Canadian Society of Presbyterian History

Papers 2016

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About the Canadian Society of Presbyterian History

Dedicated to the Study of Presbyterian and Reformed History

The Canadian Society of Presbyterian History (CSPH) is a religion-centred learned society. It meets annually on the last Saturday of September. One hundred and eighty-five papers have been presented to the Society since it was founded in 1975. So far, 35 of these have been published on **csph.ca**. More are to follow.

Membership is open to individuals and institutions that share an interest in and a fascination for the study of Presbyterian and Reformed history.

Notes on the 2016 Presenters

R. Ritchie Robinson has served the congregation of St. Giles Presbyterian Church in North Sydney, Nova Scotia, since 2002. From 1989 to 2002, he served at two Presbyterian churches, St. James and Knox, which make up the Boularderie Charge. He was ordained as a Minister of Word and Sacrament on 16 June 1989, shortly after graduating from Presbyterian College, Montreal. Rev. Ritchie earned his earlier degrees from McGill University and Cape Breton University. He grew up in Englishtown, on the shores of St. Ann's Bay, surrounded by accounts of the life and ministry of Norman McLeod, the subject of his 2016 paper.

A. Donald MacLeod is president of the CSPH and Research Professor of Church History at Tyndale Theological Seminary, Toronto. On 19 October 2016, he received a Distinguished Scholars Award "In recognition of outstanding scholarly contributions and gracious support of students and fellow scholars" at a Presbyterian Scholars Conference at Wheaton College, Illinois. Rev. Dr. MacLeod has authored numerous books and papers, including the award-winning *W. Stanford Reid: An Evangelical Calvinist in the Academy*.

Stuart Macdonald teaches the history of Christianity, including the history of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, in his role as Professor of Church and Society at Knox College, Toronto. He researches and writes in the fields of Scottish history, specifically accusations of witchcraft, and Canadian church history. His articles on Canadian Presbyterians have dealt with various topics, including the First World War, responses to Vatican II, ethnicity, and developments in the Church since the Second World War.

Restless Spirit: The Odyssey of Norman McLeod 1780–1866

R. Ritchie Robinson

"Children, children, look to yourselves. The world is mad." The opening words of this paper are purportedly the last words of the Reverend Norman McLeod. As he lay on his deathbed in Waipu, New Zealand, in 1866, this Moses-like personage exhorted his followers to be circumspect of the world and its fleeting charms. The forceful personality and independent spirit that set him apart shone through even in his waning hours.

This year marks the 150th anniversary of McLeod's taking leave of this life. One can only imagine how his death affected the faithful flock over whom he had cast such a long shadow for such a long time. From Scotland to Cape Breton to New Zealand, McLeod traversed the globe as an iron man in an age of wooden ships. He commanded a fierce loyalty from men and women who were willing to pull up stakes and follow him to the ends of the earth.

Who was this man with the restless spirit? Norman McLeod has been maligned and caricatured, despised, and scorned as an ecclesiastical despot who would have neither truck nor trade with any who dared to challenge his brand of the Gospel. Some might say that the only God he knew was a frowning Providence that tipped the scales with more law than grace.

I would contend that Norman McLeod was much more than the monolith many assume him to be. I agree with Laurie Stanley-Blackwell that he was a product of his age. As she says, ". . . he differed little from his austere Free Church contemporaries."[1]

But Norman McLeod cannot be easily buttonholed as a crank or misfit in the wider world of the church of his day. I hope to show that there was more to this man than the negative aspects of his character that some have chosen to emphasize. While not overlooking those aspects, I think that he needs to be reconsidered in terms of the complicated cleric I believe him to be.

Growing Up in the Church of Scotland

Norman McLeod first saw the light of day in September 1780, in Assynt on the west coast of Sutherlandshire, Scotland. He came from a pious family. His father was a member of the Scottish Kirk, and his mother, a dissenter from the English church.

We know virtually nothing about McLeod's early life. One thing we do know is that the parish minister was the Reverend William McKenzie. John Kennedy of Dingwall, in his book *The Days of the Fathers of Ross-shire*, says,

> Mr. McKenzie . . . was almost all that a minister ought not to be . . . Always accustomed to regard his pastoral work as an unpleasant condition of drawing his stipend, he reduced it to the smallest possible dimensions, and would not infrequently be absent without reason and without leave, for many weeks together from his charge.[2]

It was in the rocky soil of this controversial man that the seeds of McLeod's antipathy towards the established Church of Scotland were sown. McKenzie's bad example and negative influence no doubt coloured McLeod's thinking and theology for the rest of his life.

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1 Laurie Stanley-Blackwell, *Tokens of Grace: Cape Breton's Open-Air Communion Tradition* (Sydney, NS: Cape Breton University Press, 2006), 72.

2 John Murray, *History of the Presbyterian Church in Cape Breton* (Truro, NS: News Publishing, 1921), 21.

If McKenzie was a force for ill, the Reverend John Kennedy, a man of great piety, had the opposite effect on young Norman. Kennedy's ministry was so blessed by God that it resulted in a spiritual awakening in the area. As John Murray writes, "Norman McLeod was one of the young men, who, in that season of blessing, experienced the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to awaken, regenerate and save sinners."[3]

Norman McLeod's newfound faith and its attendant enthusiasm led eventually to dissension and disunity. He took upon himself an authority that rankled the frocks of the local clergy. As a result, "he separated from the church and began to form a sect of his own."[4] This was the beginning of the restless and independent spirit that was the Reverend Norman McLeod.

When McLeod's first child, John Luther, was born, he and his wife, as John Murray eloquently puts it, "carried their infant boy over mountain and moor, from Lochbroom to Lochcarron, a distance of forty miles, in order to have their child baptized by the far-famed Rev. Lauchlin McKenzie."[5] But it wasn't to be. Their own minister had preceded them and forbade McKenzie from administering the sacrament.

This experience had such a profound effect on McLeod that he went as far as to say later while in Cape Breton, "Probably I should never have come to this country but for the prosecution if not the persecution of that man."[6] The long and fruitless journey "over mountain and moor" was a contributing factor to the journeys that awaited this leader of men and women.

Following his conversion at about age 27 or 28, McLeod felt called to the ministry. But after a time of study at the University of Edinburgh, he could not bring himself to seek ordination from any presbytery of the Church of Scotland. He, like others of the time, disdained the moderatism and patronage of the established church. Flora McPherson describes the Moderate Party of the Church by saying, "Through the years, moderation had degenerated to laxity and indifference. Among the prominent clergy, social charm and literary accomplishment often replaced religious fervor, and the lesser men, like William Mackenzie of Norman's home parish, could only compensate for their spiritual emptiness with cheerful conviviality."[7] McLeod, though much a loner himself, was not alone in believing that the Church of his day was too close to the secular authority. Many of his fellow seminarians shared his disdain for what he regarded as an apostate church.

McLeod, in regard to the Church of Scotland at the time, was on the outside looking in. His antipathy towards her clergy was reciprocated to a high degree when he was denied an opportunity to preach and teach in church and schoolhouse, respectively. But he soldiered on. As the Reverend Dr. Ian G. MacLeod has put it, "It is quite possible that a man of lesser fortitude, milder disposition or weaker religious conviction would have succumbed to the authority and power of the Church, or perhaps might have lost his faith altogether. Not so Norman McLeod."[8]

His attitude is expressed in his own words in his book *The Present Church of Scotland and a Tint of Normanism Contending in a Dialogue*: "I am thought by some people strangely singular and by some others deeply fanatical, because I will not and dare not pronounce their

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3 Ibid., 22.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid., 23.

6 Ibid.

7 Flora McPherson, *Watchman against the World: The Remarkable Journey of Norman McLeod & His People from Scotland to Cape Breton Island to New Zealand* (Wreck Cove, NS: Breton Books, 1993), 6.

8 Ian G. MacLeod, *A History of the Church in St. Ann's* (Sydney, NS: Lynk Printing, 1970), 6.

Shibboleth . . . I should at once prefer being chained to the West India slave, enjoying full liberty of conscience, to being joined with the Scottish clergy . . ."[9]

John Murray makes a statement in his book that I will challenge later in this paper. He writes, "He might have sought a license from another denomination, but he was too good a Presbyterian to do that."[10] Whether McLeod was a "good Presbyterian" in the truest sense of the word is, I think, up for debate.

Setting a New Course

Norman McLeod turned at this point in his life to both teaching and to his original occupation of fishing. At about this time he decided he needed to set a new course — literally. McLeod made up his mind to leave Scotland and to set sail for New Scotland, or Nova Scotia. It was 1817 and McLeod was 37 years old. It seems that he had burned his ecclesiastical bridges, and a new beginning was in order. It was also the infamous period of the Sutherland Clearances. No doubt, this played a large part in helping to guide McLeod and his friends to their ultimate decision.

Their means of conveyance was a ship called the *Frances Ann*. The port from which they embarked was Lochbroom. Their destination was Pictou, Nova Scotia. Like so many voyages of the time, their journey was long and dangerous. Apparently, the *Frances Ann* sprang a leak during a vicious gale. It was the captain's considered opinion that they should reverse course and make for the nearest Irish port. With the take-charge attitude for which McLeod would become famous, he purportedly said, "No, keep on your course. We are nearer to the coast of Nova Scotia than to the coast of Ireland."[11] The captain reluctantly agreed with his passenger and the *Frances Ann* reached Pictou safely and soundly.

McLeod and those immigrants who accompanied him took up lots along Middle River, Pictou County, between the settlements of Alma and Gairloch. Most of the Gaelic-speaking Highlanders were from the same area of Scotland as himself and were quick to welcome him as one of their own.

George Patterson, in his history of the county of Pictou, says this of McLeod's sermon content as he travelled through the area: "Those who have heard him at this time describe his preaching as consisting of torrents of abuse against all religious bodies, and even against individual against individuals, the like of which they had never heard, and which was perfectly indescribable. But though so wildly fanatical, he was a man of great power, and gained an influence over a large portion of the Highlanders, such as no other man in the country possessed."[12]

McLeod's hold over the faithful took on a sect-like quality. His followers and admirers came to be called "Normanites." He did not lead a formally constituted congregation, but he does appear to have had a congregation nonetheless. He had a growing following among the adherents of other clergy and churches that, no doubt, caused no little concern. As had been the case in Scotland, Norman McLeod was poaching the parishioners of surrounding charges. It seems that his charismatic style was a powerful draw for many.

The great pioneering apostle of the Maritimes, James McGregor, described the Reformed situation in the area in this way: "There is a fourfold zeal in Pictou. Zeal for the Established Church of Scotland; zeal for the Presbyterian Church of Nova Scotia; zeal for lukewarmness;

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9 McPherson, 23.
10 Murray, 24.
11 Ibid., 25.
12 Ibid.

and zeal for Norman McLeod . . . people will go much farther to hear him than any minister in Pictou."[13]

We can only surmise, but McLeod's gains were his colleagues' losses, and this may have created tensions in the area. Therefore, a call from a congregation in Ohio was both providential and convenient. It is thought to have been a congregation in a place called New Lisbon. McLeod acceded to their request and went about the business of preparing to sail to the United States. He wasn't, however, planning to go alone. A contingent of his faithful were prepared to follow him yet again. It is not often that when a minister accepts a call to one congregation that his former congregation goes with him. But so strong was the affection that the Normanites had for him that they were willing to be transplanted to Ohio.

Finding Home in St. Ann's Harbour

All of this meant that a vessel was needed to accommodate the exodus south. That vessel was built at Middle River beginning in 1819. But if McLeod had followers, he also had detractors, something that is borne out by the unofficial name of the ship — the "Ark." The enterprise was apparently scoffed at, and McLeod was compared to Noah who was similarly maligned for the ship God had commanded him to build. McLeod predicted disaster for the pagans of Pictou.

