"Stanford Reid's Legacy for Christian Academics"

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This conference marks the centenary of the birth of William Stanford Reid, born 13 September 1913, at 619 Victoria Avenue here in Westmount. The name suggests his dual heritage: William, the name of his forty-eight year old Scottish father, a doughty Presbyterian minister whose new church was being built a few blocks away. Stanford was his mother's name: English Daisy Stanford, thirty-five, a woman of courage and conviction who had served as a missionary to India. Their older son, who always used his second name Stanford, went on to make his mark as the twentieth century unfolded as cleric, academic, scholar, *provocateur*, and above all a Christian, an evangelical Calvinist. It is his legacy I have been asked to summarize as we celebrate the centenary of his birth. As I do so I will speak first of the legacy of the man and then the legacy of his message.

It is appropriate that our celebration is on the campus of McGill University. McGill, funded by a fur trader who worshipped at St Gabriel St. Presbyterian Church as soon as it was founded in 1792, was dominated for thirty-eight years of the Nineteenth Century by Principal Sir William Dawson, geologist and psalm-singing Free Churchman. McGill's major financial backers in the mid-nineteenth century were Free Church elders Peter and John Redpath and Joseph MacKay who also built and endowed Presbyterian College on the McGill campus. For over thirty years its Principal was another doughty Calvinist, Donald Harvey MacVicar. MacVicar created what was called the "Princeton [Seminary] of the North" and stamped his theology on Stanford Reid's father and, by inheritance, Stanford himself.

The Reid identity was tied up with McGill: W. D. and his two brothers were graduates in arts and did their theology at Presbyterian College. W. D. taught there but when a choice had to be made as to which seminary Stanford would attend, having received an honours BA and an MA at McGill before he was 21, he opted instead for Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia. That renunciation of his past was later repeated when in 1965 after teaching at McGill for twenty-four years he left Québec forever to found the History Department at the new University of Guelph.

On 2 June 1963 Stanford Reid made a headline in the Montreal *Gazette*. "Presbyterian Minister Leads a Double Life." Marcia Hollis, the American wife of the man who became the eleventh Anglican archbishop of Montreal, described Stanford Reid's double life as minister and academic as "difficult" but done "with considerable success." Reid had just been appointed Director of Men's Residences at McGill. His responsibility for the previous eleven years for 224 students as Warden of Douglas and Wilson Halls of Residence had now expanded to 825 with the new dormitories just opened further up

Mount Royal. She noted that "Professor" Reid – never Rev. Reid at McGill – was also an ordained Presbyterian minister, "a fact less well known." 1

Straddling two careers was never an easy call for Stanford Reid. When, after a decade of part-time teaching at McGill, he left the pastorate of the Town of Mount Royal Presbyterian Church, which he had founded in 1944, to accept an appointment as associate professor at McGill in 1951, he did so, the article continued, with "a growing commitment that 'secular universities' needed more teachers of Christian convictions and background. I've never tried to proselytize, Dr Reid said firmly. But I do feel that everyone speaks from some background, whether it's humanism, materialism or Christianity." Reid went on to cite a student who had railed against church, clergy and all forms of religion in his classes. As Reid always did with his students, the young man was invited to tea in Reid's apartment in Douglas Hall and discovered that Reid was not only a Christian; he was also an ordained minister. He apologized profusely. "I told him," Reid explained, "that if he really believed what he said, he should keep on saying it whether I was a minister or not. I don't think he quite understood my point of view."

Fifty-one years later: how things have changed! Earlier this month Québec's Premier Pauline Marois introduced a so-called "Charter of Quebec Values" designed "to promote secularism and religious neutrality in public institutions." From being the most religiously observant area in North America fifty years ago Québec has become the most secular. This is reflected in its social norms: in 2006, a third of couples in Québec were in common-law unions and close to 60% of new registered births in Québec were to unmarried mothers. With that collapse has come an aging and emptying of churches, striking with the large Roman Catholic mausolea of a previous generation but even more obvious with the Protestant mainline churches in Québec due to the impact of secularism but greatly exacerbated by the Anglophone exodus of the 1970s. Church attendance in Québec is lower than anywhere else in North America and is on a par with Western Europe.

