



Good Samaritan Hospital,  
Klondike, Yukon

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## *The Rev William Taylor Vs. The Bishop of Rome*

by John Vaudry

First Presbyterian Church, Pembroke, ON

On 9 May 1876, the Rev. Dr. William Taylor, a leading minister in the newly-formed Presbyterian Church in Canada, preached a sermon on the papacy before the Synod of Montreal and Ottawa. At the urging of such leaders as D. H. MacVicar of Presbyterian College, the sermon was published by the Synod as a pamphlet (McLennan Library, McGill University, has a copy) thus fanning the flames of controversy between Protestants and Roman Catholics in various parts of the Dominion. This notable sermon, based on 2 Thessalonians 2:4, dealt with the theme, 'The Pope, the Man of Sin,' and set out a case for the view, long-held among Evangelicals, that the papacy is to be identified with the Antichrist foretold in Scripture.

Who was William Taylor and what prompted him to preach on such a topic? What were his arguments and how was his discourse received by Protestants and Catholics in his day? Also, how is Taylor's position viewed in the Presbyterian Church today?

### I

William Taylor was born in Scotland in 1803, and educated at Glasgow University, although there is apparently no record of him graduating. Raised in the Church of Scotland, he was, however, attracted by the evangelical fervour of the Secession Church, founded by Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine, and joined that body. He was ordained to the ministry in 1831 and served at Peebles until he emigrated to Canada in 1833, where he became min-

ister of the Secession Church, situated in what is now 'old Montreal'. His church was known as 'the wee kirk in little Dublin', a reference to the large number of Irish living in the area. In 1864, the congregation took the name 'Erskine', moving up-town in 1866.

Taylor was deeply interested in both evangelism and social concern. For a brief time, he edited the *Canada Temperance Advocate* (the temperance movement that promoted total abstinence being a response to the widespread abuse of alcohol in 19<sup>th</sup> century North America). In 1857, he received an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from the strongly abolitionist Franklin College of Ohio, no doubt reflecting his interest in the well-being of Black ex-slaves. With prominent layman James Court, Taylor visited Europe in 1839 to recruit workers for the French Canadian Missionary Society, an organization aimed at the conversion of francophone Roman Catholics in Quebec. As well, Taylor worked tirelessly in the cause of church union. When his United Presbyterian Church (as it had come to be called) joined with the Free Church in 1861 to form the Canada Presbyterian Church, he was chosen as the first moderator. This union was a major step towards the formation of The Presbyterian Church in Canada in 1875.

William Taylor was a pastor-theologian of the classic type. He used the original languages in his study of Scripture and was considered one of Canada's best Hebraists. He was also a capable

preacher and several of his sermons were printed at the request of his hearers. One especially—‘A Testimony Against Duelling’ (1838)—was a full-scale assault on an established social custom among gentlemen with a high regard for their ‘honour.’ He died while on holiday in Portland, Maine, in 1876. His memory was kept alive for many years in a congregation named for him—Taylor Presbyterian Church on Papineau Street in Montreal (and later, Fairmount-Taylor).

## II

The subject of Taylor’s sermon to the Synod, the Anti-Christ, has a long history and has been the focus of much fascination by students of Biblical prophecy. In the OT, Dan.7 is often taken to point to a person or power set in opposition to Christ and his Church in the last days, and in the NT the Revelation (e.g., 11:7) has been seen to contain references to such a figure. The actual term ‘antichrist,’ however, appears only in the letters of John (1 Jn. 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2

Jn.7). John seems to accept the idea of an evil being who will appear at the end of this world (‘you have heard that antichrist is coming’) but also views anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ as manifesting ‘the spirit of antichrist.’ The word ‘antichrist’ does not appear in the writings of Paul, but in 2 Thess. 2:3-12 he refers to ‘the man of sin’ or ‘lawlessness’ (RSV), one who will oppose Christ by means of ‘the working of Satan’ until he is overthrown by the power of Christ.