In May of 1820 Norman McLeod and his Normanites boarded the "Ark" and set sail for what they thought would be the Gulf of Mexico; however, the next we hear of them, they are in St. Ann's Harbour in Cape Breton, where McLeod would live for 31 years.

How they arrived is described in an 1885 letter of a descendant of one of the crew:

> The wind favoring, they made for Cape North, then sailing close by land and examining the coast some fine afternoon they arrived near St. Ann's Harbor and commenced to try for fish. They found codfish very abundant and after getting a good catch made for the Harbor to pass the night. When looking around in the morning they were delighted with the prospect, weighed anchor, and sailed for the head of the Harbor, a distance of six miles. They landed and after a short consultation, decided to go no further.[14]

This was the second, albeit unexpected stop on McLeod's odyssey. He lived in no other single place longer than he did in Cape Breton. Arguably, it is the place where he had the greatest influence and left the longest legacy.

In this community surrounding St. Ann's Harbour, from Englishtown to North River, Norman McLeod developed a theocracy fashioned in his image. The relative isolation of the area lent itself to this kind of situation. McLeod was schoolmaster, magistrate, and minister. He was sovereign of all he surveyed. He was prophet, priest, and king. There was little that escaped his notice and scrutiny. As John Murray describes it, "His personality overshadowed everything. His will or word was law with his people."[15]

McLeod's community was considered a model of morality and industry. It was described as "the most sober, industrious and orderly settlement in the island, (who) have a pastor of their own, endowed also with magisterial authority, to whose exertions and vigilance the character of the people is not a little indebted."[16]

How different this is to our time and situation! Today there is little fidelity to the Church or her ministers. Fidelity has given way to much fickleness where people, if they are church

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13 McPherson, 39.

14 Bonnie Thornhill, *The Road to St. Ann's* (Sydney, NS: City Printers, 2007), 19.

15 Murray, 73.

16 Robert J. Morgan, *Rise Again! The Story of Cape Breton Island: Book One* (Sydney, NS: Breton Books, 2008), 116.

attenders at all, change their allegiance as often as their attire. Contrast that to this assessment by Murray:

> That original congregation, or at least a goodly part of it, was the congregation that Mr. Norman McLeod gathered about him on the upper reaches of the Middle River of Pictou, Nova Scotia, between August, 1817, and May, 1820. It had an even earlier origin than that. It came across the Atlantic with Mr. McLeod in 'The Frances Ann' in the summer of 1817 . . . They came to Pictou with him in 1817, and they came to Cape Breton with him in 1820; aye more, a number of them went to Australia with him in 1851, and to New Zealand in 1854.[17]

It's plain to see that this 19th century patriarch had many a willing adherent joining him to many promised lands.

It seems, however, that for Norman, his promised lands soon became spiritual wastelands. Utopia, for him, was elusive. Take, for instance, his blistering assessment of Pictou as mentioned in a letter he wrote in 1840: "I do not know the comparison of Pictou in the whole land, for shameless and daring wickedness . . . I humbly desire to bless the name of the Lord, for having given me and some of my friends a gate to escape from it in time . . . O Pictou, Pictou! Thy sins are fearful, and thy judgements are alarming."[18]

By 1848 the novelty appears to have worn off when it came to Cape Breton, as well. In correspondence dated 22 August, McLeod writes:

> There is a good degree of excitement among my own friends here, in favor of South Australia . . . I know, without hesitation, that it is a far more favorable country than this . . . I would not choose this place for the fixed residence of any of my sincere adherents; if the Lord, in his good providence, would open for them a likely door of escape . . .[19]

As Laurie Stanley-Blackwell puts it in *The Well-Watered Garden: The Presbyterian Church in Cape Breton, 1798–1860*: "McLeod weighed the merits and disadvantages of remaining in Cape Breton, 'this now desperate and dreary place' or emigrating to Australia, 'a kind of comparative Paradise.'"[20]

At about this time, Cape Breton was in the throes of a famine not unlike the situation in Ireland that led to mass immigration to other parts of the world. It began in 1845 and continued for seven years. The blight turned vegetables black, including the staple of potatoes. Settlers arriving from Europe brought it with them.[21] Norman McLeod's settlement was not spared its effects.

McLeod described the dire situation in this graphic way: "The general destitution has made it impossible, even for the most saving, to shut their ears & eyes from the alarming claims and craving of those around them, running continually from door to door, with the ghastly features of death staring in their very faces."[22]

Added to this was the fact that dissension had infiltrated the ranks of this otherwise congenial congregation. Some had become disillusioned with McLeod's rather dictatorial rule. A man named Norman McDonald took drastic action by moving all the way to Upper Canada (now Ontario). Another nemesis was the influential merchant John Munro. Munro blamed McLeod for boycotting his business and accusing him of dishonesty and worldliness. In a letter to *The Times and Cape Breton Spectator*, Munro writes pointedly: "But these are

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17 Murray, 71.

18 "Letters of Rev. Norman MacLeod," *Cape Breton's Magazine* 13 (1976): 26.

19 Ibid., 25.

20 Laurie Stanley-Blackwell, *The Well-Watered Garden: The Presbyterian Church in Cape Breton, 1798–1860* (Sydney, NS: Cape Breton University Press, 1983), 168.

21 Morgan, 121.

22 Ibid.,123.

years of changes, and no doubt, will be remarkable in history for revolutions and the upsetting of old dynasties. The other Pope has got a start, and who knows but the chair here may soon begin to totter, also?"[23]

In one of his 1835 letters, McLeod refers to those who left his domain with these acerbic observations: "Little do they conceive what mercies and privileges they exchange for wild Canada, where, according to a late calculation, there are ten Romanists to every Protestant, and the latter too frequently also of indifferent characters and various persuasions . . ."[24]

Journeying Down Under

Eventually like those he earlier criticized, McLeod prepared to leave the place he had called home for 30 years. Responding to the invitation from his son Donald to join him "down under," McLeod and his followers set to shipbuilding yet again. One can only marvel at the faith and fortitude it took to embark on this intimidating ocean-going enterprise. We need to remember that, at this time, the Reverend Norman was 70 years of age. The project must have taxed his physical resources; however, his determination made him equal to the task.

A poem by Helen C. MacDonald, titled "The Pioneers of St. Ann's," captures the spirit of McLeod and his followers particularly in this verse:

> But oh! The sea was in their blood,
> And when the tidings came,
> The glories of Australia's land,
> Adventure's spark to life was fanned,
> And soon was all aflame.[25]

On 28 October 1851, McLeod and some of his followers set sail on a ship named after one of his daughters, the *Margaret*. It has been said that he preached his farewell sermon on a "rocky promontory" in Englishtown, which is at the bottom of the driveway of the home where I grew up. We will probably never know for certain.

When the sermon was over, Norman McLeod stepped onto the *Margaret* and sailed out of the harbour into which he had sailed 31 years before. He would have taken a last and lingering look at the church he had built at Black Cove, at the home he had erected — his school and the houses that now dotted the countryside where three decades before there had been nothing but virgin forest. No doubt, it was a time of mixed emotions as he contemplated what was past and what lay ahead.

As for those not embarking, John Murray wrote, "Hundreds . . . with tears in their eyes and sorrow in their hearts, gathered on the shore to witness their departure, lamenting most of all that they themselves were under the necessity of remaining behind, for a time at least."[26]

Eventually, five more vessels left St. Ann's to join their spiritual leader. Between 1851 and 1859, 883 persons migrated to New Zealand. Many of these emigrants were not necessarily sheep of Norman McLeod's flock. They were men and women from Baddeck to Boularderie. Much like the situation had been in Pictou, McLeod's influence and the prospect of a new beginning enticed many to sail around the world. There must have been a marked effect on ministers and congregations when so many left the ranks of local churches to join the journey.

Unfortunately, McLeod and his followers had traded the blight of Cape Breton for the drought of Australia. The land was unsuitable for farming. There was no milk and no honey.

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23 Stanley-Blackwell, *The Well-Watered Garden*, 166.

24 "Letters," *Cape Breton's Magazine*, back cover.

25 Thornhill, 14.

26 Murray, 31.

They were disillusioned and disappointed, and their trouble did not stop there. Typhoid fever struck the settlers and many died. McLeod and his wife Mary lost three of their sons. Finally, he made arrangements with Sir George Grey, governor of New Zealand, to obtain a large grant of land in the North Island. There he could keep all his people together. Here, finally, was the land of promise. The soil was fertile, the climate was mild, and ready cash was available from the sale of Kauri gum.

A memorial says this:

> Sacred to the Memory of the Rev. Norman MCLEOD and his beloved wife Mary MCLEOD who died 1857, both of whom were public servants of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. He preached the Gospel for 60 years. Born at Stoir Point, Assynt, Scotland, 29th September 1780; Died at Waipu, New Zealand, 14th March 1866, aged 86 years.[27]

A Complex Character

Norman McLeod was a complicated man. John Murray has it right when he says, "He had all the freedom of an independent church minister, while at the same time he had all the authority of a Presbyterian Church minister."[28]

The Presbytery of Cape Breton attempted to bring McLeod under its authority in a letter to him in 1840. In a vehement reply, McLeod writes, in part:

> Your letter of the 24th · · I received this morning, to which I beg to answer that it requires a piece of self-denial in me to take any notice of such a fulminating farce . . . I flatly deny having ever claimed the 'Status of a minister of the Church of Scotland,' and in all humility and sincerity, desire to bless heaven for having enlightened my mind to dread and abhor that status . . . I heartily regret that your unfortunate, offensive and confirmed insolence and pride, so conspicuous in your letter as a true specimen of your general disposition and conduct as ministers towards all who dare object to your measures, render it impossible for me to answer you in a more agreeable style.[29]

The noted United Church historian John Webster Grant wrote with Norman McLeod in mind: "Some of the most colourful Presbyterians of pioneer days were mavericks who resisted any kind of official control."[30]

The Reverend Robert Somerville who, many years ago, was clerk of the Presbytery of Auckland, penned the following description of Rev. Norman:

> Mr. McLeod was a wonderful man. There was an aloofness about him that made him a wonder to many . . . the Waipu people looked upon him as almost divine. His influence upon them was marvelous. They were most obedient to his commands. He kept them in such restraints that the younger people were glad to breathe the air of liberty occasionally. He would have nothing to do with the presbytery of Auckland, and yet one of his dying requests to his people was to keep united, under Mr. Eneas Morrison, until the presbytery appointed a successor. He would not baptize the children, because no parent was good enough to receive baptism for his little ones. It was the same with the Lord's Supper. Yet, with all his peculiarities, he was a genuinely good man, doing good in his own way, and doing it successfully.[31]

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27 Ibid., 33.

28 Ibid., 249.

29 Ibid., 252–53.

30 John Webster Grant, *Divided Heritage: The Presbyterian Contribution to the United Church of Canada* (Yorkton, SK: Laverdure and Associates, 2007), 129.

31 Murray, 33.

Somerville's portrait of McLeod reveals a most accurate acquaintance with this unique cleric. For example, McLeod was a legend in his own time. His legendary status was not posthumous. It very much existed while he was still living among his people. He was, indeed, "a wonder to many."

Just as he had "resisted any kind of official control" while in Cape Breton, he continued the same practice in New Zealand. He spurned any advances that might have been made by the presbytery in Auckland. I would contend that, in many ways, Norman McLeod was more a Congregationalist than a Presbyterian. He was a Presbyterian in theory, but Congregationalist in practice.

This assessment is accurate on several levels. Take, for instance, his style of church government. As far as we know he led congregations without the assistance of elders or an organized session — a necessary element of presbyterial government. There is no evidence that any elders were elected in either St. Ann's or Waipu.

Another characteristic of the Presbyterian Church is that it is a place where the sacraments — baptism and the Lord's Supper — are rightly administered. Norman McLeod administered neither during his entire ministry. None of his parishioners, including their offspring, were considered worthy to partake of the means of grace. McLeod was the judge and the jury in both Cape Breton and New Zealand. In withholding the sacraments from his people, he considered his commands more binding than what Christ commanded when he said, "This do in remembrance of me."