Stanford Reid's legacy as an academic historian in the university has to be placed in the context of the seismic changes that took place in Canadian religious life during his teaching career. He began his academic work at McGill at the zenith of an ultramontane Catholicism that bordered on fascism. To this day in the Church of the Madonna della Difesa in Montreal's Little Italy there is a fresco commemorating the 1929 Lateran treaty with the Vatican with an heroic Mussolini riding his horse in triumph. Just before the outbreak of war in 1939 the three times mayor of Montreal and local Member of Parliament Camilien Houde stated "the sympathy of the French-Canadians in Quebec will be on the side of Italy.

¹ Hollis, Marcia. "Teaches At McGill: Presbyterian Minister Leads A Double Life." *Montreal Gazette*, 2 June 1962. 22.

² Ménard, France-Pascale. "What Makes It Fall Apart? The Determinants of the Dissolution of Marriages and Common-Law Unions in Canada." *McGill Sociological Review*, Volume 2, April 2011, 60.

Remember that the great majority of French-Canadians are Roman Catholics, and that the Pope is in Rome."³ He sat out most of the war in prison for sedition.

As an "Anglo" in a French-speaking province, whose family had arrived from Scotland in the 1830s and settled in a small community south of Québec city, much of Stanford Reid's pugnacious assertiveness came from being a part of a minority. He was not only a Protestant vastly outnumbered in the general population, he was an evangelical, one of only two on the McGill faculty at the time, outspoken about their faith identity. Even in his own denomination, as a continuing Presbyterian who was a confessional Calvinist, he was often marginalized and dismissed as "that fundamentalist," which he definitely was not. But with all his pugnacity he was never bitter or angry.

The union of 1925 between Presbyterians, Methodists and a few Congregationalists had been fought out combatively, even among the Reids. The three brothers were divided: Andrew went with the Unionists, Allan became the rallying point for minorities who reestablished 120 Presbyterian churches across the Synod of Montreal and Ottawa, and then there was feisty W. D. Reid, Stanford Reid's father, minister of Stanley Presbyterian Church in the upscale Montreal suburb of Westmount. Stanley Church was dedicated the year after Stanford Reid's birth. It was a monument to Christendom, a recreation of the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. That summer of 1914 "death like a proud tower looked gigantically down" on Western civilization⁴. With the outset of World War I, the slow march to extinction of both the British Empire and Western institutional Christianity began. The war memorial from Stanley Church, commemorating the scores of loyal British colonials who gave their lives in the trenches of France, was last seen in an antique store on Notre Dame Street, downtown Montreal. What does it mean to the West Indian émigrés who now fill the auld kirk?

The Presbytery of Montreal, the geographic heart of opposition to church union in 1925 and once the largest in the continuing denomination with sixteen thousand members, has now shrunk to less than three. One of Stanford Reid's more productive efforts – it seemed at the time – was church planting in the 1950s: of the nine suburban Montreal Presbyterian churches he helped initiate or support only four struggling congregations now barely survive. His own Town of Mount Royal Presbyterian Church, founded by him in 1944 to be a solidly Reformed and committed congregation, is currently on life support.

In his oft quoted chapter "What Happened to Christian Canada?" Mark Noll sets about to explain why, quoting Québec film-maker Denys Arcand in *Les invasions barbares*, "In 1966 all the churches emptied out in a few weeks." Three years earlier, as a university professor, Stanford Reid anticipated the exodus in an article on "The Church and the Campus." "[The] he fact that most of the students lost to the church during their college

³ In a speech given in the Montreal YMCA and quoted by *Time* 20 February 1939

⁴ "While from a proud tower in the town/Death looks gigantically down." Edgar Allen Poe "Death in the City" appropriate by Barbara Tuchman for her best-selling account of the summer of 1914

careers came to the campus without any real understanding of Christianity. They are abysmally ignorant of even the most elemental Christian principles and certainly have no idea of the meaning of personal faith in Christ as Saviour and Lord." The superficial Christianity that built those pretentious A-frame churches of the 1950s and early 1960s with their so-called Christian education centres that proved to be neither Christian nor particularly educational, Reid saw to be a chimera, an illusion. "The church does not need to lose out on the campus," he concluded, "if it is prepared to do its 'home work.'" That, it subsequently turned out, it had singularly failed to do.

