

Saints and Sinners: Popular Myth and the Study of the Personalities of the Antigonish Movement

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Article abstract

The narrative of the St. Francis Xavier University Extension Department has long been styled as an exchange between “saints and sinners.” Beginning in the 1930s, journalists, writers, and historians wrote of the leading saint, Fr. James J. Tompkins, and his struggle against the foremost sinner, Archbishop James Morrison, which resulted in the priest’s exile to Canso in 1922 and ultimate redemption as the spiritual father of Antigonish Movement. Exploring aspects of the Extension story, this article examines the “saints and sinners” myth and illustrates the effect that it has had on the history of the movement.

Saints and Sinners: Popular Myth and the Study of the Personalities of the Antigonish Movement

PETER LUDLOW

L'histoire du Service d'éducation permanente de la St. Francis Xavier University a longtemps été dépeinte comme un échange entre « saints et pécheurs ». À compter des années 1930, des journalistes, des écrivains et des historiens ont écrit à propos du chef de file parmi les saints, le frère James T. Tompkins, et de sa lutte contre le plus grand des pécheurs, l'archevêque James Morrison, qui conduisit à l'exil du prêtre à Canso en 1922 et à sa rédemption ultérieure en tant que père spirituel du mouvement d'Antigonish. Explorant divers aspects de l'histoire de l'éducation permanente, cet article examine le mythe « des saints et des pécheurs » et illustre l'effet qu'il a eu sur l'histoire du mouvement.

The narrative of the St. Francis Xavier University Extension Department has long been styled as an exchange between “saints and sinners.” Beginning in the 1930s, journalists, writers, and historians wrote of the leading saint, Fr. James J. Tompkins, and his struggle against the foremost sinner, Archbishop James Morrison, which resulted in the priest's exile to Canso in 1922 and ultimate redemption as the spiritual father of Antigonish Movement. Exploring aspects of the Extension story, this article examines the “saints and sinners” myth and illustrates the effect that it has had on the history of the movement.

SITTING AT HIS DESK IN MOCKLER HALL on the campus of St. Francis Xavier University (St. FX) in the late summer of 1949, Monsignor Moses Michael Coady, by then a widely celebrated figure, was reflecting on the roles of the principal actors within that university's Extension Department.¹ That evening he wrote a letter to a colleague in Michigan concerning the role of his double cousin, Fr. James J. Tompkins, in the fabled organization:

Before anything else, I must clear up a false impression that some people in the U.S. have with regard to Dr. Tompkins' place in our Movement. We have had several requests for details on the sensational find (as they thought) that Father J.J. Tompkins, “Jimmy” as they called him – which, by the way he hates and I

1 Although Coady was not appointed a domestic prelate until 28 April 1946, he will be called Msgr. Coady throughout this article. Similarly, although appointed a personal archbishop (an honorary title, without the responsibilities of an archdiocese) on 26 February 1944, James Morrison will be known as Archbishop Morrison throughout.

don't blame him – was the Father of the present Antigonish Movement while he was at St. F.X.; that he was kicked out of St. F.X. for holding advanced ideas, banished to Canso, and has been persecuted ever since. As you are well aware, this is all fiction.²

Coady's biographer, Michael Welton, has argued that the Antigonish Movement is so profoundly mythologized that it is difficult to see under "the 'something added' to the 'realities beneath'."³ Elucidating on this point, this article contends that the story of the Antigonish Movement has too often been framed as an adversarial exchange between progressive (Fr. James J. Tompkins) and reactionary (Archbishop James Morrison) and that this facile narrative has given rise to a notional juxtaposition of "saints and sinners" that confuses chronology and neglects archival realities. Significant elements of the literature of the movement suggest, misleadingly, that either one was with Tompkins, and therefore a saint, or against him, and consequently a sinner.⁴ In exploring the phenomenon, this article will examine key aspects of the Extension Department's history and discuss the pitfalls of examining the Antigonish Movement through this prism.

Although Extension, as an institutionalized department, was formally established between 1928 and 1930, its narrative began roughly two decades before. Most historians, biographers, and journalists have established 1912 as the year of its spiritual birth. In that year, Fr. James J. Tompkins returned from a Congress of the Universities of the Empire – "ablaze with new vision" – to commence his journey from persecuted college intellectual and "banished" Canso priest to redemption as the legendary father of Extension.⁵ Few writers have been concerned with Tompkins's philosophies before 1912, or with his relationship with his ecclesiastical superior, Bishop John Cameron.⁶ Not coincidentally, 1912 is also the year the

2 Moses M. Coady to D.A. MacInnis, August 1949, RG 30-2/1/2726, St. Francis Xavier University Archives (STFXUA).

3 Michael Welton, "Decoding Coady: Masters of Their Own Destiny Under Critical Scrutiny," *Studies in Continuing Education* 24, no. 1 (May 2003): 76-7; Michael Welton, *Little Mosie from the Margaree: A Biography of Moses Michael Coady* (Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, 2001), 5.