Somerville sums up the essence, I think, of Norman McLeod with four words I referenced earlier: "in his own way." McLeod did things his way. He was a restless and independent spirit who was a law unto himself and who brooked no quarter with anyone and anything. With few exceptions, he held sway over men and women, young and old, who were willing to follow him to the ends of the earth.

A man of some contradictions, McLeod did have a somewhat softer side, evident on rare occasions. On departing from St. Ann's, though estranged from formal church authority, he deeded his church building to the Free Church of Nova Scotia. As Somerville notes, before McLeod died in 1866, he was open to the Presbytery of Auckland appointing his successor in death even though he would have nothing to do with it in life.

Flora McPherson, in her book titled *Watchman against the World*, contends that Norman McLeod was a ready advocate for what today we would call the "little guy." He was always prepared to stand up against any form of abuse, churchly or otherwise. McPherson writes, "Part of his success may have been that in him the weak and unlettered men saw, as well as their spiritual leader, their defence against the strong men of the community . . . As he assailed the strong and successful, he was the spokesman of the lesser men."[32]

The Reverend Dr. Ian MacLeod, in his 1970 book *A History of the Church in St. Ann's*, says this: "There lived in the vicinity of Englishtown, a Mrs. Dorothy Wilhausen, a lady of German-Swiss descent, who was not familiar with the language of the Scots which was used in the home and in the Church. When Mrs. Wilhausen appeared in Mr. McLeod's Church, as she did on occasion, he would preach an additional sermon for her benefit. The language used in the second sermon would be English which she could understand."[33]

In a letter written just months before he left Nova Scotia in 1851, McLeod allows that he was not without imperfections. He says, in part, "If I will be spared to cross the great seas, I shall think it my privilege & pleasure to write you a sketch of the scenes & circumstances of the country of our destination, in secular and religious concerns . . . I wish to pray Heaven that the long continuation of your attachment to me, thro good report amidst all my failings &

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32 McPherson, 99.

33 MacLeod, 11.

short comings, would be blessed to your own souls; and that any deficiencies in my own doctrine, or example, might not prove a stumbling block to any of you."[34]

Neil Robinson (no relation), a descendant of those who migrated to New Zealand, makes reference to the fact that Norman McLeod cannot be easily categorized. He writes, ". . . those close to him could tell stories that seemed to contradict much of what they saw — his willingness to live on human terms with leaders in, for example, the Catholic church, as long as they earned his approval; his gentle affection for little children, recalled often by grizzled old men remembering their youthful contacts with the minister."[35]

The strong feelings elicited by Norman McLeod in his life continued in his death. When McLeod's casket was being carried to the cemetery, a man who had been antagonistic to the cleric volunteered to relieve one of the pallbearers. The bearer turned on the volunteer and exclaimed, "Do you think I would let *you* touch his coffin?" "All right," shrugged the other man, "you can take him to hell yourself."[36]

Robinson goes on to observe that "Norman McLeod was a fascinating, highly complex character . . . harsh and kindly, dogmatic, but listening to reason when he was inclined."[37]

In 1994, a plaque was erected in McLeod's birthplace of Stoer Point. It says, in part: "To the memory of the Rev. Norman McLeod . . . Leader, Minister and Teacher. He led his people over 14,000 miles of ocean to Nova Scotia, Australia and New Zealand . . . They followed him to the ends of the earth."[38]

In closing I can do no better than quote this assessment of the Reverend Norman McLeod by George Patterson:

> The character of Mr. McLeod is so complex that we do not attempt to delineate it. That he was a man of great piety and thorough earnestness no one can doubt. That he did a great deal of good is equally undeniable. His plans to make people better were faultless, but the methods he took to carry them out were bad. He tried to force men to be religious and moral; and there he made his great mistake. He was, too, of that morbid Christianity which looks on the dark side of the shield in everything. Perhaps the last words he uttered before his soul took its flight will best illustrate this phase of his character. "Children, children, look to yourselves, the world is mad."[39]

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34 "Letters," *Cape Breton's Magazine*, 26.

35 Neil Robinson, *To the Ends of the Earth* (Auckland, NZ: HarperCollins, 1997), 18–19.

36 McPherson, 178.

37 Robinson, 19.

38 Ibid., 225.

39 George G. Patterson, *Patterson's History of Victoria County* (Sydney, NS: College of Cape Breton Press, 1978), 102.

"The Missionary Who Wasn't": The Centenary of Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1916–2000) *

A. Donald MacLeod

The 21st of July this past summer marked the centenary of the birth of Wilfred Cantwell Smith,[1] a significant pioneering Canadian Islamic scholar. A pathfinder in the field of comparative religion, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, always the controversialist, affirmed that there was no such thing as religion. An interpreter of Christianity, he stated that Paul the apostle must be wrong.[2] He was a fascinating man.

It is only recently that the study of Islam, the religion of a billion and a half human beings, has been given its rightful place. For too long, in a world riven by religious conflict, Islam has been known through caricature, half-truth, misrepresentation, distortion, and misunderstanding. Cantwell Smith devoted his life to responding to this need for accurate characterization. A genial academic, appreciated by his students for his modesty, charm, and approachability, he was the first full-time professor of Islamic studies in three major universities: McGill, Dalhousie, and Harvard. Cantwell Smith, born a Presbyterian, nurtured as a child in a Presbyterian congregation, and sent out as a Presbyterian missionary, to the end of his life declared himself a Presbyterian (although latterly a minister in good standing in the United Church of Canada). So, it is appropriate that the Canadian Society of Presbyterian History mark this anniversary by honouring one who claimed to be one of our own both by nationality and denomination.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith, son of Victor Arnold Smith and Sarah Cory Cantwell, was born in Toronto and raised in Knox Presbyterian Church. Seven years before his birth, the congregation, the oldest Presbyterian church in Toronto, had relocated from its downtown property at Queen and Bay streets to an uptown site at Spadina and Harbord. However, the original property (glebe, land, and sanctuary) could never be sold, according to the terms of the gift from Jesse Ketchum, the first minister's father-in-law. Ketchum was a canny Buffalo tanner who had bought that land during the War of 1812 at fire sale prices. A trust was set up in his name, and income — the amount to be renegotiated every 21 years — provided funds for the congregation. That amount increased considerably after Knox Church relocated and the site was leased by the Robert Simpson Company, a large department store.

With the arrival of American Henry Martyn Parsons in 1879, the congregation became more like a frontier revival camp meeting. It also became a centre for a new method of interpreting the Bible, popularized by the Plymouth Brethren teacher J. N. Darby, called "dispensationalism." Under Parsons's successor, A. B. Winchester, an editor of the 1909 *Scofield Reference Bible*, it propagated an interpretation of the Bible which often focused on prophecy and end-time speculation. On Winchester's departure in 1922 to become a minister *extra muros* (without walls) for a wide-ranging North American conference ministry, J. G. Inkster was called as successor. Inkster, who had his own demons, would be Cantwell Smith's minister as he grew up, his preaching and teaching of Christianity shaped by dispensationalism. As a community, Knox Church sometimes struggled to exemplify Christian charity and forbearance.

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* Thanks to Bob Anger, assistant archivist, Presbyterian Church in Canada; thanks, too, for the encouragement of James and Beth Tebbe, rector and archivist, respectively, Forman College, Lahore, Pakistan; and J. Dudley Woodberry, dean emeritus and senior professor of Islamic Studies, School of Intercultural Studies, Fuller Theological Seminary.

1 For comparison of Smith with other recent interpreters of Islam, see James A. Tebbe, "Kenneth Cragg in Perspective: A Comparison with Temple Gairdner and Wilfred Cantwell Smith," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 26, no.1 (January 2002): 16–21.

2 W. C. Smith, *Towards a World Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1981), 35.

While the congregation militantly stated that it was "contending earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints," it was hardly a traditional Reformed faith propagated from its pulpit. Dispensationalism compromised the historical integrity and unity of biblical revelation, stating that the Old Testament, so important in interfaith and intercultural dialogue, did not apply to "the church age" — Christians were now in a new dispensation. Grace, another foundational Christian principle, was compromised by a semi-Pelagian approach, one of the chief appeals of Christianity to a Muslim. Because of its preoccupation with "Daniel propheta" (reflected in a creative stained-glass window in the new Knox Church) and the prophet's "70 weeks" leading to the Second Coming of Christ (always *before* the millennium), dispensational eschatology and that of Islam met in a bizarre coming together — Dabiq or Armageddon, take your choice, IS/Daesh or Christian. Jesus's so-called "imminent return" was a key factor in motivating missionary commitment: the return of Jesus would be hastened as the Gospel was proclaimed to all nations (Matthew 24:14).

Knox Church became a hub for no less than seven "faith missions," some supported by its Ketchum Trust income. It was also three blocks away from the Toronto Bible College, one of the few non-dispensational Bible schools in North America and noted for the number of graduates it sent to the mission field. The Presbyterianism of Cantwell Smith's childhood — barely recognizable from its historic Reformed identity — proved profoundly influential, both in action and reaction, as Cantwell Smith's thinking developed. In spite of two years of post-graduate research at a Cambridge divinity college and ordination by the Church of North India, Cantwell Smith never had a theological education. His approach to Christianity was sociological.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith and his brother, Arnold Cantwell Smith (older by a year and a half), had a privileged childhood. Their father was West Indian, born into the Grenada plantocracy. They grew up on prestigious Dunvegan Road in Lower Forest Hill and both attended the exclusive private Upper Canada College nearby. Wilfred supplemented his education there with courses at Grenoble and Madrid. Both brothers then went on to the University of Toronto. Arnold, a Rhodes Scholar, had a distinguished diplomatic career as a colleague of Lester Pearson, spending a decade as the first Commonwealth Secretary (1965–1975). He predeceased his brother by seven years. Their father, Victor, was immensely (and understandably) proud of his two gifted sons and did everything he could to promote their careers.

As a loyal churchgoer, Wilfred, on entering university, was encouraged to join the Student Christian Movement (SCM). His membership there would shape the subsequent direction of his life. SCM had grown out of the old Student Volunteer Movement but by the 1930s had taken a marked leftward turn, emphasizing in a time of desperate economic dislocation social action rather than missionary recruitment.[3] It was at SCM that he met his future wife, Muriel Mackenzie Struthers, the daughter of Canadian Presbyterian medical missionaries and a pre-med student at the university. Her father was Dr. Ernest Black Struthers[4] of Galt (now Cambridge), Ontario. Originally sent out by the China Customs Union as a medical civil servant, he joined the Honan Mission of the Canadian Presbyterian Church, teaming up with Jonathan Goforth, one of Knox Church's venerated missionaries. Struthers went on to Shandong, where he became head of the medical faculty at Qilu University, a bastion of liberal Protestant missionary service.[5] Muriel Struthers had all the

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3 See my *C. Stacey Woods and the Evangelical Rediscovery of the University* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 122.

4 See Gerald H. Choa, *"Heal the Sick" Was Their Motto: The Protestant Medical Missionaries in China* (Shanghai: Chinese University Press, 1990), 132.

5 See my chapter in *China's Reforming Churches*, ed. Bruce P. Baugus (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation, 2014). Also, 赵曰北，《历史光影中的华北神学院》（香港：中国国际文化出版社，2015年

humanitarian instincts of her remarkable father and throughout her long life (she died in 2010) was a champion of left-wing causes. In the 1930s, SCM, faced with fascist thuggery and dire economic privation and dislocation, became a recruiting ground for the Communist Party of Canada. Wilfred and Muriel were soon seen as a couple at SCM, and she had a profound influence on him. The patchy[6] University of Toronto SCM archives from that period show Wilfred, as president, providing some leadership in Bible study, supplementing the steady SCM diet of social activism, hosting a retreat at his home on Dunvegan Road the same month he graduated in 1938. SCM redirected the energies of many devout church collegians in the 1930s.