So Stanford Reid would answer Mark Noll's question "What Happened to Christian Canada?" by a simple answer: they lacked a coherent and credible Christian faith. The failure was primarily a *theological* one. Church union in 1925, creating Canada's largest Protestant denomination, had compromised a distinctively Christian voice based on Biblical authority and theological integrity. Ironically it was the Free Church element in the Presbyterian Church in Canada (the largest Protestant denomination in Canada prior to 1925) that took the lead in church union negotiations.

The Free Church in Canada, formed in 1844 as the Canada Presbyterian Church, through its various unions (1861 and 1875) had always represented the best and most evangelical element of Canadian Presbyterianism. When in 1902 on behalf of their General Assembly, then meeting in Winnipeg, three Presbyterians appeared before the concurrent General Council of the Methodists the spark was lit, a spark that ignited a controversy that ironically disunited Canadian Protestantism in the name of union. One of the Presbyterians was C. W. Gordon, who by his pen name Ralph Connor was known for syrupy novels of a sentimental Canadian spirituality. The second of the trio was recently immigrated William Patrick, a Free Church minister from Scotland, who had become Principal of Manitoba College, and who enthused about the recent union between the United Presbyterians and the Free Church of Scotland as a template for a merger between ostensibly Calvinist Presbyterians and Arminian Methodists. As the conflict raged for the next quarter century W. D. Reid was forced to take sides as C. W. Gordon shouted to him across the 1923 General Assembly "We will force you rebels by an act of parliament, whether you like it or not."

Deprived of its Free Church element, what emerged in the continuing Presbyterian Church was a rump at both ends of the theological spectrum: confessional Calvinists (and some fundamentalists) on the so-called "right" and broad church latitudinarians and Scotophiles on the "left." When both the two remaining theological colleges were led by principals on the "left" – Gresham Machen having turned down a proposal to nominate him to be principal of Knox College⁶ – the Presbyterian Church in Canada lost any coherent theological identity. The neo-orthodoxy of Walter Bryden, who taught at Knox College from

⁵ Reid, W.S. "The Church and the Campus" *Presbyterian Record* April 1963. 14.

⁶ See my "Knox College and Knox Church Going Separate Ways after Church Union" in *The Canadian Society of Presbyterian History Papers 2012*. 34 – 42. See also Hart, Daryll G. *Calvinism: A History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013. 266-267

1927 to 1952, came closest to providing it. In December 1951, on his all too brief retirement, Reid wrote in *Reformation Today*, the magazine he edited (and financed), "Dr Bryden has done a great deal to make the Presbyterian Church theologically conscious."

That is why, when he arrived at Westminster Theological Seminary in the autumn of 1935, Stanford Reid found the school so challenging and life-affirming. It shaped not only his theology, it also instructed him in that Calvinist sense of vocation which understood "full-time Christian service" as more than the ordained ministry or missionary service and instilled a deep respect for academic scholarship, contrary to the anti-intellectualism of 1930s American fundamentalism. Although he had only a year and a half with Gresham Machen before Machen died on 1 January 1937, the exposure to Reformed theology was life-redirecting. Hitherto his experience of Evangelical Christianity had been the Keswick piety of his English mother and the fundamentalism of Howard Guinness, who had founded the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship in 1929, followed by "Tiny" or Noel Palmer. Though still in high school Reid had been a charter member of IVCF, an English transplant specializing in camping experiences and personal evangelism. By Christmas 1935, returning to Montreal, he shared his enthusiasm for his newly acquired theological insights with his bewildered local InterVarsity alums.

In 1973, looking back over thirty-three years of academic work, he wrote a church functionary in response to a questionnaire as to why he had "left the ministry." Appealing to the example of the apostle Paul who lectured in school of Tyrannus in Ephesus for two years, he challenged such a narrow concept of ministry: "My conviction is that our church has to get away from the quasi-priestly concept of the minister to a much broader view." He added: "being a convinced Calvinist, I believe that the New Testament clearly teaches that Christ guides his people by his providence and that as they prayerfully follow his providential leading he opens up ways before them. All my moves have taken place only after a good deal of thought and prayer in order that I should do what the Lord wished me to do."