Speculation about the identity of the Antichrist continued in the centuries following the NT era, with the Fathers generally believing in the coming of a particular political or religious figure (e.g., a

Nero redivivus) who would fulfil this role. According to W. Bousset, Gregory I, Joachim of Floris (12<sup>th</sup> century), Wycliffe and Hus took the view that the papacy was Antichrist, or at least his forerunner. The Franciscans promoted this notion and from them the conviction was passed on to various pre-Reformation sects.

Both Luther and Calvin identified Antichrist with the papacy. This view is expressed clearly in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), chap. XXV, Sect. 6, which states ‘the Pope of Rome...is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the Church against Christ, and all that is called God.’ This classic Protestant position was maintained by Biblical commentators up until

the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but with the growth of modern critical views of the Bible, it has been largely abandoned.

## III

Taylor’s sermon is based on 2 Thess. 2:4 (part of a passage that James Denney called ‘an Apocalypse on a small scale’)—‘Who

opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.’ Far from being an example of rabid anti-Romanism, the sermon is scholarly and couched in temperate language. The tone is reminiscent of the way Charles Hodge of old Princeton Seminary dealt with Catholicism in his letter to Pius IX—gracious and fair.

Taylor’s exegesis argues that the word ‘god’ in Scripture can refer to magistrates, that ‘the temple of God’ is used figuratively by Paul to describe the Church, and that the Vulgate is to be preferred in its rendering ‘as if he were God.’ He agrees with Calvin that ‘Antichrist is not an enemy, who is to

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come against the Church from without, but is a domestic foe, who arises within the Church herself.' He also maintains that it 'is not an uncommon thing, in the scriptures, to take the name of an individual, or a city, as the synonym of a class; as Abraham, Moses, Sion, Babylon & c.' Thus, Antichrist exalts himself above lawful magistrates, 'has his seat in the Christian Church, and exhibits himself there, to the gaze of the world, as if he were God, the very representative of God on the earth.' The inevitable question is: 'of whom speaketh the prophet this?'

Various theological arguments are adduced in an attempt to prove that 'the Popes of Rome in their office as Heads of the Papal system' are to be identified with the Antichrist of 2 Thessalonians. First, the Roman system 'deprives Christ of the place of honour and authority which belongs to him as sole King and Redeemer.' Then, the papacy exalts itself above 'all human authority, civil or sacred.' The Roman church may be considered 'the temple of God,' in the words of Calvin, 'not because she possesses all the qualities of a Christian church, but because she still retains a *residuum* of them.' In addition, the pope acts 'as if he were God' in claiming infallibility, the ability to forgive sins, and to possess the key of the gate of heaven.

Taylor is careful to qualify his position, stating that he does not 'refer to the Popes of Rome, either past or present in their personal characters, but only as the Heads, or Representatives of the Antichristian system.' According to all reports, he states, 'the present Pope is one of exemplary moral character; according to the testimony of history, some of his predecessors have been monsters of vice.' But that is not the point. In their *official* capacity they have all claimed to be the Vicars of Christ. Taylor also admits 'cheerfully' that there are true Christians in the Roman communion who follow Christ 'according to the light which they possess.' There does not appear to be anything original in Taylor's argument: it is simply the standard 19<sup>th</sup> century Protestant approach.

#### IV

What led this Montreal minister to preach such a sermon on such an occasion? The answer, I believe, lies in the fact, first of all, that he resided in Quebec, one of the most solid bastions of Roman Catholicism in the world up until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. He states this explicitly towards the end of the sermon by referring to the situation 'in this Province.' He cites the power of the Church:

The education of the people in this Province, is controlled by the Church of Rome; public monies are squandered in supporting her schools and monastic Institutions...She overawes the Courts of Justice, so that persons who assault Protestants, or destroy their places of worship, can scarcely be brought to punishment...The political franchise of the people is virtually in her hands...By the terrors of excommunication, the priest can turn the scale as he pleases.

The second reason for Taylor's sermon derives from the times in which he lived. Only a few years before (1870) Pius IX had promulgated the dogma of Papal Infallibility as agreed upon by the Vatican Council—a victory for the Ultramontane party over the Gallicans in the Church. Taylor, like most Protestants, was concerned about 'the ambitious designs of the Vatican' and its claim to both temporal and spiritual authority. While he professed a desire to live in peace with his Roman neighbours, and stated that he had always 'demanded the same rights for them as for ourselves,' he exhorted his fellow Presbyterians to be alert and remain faithful to Protestant doctrine and discipline, *and* 'our Protestant liberties.'