4 The literature of the Extension Department, the chief engine of the Antigonish Movement, is awash with religious and biblical references. I borrow the term "saint" from Eugene Forsey, who wrote that Coady and Tompkins were "the two great saints of the St. Francis Xavier University co-operative movement." See Eugene Forsey, *A Life on the Fringe: The Memoirs of Eugene Forsey* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1990), 83. The term "sinner" has been adopted partly as the opposite to sainthood, but more directly because of the consistent impugment in key areas of the literature – illustrated in the main body of this article – of all those portrayed as opponents of the two, and especially of Tompkins.

5 When Tompkins left for the 1921 congress, *The Casket* reported that his ideas had germinated at the 1912 congress. See *The Casket*, 2 June 1921. Even Archbishop Morrison's silver jubilee souvenir program mentions Tompkins and the conference.

6 It is interesting that Bishop John Cameron (1827-1910) enters so rarely into discussion of Fr. Tompkins. Despite his contentious career as one of the most factious Catholic prelates in Canadian history, Cameron is remembered warmly for sending Tompkins and Msgr. Coady "abroad" for study. One wonders how Cameron would have reacted to Tompkins's educational agenda had he not died in 1910. See R.A. MacLean, *Piety & Politics: Bishop John Cameron* (Antigonish: The Casket, 1991), 169.

leading sinner, James Morrison, arrived in Antigonish as the diocese's fourth bishop; this year has been generally accepted as a starting date for Tompkins's progressive endeavors because it is the year his rival arrived. To flourish, an inspired protagonist often requires a dull antagonist; thus Tompkins plays the "marvelous priest"⁷ to Morrison's "hapless mediocrity."⁸

The story of Fr. Tompkins is renowned. His passion for adult education, his fund-raising genius, and his dynamic – if cantankerous – personality attracted many disciples. The account of his fight against an apathetic and traditionalist Catholic hierarchy, and his ultimate "banishment" to the coastal parish of Canso in 1922, ensured his eternal popularity. His story is representative of what Ian McKay and Robin Bates refer to as a narrative of "clear-cut heroes and villains" in the history of Nova Scotia.⁹ In a more specific context, Jacob Remes has recently articulated this consensus: the archbishop of Antigonish "opposed Tompkins's reforms from his position as the priest's ecclesiastical superior."¹⁰ This argument, as narrated in the Extension literature, is captivating and resilient; however, it is also unsubstantiated. The postulation that Tompkins was persecuted in the decade before his 1922 transfer to Canso (and indeed afterwards) has tended to compromise the historical accuracy of prevailing Extension accounts, and has laid the foundation for a misreading of Extension's goals.

The compartmentalization of Extension personalities into "saints and sinners" began during the 1930s. The early accomplishments of Msgr. Coady, Fr. "Little Doc" Hugh MacPherson, and, of course, Tompkins captivated the cadre of journalists who traveled to Nova Scotia to bear witness to the "miracle of Antigonish."¹¹ The movement became, as Scott MacAulay has shown, "the focus of national and international attention."¹² Sometimes at the expense of journalistic objectivity, these writers were drawn to the charisma of Coady and the vision of Tompkins. Yet, as James Sacouman has argued, the focus "upon the leadership of the movement" undoubtedly exaggerated the impact of these "humble giants."¹³ Perhaps more crucially, the writers also popularized a narrative that ultimately sought to distance their heroes from the dominant disposition of early 20th-century Roman

7 See the book cover of Jim Lotz and Michael Welton, *Father Jimmy: Life and Times of Jimmy Tompkins* (Wreck Cove, NS: Breton Books, 1997).

8 Welton, "Decoding Coady," 82.

9 Ian McKay and Robin Bates, *In the Province of History: The Making of the Public Past in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 35.

10 Jacob Remes, "In Search of 'Saner Minds': Bishop James Morrison and the Origins of the Antigonish Movement," *Acadiensis* XXXIX, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2010): 61. See also Lotz and Welton, *Father Tompkins*, 28.

