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# *A Requiem for The Presbyterian Record: Reading the 1892 Record (vol. 18)*

by Peter Bush

The *Presbyterian Record* launched on Jan. 1, 1876. In June of 1875, four Presbyterian denominations in Canada came together forming The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Each had its own monthly publication. Those publications were merged into a single publication, the *Record*, with James Croil as editor. Croil was also the agent (financial officer) for the newly merged denomination.

The *Presbyterian Record* ceased publication at the end of 2016, after 141 years in existence. During that time, it had eight editors. As I reflected on how to mark the history of the *Record* in this publication a couple of ideas came to mind. I have settled on reading one year of the *Record* as a lens through which to understand The Presbyterian Church in Canada. This approach seems appropriate since that is what the *Record* tried to do, provide readers a lens through which to understand the denomination. Even when the story was not directly about Canadian Presbyterians, the author was aware the readers were predominantly Canadian Presbyterians and so the story spoke indirectly to the Canadian church.

The year chosen was 1892. I could claim the choice was because it was the first year of the Rev. Ephraim Scott's tenure as editor (he served for 34 years, longest serving editor), or because that year the denomination started building a bureaucracy to administer the mission of the church, or because the Alliance of Reformed Churches met in Toronto that year. All of which are true. However, it would be more accurate to say I wanted a year at some dis-

tance from the present and I happen to have a complete copy of volume 18 (1892) of the *Record* on my bookshelf, making research easy.

The Rev. Ephraim Scott came to the *Record* in 1892 from serving United Presbyterian Church in New Glasgow, NS. Born in 1845, Scott was educated at Dalhousie University, receiving both a B.A. and an M.A. Following a three-year ministry at Milford, NS, he was called to Westminister. He took over the *Record* as someone who had extensive experience in the pastorate, unlike his predecessor who was not ordained.

Scott made immediate changes to the publication, adding slightly to its length and printing it on heavier paper. The type face was changed as well, primarily adding space between lines, to assist in reading. Although Scott was not adverse, late in a multi-page article, to reducing the line spacing to make the article fit. The publication would now be 28 pages each month, with a page size of 9.5 in by 6.25 in (24.3 cm by 16 cm). Only the January 1892 issue had an illustration, a picture of James Croil on the front page, honouring him as the first editor of the *Record*. Usually the editorial comments began immediately below the masthead, which took up about one-third of the front page which was also the front cover.

Ads were kept to a minimum, usually two or three small ads appeared on the last page at the bottom of the page. The *Record* depended on subscriptions to keep it financially viable.

Each issue of the twelve issues had the same basic format. A series of editorial comments from Scott on various aspects of the denomination's life or encouraging people to get their congregation on the every home plan with the *Record*. This would be followed by letters and reports about mission and church extension work in Canada. Then came letters and reports from missionaries outside of Canada. All of the mission related material was generated by Canadian Presbyterians.

A section called "Church News and Notes" recorded inductions, deaths, notices of Presbytery meetings. Often, if space allowed, there was one page "Other Churches and Their Work" which would include brief, tightly spaced, news items taken from a variety of denominational news sources around the world. "The Family Circle" was a collection of devotional material, humorous stories with a moral, and a deeper theological reflection piece – all of which were lifted from non-Canadian sources. The absence of Canadian Presbyterian voices from this part of the *Record* is noticeable.

Then came the Sunday School lessons for the month, complete with lesson content, memory verse and catechism question. From Jan. to June 1892 the lessons focus on the major Old Testament prophets and Psalms; from July to Dec. the focus was on the book of Acts. Quarterly review lessons summed up the material of the previous 3 months. As well, a temperance lesson and a missionary lesson were presented. No lesson related to Easter was provided, although the additional Christmas lesson used Luke 2. Christmas Day fell on a Sunday in 1892.

Each issue concluded by listing what congregations and individuals had contributed financially to the various "schemes" (programs of the church). Each department, program, college of the church did its own fundraising until 1913 when a unified budget was introduced. By my count there were at least 18 different funds among which congregations and individuals chose as to where to put their contributions. Included were large program areas like Home Missions and Foreign Missions to quite small funds like the Knox College Student Missionary Society.