Naturally, this sermon provoked a response from Roman Catholics. On 15 May 1876, the Archbishop of Toronto, John Joseph Lynch, replied to Taylor in a letter to *The Globe* with the heading 'Catholicism Misrepresented.' Violence against Protestants by Roman Catholics was *not* permitted by the Church, he maintained, and he cited the patient endurance of injustice by Catholics in Ireland at the hands of Protestant landlords as evidence of Rome's real attitude. On the other

hand, a number of Protestants approved of Taylor's position, and one writer answered Lynch, making reference to the 'murderous attacks upon Father Chiniquy [a convert to Protestantism] in the Eastern Provinces.'

## V

Today, William Taylor's sermon seems dated. The vast majority of Biblical scholars do not accept the exegesis that sees the papacy as 'the man of lawlessness' of 2 Thess. 2:3, 4. Many Evangelicals would agree with commentator Leon Morris that 'it is difficult to think of a line of popes as constituting the Man of Lawlessness. He seems rather to be an individual. No one would gather from reading the words of Paul that he was referring to a line of ecclesiastics.'

Denney says it is 'impossible' as an 'interpretation, though perhaps a 'fair application of the Apostle's words,' in spite of seeming highly uncharitable. In addition, circumstances in the Province of Quebec have changed to such an extent that Taylor would hardly be able to recognize the place he knew

so well in 1876. A number of changes have come about in the Church since Vatican II, and the Quiet Revolution has turned Quebec in to a very secular society. Many of his worries about the Church's temporal influence have been rendered irrelevant.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada has also been deeply influenced by the ecumenical movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and Roman Catholicism is widely regarded by mainline Protestants as simply another Christian denomination. There is a reluctance even to acknowledge that important doctrinal differences remain between Catholics and Protestants. In 2001, the General Assembly adopted a Declaratory Act on Sect. 6 of Chap. XXV of the Westminster Confession that states:

Although the Westminster Confession of Faith

refers to the Pope as antichrist, we do not believe it is now warranted to do so. We deplore the legacy of hatred and violence generated by such theological invective. We recognize the work of the Holy Spirit in and through the Roman Catholic Church, among others, and are pleased that we have had and can anticipate good relations with our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters in our mutual desire to serve Christ and his Kingdom.

Curiously, the Declaratory Act seems to suggest that the view that the papacy was the Antichrist was once 'warranted,' but 'now' it is not (rather than 'we do not believe it was ever warranted'). The Church Doctrine Committee reported to the

previous year's Assembly that 'It is *no longer* appropriate in our time to refer to the Pope as antichrist.' (my italics) This suggests that it was at one time appropriate to make that identification. The entire thrust of the Committee's argument is historical rather than exegetical, and one is left wondering whether the Committee under-

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stood that Calvin, Taylor and others sought to justify their view from Scripture and saw the papacy as the *eschatological* Antichrist, not simply as a body that sometimes produced 'bad popes' or could pose a political threat. In other words, while it may well have been right to adopt a Declaratory Act on this part of the Confession, did The Presbyterian Church in Canada misunderstand the historic view to some extent and effectively set aside Chap. XXV, Sect. 6 for the wrong reasons?

William Taylor was clear as to why he viewed the papacy as 'the Man of Sin'; he felt that Holy Scripture pointed in that direction.

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## HISTORICAL VIGNETTE

Anna Ross (1848-1933), the author of the quoted material had served as the first Principal of Ewart College (1897-1898). This piece is taken from the pamphlet “The Sikhs in Canada: An Appeal”, published in 1914 or 1915. The event described took place between May and July 1914. The pamphlet was distributed “in this work of arousing public opinion.”