11 Welton, *Little Mosie from the Margaree*, 253.

12 Scott MacAulay, "The Smokestack Leaned toward Capitalism: An Examination of the Middle Way Program of the Antigonish Movement," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 44.

13 R. James Sacouman, "Underdevelopment and the Social Structural Origins of Antigonish Movement Co-Operatives in Eastern Nova Scotia," in *Underdevelopment and Social Movements in Atlantic Canada*, ed. Robert J. Brym and R. James Sacouman (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1979), 109.

Catholicism. In other words, not everyone was comfortable with the description of the work in Antigonish as the “mystical body in action.”¹⁴

The earliest chroniclers of Extension were not interested in extensive scholarly studies; that would come later. Rather, as seasoned journalists, they offered narratives “that would reach the largest number of people.”¹⁵ Delineation of quarterly lobster catches and annual attendance levels at study clubs throughout the diocese, while occasionally cited, did not sell magazines or journals. The story of the redoubtable Fr. Tompkins in foggy and impoverished Canso, however, had genuine possibilities. By the time these chroniclers met Tompkins, he was long past his sojourn in the proverbial desert and yet his work in Canso formed a durable backdrop for their stories. Ignorant of the circumstances behind Tompkins’s transfer to that fishing community, many chroniclers simply assumed that the priest had “doffed his collar” to “work among the fisher folk.”¹⁶

The canonization of Fr. Tompkins as a long-suffering victim of his ecclesiastical superiors had to await the 1938 publication of Bertram Baynes Fowler’s *The Lord Helps Those . . . How the People of Nova Scotia are Solving Their Problems Through Cooperation*. Published by Vanguard Press, this uplifting but befuddled book concocted the legend that Tompkins was persecuted for his efforts to create an extension program in the decades before his “exile” in 1922. Referring to Tompkins as “John the Baptist,” Fowler not only credited the priest as the father of Extension, but also provided a tendentious interpretation of his transfer from St. FX. Tompkins, it seemed, had “lost his bitter battle with evasion and apathy.”¹⁷

Although Fowler recognized that the debate over university amalgamation – stemming from the Carnegie Corporation of New York’s initiative of 1921-22 – had exerted a specific influence over Tompkins’s removal from St. FX, he was deliberately vague on details.¹⁸ One nonplussed reviewer in the *New York Times* complained that the book was “not altogether clear on this point.”¹⁹ Fowler purposely left it to the reader to determine which of Tompkins’s ideas “caused discomfort.” Without offering specific corroboration, Fowler simplified his narrative by creating a linear storyline of persecution, culminating in the priest’s banishment from the corridors of power. “All in all I had a kind of Roman Holiday at the expense of the sitters-on-the-fence,” Fowler wrote to A.B. MacDonald, Extension’s associate director, after finishing the manuscript, “in each case I said lots of nice things about you fellows.”²⁰ Notwithstanding any pleasure Tompkins – by now a priest at Reserve Mines, Cape Breton – may have taken in the pillorying

14 Sister M. Anselm, “The Antigonish Movement: A Talk Given at St. F.X., 6 November 1963,” RG 30-3/8/1, STFXUA.

15 Mary Arnold to Coady, 22 July 1959, RG 30-2/1/158, STFXUA.

16 Marieli G. Benziger, “A light in the East,” *The Grail* (December 1939): 249.

17 Bertram B. Fowler, *The Lord Helps Those . . . How the People of Nova Scotia Are Solving Their Problems Through Co-Operation* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1938), 20-1.

18 Fowler knew the Extension personalities well. He surely would have inquired into the reasons for Tompkins’s transfer. Fowler and A.B. MacDonald regularly went on fishing trips together. See Bertram B. Fowler to A.B. MacDonald, 23 April 1938, RG30-2/2/748, STFXUA

19 *New York Times*, 31 May 1938.