General Assembly, held in Montreal in 1892, was a nine-day event; beginning on the evening of Wed., June 8, with a sermon by the outgoing moderator, the Rev. Dr. Thomas Wardrope of Guelph. Principal Caven of Knox College was elected moderator. While mornings and afternoons were given over to business, each evening a planned presentation about some aspect of the church's work was made, not just for the commissioners, but for any from the entire community who wished to attend. On Thurs. evening, the Rev. James Robertson, Superintendent of Missions in the West spoke about the call and needs of the church west of the Ontario/Manitoba border. On Fri. evening, the Rev. Wilkie spoke about the work in India. Robertson and Wilkie were among a cadre of orators who could hold an audience's attention for an hour. Sat. was a half day. In the afternoon, the Principal of McGill threw a garden party for the Assembly. Sunday morning clergy were preaching in various places in and around Montreal. Sunday at 4 pm the Assembly held its communion service. Then there were four days of business, until finally on Thursday evening, after 80% of the commissioners had headed home the Assembly finally closed with the singing of Psalm 132 (the same psalm the Assembly still sings each year at its close.)

1892 marked a shift in the denomination. Up until this point the mission work of the church was administered by committees of the church none of which had full-time national staff. The committee convenors and secretaries did all of the correspondence with missionaries in the field, the development of policy, and managing the day-to-day financial matters. For a number of years, the Foreign Missions Comm. had been feeling it was no longer possible for volunteers to manage the growing overseas mission staff and the complexity of managing multiple fields. Their solution was appointing a full-time paid secretary of the committee. This suggestion had been sent to presbyteries for discussion and towards potential approval at General Assembly in 1892. With little debate, the position of secretary was approved by the Assembly. The surprise was the Assembly voted on Wed. the Rev. R.P. Mackay of Parkdale, ON, who had no overseas

missionary experience, into this position over two other candidates who had served overseas. Mackay was to serve in this capacity until 1925.

Additional changes came in 1892, the editorship of the *Record* had been part of the work of the Church Agent, whose primary concern was the financial matters of the church. With Scott's appointment the editorship became a full-time job, with his attention given over completely to the *Record* and its work in advancing the mission of the church. Further, a new clerk was appointed for the General Assembly. In 1875, when the four denominations came together, three of the four clerks were named Clerks of Assembly. One had retired in 1880, leaving two. In 1892, a second of the original clerks, the Rev. Dr. Reid retired, requiring the election of a new clerk. The Rev. Dr. R. Campbell was the first Clerk of Assembly named to that role from the amalgamated church, that is, without someone saying "He is clerk because he had that role in one of the predecessor churches." Campbell was to remain a Clerk of Assembly for 29 years.

According to the *Record*, no one at Assembly commented on the evolution taking place in the life of the denomination.

The big source of debate at the Assembly was Manitoba College's desire to reverse its academic year. Theology and pre-theology students were available to cover mission charges in western Canada during the six-month summer break – but October to March the congregations they served went without pastoral support and often struggled to remain together as a faith community. Manitoba College sought to address this problem by flipping its year, students would attend class April to Sept, and be available to serve congregations through the winter. The debate was long and at times contentious. The motion to change the order was introduced on Monday, and part of the next three days was given over to the debate about this, until on

Thursday afternoon the College was given permission to make the changes it wished.

Scott, who by July 1892 was feeling increasingly comfortable in his role as editor, proposed some changes to Assembly. The most significant being committee convenors be allowed only 20 minutes to speak introducing their report, and that all speeches about recommendations be limited to 5 minutes. He suggested shorter speeches "would be excellent training for the speakers themselves. It would lead them to begin at once with what they have to say, to say it in the fewest words, and to stop when they have done." (p. 169)

*Scott suggested shorter speeches at Assembly "would be excellent training for the speakers themselves. It would lead them to begin at once with what they have to say, to say it in the fewest words, and to stop when they have done."*

Mission at home and overseas was a central focus of the *Record*. Relying primarily on letters from mission staff, be they the Superintendent, like Robertson, or junior staff, Scott was constantly asking for more letters to put into the publication.