That autumn, Smith went to Cambridge University's Westminster College, the theological seminary of the Presbyterian Church of England, where his Marxism proved a liability. There he wrote a thesis that critiqued the British Raj in India, and the examiners felt that because of his rigid Marxism, it did not meet their rigorous intellectual standards. By the time he returned to Toronto, the Second World War had broken out.

While in England Cantwell Smith had been approached by William L. Paton,[7] originally of the Student Volunteer Movement/SCM, secretary of the National Christian Council of India in the 1920s, and now the influential secretary of the International Missionary Council. "Dr. Paton," it was reported[8] by W. A. Armstrong, the PCC's Foreign Missions secretary, "was most enthusiastic about this young man. He says he is doubtful if there is anyone anywhere so brilliant and with such fine qualifications for this work." The work that Paton had in mind, discussed in an earlier visit to Toronto with Anglicans, Baptists, Presbyterians, and United Church representatives on the Foreign Missions Council, was to "cooperate in work among the Mohammedans in India."[9]

Cantwell Smith wanted to go to India with his bride, intending to sail from San Francisco to Calcutta (because of U-boats on the Atlantic); however, he needed a loan for a year for travel (his Fellowship would support the couple once they arrived). Strong representations about this need from Muriel and Wilfred (and later his father, Victor) were made to Armstrong in his office, a frequent occurrence before Victor moved out of the city, something that must have challenged Armstrong's pastoral patience. "They are both unassuming," wrote Paton of the young couple. "No flamboyant play of the training which they have already had and the success which has attended their scholastic efforts." Paton went on to say that if the PCC dithered, they would go to the United Church in seeking the $890 required.

In a further letter, dated 28 August 1941, Paton weighed the options for Smith's placement. Cantwell Smith was regarded as a valuable asset who seemed to have so much potential for the evangelization of Muslims in India. There was the Forman Christian College in Lahore, Punjab, whose principal, Surendra Kumar Datta, had an outstanding reputation, particularly in reaching Hindus. "One great advantage of a job in the Forman College is that it will bring Smith into touch with a considerable number of young Muslims and the standing of the College is such that it would help rather than hinder his general contacts with Muslim leaders."[10] On the other hand, the Henry Martyn School of Islamic Studies in Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, was founded in 1930 by a consortium of American and British mission boards with "the twofold purpose of making a close study of present-day movements among Muslims in India for the preparation of Christian literature more adequate to the needs of the day in this

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6 They were received in 1979 and have only recently been partially catalogued.

7 William L. Paton (1886–1943), described as an "Ecumenist, secretary, International Missionary Council. Regrouped Cambridge SCM 1910 after the IVF [Inter-Varsity Fellowship] CICCU [Cambridge Inter-Collegiate Christian Union] defected because of liberalism."

8 W. A. Armstrong to A. M. Hill [of Verdun, QC], 20 July 1949. PCC Archives.

9 Ibid.

10 Paton to Priest, 22 August 1941. PCC Archives.

field."[11] American Presbyterian Dwight Donaldson had recently been transferred to the school from Iran and there was much hope of a new and more reflective appeal to Islam. Smith's appointment remained fluid throughout his six years in India as he travelled between the two schools but lived in Lahore, where his wife attended medical school.

At Knox Church there was euphoria because at last something was being done to reach the unresponsive Muslim world, particularly in India where the PCC had worked mainly in tribal areas. On 31 March 1941, Knox Session voted the entire salary of $2,500 for the Smiths from the Jesse Ketchum Trust. A fulsome letter by the new incumbent at Knox, T. Christie Innes, dated 3 April 1941, stated that "[t]his whole project must be fraught with rich divine blessing, and we shall constantly seek to maintain not only financial support but deep spiritual and personal interest in this vitally important and happily conceived project of the Canadian churches."[12] Armstrong's response was an appeal for Knox to get behind the General Assembly's budget which they had been reluctant to do; Armstrong concluded, "That the one who is heading up this new task is a gifted and consecrated son of one of your own families makes this action of your Session uniquely fitting."[13]

As the Smiths settled into their quarters in Forman's Ewing Hall on Roberts Road in the autumn of 1941, W. A. Cameron continued to send encouraging words, but now the question of ordination in the PCC had been raised by Wilfred's father in conversation with Cameron. Cameron explained the process of being ordained as a PCC clergyman but said, "I am sure that some adjustment in the matter could be made. It might be that the General Assembly would have to be consulted."[14] On inquiry Smith discovered that the United Church of North India (UCNI), a 1924 amalgamation of various Protestant denominations working in the country, would be willing to ordain him with the possibility of retaining his Knox membership as well as that of his local congregation, Naulakha, in Lahore.[15]

There was a one problem: the UCNI statement of faith that Smith would be required to sign. He responded: "It is clear that this embodies a more or less modified version of the early Reformation Church. To me it seems insincere not to recognise that was generally put forward to the modern church, especially in America. I am personally acquainted with a large number of ministers and theological professors, to say nothing of church members whose faith the formal confession does not adequately describe." In the letter he indicated that the Canadian SCM statement of faith was one he and his wife could sign. It spoke of "the conviction that in Jesus Christ are found the supreme revelation of God and the means to a full realization of life."

Smith's response sent Armstrong to Knox College, where he met with W. W. Bryden, Systematic Theology professor, who carefully examined the UCNI Confession "and was very much pleased by it."[16] On the other hand, he had concerns about the Student Christian Movement statement. What it said no Christian could take exception to; however, in ordination, the Church puts its imprint on a person, in what one might call "an official capacity . . . the statement of faith of the SCM is not adequate. More should be known of a man's theological point of view."[17] Smith had earlier stated that he could not treat confessional subscription as "a mere formality. This seems to be an inadequate practice. Surely a fundamental issue is at stake and I hesitate to treat it as of little importance." Something had penetrated about transparency in doctrinal subscription (perhaps at Knox

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11 An undated sheet titled "Henry Martyn School of Islamic Studies, Landour," circa summer 1940. PCC Archives.
12 Christie Innes to W. A. Cameron, 3 April 1941. PCC Archives.
13 W. A. Cameron to T. Christie Innes, 4 April 1941. PCC Archives.
14 W. A. Cameron to W. C. Smith, 22 September 1941. PCC Archives.
15 W. C. Smith to W. A. Cameron, 12 January 1942. PCC Archives.
16 W. A. Cameron to W. C. Smith, 21 May 1942. PCC Archives.
17 Ibid.

Church?) and with integrity, he refused to sign a statement, as many did, "with mental reservations."

Victor Smith set up a time to meet with Armstrong who commended his son's honesty but went on to concede that "[y]ou can see that it poses certain difficulties."[18] Armstrong's response to Wilfred's 12 January letter had been delayed due to wartime postal challenges. In a follow-up in late July, Smith wrote an emotional four-page letter.[19] "The conception of the missionary task — or at least of our task — is to serve the people among whom we are working: in this case, the Muslims of India." He continued in language from his SCM days: "we have it amply illustrated by modern knowledge, by Hitler, by the U.S.S.R., that human nature is profoundly influenced for good or ill by the political, social, economic, and physiological set-up in which and through which it functions." He challenged Cameron to accept that in "many years of intensive study, reflection, and activity, there is little likelihood of a fundamental change in view."

Cantwell Smith's view of the missionary task was, to say the least, unusual: he and Muriel were lecturing on a local radio station on the achievements of the Soviet Union, he on "Religion in the U.S.S.R." and Muriel on "Health in the U.S.S.R." Smith is also credited with founding the Punjab Communist Party. His brother, posted to Estonia and Moscow at the time, would later provide a more realistic picture of Stalin and his gulags.

Meanwhile, as W. A. Cameron wrote H. B. Gordon, Ketchum Trust treasurer, "It is an honour to us as a church that one of our young men should have so commended himself by ability, scholarship and consecration of purpose to the difficult task of presenting the claims of Christ as Saviour and Lord to the Muslims that he has been so heartily accepted will be a particular pleasure in that he is one of your boys."[20] Indeed, Smith had received wide acceptance in the Muslim community for his ability to sit and learn from them as he acquired their language. In November 1942, he was invited to attend the All-India Muslim Students' Federation Conference in Jullundur, Punjab, as the guest of the principal with whom he stayed, a Cambridge graduate. There, for the first time, he observed Muhammad Ali Jinnah, later founding father of Pakistan, who was chairman. "I was very pleased to attend," he wrote afterwards.[21]

His rejected Cambridge Ph.D. thesis, *Islam in Modern India*, was first published locally. At Forman, he lectured on Muslim history. In his October 1942 report, he stated, "I feel now that I have reached the point of actually getting across to them something worthwhile."[22] With his keen mind, his growing knowledge of Urdu, his lack of any sense of racial superiority as a colonial, and the theological removal of any desire to "convert" Muslims to Christ, he related to them naturally and identified with them. He was very popular with Muslims one on one as he was with all his students. His book, which appeared first in 1943 and went into four editions in the next three years, showed the development of his thinking as he searched for common ground between Islam and Christianity, a quest he would later abandon. His views on partition, as the process accelerated during his years in India, also showed development as he grew to accept the inevitable.

Four days before Christmas 1943, the relationship between Wilfred and Knox Church was abruptly terminated. The Trust Committee ended its support of the so-called "Mission to Muslims." The allocated funds were, instead, redirected in 1944 to a missionary to Formosa, George W. MacKay, a doughty theological warrior who had kept the Formosa field for the continuing Presbyterians in 1925 (the only one not taken by the United Church). Victor,

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18 W. A. Cameron to Victor Smith, 27 March 1942. PCC Archives.

19 W. C. Smith to W. A. Cameron, 25 July 1942. PCC Archives.

20 W. A. Cameron to H. B. Gordon, 24 January 1940. PCC Archives.

21 "Report from Wilfred Smith, November 1942." PCC Archives.

22 "Report from W. C. Smith, Oct. 22, 1942." PCC Archives.

whose work with the Canadian government's Munitions and Supply department had transferred him to Hamilton (and later Ottawa), wrote an emotional letter to W. A. Cameron: "we are reminded that our Lord himself was rejected by the very synagogue which he had visited from boyhood from Sabbath to Sabbath, when they wanted to kill him, and the servant is not above his Lord."[23]

Cameron's superb pastoral skills went into overdrive as he recommended that Victor quietly leave Knox Church and not make the very public withdrawal he had threatened. "I know how deeply the action of this Committee will hurt Mrs. Smith and yourself with this background of your long connection with Knox Church," he wrote, "and the fact that your boys grew up within that congregation."[24]

Apparently, a letter had been sent to Wilfred from the trustees in October asking for his views on two matters: Holy Scripture and his understanding of Jesus as the only way to God. His answers were not regarded as satisfactory. Knox Church had been swept along when he was first appointed and had not done a proper interview. But the family was somewhat naïve to think that a man who self-identified as a "modernist" would ever be acceptable at Knox Church.

As Victor Smith predicted, there was some dissension about the decision not to continue his son's salary. A "W. C. Smith Committee" had been formed and prominent among its members was the name of Mrs. Inkster, who had become embittered and severed her links with Knox. Meanwhile, Christie Innes left the congregation to become the head of the American Tract Society in New York City.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith had one final perk as a Presbyterian minister and missionary. On his return to North America in 1946, he applied for accommodation at Princeton Seminary. The Payne apartments on Alexander Street had been endowed in the 1920s for Presbyterian foreign missionaries as a place to stay while on furlough. There, a block away from Princeton University, the Smiths, now with two small children, stayed until Smith finally completed his graduate studies, which enabled his appointment to McGill in 1949 as its first professor of Islamic Studies. At that time, with his ordination in the Church of Christ of North India recognized by the PCC, he was added to the appendix to the roll of Montreal Presbytery; however, his name was dropped without explanation in the 1962 *Acts and Proceedings*. His subsequent career, with its ideological twists and turns, took him to Dalhousie and Harvard universities and is beyond the scope of this paper.