*The story of the “Komagata Maru” and her passengers must be very briefly given. The bar that has for several years excluded Hindus from Canada has been the rule that only those could be admitted to our shores who came by one continuous route. As there was no continuous route the Hindus were kept out. But last spring 350 of these Sikhs clubbed together and made a continuous passage by chartering a ship for themselves, and last May they entered Vancouver harbour...*

*...these men...who at a cost to themselves of nearly \$57,000 had come by one continuous route, who now politely asked admission as British subjects and expected it, received instead indignity after indignity. It is almost inconceivable the lengths to which official insolence went in the treatment of these strong, proud, independent men. They were not allowed to set foot on shore at all. They were not allowed to communicate with the Sikhs on shore at all. They were not allowed to communicate with their own lawyer....If this is Canadian justice, it is not British justice.*

*When the case had been decided against them, they expressed their willingness to leave, only requesting that they should be supplied with provisions for the return voyage. The immigration authorities refused...[and] endeavoured to force them to commence their long voyage without provisions. This roused the man and the soldier in these Sikhs, and they prevented the captain from obeying. 175 policeman and the stream from a fire-hose only roused them the more. They beat back the policemen with fire-bricks and lumps of coal. Then in the dignity of their might, Canada ordered the cruiser “Rainbow” to proceed alongside the “Komagata Maru” and compel submission. By this time the inhuman attempt to send 350 men across the Pacific starving had been abandoned, and offers of abundant provisions were made. But...they had been barbarously treated by representatives of the Canadian Government, and they were resolved to put no trust in any offers now made to them, but just to fight and die, if need be.*

*That was the position Canada found herself in July 22<sup>nd</sup>. The guns of the “Rainbow” were trained on the little “Komagata Maru”. The Sikhs on board her had used timber to construct barricades, and the blacksmiths among them were working at fever heat making swords and pikes. The Government then in extremity sought...to have a deputation of shore Sikhs endeavour to convince [those on the ship] that the Government this time was really acting in good faith, to accept the offers of provisions, and leave. They were finally successful, and the little ship sailed away.*

*It is a sad story. It is a shameful story. They could at least have been treated courteously and given a chance to plead their own cause fairly, even if the law had refused them admission in the end. But most Canadians know little of these things. It is for those who understand to rise in their might and so to take hold upon God and man that our Government shall be impelled and compelled to do the thing that is right to these tall, dark strangers, who can readily be counted brothers indeed by those who know a man when they see him.*

For Ross taking “hold upon” God and people meant three things:

- Prayer that God would act to cause the government to do the right thing;
- Writing to politicians to ask them to do the right thing; and
- Mobilizing others to also pray and write.

## BOOK NOTES

Rodney Clapp, *Johnny Cash and the Great American Contradiction: Christianity and the Battle for the Soul of a Nation*, (WJKP, 2008)

Clapp, an incisive cultural observer, is always worth reading. The sub-title describes the book's content. The middle chapters identify contradictions in the American experience: lonesomeness and community; holiness and hedonism; tradition and progress; guilt and innocence; violence and peace. As neighbours it is easy to critique the American experience, but Canadians need to be aware of two dangers -- first, the failings we see in our southern neighbours may be obvious because those failings are present in us; and second, righteous indignation easily becomes spiritual pride.

The following from Clapp's final chapter is worth reflecting on: "In sum, asked how I might suppose a baptized Christian could also be an American patriot, I would reply: in the same way one is a baptized Christian and strives to be a loyal mature child to their elders. The commitment of baptism is comprehensive or basic, and when push comes to shove, overrules particular commitments to one's parents and one's nation." (126)

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Michael G. Long, ed., *The Legacy of Billy Graham: Critical Reflections on America's Greatest Evangelist*, (WJKP, 2008)

Billy Graham is an iconic figure not only in the United States but throughout World Christianity. Any comment about him, either positive or negative, is analyzed as much for what says about the speaker as for what it says about Graham. Long has gathered fourteen essays from "prominent mainline to progressive scholars" who take Graham seriously, but most are not overly sympathetically, evaluating Graham on categories that do not apply well to someone who Tom Long accurately describes as a "hot gosseller" (10). (Long's essay on Graham's preaching is insightful.) As we are reminded numerous times Graham has been connected to every president from Truman to George W. Bush, meaning significant dis-

cussion of Graham's politics. Philip Wogaman's essay is balanced, analyzing Graham with categories Graham would understand; Douglas Sturm and Karen Lebacqz have greater difficulty moving beyond their preferred categories when reflecting on Graham's legacy.