Challenged as to why and how the Presbyterian Church was doing mission among the French-speaking Roman Catholics of Quebec, Scott articulated an approach to mission that applied beyond Quebec. Writing before Vatican II, when most Catholics still worshipped in Latin, he wrote:

Where we find [people] without the word of God in their own tongue, that they can read and understand, we are bound to give them that word. There is no compulsion to make them accept it. All that we do is to go to them in love and tell them what we know of the way of peace. If they do not choose to listen, all well; if, hearing, they prefer their own system, they are free to follow it. (p. 200)

Scott had provided a methodology for evangelism in the midst of religious pluralism.

The call to evangelism in the west, according to James Robertson, required sending out pastors as quickly as possible after the settlers had arrived. Using his ability to turn a phrase, something he was noted for, he put the case bluntly:

The gambler, the rum seller, and the strange woman travel by fast express – the church by slow stage. When the church arrives, she finds saloons, gambling hells and worse places in full blast, and largely controlled by bilks [cheats]. ...The missionary should accompany the settler, not follow them afar off. (205)

Robertson and Scott were at pains to point out those who served the church in the “rough” west were no less worthy of support and respect than those who went overseas to India, China, or the New Hebrides. Picking up on the Home Missions Committee slogan describing the characteristics they were looking for in candidates: “grace, grit, go, gumption”, Scott wrote,

there can be no doubt as to its forcefulness, and the excellence of the qualifications named, and their indispensability to success, whether in the quiet congregation of the east or the rougher mission stations of the far North West; whether in the Home or the Foreign Field. (253)

Ministry was hard and clergy wherever they served were worthy of respect.

Scott depended on missionaries overseas to tell the church about their work, but also about the country in which they were serving. As a result, the attentive reader of the *Record* would have had an understanding of a diversity of places in the world outside Canada. For example, they would know missionaries still faced the possibility of being killed in the New Hebrides, riots in China were common, and the indentured servants who worked the plantations in Trinidad were both Muslim and Hindu.

Readers would also have learned something of the culture and philosophy of these contexts. Donald McGillivray, a missionary to China, wrote long letters full of cultural descriptions. He described the challenges involved with determining which Chinese characters to use for God, since there is no Chinese character for God. He wrote, the people of Chu Wang (the community where he was living) “seem to have some notion of a supreme being, but that is so hazy, that, use any term you choose for God, and you must add infinite explanation if you would convey your idea.” (265) In a subsequent

letter, McGillivray pointed to the one of the frequent objections raised, “We constantly hear, as we did today, ‘God is dumb, how can He speak with people?’ (referring to our constant assertion that we have His word in the Scriptures). This seems to show that they have no conception of a supernatural revelation.” (293) Through such letters, readers of the *Record* were confronted with challenges to the Christian faith raised by a philosophical system they would have regarded as completely other. In describing these conversations, McGillivray was enlarging readers understanding of the world and engaging them in the challenges missionaries faced.

The missionaries’ letters provided readers with eye-witness accounts of political and economic developments in other parts of the world. Norman Russell, who went to Mhow, India adopted a prophetic tone when he wrote,

India is fast becoming an active quantity in the world’s history....India is awakening; her intellect is being quickened, her lagging forces set in motion...Young India is beginning to speak; and in no uncertain voice will she soon make herself heard throughout the world, demanding the position to which her numbers, her intellect and her resources entitle her.” (183)

India’s awakening was the result of mission endeavours in the areas of education and health care, but most especially through the preaching of the gospel. While Russell’s words were somewhat premature, his analysis was accurate and readers of the *Record* had the opportunity to read such analysis.

The missionaries were aware of a nascent critique of overseas mission work and its value. George Leslie Mackay, a spiritual entrepreneur, told the story of opening a chapel (church building) at Lam-kham, where as a result of the preaching 5 families made the decision to “worship the Creator of Heaven and Earth.” (185) They joined the more than fifty others who were already part of the Christian community in Lam-kham. Mackay was blunt: “Some people are wont to say ‘The Gospel has lost its power, if it ever had any.’ Let them tell that to somebody else, not me. The preached word of God, directed by the All powerful Divine Spirit that day

produced the above results.” Mackay would not be dissuaded from proclaiming the gospel and living in expectation of the Holy Spirit’s working.