In a quote from my 2004 biography of Reid that has often been cited since, I say that "Throughout his life he was ignored, minimized, ostracized and rejected. Remarkably all of these experiences did not leave him bitter or angry. His Calvinism provided a ready antidote to this buffeting. He was continually going back to the themes of providence and the perseverance of the saints. His Calvinism was of a very practical and personal nature." The life of an academic is not free from struggle, there is no ivory tower in academia as Reid discovered. Twice he received stinging reverses: the failure of the 1950 Canadian Presbyterian General Assembly to appoint him to the chair of church history at Presbyterian College in favour of a much less qualified man and his passing over after he accepted an

⁷ WSR to Alex MacSween, 7 September 1974 (Special Collections, University of Guelph Library).

⁸ MacLeod, A. D. *W Stanford Reid: An Evangelical Calvinist in the Academy.* Montreal and Kingston: McGill Queens University Press, 2004. 300.

invitation in 1954 to preach during the vacancy at Knox Church, Toronto, the premier evangelical Presbyterian pulpit in Canada. These haunted him to the end of his life. And there was at the end his wife's blindness and dementia. Westminster Seminary made him convinced of the sovereign grace and love of an Almighty God, life confirmed it.

In 1965 came that great rejection as he accepted an appointment to set up a History Department at the University of Guelph, then derisorily called "Moo U" because of its previous incarnation as an agricultural school. Leaving a full professorship at McGill, Provost of one of the most prestigious universities in Canada, a recognized scholar which provided him time for research and study he and Priscilla set off for small city Ontario. It turned out to be the most fruitful fourteen years of his professional life. At Guelph he was riding the crest of a wave of university expansion, money (at least initially) was no consideration, and he brought together his own department of diverse interests and personalities. As an invited preacher he had opportunities to speak across denominational divides, finding a special welcome in the growing Ontario Christian Reformed community who appreciated a native Canadian voice for their recently imported Reformed faith.

He brought some of his graduate students with him to Guelph – a particular reason why Guelph had hired him – and soon he had more of them than any other professor in the new Wellington College. The impact of his careful and caring supervision widened and perpetuated his influence. There were drawbacks: he never found a congregation that was totally theologically congenial and his research and writing were often postponed in spite of his prodigious work ethic. Covering for an appointee in his department he never should have hired meant that his biography of John Knox, which was to be his *chef-d'oeuvre*, had to be delayed beyond the 1972 commemoration of Knox's death and as a result was not all that it might have been.

So much for Reid the man: what, as an academic, were the emphases of his scholarship that made him so important a figure for his students and for the many who respected his keen insights and careful research? I emphasize five areas of his interest:

(a) the special place of Québec within the Canadian mosaic:

Stanford Reid was first and foremost a Quebecker and his academic interests were shaped by his place of birth, his *patrimonie*. While his first book, his master's thesis published in 1936, was about Upper Canada, his iniital research as an academic was Québec and specifically the seigneury of Mille-Îles. During the war years, unable to go overseas, he spent a lot of time in the registry office in St Eustache poring over its early records. Though not completely bilingual Reid, always a gifted linguist, spoke serviceable French and preached in Église St Luc in East End Montreal at the request of the Presbytery when no Francophones were available. McGill at the time was English to an extent hardly conceivable today but residents of Douglas Hall can remember, while eating their meals in the dining hall, lively conversations in *patois* between Reid at the high table and the formidable Auriole

Horiange in the kitchen. Once a Quebecker, always a Quebecker: moving to Guelph did not alter his primary allegiance to his province of origin. And Priscilla Reid's contribution to the preservation of Le Vieux-Montréal as President of the Historical Association of the city was a further enhancement of the Reid's legacy to the future of their native province.

(b) Scotland's unique place in history:

Stanford Reid's greatest legacy was his contribution to the study of Scottish history and the establishment of the Scottish Studies programme at the University of Guelph. This reflected not only his father's Scottish identity; it also reflected that symbiosis between the Québécois and the Scots after 1763 in which the enemy of my enemy is my friend, a North American version of the auld alliance. Doing his graduate study at the University of Pennsylvania provided him with excellent resources for his Ph. D. thesis on fifteenth century Scotland, particularly important since the countries were at war and travel was limited. Henry Charles Lea had accumulated a remarkable collection of primary source material and the medievalist Arthur Charles Howland was his supervisor. The four academics on his thesis committee were all distinguished medievalists but none had ever ventured north of Tweed and Reid would later boast that he knew more about Scotland in the Middle Ages than any of them. Though never published, out of his thesis research flowed several learned articles. And after the war he and Priscilla made frequent forays pver the Atlanta and in the process of his research would acquire a series of Scots nobility that he recruited to McGill as residents in Douglas Hall. It was at Guelph, a centre of Scots emigration, that the Scottish emphasis took flight: the collection of primary Scottish sources now rivals that of the University of Pennsylvania and Reid was a notorious trophy hunter for the University of Guelph Scottish collection. In addition to the Knox biography he wrote another on *The* Skipper from Leith, Robert Barton of Over Barnton, a fifteenth century Scottish privateer, probably his best book. Unfortunately another of his books, The Scottish Tradition in Canada which he edited, was uneven but his concluding remarks bear repeating: "the Scots who came to Canada ... have been an influential factor in Canadian identity" and this influence he traced to "The Scottish Tradition," their historical inheritance. Much of the rising interest in that tradition in Canada can be traced back to the influence of W. Stanford Reid.

(c) his Reformed theological commitment

From his days at Westminster Seminary Stanford Reid was a passionate advocate of Reformed theology, the faith of the Scottish Reformation. In four memorable lectures given to several Canadian Presbyterian synods in 1960 at its 400th anniversary he spoke of the revolutionary impact of Reformed theology in Scotland as a paradigm for the present day: "The true preaching of the Gospel was the heart and core of the reformers' objective, the weapon of their warfare, and this would seem to be the greatest need of the world today ...

⁹ W. Stanford Reid, "Scottish Tradition in Canada" W. Stanford Reid, Ed. *The Scottish Tradition in Canada*. Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1976. 310.

the exposition and applications of the Scriptures."¹⁰ Reid was not only a Calvin scholar, he was willingness to be identified as a Calvinist at a time when such a designation was not at all popular meant that he was soon enlisted in several causes that would owe much to his commitment and are a part of his legacy. In 1946, out of the Gordon Clark fiasco, he became a trustee of Westminster Seminary, a position he held for thirty-seven years. He left only after successfully – but at a heavy personal cost – defending the school from non-Reformed teaching about justification. In other organizations he poured himself into proved not to be as durable: the Reformed Ecumenical Synod is now a thing of the past, as is the International Association for Reformed Faith and Action.

(d) the task of the Christian historian

One of Reid's more memorable and influential series of lectures was given in 1960 at the Cherry Hill Farm in Unionville, Ontario, to the second Conference of the Association for Reformed Scientific Studies, another Reformed organization that has morphed into several subsequent incarnations including the Institute for Christian Studies. Titled "Absolute Truth and the Relativism of History," Reid concluded by addressing the issue of how one's Christian faith affects the work of an historian creating "a situation somewhat different from that of his unbelieving colleagues. In the first place it impresses upon him the responsibility of his calling to be a Christian historian. God has called him to this work in order that he may think God's thoughts after Him, although on a finite space-time conditioned level." He then traced the consequence of such an audacious assertion: "It should ... make him a very busy and industrious worker, not merely as a collector of facts, but as one who strives, in the light of the Scriptures, to understand, even though in a very fragmentary way, something of God's action in history." He then disclaimed any attempt to force history into a pattern "for he does not have to prove God's providential action in the Creation since he realizes that it is there whether one recognizes it or not. Also, he knows that only by the Spirit speaking through the Scriptures can one ever really acknowledge God's sovereign rule. For this reason and because he believes that all the facts are God's facts, he strives to carry on his work with as much care, accuracy and honesty as he can muster." Stirring words and among those present none was more affected than C. Thomas MacIntire, later to become a distinguished Professor of History at the University of Toronto and now Professor Emeritus at its Victoria University.