On retirement in 1984 Smith returned to his native Toronto. At the end of his life he took up residence in Fellowship Towers, Yonge Street north of Davenport, where another resident, Griffin Poetry Prize winner, Margaret Avison, ironically a member of Knox Church, immortalized him in her poem "To Wilfred Cantwell Smith."[25] His funeral 16 years later took place in Bloor Street United Church (formerly Presbyterian), four blocks from Knox Church, conducted by his close friend N. Bruce McLeod, the maverick former moderator of the United Church, with a Presbyterian liturgy. Harvard asked the family at the time for his papers so that they could be archived at the university. Characteristically, Smith had had them all destroyed. He felt that his books and his work spoke for themselves.[26]

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23 Victor Smith to W. A. Cameron, 11 January 1944. PCC Archives.

24 W. A. Cameron to Victor Smith, 14 January 1944. PCC Archives.

25 Margaret Avison, "To Wilfred Cantwell Smith," *Concrete and Wild Carrot* (Toronto: Brick Books, 2002), 67–68. "Myopic, skeptical, sometimes distraught,/ slowly your readers see ourselves as foreign,/ trotting for safety through our little warren/ of walled ways. Now, perilously, we're out."

26 Professor Brian Cantwell Smith [University of Toronto], in a phone discussion with the author, 21 April 2016.

What Were They Thinking? The Place of Women and the 1966 Decisions on Ordination

Stuart Macdonald

The Presbyterian Church in Canada (PCC) made headlines in January 1970 with the release of a report commissioned by its national Recruitment and Vocations Committee. Headlines included "Presbyterians called 'Rigid and Inflexible,'" "Presbyterians aren't with it," and (a personal favourite) "'We're Stodgy, Too Slow to Change,' Says Report," above which the newspaper had the caption "Presbyterians Flail Selves."[1]

Amid all the controversy both when the report was released and when its recommendations were brought before General Assembly in June, what stands out most when looking back on the report is not what is in it, but what was omitted. The Ross Report was commissioned to deal with a (supposed) crisis in vocations — a need for more ministers to serve in congregations. Given that the Presbyterian Church in Canada had four years previously accepted that women could be ordained as Ministers of Word and Sacrament,[2] thus doubling the pool of potential recruits, one would have thought that the Recruitment and Vocations Committee, or their outside consultant the P. S. Ross Company, would have somehow seen this as a solution to the perceived problem. They did not, however. Women are strikingly absent from the consideration of this committee, which is surprising as this committee was not considered "conservative" in its theology or approach to other issues; indeed, in many ways, this committee represented those within the PCC in the late 1960s that one would have anticipated being most open to, in support of, or even driving the ordination of women. Yet, in the final Ross Report, women are absent as a solution to the crisis of not enough ministers. Indeed, one of the few places women appear in the report is as a perceived problem, namely, minister's wives who are unhappy and thus persuading their husbands to leave ministry.[3]

The discovery that, only four years after the decision to ordain women, the Ross Report seemed oblivious to this as a possible solution to the recruitment issues they were considering[4] was what first got me considering the question: "What were they thinking in 1966 when they made the decision to ordain women?" The key here is not the importance that we now place on this decision or how we understand and interpret it; it is to understand how those participating in 1966 perceived the decision. That decision has come to have a prominent place in the way in which the denomination has understood itself over the last 50 years.

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1 Valerie M. Dunn, "Whatever Happened to the Ross Report?" *Presbyterian Record* (February 1971): 2–3. The headlines can be seen in the graphic with this article.

2 Throughout this paper, the term *minister* will be used to refer to "Minister of Word and Sacraments." The term *teaching elder* also applies to this office, but can be too easily confused with the term *elders*, which will be used exclusively for those ordained to serve on sessions as ruling elders.

3 Stuart Macdonald, "Divining the Entrails: One Challenge in Studying How Presbyterian Church in Canada Looked at Itself and Its Future, 1945–2000," *Canadian Society of Presbyterian History Papers 2006*, 10–28.

4 The discovery was made while researching what became Stuart Macdonald, "Divining the Entrails."

The General Assembly celebrated the 40th Anniversary with a major presentation and also noted the 50th Anniversary in 2016, as did Knox College, where the Reverend Linda Ashfield was invited to be convocation speaker.[5] But while the denomination has marked the various key anniversaries of the 1966 decision, the ordination of women is an aspect of the history of the Church that, like so many other aspects of the denomination since the Second World War, has not received much academic study. John Moir noted the debates and decision in his survey of the Canadian Presbyterian Church, *Enduring Witness*.[6] Jo-Ann Dickson has presented a paper, later published in the *Papers of the Canadian Society of Presbyterian History*, on the background to the memorial sent by the Presbytery of Montreal to the General Assembly in 1979. A. Donald MacLeod has published an article on the relationship between this debate and what became known as the "liberty of conscience" debate, and the origins of the Renewal Fellowship Within the Presbyterian Church in Canada. Most recently, Peter Bush has explored the early work of the Committee on the Place of Women in the Church, from 1953 to 1957, in *Presbyterian History*.[7] Important work has been done.

What seems clear from the these publications as well as various unpublished works[8] and my own research is that there are two distinct phases to the debate on the ordination of women in the Presbyterian Church in Canada: first, discussion on the place of women in the Church (which takes us from 1953 to 1966); and second, the responses to the changes, particularly related to ordination, which occurred a little more than a decade later and were concentrated in the period from 1979 to 1982, and which included the debate about "liberty of conscience" in terms of accepting this newly defined role for women.

Approach and Methodology

In considering the question *What were they thinking in 1966?* a few methodological decisions needed to be made.

One was that oral history would not be the most useful research tool at this relatively early stage. Some historical events take on a life of their own and are remembered based upon what happens later to the extent that individuals start to recast the historical events in

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5 The Reverend Linda Ashfield also did a fine presentation on the history of the debate. I am indebted to her for highlighting, among things, the importance of the 1960 overture (discussed below).

6 John Moir, *Enduring Witness*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1987), 255, 263–64, 280–82, gives a brief survey of both stages of the debate. Lois Klempa and Rosemary Doran, *Certain Women Amazed Us: The Women's Missionary Society, 1864–2002* (Toronto: Women's Missionary Society, 2002), 304–5, also discuss the background to the 1966 decision. Neither discussion is extensive or comprehensive, and interesting errors have crept into each of these accounts.

7 Jo-Ann Dickson, "Testing 1966: Unrest in Montreal" in *Canadian Society of Presbyterian History Papers 2012*, 43–55. A. Donald MacLeod, "From Reaction to Renewal: Presbyterian Renewal Fellowship, 1979–1987," in *Studies in Canadian Evangelical Renewal: Essays in Honour of Ian S. Rennie*, ed. Kevin Quast and John Vissers (Markham: FT Publications, 1996), 175–94. Peter Bush, "The Opening of the Women's Ordination Debate in the Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1952–1957," *Presbyterian History* 60, no. 2 (2016): 1–6.

8 This is also an area where many students do essays. I am indebted to all of them for their contributions and ideas, for the perspectives and what I have learned. In particular, I am grateful to Susan Shaffer for a sharing a fine paper she did as an M.Div. student and to Jo-Ann Dickson, who raised some issues that I hadn't been aware of and that contributed to my reconsidering the broader debate.

light of later events.[9] The decision of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, I would argue, is one of those events. Later debates in the early 1980s have recast understandings of the debates in 1966. Commemorations have stressed some aspects of the decision, but downplayed others. Oral history has a place and will offer great insights; however, I consciously chose at this stage of historical enquiry not to interview individuals and ask them about their experiences and to use with caution later recollections related to the events of 1966 and leading up to them. Instead, research relied on traditional historical sources created at the time, such as the *Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly,* the reports and publications of the key committees, the denominational magazine *Presbyterian Record*, and archival sources.

One unexpected discovery was a file folder, donated to the Caven Library at Knox College in June 2016, containing minutes of the Committee on the Place of Women in the Church from 1957 to 1963. Much of this material supports what we already know from the *Acts and Proceedings*, but some interesting additional insights can be gleaned. My research project began with an extensive exploration of these primary sources. Only after this did I consult the secondary sources, including the Presbyterian Church in Canada Archives web presentation and the previously noted article by Peter Bush in *Presbyterian History*.[10] This approach led to the discovery of some inaccuracies as well as some significant omissions that have crept into the secondary literature. The story has sometimes been told with a focus on the ordination of women as ministers to the extent that the ordination of women as elders has been lost. This was a debate about the place of women in the Church, with the question of ordination of women as elders being foremost and as ministers secondary: at least, that is what this paper will argue. It will proceed in two stages: first, an outline of the main events and stages of the debate; and second, an analysis of what occurred.

The 1953 Overture and the Committee on the Place of Women in the Church

In 1953, the Synod of Manitoba sent an overture to the General Assembly, asking it to consider the "Place of Women in the Church." The overture began by quoting scripture, noting that "in the Church of Jesus Christ there is no east or west . . . neither male nor female" before turning to the major concerns. The Synod noted that it was not "the custom" in the Canadian Presbyterian Church "to include women in Kirk Sessions." In the next of their arguments, they indicated that Presbyterians had "failed to give women equal status and responsibilities in the Church," the result being that the full potential of the Church had not been realized. The overture then noted "it is our opinion that the question of the status of women in positions of leadership in The Presbyterian Church in Canada needs clarification, to the end that the Church may recognize the teaching of Scripture, that in Christ there is

9 I am indebted to my colleague Bruce Douville, who supported this concern during a presentation at a Canadian Society of Church History meeting in 2016. See James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), ix–xii, 1–8, 200–202.

10 Emily Tippins, "Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Ordination of Women 1966–2016," Presbyterian Church in Canada Archives online exhibit, http://presbyterianarchives.ca/2016/07/20/celebrating-the-50th-anniversary-of-the-ordination-of-women-1966-2016. Peter Bush, "Opening of the Women's Ordination Debate."

neither male nor female," before asking the General Assembly to consider this question and appoint a special committee to report to the next General Assembly.[11]

It is worth quoting this overture in detail to see what is there as well as what is not mentioned. What we see in the overture is a clear appeal to scripture. The concern is women in leadership, but the specific example mentioned is at the congregational level, specifically Kirk Sessions. What is less clear is whether the Synod had women as ministers in mind as they shaped this overture.

What is clearly absent, though, is the word *ordination*, something noted by the committee established by the General Assembly in 1953. At the next Assembly, it did not present a final report (as the overture seemed to request) but asked that the committee be continued and that "if the question of Ordination is to be considered, the Committee be so instructed." After an amendment that this be referred to the Committee on Articles of Faith (what is now known as the "Church Doctrine Committee") failed, the committee was given the power to consider this issue. Its next recommendation, that it consult with "representative women of the Church," also passed.[12]

The committee's report to the 1954 Assembly, as well as its report to the 1955 General Assembly, makes clear the issues with which the committee, known as the "Committee re: The Place of Women in the Church," was grappling.[13] Scripture was one issue. The committee recognized the principle of male and female equality in Galatians 3:28 which the Synod of Manitoba had raised, but wondered if "this general principle was subject to certain modifications of which I Timothy 2:11, 12 and I Corinthians 14:34, 35 are the extreme examples."[14] How scripture was to be interpreted was a clear issue. The committee also looked at developments in doctrine and history. It posed a key question: "How shall we emerge from the confusion of doctrine with custom, and how shall we define doctrine in this matter?" Examples used of such confusion include John Knox's *First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* which they declared "of no analogy we may say to the matter of the place of women in the Church, despite much pleading to the contrary."[15]

The committee stressed that they believed that the denomination should not "proceed on analogy with what has been done in the professions" but needed to focus on "Biblical principles." Three general issues were then presented for the Church to consider: first, how women were being involved in the work of the local congregations (which the committee believed was less effective than current rules in the Church permitted); second, the question of ordination; and third, representation at General Assembly.[16] The committee understood the questions before it very broadly, to include all aspects of the question of how women were exercising their gifts and leadership in the Church, and those places where their voices and leadership were not being used. When it came to ordination, the committee focused both on

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11 *Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly, 1953*, 393.

