Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

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BA (University of Waterloo, 2015)

“Arc of the Covenant: The Evolution of Trinity Western University’s Community Covenant as a Response to Secularization”

Department of History

Wednesday, August 12, 2020
10:00 A.M.
Conducted Remotely

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Lynne Marks, Department of History, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Paul Bramadat, Department of History, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Pamela Klassen, Department for the Study of Religion, University of Toronto

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Stephen Ross, Department of English, UVic

Dr. Stephen Evans, Acting Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

Over the last five years, Trinity Western University has become known for its Community Covenant, a five-page religious-based “Codes of Conduct” that, according to many, contains discriminatory language, particularly towards LGTBQ people.

While this document has been in existence only since 2009, Trinity has had a Christian-informed code of conduct since its early years. When looking at these documents—five in total—from one iteration to the next, what we see on the surface is a school that has, over time, increased its demands on the behaviour of its staff and students by requiring greater restraint on everything from sexual behaviour to the kind of entertainment in which they engage. What appears to be happening is that TWU, as an institution, is becoming more conservative while the rest of North America becomes more secular and more liberal. However, an examination of student newspapers and handbooks, as well as interviews with past and present students, faculty and staff reveals a much more complex relationship to a rapidly changing world. These latter sources show that how individuals within the institution respond to secularization are not always aligned with the evangelical Christian goals of the school.

This then begs the question: are TWU’s formal guidelines evidence of an institution that has, at times, been both insular and unaware of changes not only within the outside world, but among its own people? Or instead, do these documents reflect an astute awareness of changing societal norms? In other words, is the evolution of this document a direct response to secularization and an attempt to hold on to conservative Christian values? In this thesis, I argue that the latter is true.