(e) the role of a Christian academic in the university

One of the things that gave Reid stamina as a Christian academic in an environment often inhospitable to his Christian commitments was the persuppositional apologetic of Cornelius Van Til, his professor at Westminster Seminary. On Van Till's ninetieth birthday he wrote to him to express his gratitude:

"Basing my thinking on your whole method of approach, I taught history from that point of view with quite amazing results. This was particularly true of a course I gave

 $^{^{10}}$ "The Scottish Reformation," Printed by the Synod of Toronto and Kingston, PCC, 1960.

for some twenty years on western intellectual history since 1500. I would have the class various assigned readings and we would discuss them in class, and I would all the read time use your methodology to present criticisms of non-Christian positions and then have them think of the Christian writers, philosophers, musicians., artists, etc. The results were very often extremely interesting -- my approach was quite acceptable to the university authorities, for at McGill I was asked to act as the fill-in lecturer for the principal's course on economic history and when I was asked to take over the directorship of the men's residences I was told by the principal that it was because of my Presbyterian stance. And I found that the same attitude was common at the University of Guelph."11

Intellectual history is no longer in vogue in academic circles, and Reid's course, History 410, is an anomaly in academia, providing as it did a panoramic view of western thought with select readings Reid had chosen, from the Reformation to a passage in Martyn Lloyd Jones' *Truth Unchanged and Unchanging*. It always surprised me that Jewish coeds found his approach particularly appealing. The reference to the suave and sophisticated McGill Principal Cyril James is significant: Reid would not have had the freedom he had without James as his sponsor and supporter. Theirs was a complex and intense relationship from the moment they both arrived on the McGill campus almost simultaneously. When McGill Chancellor, the industrialist Ray Edwin Powell, fired James, Reid was there for him finding, as Christian academics in secular universities sometimes discover, there are opportunities to share one's faith in unexpected circumstances as doors open. For James, devastated by ill health and with an uncertain future, Reid helped to remind him of a youthful faith he once had professed.

So the question with which we are left as we mark the centenary of the birth of William Stanford Reid, would he have had the same freedom today that both McGill and Guelph provided him as an observant and committed Evangelical Calvinist? There has indeed been a sea change in the culture, Christendom is gone forever, secularism marches on, and the world that Stanford Reid knew, from his birth in comfortable Anglophone Québec a few months before the ominous summer of 1914, a Québec he escaped as it was in the early throes of la Révolution tranquille, that world is no more. McGill Is a different place, as are all Canadian universities. His tenure as an academic was in that brief twilight of academic freedom when a religious voice could still be heard and respected in academia. He seized that opportunity, redeemed the moment that never returned, and left a legacy of faithful service and obedience.

Perhaps the last word can be left to a preent-day McGill professor, Charles Taylor, who, he tells me, did not take Reid's History 412 as an undergraduate. In his magisterial *A Secular Age* he speaks of today's "spirituality of quest" and urges "that we focus not on

¹¹ WSR to Cornelius Van Til, 23 June 1985, WSRFF, PCC Archives, Don Mills, ON.

what our Age has displaced, but on what characterizes it." He calls ours an Age of Authenticity and says that "The same long-term trend which produced the disciplined, conscious, committed individual believer, Calvinist, Jansenist, devout humanist, Methodist: which later gives us the 'born-again' Christian, now has brought forth today's pilgrim seeker, attempting to discern and follow his/her own path. The future of North Atlantic religion depends for one part on the concatenated outcomes of a whole host of such quests; and for another, on the relations, hostile, indifferent, or (hopefully) symbiotic, which will develop between modes of quest and centres of traditional religious authority..."¹²

It is not an ordered picture Taylor presents but one full of challenges for the observant Christian. It is a world which Stanford Reid, who loved the cut and thrust of debate, would have found highly congenial, had he been granted the same freedom today that he enjoyed during his years as an academic. His faith, his commitment to a Reformed world-and-life view, represents a belief-system that historically has thrived in uncertain times: had Canadian mainline Protestant churches been clearer in their own beliefs, as Reid constantly affirmed and subsequent events have proved him right, they would be in a much healthier space today. "My ministry," he once wrote, "may be different from most. As a result of my lecturing and writing I am able to take a stand among scholars and since they know my position, I believe that it is a testimony to the grace of God in Jesus Christ." That is the legacy that Stanford Reid has left us.

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¹² Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age.* Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2007. 532-3.

¹³ WSR to Alex MacSween, 7 September 1974 (Special Collections, University of Guelph Library) a quoted in MacLeod, A. D. *W Stanford Reid: An Evangelical Calvinist in the Academy*. Montreal and Kingston; MQUP, 2004. 1.