12 A&P 1954, 33–34. The text of report is not in A&P 1954.

13 The committee was sometimes referred to as the "Special Committee," while at other times, it was referred to as simply the "Committee." It was always a special committee, as opposed to a standing committee of General Assembly, in the sense that it had been established to do a specific task. Throughout this paper, it has been referred to simply as "the committee."

14 1954 report. This was published as part of a document, *Report of the Committee re: The Place of Women in the Church, General Assembly 1955*, 9. The copy used in this paper was in the Caven Library file folder containing minutes from the Committee on the Place of Women in the Church.

15 1954 report, 10.

16 Ibid., 10–11.

ordination to ministry and to eldership; at the same time, they were cautious in seeing either as a solution to what they considered to be the problem:

> There are many who consider the ordination of women to the Holy Ministry and the Ruling Eldership will automatically solve the problem of the place of women in the Church. The problems are deeper than the matter of ordination. We believe that the Churches that have permitted such ordinations have not the full answer, and have less of an answer than they expected.[17]

Having noted this concern, the committee, nonetheless, asked the General Assembly specifically if they were to consider the question of ordination, which the Assembly approved. The next year's report (1955) continued the same general themes before addressing the specific issues related to the ordination of women "to the Ruling Eldership or the Ministry or both."[18] The committee noted that it experienced two voices in the Church, the one believing that the principle of equality in Christ now needed to be exercised in full, and a second, contrary voice, which believed in this principle, but did not believe that this implied "equality of function."[19] Recognizing these two different viewpoints, the committee recommended first, that the reports of the committee (1954 and 1955) as well as two papers — one by Professor F. Scott Mackenzie, the other by Professor David Hay — be distributed to the presbyteries, presbyterials, and other "organized Presbytery-wide groups of men or women within Presbytery bounds," for comment; and second, that the two specific questions of whether women could be ordained as elders and as ministers be sent down to the presbyteries, presbyterials, and the other groups named, and that the actual number of votes cast be reported back.[20]

Negative Response and the Council Plan

When reports came into the committee, it was clear that there was only limited support for the ordination of women as ministers and as elders, although the latter was not nearly as unpopular. The tally of individual votes within each of these bodies was as follows:

- presbyteries in favour of ordaining women to the ruling eldership (elders) — 171; against — 391;
- presbyteries in favour of ordaining women to the ministry — 91; against — 458;
- presbyterials in favour of ordaining women to the ruling eldership (elders) — 826; against — 908;
- presbyterials in favour of ordaining women to the ministry — 638; against — 1,113.[21]

The committee reported these results to the 1956 General Assembly.

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17 Ibid., 11.

18 1955 Report, 3. This was published as part of a document, *Report of the Committee re: The Place of Women in the Church, General Assembly 1955.* There is a great deal of rich detail in this report.

19 Ibid. The arguments, particularly around the second view, are fascinating.

20 Ibid., 4. A&P 1955, 58–59.

21 This was reported in A&P 1956, as part of the report of the committee, 312–13. The results from presbyteries have been noted in the literature and are fairly widely known. The results from presbyterials are less widely known. *Presbyterials* were official bodies of the Women's Missionary Society, usually following the same boundaries of presbyteries.

Margaret MacNaughton, who was a member of the committee, was given permission to speak to the Assembly before various motions from the committee were brought forward. The ordination of women as ruling elders and as ministers was recognized as impassable at the time (so it was decided not to send recommendation 4 down under the *Barrier Act*), but there were other things the committee believed it needed to do. One was to consider the question of the ordination of deaconesses (recommendation 7), which was amended to involve a study of the role and place of deaconesses.[22] The committee continued to consider the place of women in the Church. The question of what to do with women who were ordained by other churches while missionaries was one issue referred to the committee for its consideration.[23]

The challenge of giving a voice to women remained the main concern of the committee as noted in their 1957 Report to the General Assembly:

> It is now clear to us as a Committee that the matter of ordination for women as Ministers, Ruling Elders or Deaconesses is a minor one compared to the conviction among thoughtful women everywhere that women might well have a more definite voice in the Courts of our Church. The question is, against our centuries' old canonical law, practice and tradition, how shall this be achieved.[24]

The committee had a proposal: to establish presbytery councils, synod councils, and an assembly council, at which women would be able to participate and have a voice. (No congregational council was suggested because it was believed that a "Session may call into consultation all groups within the congregation.") After the councils met and discussed a wide variety of issues, including doctrine and worship, the requisite church court would then meet "to give formal ratification to the acts and proceedings of the Council." The committee, chaired by Louis Fowler, asked for feedback on the principles of the scheme, knowing that many of the details still needed to be worked out.

One rationale given for the support of the council idea was the experience of ordination in other churches. Citing the example of the United Church of Canada, they estimated that there would be "only nine women ministers" across the denomination if the Presbyterian Church in Canada followed the same pattern in proportion to its size, and, if they followed that of an American denomination, only 28. It was suggested that this would not give women a voice as ministers, nor would women elders be represented in equal numbers to men, "at least not for a long time," nor would ordaining women as deaconesses solve the issue: "In short on the basis of ordination, women will not come into any practical equality." The issue of finding a voice for women — a voice with some degree of equality — had become a greater concern for the committee than had the issue of ordination.[25]

As most of us recoil at the thought of another structure or committee, it is perhaps not surprising that the council plan did not receive a great deal of support in the Church. The report to the 1958 Assembly noted the lack of enthusiasm, and while the committee

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22 A&P 1956, 312–14, for report. The Assembly's actions are in the minutes: 74–75, 84–85.

23 A&P 1957, 77.

24 Ibid., 259–60.

25 Ibid., 260–61. The report makes this clear in a few places. At the same time as the discussion of the issue at the committee level, the *Presbyterian Record* included several articles looking at the question of the ordination of women, in particular, looking at the scriptural issues. For more information on these articles, see note 59 below.

continued to meet and consider various other issues that demonstrated a broad concern for the place of women in the Church, no way forward seemed possible.[26]

In 1960, completely independent of the Committee on the Place of Women, the Synod of Toronto and Kingston sent an overture to General Assembly asking them "to come to the earliest possible decision on the whole question of the ordination of women to the full ministry of the Church." The overture had been the result of the session of Knox Waterloo forwarding a female candidate for ministry, Shirley MacLeod, to the Presbytery of Guelph for their support and approval. At the 1960 General Assembly, a motion to allow Shirley MacLeod to speak was defeated, but the question of the ordination of women to the ministry was sent down to the presbyteries under the *Barrier Act*.[27] The results were reported in 1961. Fourteen Presbyteries (34%) supported the ordination of women to ministry, but 26 (64%) opposed it.[28]

The Presbytery of Montreal responded in a different way. They sent an overture to Assembly noting that the presbyteries had not had sufficient time to consider the issue of ordination of women and asking that Assembly withhold any decision "for at least two years" so that a full study could be made "by the Committee on Articles of Faith or such other body as the Assembly shall choose and by the Presbyteries, of the biblical doctrine of woman and of ordination" so that the Church could make its decision "on the basis of its own standards."[29]

The Place of Women in the Church — Committee & Study Guide

These two overtures (1960 and 1961) happened outside of the work, but not awareness, of the Committee on the Place of Women in the Church. Louis Fowler had done an excellent job of trying to think broadly of how the talents of women might be better used in the Church and in his leadership of the committee. A memo from him to members of the committee in December 1959 referenced the overture from the Presbytery of Guelph, but also showed him thinking broadly about how women were to be included in the life of the Church. While this certainly included the question of ordination to the ministry and eldership, other questions were also raised: these included "the place of ALL women in the Church" and how they could be integrated into the Church's various structures.[30]

At the General Assembly in 1960, a new convener, Eoin MacKay, was appointed. What is evident in the reports to General Assembly in 1961 and 1962, as well as in the minutes of the meetings of this committee from this point on, was a change of focus. At its 16 November 1960 committee meeting, the new chair opened with a reading from Ephesians and a prayer "asking for God's direction in the work of the committee and God's blessing on the Church's work within the Church and in the community." MacKay then began the task of clarifying and refocusing the committee's work. This work was cast very broadly, with the task of the committee being "to discover what we conceive to be the real role of women in the Church and the community, and the way in which women can fulfil their role as members

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26 A&P 1958, A&P 1959, A&P 1960. This concern is also demonstrated in the minutes of the committee. Minutes of the Committee, Caven Library.

27 A&P 1960, 39, 54, 71, 103. The text of the overture is printed, 456.

28 A&P 1961, 350, for these results.

29 Ibid., 415.

30 "Memoranda from Convenor to Committee Members: Dec., 1959," Minutes of the Committee on the Place of Women, Assembly Committee re: The Place of Women in the Church, Caven Library, Toronto.

of the Church of Christ." The question of place in the "Courts of the Church," including ordination, was clearly central, even though the "evidence based on earlier studies is that women are not clamouring for ordination but they do want a real place in the life and work of the church."

A clear statement of the purpose for the committee and the main question before it became part of the report to the 1961 General Assembly.[31] The committee's purpose was "To define the place of women in the Church in such a way that in the totality and unity of the Church's life and of the Christian life as a whole, women can exercise their gifts to the fullest possible extent as members of the Church of Jesus Christ." The question before the committee flowed from this purpose: "How is the Church to act in obedience to Jesus Christ in relation to the place and contribution of women in the life of the Church?"[32] A clear focus on scripture and the authority of scripture in addressing the question was clearly laid out. The committee noted it had "accepted the responsibility of a biblical approach to the matter." In addressing the central question before it,

> we believe that the matter of the place of women in the Church cannot be rightly dealt with on the basis of considerations of long-accepted custom, traditional or contemporary preferences held more or less strongly, sociological attitudes and pressures of our age with its general acceptance of women in all secular vocations, or isolated scripture texts so often used to justify opposite conclusions to the whole question.[33]

The committee was very clear on what it intended to do and how it intended to approach the issue with a focus on what the Bible had to say. Yet it was also clear from this report that the Church was aware of how the Bible could be interpreted differently. It noted that it wanted to hear "the testimony of the Bible, without falling into the impasse which an uncoordinated use of isolated proof texts inevitably produces on this question."[34]

If the committee laid out clearly its understanding of its purpose, the question before it, and its intention to look to the Bible as its authority in answering these questions, it also was concrete in addressing the real issues before it, both large and small. It was forthright in saying that it intended to look at "such questions as the ordination of women to the ruling and teaching eldership." It was also interested in other ways in which women could "exercise their gifts to the fullest extent as members of the Church of Jesus Christ" not only within the Church but within the world. The committee explicitly noted that its task was "to set forth a biblical doctrine of the place of women in the purpose of God."[35]

This question of the need for a doctrine of women, which would include the issue of ordination, was also noted in the overture from the Presbytery of Montreal, directed by the 1961 General Assembly to the Articles of Faith Committee. In the months in 1962 prior to the next General Assembly, a subcommittee of the Articles of Faith Committee met with the Committee on the Place of Women for parts of their meetings to coordinate their work on the doctrine of women. Broad questions, as well as specific questions such as "Scriptural Authority" and "the need to discover how to help the church interpret Paul on the question of the Christian service of women" were among the things discussed at the 24 January joint

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31 Minutes of the Committee on the Place of Women in the Church, 16 November 1960.