Harvey Cox's concluding essay provides an irenic summation of Graham, "Ecumenist, prophet, peacemaker -- Billy Graham is all three. Yes, he was a 'late bloomer' in some of these areas. His record is far from perfect, but then, shoes is? Given the background and the era from which he came, his maturation is nothing short of remarkable." (229)

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Mark G Toulouse, *God in Public: Four Ways American Christianity and Public Life Relate*, (WJKP, 2006)

Toulouse identifies four styles or patterns of interaction between faith and politics, styles present in the United States today. The first, "iconic faith", is the use of God as a public image. For example, "In God we trust" appearing on US currency, or "God keep our land" in "O Canada". These references to God are not references to the God made known to human beings in Jesus Christ, but rather an image of God (an icon) projected by the state. The second pattern, "priestly faith", mixes political and religious leading to a call to the nation to live up to being a Christian nation. In the process Christians forget their citizenship is in the reign of God not in any national entity. This view is heard in the repeated refrain "I thought Canada was a Christian country."

The "public Christian", knows well individual Christians have two citizenships, one to a nation state, and more pressing and demanding citizenship, citizenship in the reign of God, made known in Jesus Christ. The public Christian engages in politics, believing God acts in history, always acting in the simple knowledge that "Jesus is Lord". The fourth style, "public church", believes the church as a corporate entity is to engage the political powers of the day. The community of faith takes on the role of prophet,

speaking truth to power. Individuals within the community having spoken corporately may choose to not act personally, leading to a divide between corporate faith proclamation and quiet private faith.

The styles Toulouse finds in the United States are present in Canada as well. People seeking to understand the confused way faith gets used and abused in the public sphere would do well to read this book.

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Brian Brock and John Swinton, eds., *Disability in the Christian Tradition: A Reader*, (Eerdmans, 2012)

A collection of noted scholars introduce readers to how Christians over the last 2,000 years have reflected on disability and the meaning of being human. Each expert provides an introductory essay (12-15 pages) on an individual or group, and then provides a selection of writings by the thinker under discussion (again 12-15 pages). Giving readers the opportunity to engage with giants of Christian history: Augustine, Julian of Norwich, Luther, Calvin, Bonhoeffer and Jean Vanier.

A quote from Bonhoeffer provides a flavour of the material: "What is the meaning of weakness in this world? We all know that Christianity has been blamed ever since its early days for its message to the weak....It was the attitude towards the problem of weakness in the world which made everybody into followers or enemies of Christianity....Christianity stands or falls with its revolutionary protest against violence, arbitrariness, and pride of power and with its apologia for the weak." (373)

This book has a place in conversations about disability and the meaning of being human, and in understanding that studying church history introduces us to voices that speak to contemporary issues.

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Nancy Koester, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Spiritual Life*, (Eerdmans, 2014)

Harriet Beecher Stowe (1809-1896) authored the influential anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which confronted readers with the slave experience in the American south. Tolstoy called the novel "the highest art" since it evoked "positive feelings of love of God and one's neighbour, and negative feelings of indignation and horror at the violation of love."

(324) Among Stowe's source material was the 1847 autobiography of Josiah Hanson, who after escaping to Canada opened a settlement for escaped slaves near Dresden, Ontario. (Now a National Historic Site.)

Beecher Stowe's father, Lyman Beecher, was a leader of New School Presbyterians; her brother George also became a Presbyterian minister. Beecher Stowe used her pen to challenge readers to practical faith. Central to her theological understanding was the belief that "God maintains an active presence in the world and in the lives of his people." (20) Koester's biography presents readers with a woman who used what she had in skills and position to live as a follower of Jesus Christ. Readers will be rewarded for reading this biography.