The Rev. Lal Bahari, a Presbyterian Church in Canada minister, from India who became a follower of Jesus in Trinidad and was trained in Trinidad, identified 7 signs indicating a person was interested in hearing more about the gospel message. There were: 1. Respectful listening. 2. Ask the catechist to come more often. 3. Inviting the neighbours to come hear the message. 4. Silencing objections raised by other listeners. 5. Taking a quiet walk with the missionary, usually after dark. 6. Raising questions indicating a loss of confidence in their previously held belief system. And 7. Telling the missionary about others whose views were changing. (147) Whether it was Bahari’s intention or not, he had provided Canadian Presbyterians with patterns to look for the lives of friends and neighbours indicating a desire to hear more of the gospel message.

The missionary content was an important part of the *Record*, not simply because of the space it took up in the publication. But more importantly because it declared the Presbyterian Church’s purpose to be reaching people who were outside the range of hearing the gospel without the church making the effort to bring them the gospel. That the church’s purpose was mission, was the inevitable conclusion readers would draw.

From September 21-30, 1892 the Fifth General Council of the Alliance of the Reformed Churches holding the Presbyterian System met in Toronto. Scott published five pages of content in the Nov. *Record*. Speakers outlined the Characteristics of Reformed Churches to be: supremacy of scripture, simplicity of worship, the rights of conscience, scriptural church government, Christ as the only mediator, the Holy Spirit as renewing agent and

power. The mission of Reformed churches was “to maintain and teach these characteristics until the end comes.” (284)

Canadian Presbyterians were prominent among the speakers at the gathering. Principal William Cavan preached the opening sermon on John 16:13 “Howbeit when He the Spirit of truth is come He will guide you into all truth.” Hugh McKay, long time mission to the Indigenous people in Saskatchewan spoke as did James Robertson, Superintendent of Missions for Western Canada. Principal Donald MacVicar spoke on “The Biblical Idea of Ministry”, in which he drew contrasting parallels

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showing distinctions between the Presbyterian approach and Roman Catholic understandings. “Not a priesthood for sacrifice, but in common with all God’s people, one of service; their work not to mediate between God and people, but to

declare God’s truth to people.” (286) William Cochrane of Brantford spoke about Sunday Schools. And John Laing of Dundas, Ontario offered critique of the Roman Catholics. Principal George Grant of Queen’s University addressed the wage question “His fundamental idea had as its woof, profit sharing as well as wage earning on the part of the employee, and as its warp, the Golden Rule.... If people would only do justly and love mercy there would be no wage question.” (286)

In giving space to the gathering and the prominence of Canadians in speaking, Scott was affirming that Canada and Canadian Presbyterians had come of age, being able to hold their own with the world’s other Presbyterian denominations.

While noting some of the challenges faced by the church, the *Record* in 1892 painted a picture of a church certain it had come of age and ready to take its place among the world’s denominations. A church committed to mission at home and overseas.

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# HISTORICAL VIGNETTE

The ad below ran in the Oct. 1917 *Presbyterian Record* and was placed by The Board of Finance, which was responsible for the unified budget for the programs, agencies, and colleges of the church. The ad needs to be understood against the backdrop of World War I and the introduction of conscription in the late summer of 1917 which sought to mobilize enough Canadian soldiers to fight the war in Europe.

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## THE CONQUERING CHRIST

The Captain of our Salvation goes forth conquering  
and to conquer. "He shall not fail nor be  
discouraged till he hath set judgment in the earth."