32 A&P 1961, 290.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

meeting.[36] These questions were discussed further at the February joint meeting. That same meeting included the discussion of resources, as well as the need to find someone to translate the key findings of a recently published German scholarly book on the place of women in the ancient world and church.[37] By the May meeting of the joint committee, an outline of an adult study document with some suggested biblical passages for consideration and other content was presented, as well as recommendations for other material.[38]

It is not surprising, then, that the report of the Articles of Faith Committee noted that, in relation to Overture No. 6, 1961, they had been working with the Committee on the Place of Women because of its existing and ongoing work on "the doctrine of woman."[39] The Committee on the Place of Women reported as well on their work with the subcommittee, but went into much greater detail as to the questions they were considering and the approach they were taking.[40] In the end, the Articles of Faith Committee focused on questions related to ordination in general. The question of doctrine of woman was handled by the Committee on the Place of Women, and the Articles of Faith Committee commended the study guide prepared by that committee.[41] This document, which we know as *Putting Woman in Her Place*, continued to be worked on by the Committee on the Place of Women, and was distributed for study and comment following the 1963 Assembly.

The study guide produced by the committee, *Putting Woman in Her Place*, was brief and demonstrated the concerns voiced by the committee. The 16-page document focused on Bible studies, preceded by some introductory articles and followed by a summary of what the committee had reported to General Assembly in 1961, 1962, and 1963. Authorship of the document was ascribed to the committee, with Robert Carter being noted as the editor, and various other contributions noted. The Bible studies themselves arose out of the committee's own work, as well as contributions by the "co-operating members" from the Articles of Faith Committee. The Bible studies were preceded by three articles: (1) a summary of an article by Henrietta Visser't Hooft published in *Theology Today* which drew on the insights of Karl Barth and Martin Buber; (2) a shorter summary of an article by Professor Paul Ramsey of Princeton about marriage, in which male–female partnership was stressed; and (3) a committee-prepared summary in English of a recent German publication by Johannes Leipoldt, outlining the latest research on Jewish and Greek attitudes to women around the time of Jesus. Summaries of the latest scholarship were thus seen to frame how the scriptures were to be understood.

The six-part Bible study looked at the relationship between men and women in Creation (Bible study no. 1), in the Fall (Bible study no. 2), and in the new state of redemption in Christ (Bible study no. 3); it also considered Jesus's attitude to women (Bible study no. 4) and Paul's view of women (Bible study no. 5) before the final study (Bible study no. 6), which considered various texts under the general rubric "some practical considerations." Texts from Paul that many understood to restrict what women could do within the Church were considered, but were not the starting (and thus ending) point in this discussion; they were considered within what the committee saw as the broader context of scripture. Within

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36 Minutes of the Committee on the Place of Women in the Church, 24 January 1962.

37 Ibid., 26 February 1962.

38 Ibid., 10 May 1962.

39 A&P 1962, 288.

40 Minutes of the Committee on the Place of Women in the Church indicate that members were very explicit about some of the questions they were considering.

41 A&P 1963. The Articles of Faith report, 301.

each study, biblical texts were considered, questions were raised, and specific issues for discussion were encouraged (although in the study on Jesus's view of women no section marked "Discuss" is identified; instead, five selections from the Gospels are noted as "Bible Passages to consider"). The hope was that congregations would engage in study with each participant having a copy of the booklet and that feedback and responses would be provided to the committee in the ongoing process of the Church seeking "the guidance of God" in order to discover what actions needed to be taken "in accordance with His will."[42]

When the committee reported again in 1964, they had received considerable feedback and input from the Church in relation to their work. In the committee's mind, this would be their final report. They had done the task set out for them by the Church and it was now up to the Church to decide. The committee began by noting that the study *Putting Woman in Her Place* had been widely distributed, used, and generally well received. To those who responded that they believed "the material was slanted a bit in a particular direction," the committee noted that this had not been their intent, "however well we succeeded."

The committee then laid out what it believed were its main affirmations. The first was that *genus man*, or humanity, was to be a partnership of male and female, and that men and women were created to live in harmony. The second was that when the Bible speaks of man it was referring to "this partnership of male and female." One implication of this which the report noted was that when this was forgotten, "[w]hen we think and act as if only the male is called to know and serve God and His purpose for the world and as if only the male is endowed with the Holy Spirit to fulfil such a calling we are unbiblical."[43] A third affirmation was that challenges in living this out related to the challenges of biblical interpretation. The committee again argued that an impasse was reached when "isolated proof-texts" were chosen. The Church needed to look more broadly:

> [T]he prophetic-apostolic Word of God of which the incarnate form and content is Jesus Christ is not to be identified in any mechanical way with the individual words of Scripture. To put it bluntly, a verse we may read in Leviticus or a pauline epistle must be judged and, if necessary modified or corrected in the light of Jesus Christ and the essential message of the gospel. The confession that both Church and Bible stand under the final authority of the Word of God is a cardinal tenet of reformed theology.[44]

The committee made one final affirmation, asserting the sovereignty of God over all human structures and authorities.

Based upon these affirmations, the committee then went on to state its conclusions and make recommendations. First, the committee concluded that there "can be no distinction in the status accorded men and women as members of the Body of Christ." The Church, it was argued, should serve as an example to the world in this regard. The committee next concluded that women could be ordained as ministers. As they put it, "we believe that women should not be barred as women from taking their place in the pulpits of the church." The phrasing of this statement needs careful consideration, as do some of the next comments of the committee, in particular, as these relate to marriage and ordination.[45] When it came to ruling elders, the committee was more direct: "we believe that women in whom the Church

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42 Committee on the Place of Women in the Church, *Putting Woman in Her Place* (Toronto: Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1964). The quotations near the end are taken from the introduction by Eoin MacKay, 1.

43 A&P 1964, 386.

44 Ibid., 387.

45 Ibid., 388.

discerns the necessary gifts and calls to exercise them should be free to take their place in all the courts of the Church." Marriage was not noted in relation to elders.

These conclusions were followed by a series of six recommendations. The central ones were recommendations 3 and 4, which dealt with women as ministers and elders respectively, and recommendation 5, which asked that these be sent down to the Church for study, "with a view to issue an action at the 1965 Assembly."[46] Perhaps because it was not clear who was to issue such an action or deal with the reports back, the committee's motions were amended. The amended motion had the committee continuing and responsible for communicating the responses and (one would assume) proposing the actions that needed to be taken.[47] Thus, the committee reported the findings to the next General Assembly (1965): of the 49 presbyteries, 32 had reported (leaving 17 that had not responded for whatever reason). When it came to ordaining women as elders, 21 presbyteries (64%) were in favour, with 11 (36%) opposed. When it came to women as ministers, there were 3 fewer in favour, 18 (56%), with 14 (44%) opposed. The committee reported these findings, then noted:

> Thus, while we have by no means reached a common mind in these matters, when compared with the responses made in past years the returns indicate a definite trend towards the acceptance of women into full partnership in the life and work of the Church. The conclusions of your committee as reported a year ago remain substantially the same.[48]

The committee then commented on the four recommendations it was making, these being essentially the same as those presented in 1964 and including recommendations 3 and 4 dealing, respectively, with the ordination of women to the ministry and eldership.[49] The 1965 General Assembly considered these motions.[50] The key recommendations, 3 and 4, were withdrawn and, instead, it was moved "that the substance of recommendations 3 and 4 be sent down to the presbyteries of the Church under the *Barrier Act* in the form and terms required by the said Act." This motion, as well as an additional motion to have the committee continue, were passed without any recorded dissents.[51]

The 1966 General Assembly had to deal with the issue of ordination of women, both as elders and as ministers as the responses to the remits were reported. In relation to women as elders, 31 presbyteries (66%) said yes, while 16 presbyteries (34%) said no. The support for women as ministers was notably lower, with 26 presbyteries (55%) agreeing with the remit and 21 presbyteries (45%) disagreeing. The text of these two remits sent down under the *Barrier Act* were presented to General Assembly, and in later sederunts, these were debated. In each case, the text noted that "women are eligible" to serve in the respective offices and made it clear that all of the relevant sections of the *Book of Forms* would now apply to women as well as men.[52] Discussion on the ordination of women to the eldership came first.

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46 The differences in wording between these motions is interesting, with motion 4 being much clearer. Ibid.

47 Ibid., 386–88. For the actions of the Assembly in regard to these motions, see pages 48 and 103.

48 A&P 1965, 384. The committee reported the number of presbyteries that had responded and the number that had voted in favour of each motion.

49 The only motion that seems slightly different in wording is motion 1; 3 and 4 are exact. What is interesting is some of the commentary on page 385.

50 A&P 1965, 52, noted that recommendation 2 was altered by amendment.

51 Ibid., 52, 108. Report of the committee, 384–85.

52 Text of remits, A&P 1966, 47. The vote under the *Barrier Act* was reported, 456.

The motion passed, although there was clearly opposition, and in the end dissents.[53] When the motion pertaining to the ordination of women came up at a later sederunt, more significant opposition appeared. A motion to have the vote taken by roll call failed. It was then moved that the vote be by ballot, which passed. After the necessary procedures had taken place, it was declared that the motion had passed and then it was agreed to record the vote: 133 in favour, 72 opposed. Dissents followed and were recorded. The reason given by those 32 who dissented from the ordination of women to the ministry was straightforward: "We can find no authority in the Scriptures which would require or permit women to be ordained to the teaching eldership."[54]

The committee took the unusual step of appointing a subcommittee to reply to the dissent, and when that reply to the dissent was introduced, a protest to the reply followed.[55] The 1966 Assembly was clearly divided on this issue. A look at the minutes shows that the Assembly was divided on other issues as well, notably on how to respond to the growing war in Vietnam. The results of the decisions of the Assembly were clear: women could now be ordained as elders and as ministers.

The responses to the 1966 decisions varied. The most immediate response was the ordination of women as elders. Two congregations — Fallingbrook in Scarborough and St. Andrew's, Arthur — ordained women within the month following the decision.[56] In the subsequent months and years, more and more sessions, as they held elections, elected women to serve as ruling elders. At the next General Assembly, 1967, two women — Mary Whale and Addie Forrester — appeared for the first time as commissioners with voice and vote. Yet, at that same Assembly, the Commission on Recruitment and Vocations continued to wring its hands over the lack of suitable candidates for the ministry. Nowhere in that report nor in the Ross Report of a few years later is there any indication that, by its actions in 1966, General Assembly had doubled the possible pool of potential recruits for the ordained ministry.

After the 1966 Decisions

What were they thinking in 1966? What had the Church done? Church courts were now open to women. Women could now be elders and thus could serve on sessions, at Presbytery, at Synod, and even at General Assembly. This was the crucial decision made in 1966. It solved the problem that the council plan had not been able to resolve other than by replicating all kinds of structures. The Church also allowed women to be ordained as ministers yet it is not clear that there was an expectation that any other than a few exceptional women might answer this call.

Shirley Jeffrey was the first woman ordained as a minister in the PCC in 1968 and is remembered widely as such. She had a clear sense of call. She was also single. But Shirley Jeffrey was not followed by dozens of women; indeed, over the next few years what we see are individual women studying at theological college and then moving forward. They were individuals and, by definition, exceptional. And while not everyone in the Presbyterian

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53 A&P 1966, 52.

54 Ibid., 75–78, 98–100. Quotation at 99.

55 Ibid., 116.

56 The women were Wynn Thomas and Joan McInnes, respectively. Source: PCC Archives online exhibit, "Celebrating the 50th Anniversary."

Church in Canada was happy with women studying theology (and some made their female classmates aware that they believed women had no place in seminary) or serving as ministers, there were few women ministers — one could easily ignore the 1966 decision.

Or, one could easily ignore the decision until around 1974 and 1975 when women began to study theology in significant numbers and then seek ordination. Some of these women were also married or intended to be married. This put strain on the system, indeed, on a peculiarly un-Presbyterian part of the system — the Ordained Missionary appointment system — which contributed to a reaction against the changing place of women in the Church. This, in turn, led to a 1979 memorial on the place of women in the Church and the debate about the liberty of conscience of those, particularly candidates for ordination, who did not accept the decision of the 1966 General Assembly that women could be ministers or elders. Discussing these later debates goes beyond the scope of this paper. But we need to be cautious not to read the 1966 decisions through the lens of these later debates.

