (by which he means a wholly elected Upper House) and “Remove” (by which he means abolition). The fourth opinion calls for both appointed and elected members, which has not been discussed much in Canada but has been debated at length in the UK. His analysis of each option includes the strongest arguments advanced by the proponents while pointing out the weaknesses and logical inconsistencies posed by the opponents.

There is not much new in this book but it is an excellent survey of the literature and an ideal introduction to the subject in non technical and readable language. For Canadian readers the most interesting part is in the concluding chapter on “the future of the second chamber”. Norton laments the

absence of any intellectually coherent thinking about “parliamentary reform” as opposed to reform of the House of Commons or reform of the House of Lords. In other words, the real question should be considering how the two houses work together rather than fixating on trying to change one or the other.

This is exactly the type of question we should be asking in Canada, where Parliament is going through a profound transformation. The House of Commons has, over the last decade, given up on some of its more important conventions including the idea that procedural change should be done by consensus.

The Senate is busy transforming itself from a chamber where supporters of two political parties have alternated with mixed success at providing the sober second thought envisaged by the founders to a chamber of independent members who consider themselves non-partisan and plan to conduct themselves accordingly.

Perhaps, we too, have been spending too much time and energy thinking about how to fix one or the other. Let’s start to reflect on how these two transformed bodies must work together to give us a more coherent parliamentary system.

**Gary Levy**

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