### WHAT FORCES DOES HE MARSHALL IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH?

**2,875 MINISTERS AND MISSIONARIES IN CANADA**, Imparting That Truth Which Alone Can Make the Nation Free.

**264 FOREIGN MISSIONARIES**, Inspiring the Church to Keep Faith with Herself and Her Lord.

**11,448 ELDERS**, Solemnly Set Apart for Spiritual Leadership.

**AS MANY MANAGERS**, Entrusted With Exacting Financial Duties.

**37,207 SABBATH SCHOOL TEACHERS AND OFFICERS**, Guiding and Nurturing the Young.

**299,220 SABBATH SCHOOL SCHOLARS**, Learning the Truth and Training for Service.

**336,822 COMMUNICANTS**, Pledged at the Holy Table to Love and Sacrifice.

Who can measure the will to serve, the self-forgetful love, the spiritual power, active and latent in this mighty host? Is it a working, fighting force, putting its full strength into the Redemption of our nation and the Remaking of the world? Many thousands have endured hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ and have brought noble gifts into the Treasury of God. Much has been done. Lives have been reclaimed, sufferers consoled, characters transformed, communities cleansed.

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Nevertheless, in this supreme crisis of history, our Church is barely holding the line. It is bending, and here and there is has given way. Reproach rests upon us for a reduced staff in the foreign field, and 400 preaching stations in Canada without supply.

### OUR RESPONSIBILITY

The chief responsibility is with the commissariat, our spiritual resources, our Budget Gifts. Every dollar of the \$1,200,000 Budget for 1918 is urgently needed. Only one half of our families and communicants are contributing to our Missionary Budget, and our congregational giving for 1916 averaged only \$2.75 per communicant. To win in this war the entire Church must rally to the banner of "The Conquering Christ."

"Fill up the gaps in our files, Strengthen the wavering line,  
Stablish, continue our march, On, to the bound of the waste,  
On, to the City of God!"

**IT IS NOT WE WHO ARE TO CONQUER  
BUT HE WHO IS TO CONQUER IN US AND THROUGH US.**

## NEWS about The *Presbyterian Record*

*The Presbyterian Record* received awards from the Canadian Church Press in June 2017, the last awards it will receive.

Included was a first place citation for a news story about its own demise. “Goodbye To The Record” written by the editorial staff—Connie Wardle, senior writer, Amy MacLachlan, managing editor, Andrew Faiz, senior editor, and David Harris, editor.

The *Record*’s Art Director, Caroline Bishop, led the awards count with two first—Display Writing, “The Gender Imbalance”, January 2016; and, Front Cover, CY2016, September. The CY front cover photograph was taken by the *Record*’s 2016 Summer Intern, Gillian Secord.

Bishop also picked up an Honourable Mention for Feature and Layout Design for the May article on the missional church, “Dwell, Work, Be With God.” And another honourable mention for designing the January issue on gender imbalance in the PCC.

Rev. Susan Mattinson, minister in Thunder Bay, received a third for her General Assembly art work, “Elephant in the Room”, featured on the cover of the July-August issue.

Katie Munnik was named to a second place for her blog, Messy Table.

Rev. Dr. Todd Statham, former mission worker in Malawi, received a third place for his Feature on Germany, “Deutsche Post”, in the September issue.

Tori Bennett Smit’s Service Journalism article on “Intergenerational Worship” in the November issue also received a third place.

David Harris’s March 2016 editorial on the ongoing sexuality debate in the Presbyterian Church in Canada, received a third place.

Connie Wardle’s moving article in the December issue on losing her job and awaiting her child (Emily Grace, by the way, born in March), received a third place for Personal Experience.

Andrew Faiz’s article on Fort McMurray was named to a second place for In-Depth Treatment of a News Event.

Faiz also facilitated and edited an interview with the late Joseph McLelland done by Rev. Derek J Macleod. It received a second place for Biographical Profile.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

Answering the question: “what is a human being?” is highly contested today. Into this conversation come these books, and a few others sitting on my shelf awaiting review.

Kilner, professor of ethics and theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, drills with care and depth into the question, “what does it mean to say that human beings are made in the image of God?” He explores this question from a variety of angles always rooting his conversation in careful Biblical exegesis. After marking the ways in which the phrase has been misused, Kilner explores the use of “image” in relation to God, concluding that being *in* the image then is to shine some of the glory that has been bestowed on human beings (Ps. 8). A mirror reflects an image, and so human beings are capable of and called to reflect the glory of God. Not a glory that is theirs, but a reflection of the glory that is God’s. The objection may be raised, God is un-

known and unseen, to which Kilner neatly responds, while human beings are “made *in* the image of God”, Jesus Christ “is the image of the invisible God.” Thus we know what the glory of God looks like, for as John 1:14 tells us “we have seen his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only son, full of grace and truth.”