Conclusions

This paper has looked in detail at the discussion concerning the place of women in the Church from the overture in 1953 through to the 1966 decision regarding ordination. There are some key conclusions that we can derive from the evidence. The first is that we have misunderstood this debate to be about ordination and, in some cases, have focused so strongly on the issue of the ordination of women to ministry that we have missed the significance of the ordination of women as elders. Instead, we need to realize that the debate was about the place of women in the Church. It was a much broader debate, with the question of ordination needing to be raised a year after the original overture.

Ordination was not the end — it was a means to an end, which was a broader involvement of women within the life and structures and ministry of the denomination. Ordination was, in many ways, a barrier to meeting those ends of the greater inclusion of women. This was why the committee, after being turned down in its enquiry as to whether the Church was open to women being ordained as elders or as ministers moved to the council plan. The council plan would not have allowed women to be ministers, but it would have opened up a place for women in the decision making of the Church. It was, however, a clunky solution and it made no headway, leaving the committee caught in what it considered to be a dilemma of how women could effectively be given a voice (but not necessarily a vote) in the life of the denomination. Even when, under the leadership of Eoin MacKay, the committee changed approaches, from polity and structure to Bible and theology, the focus was still, as the study guide's title tells us, on "putting woman in her place" — with the latter word having only a positive meaning.

Ordination was a barrier which needed to be overcome. In 1966, the denomination did agree, with considerable opposition, to the ordination of women as elders and as ministers. What might have happened had women been allowed to serve on sessions without being ordained? One suspects that had they been able to (assuming that neither male nor female elders needed to be ordained), there would still have been some opposition, as this still involved women in leadership, which some considered to be prohibited by scripture.

If women had already been accepted as elders, would as much attention have been given to allowing women to be ministers? We will never know, but what this points to is the reality that the denomination was always more open to women as elders (including ordaining them)

than it was to women as ministers. Even when they were opposed to both, Presbyterians were more opposed to women as ministers. And, even those supporting the right of women to be ordained and serve as ministers included more cautious language and more prohibitions than is often remembered. Marriage was one of these barriers. A member of the Committee on the Place of Women stated in November 1960, as the committee was establishing a new direction that "his own position as that of being in favour of the ordination of women, but said that for him there was one real theological problem around the commitment required to the ministry in light of a woman's higher calling as a wife and mother."[57] This concern about married women being able to be ministers was not unique to this one individual. Indeed, while the United Church of Canada did allow women to be ordained as ministers in the 1950s, it did not allow married women to be ordained.[58]

What were they thinking in 1966? The evidence shows the denomination struggling to find a different place for women in the structures of the Church. Ordaining women to the eldership was necessary for women to have a voice and vote at the local congregational level and in the various courts of the Church, including General Assembly. What is less clear is how many women the denomination anticipated would seek ordination as ministers. One suspects that in making the decision to allow this — or, more precisely, not to bar someone who felt called simply on the ground that she was a woman — many anticipated that this would allow the occasional, exceptional (single?) woman to serve in this capacity. That significant numbers of women might feel called to ministry or that here might be the solution to the perceived shortfall in clergy does not seem to have crossed anyone's mind. If this is the case, then, our understanding of what we are studying in this period needs to broaden considerably. If we are to talk about the "place of women" in the Church we need to take far more seriously deaconesses and the committee(s) dealing with them in this period and to expand our discussion to include the amalgamation of the Women's Missionary Society (WMS) into the Board of Ministries, the amalgamation of Ewart College with Knox College, the experiences of deaconesses since 1966, and the special programs created to move many graduates of Ewart College into ordained ministry.

A second thing which has become clear is how biblical the discussion was in this period. The overture in 1953 appealed to scripture. The committee looked to scripture and did so even more explicitly under the leadership of Eoin MacKay. At the same time, those opposed to the ordination of women also looked to scripture. These various views were made clear in committee reports, as well as in the pages of the *Presbyterian Record* in the mid-1950s.[59]

But scripture was being used and claimed as authoritative in different and ultimately non-negotiable ways. In a thoughtful piece in *Presbyterian Comment* in June 1961, Everett Bean

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57 Minutes of the Committee on the Place of Women in the Church, 16 November 1960, 2.

58 Lois Wilson offers a delightful discussion of the place of women in the United Church of Canada in this period and the dilemma for those like her who felt called to ministry but who chose to be married. Lois Wilson, *Turning the World Upside Down: A Memoir* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1989), 20–35.

59 These include Louis H. Fowler, "The Place of Women in the Church," *Presbyterian Record* (September 1955): 10–11; L. Jean Black, "The Place of Women in the Church," *Presbyterian Record* (May 1956): 4–5; John A. Johnson, "Reasons for Opposing the Ordination of Women," *Presbyterian Record* (May 1956): 6–7; Frank S. Morley, "Women Should Be Ordained," *Presbyterian Record* (May 1956): 18–19; Helen Scott Sinclair, "An Order of Women," *Presbyterian Record* (March 1958): 4–5, 30; Madeleine Barot, "Men, Women, and the Church," *Presbyterian Record* (January 1959): 26; James D. Smart, "The Ministry of Women," *Presbyterian Record* (February 1959): 10–11, 32; Helen Scott Sinclair, "Is Woman-Power Wasted in Our Church? *Presbyterian Record* (October 1959): 6–7. Bush, "Opening of the Ordination Debate," discusses the relevant debate in the *Record*.

explores the place of women in the Old and New Testaments. When it came to Galatians 3:28, central to the original overture of 1953, which spoke of there being "neither male nor female" in Christ, he declared "this verse has no bearing on the question of the ordination of women." In the conclusion, he went on to say:

> As one considers the role of women in the Old Testament, and as one considers the teaching of the matter of Church Government in the Old and New Testaments, one must conclude that the ordination of women as Teaching or Ruling Elders is not commended in the Bible. In fact it is not permitted. Since the Bible is our "Church Directory and Statute Book" in doctrine and government, this should settle the matter in the minds of Presbyterians.[60]

The study guide *Putting Woman in Her Place* arrived at different conclusions; however, both sides were clearly arguing from scripture. The debate around whether women could offer leadership and teach in the Church did not create divisions in the Presbyterian Church in Canada as much as make sharper those divisions that already existed. These divisions had existed since 1925. They were about how one read scripture and about theology. What we should recognize in 1966 is that these were divisions between the neo-Orthodox, who seem to have been the majority, and the confessional Orthodox and supporters of other conservative theologies. What is largely absent from the debate is anything that we could legitimately term "liberal." It was not that one side was rejecting tradition and scripture and one side was holding on to these things; rather, both sides were interpreting tradition and scripture in different ways.

This observation leads to a third, final, and very brief point. What role did culture play in all of this? This has become key in our interpretation of historical topics related to the Church. The debate about the place of women in the Church took place at the same time that these issues were being debated in the broader society. But society did not speak with one voice. Nor by 1956 let alone 1966 had the broader culture accepted clearly our current conception of the fundamental equality of men and women. Far from it! Women doctors, engineers, and lawyers were still a rarity.

The contest in society was reflected, in some ways, within the Church. Nonetheless, caution should be exercised to not ascribe to the "traditional" position a biblical mandate, while assuming that those wishing change were driven by culture or pragmatism. There were existing understandings within the Church of what women could and could not do, and these had their origins as much, if not more so, in culture than in scripture. One clear cultural influence on Presbyterians in this period was marriage as a barrier to women being in leadership in the Church.

In 1966, Canadian Presbyterians reached a conclusion. What were they thinking? Divided as they were, they agreed that women's place in the Church included serving on sessions and in the courts of the Church; they also agreed (by a closer margin) that women might be ministers. This was done at a time when the broader culture was also considering the occupations that women could aspire to, as well as broader issues of participation and equality. The evidence shows that a thorough and biblical discussion took place before the decision. This much is clear. What is less clear is to what extent the men who made that decision in 1966 understood how it would transform their denomination.

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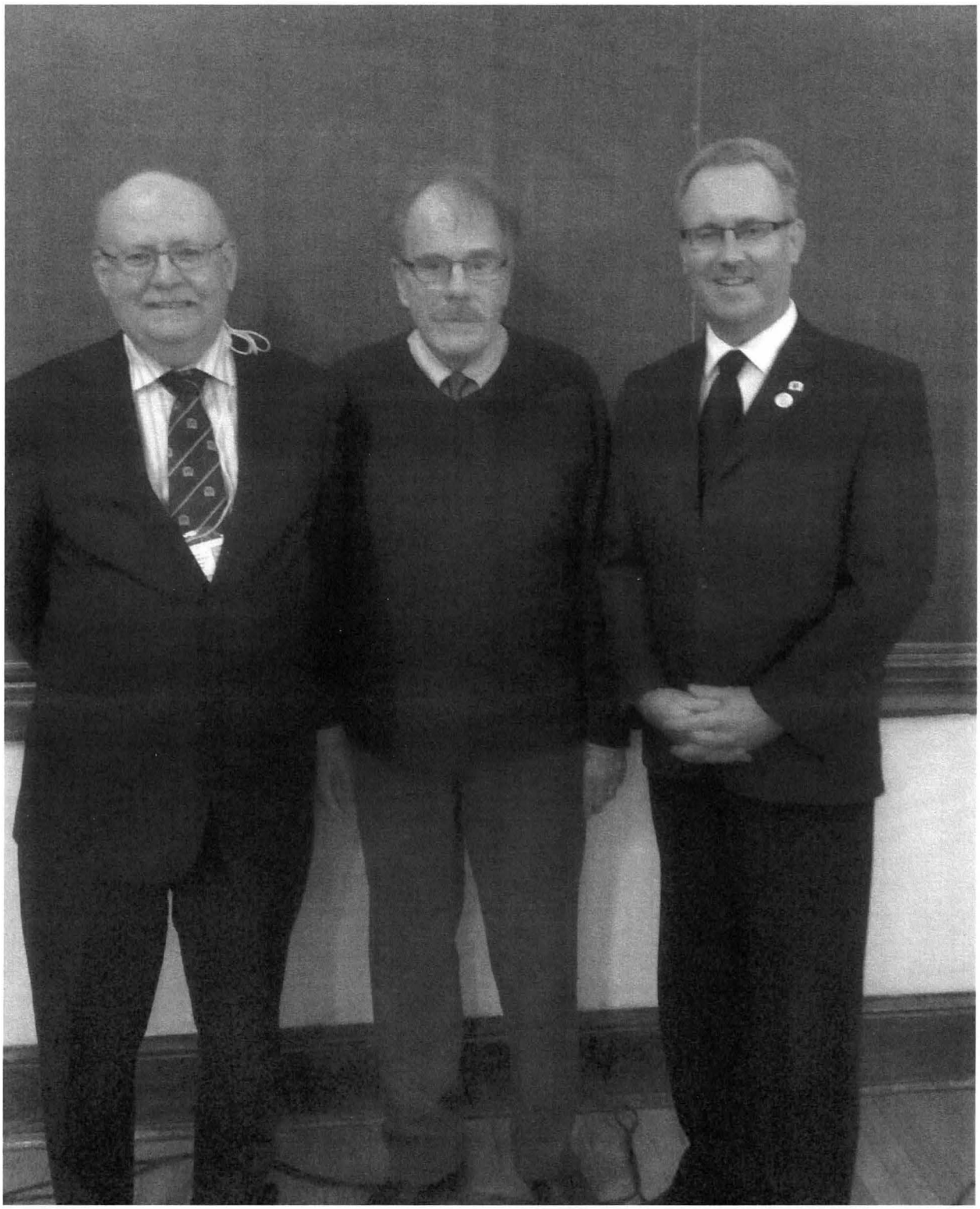
60 Everett Bean, "Regarding the Ordination of Women," *Presbyterian Comment* (June 1961): 3, 4.



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