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Bradley J. Gundlach, *Process and Providence: The Evolution Question at Princeton, 1845-1929*, (Eerdmans, 2013)

It has become commonplace to think that all discussions between proponents of evolution and proponents of creation will inevitably revert to well-worn rhetoric as both sides seek to make points rather than to engage in dialogue. Gundlach describes how for 80 years following the publication of the first American review of the pre-Darwinian evolutionary book, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1845), leading Presbyterian thinkers connected to Princeton College and Seminary struggled with evolution's philosophical and theological implications. The response by theological conservatives like Charles Hodge, James McCosh, and B.B. Warfield was nuanced, being more positive than readers might anticipate.

Canadian Presbyterians will note the connections between the Princetonians and John William Dawson, the McGill geologist and Presbyterian elder.

The thoughtfulness and careful critique the Princetonians exercised in reflecting on evolution is a helpful model for present-day Christian thinkers responding to contemporary scientific theories and discoveries. This book is not a light read, but those seeking to think about how to respond theologically to science will be glad they did.

## HISTORY PRIZE WINNERS for 2014

### *Academic Prize Winner:*

A. Donald MacLeod, *A Kirk Disrupted: Charles Cowan MP and The Free Church of Scotland*, (Mentor Imprint, 2013) 363 pgs, index.

Charles Cowan, a thoroughly 19th century figure (1801-89), business leader, church elder, Member of Parliament, sports figure, philanthropist, and social justice activist was an advocate for Scotland, who MacLeod describes as one “who moved with events rather than shaped them.”

Cowan became a partner with his father in a paper making company; making paper from rags not wood. A student of the scriptures, Cowan was attracted to the views of Thomas Chalmers and other Evangelical clergy within the Church of Scotland. He was among the lay leaders who helped fund the Free Church following the Disruption of 1843, serving for many years on the Sustentation Fund. This fund gathered a percentage of every congregation's income and from the accumulated monies paid every minister in the Free Church a stipend -- the same stipend was paid to each minister regardless of the size of the congregation served. A congregation could add to their minister's income if they had made full payment to the Sustentation Fund. This fund made the Free Church possible, for the Disruption left all churches, manses, and theological colleges in the hands of the Church of Scotland.

MacLeod describes how as a result of his Christian commitments Cowan provided for his 1,500 employees and addressed environmental concerns created by his factories. While from the perspective of the 21st century it is possible to criticize Cowan on these issues, he was ahead of his time in seeking to respond to these issues.

It must be noted that Cowan was the great-great-grandfather of Don MacLeod's wife, Judy.

MacLeod who has given us another engaging biography, this time of a little known lay leader of the Free Church, a biography that speaks to our time.

Available from [www.christianfocus.com](http://www.christianfocus.com)

### *Congregational Prize Winner:*

Allan Marjerison, *Faith in Action: The story of Tyndale-St. George's, A Mission of the Presbyterian and Anglican Churches*, (Centre Communautaire Tyndale St-Georges, 2012) 266 pgs, index.

Allan Marjerison provides a richly detailed history of Tyndale-St. George's, the ecumenical (Anglican-Presbyterian) mission in Montreal's Little Burgundy. The mission is the result of the compelling vision of Charles Johnson, a lay person with a heart for the city, and who believed the church had a role to serve the poor. The mission's objective in 1961 was: “To provide for all the people of its community, regardless of race, colour or creed, a haven of good counsel and fellowship, a place of meditation and worship and a centre of recreation for youth. To build in its people qualities of leadership and Christian character.”

Marjerison's account allows readers to see the evolution of the ministry from its roots in 1926, immediately following church union to the present day. The evolution has been impacted by the changing economic and demographic realities of the neighbourhood; by the evolving understanding of mission in general and urban mission in particular; and by practical matters beyond the control of the Board of Directors. The story that emerges is one of resilience and hope, a message that needs to be heard widely in the church as it struggles to find its mission in the present time.

The creative practicality described reminds us all that mission is lived -- for example, giving men during The Depression the opportunity to get out into nature at the camp the mission rented. The account of the congregation's establishment reminds us that it is the Spirit's working in the life of worshipping community that creates a congregation, not the action of the presbytery.

Available from Tyndale St. Georges Community Center, 870 Richmond Square, Montreal, QC, H3J 1V7 or [jendecombe@tyndalestgeorges.com](mailto:jendecombe@tyndalestgeorges.com)

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