Having laid this foundation, Kilner does two things. First, he critiques other understandings of what it is to be human. And second, he examines the ways in which the fall (Gen. 3) does or does not impact the image of God in human beings. In the end he affirms that human beings even though they are fallen are still in the image of God. “Understanding God’s image as undamaged [by the fall] fits best with all the biblical evidence. It also serves the church and world particularly well by not opening the door to abuses...and by overtly encouraging everyday respect for people different than oneself.” (175)

Kilner asserts humanity's destiny as, "God intends for person increasingly to become a meaningful reflection of God en route to a glorious eternal life as the image of God in Christ." (324).

*Evolution and Fall* is a collection of 10 provocative essays that seek to have a serious conversation between faith and science from firmly within the Christian tradition.

The introduction is worth the price of the book as the editors discuss the connection between a tradition and the reformation of the tradition, "So being part of a tradition, being involved in the dynamics of extension and reform, comes with a price of admission, viz., submission to the authority of the tradition....This doesn't mean there is no room for innovative or creative extension, but it does mean that in order for a "move" to *count* as an extension it will have to be judged as faithful to the tradition." (xxiii)

Celia Deane-Drummond sounds a warning when she writes, "How far and to what extent should theologians seek to respond to scientific theories that may themselves become obsolete over time? It is not desirable, it seems to me, to use scientific theories as some sort of epistemological grid through which theological ideas have to pass in order to be acceptable. This concedes far too much to the dominating status of science in the academy." (29)

These two quotations should not make readers think the authors are anti-science, instead they are interested in the wise and discerning use of science.

Two Canadians have essays published in the volume. Reading Richard Middleton's careful study of Genesis 3 will reward pastors and interested lay people, as Middleton encourages attention to what is there, not what is assumed to be there. Also, Norman Wirzba, whose work on food and creation is impacting many conversations, here turns his theological insights to help readers recognize that while the world is fallen (to see it as fallen requires eyes that see as Jesus sees), its ultimate goal is flourishing (to see it as it will be also requires having eyes that see as Jesus sees.)

Vainglory, Konyndyk DeYoung (professor of philosophy at Calvin College) argues, has been largely

lost from the vocabulary of west thought, being often linked in with pride. While the two are close, vainglory forces humans to confront two truths. Sometimes the things we glory in are not worthy of the glory we give them, in a runaway consumerist culture examples of this are not hard to find. More subtle are those times we give glory to the right things but for unworthy goals. To use myself as an example, being Moderator of the PCC is a worthy thing, but I may seek it or use it for less than worthy purposes like personal ambition rather than the glory of God.

The danger of books like this is readers learn yet one more reason to be hard on themselves, noting another way in which they are failing to be who they were called to be. DeYoung does not let her readers do that, she provides a series of practices that may help reduce vainglory. They include avoiding attention (in Abba Macarius the Egyptians' words, "Like the dead, take no account of the scorn of people or their praises" (89)), silence and solitude, discovering the proper roots for our self-worth through worship of God and acceptance by Christian friends, and learning to accept praise from others by glorifying the giver rather than claiming credit for our goodness, "Our goodness is from God and for God." (105)

*Vainglory* puts spiritual practices to Kilner's insights about what it means to be made in the image of God. It is a worthwhile read for personal spiritual growth, but could also be fun in a small group context where the themes could be debated and reflected upon. For as DeYoung notes, as much as need silence and solitude, we need each other in the struggle against vainglory that we might hold each other accountable.

John F. Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God*, (Eerdmans, 2015), 402 pgs.

William T. Cavanaugh and James K. A. Smith, eds., *Evolution and the Fall*, (Eerdmans, 2017), 231 pgs.

Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, *Vainglory: The Forgotten Vice*, (Eerdmans, 2014), 157 pgs.

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