20 Bertram B. Fowler to A.B. MacDonald, 23 April 1938, RG 30-2/2/748, STFXUA.

of his erstwhile political opponents, even he admitted to being “a little embarrassed at the praise” from a book that was “a bit extravagant in spots.”²¹

Fowler explained to MacDonald that his “method of approach, appraisal and handling are all from the viewpoint of the outsider.”²² Insiders, however, immediately recognized the problems that Fowler’s account presented. Among “the shortcomings of this book,” stated the *Extension Bulletin* in October 1938, was that the author, “having viewed the Antigonish Movement from the standpoint of an outsider, was unable to maintain the proper perspective.” The author of the review, Fr. James Boyle, while not objecting to Fowler’s “giving Dr. Tompkins the honor of being the spiritual father” of the movement, argued that he did not “give due credit to the other leaders.” Fowler and other chroniclers of Extension, Boyle continued, could not grasp the “great gulf” that had to be bridged between the “ideas of the propagandists of the movement” on the one hand, and the “hard realities of the administrator on the other.”²³ In other words, as Coady later argued, Extension needed to “be radical enough to be progressive, yet sufficiently conservative to be sound.”²⁴

This critique was not surprising. As late as the 1950s insiders appraised Tompkins’s transfer frequently and dispassionately. In 1953, employing the research notes of Tompkins’s biographer, George Boyle, and checking footnotes with “various contemporaries of the period under review,” Fr. William X. Edwards wrote that despite Tompkins being a “great man” there were valid reasons why “it was necessary for the bishop to act.”²⁵ Even outsiders, reviewing George Boyle’s *Father Tompkins of Nova Scotia* (1953), found that “strangely enough when his bishop came down heavily on our hero you felt he had no alternative, although your heart went out completely to the victim.”²⁶ In another review W.F. Phillips reached similar conclusions, writing that he could “sympathize with the reason which was mainly responsible for Father Tompkins leaving St. Francis Xavier’s and taking up parish work in Canso” – although he added that it was in “exile” that Tompkins did his best work.²⁷

Yet it was Fowler’s purported exposé of Tompkins’s transfer that dominated the narrative.²⁸ Although Fowler freely admitted that he had offered “no cold and

21 So wrote George Boyle, but even Tompkins was not averse to giving away copies as gifts. One recipient was the Canadian feminist Nellie McClung, who obtained a copy while visiting the priest. See Boyle, *Father Tompkins of Nova Scotia*, 201, and Veronica Strong-Boag and Michelle Lynn Rosa, eds., *Nellie McClung, The Complete Autobiography: Clearing in the West and The Stream Runs Fast* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 518.

22 Bertram B. Fowler to A.B. MacDonald, 23 April 1938, RG 30-2/2/748, STFXUA.

23 *Extension Bulletin*, 18 October 1938.

24 Coady to J.E. Michaud, 10 December 1941, RG 30-2/7/36, STFXUA.

25 William X. Edwards, “The MacPherson-Tompkins Era of St. Francis Xavier University,” *CCHA Report*, 20 (1953): 65. See <http://www.cchahistory.ca/journal/CCHA1953/Edwards.pdf>.

26 Daniel Duffy, “Review of George Boyle, *Father Tompkins of Nova Scotia*,” *The Irish Monthly* 81, no. 963 (November 1953): 436-40.

27 W.F. Phillips, “Review of George Boyle, *Father Tompkins of Nova Scotia*,” *The Furrow* 4, no. 11 (November 1953): 669-70.

28 The confusion of the early commentary profoundly affected writers with a rudimentary understanding of the Extension story. In one popular travel publication, for instance, Dorothy Duncan wrote the following: “In 1928 the president of St. F.X. – considered by those who know

dispassionate appraisal of the theories of a movement,” the publications that followed his book grasped tightly to his portrayal of victimization. Tompkins became the “prophet without honor” – banished from St. FX for his advanced social ideas.²⁹ Although there were more empirical studies of the movement in this period – Mary Arnold’s *The Story of Tompkinsville*, for example, got down to the “brass tacks” of co-operative housing – for the most part Tompkins retained his reputation as “an uncomfortable companion for the contented.”³⁰

The tenacity of Fowler’s construction, and notably its ensuing influence on future scholars, was owed in part to its simplicity. A progressive priest advocates for reform in the face of opposition. He is then banished from an academic posting to a poor coastal parish by his vindictive and reactionary archbishop and yet, undeterred, he ultimately attains triumphant recognition as the originator of a famous extension program. The story almost writes itself. The problem with Fowler’s narrative, and the scholarship that followed it, however, is a conspicuous lack of evidence. It is astonishing what little proof is offered to support such a dominant and durable thesis.

As one leading historian of Nova Scotia has argued, scholars of the province should “celebrate the historical reality as the evidence reveals itself.”³¹ The papers of Fr. Tompkins and Archbishop Morrison illustrate a congruity of purpose from 1912 to 1921, a willingness to cooperate, and a belief in the centrality of St. FX as the jewel of Catholic intellectual life in northeastern Nova Scotia. Contrary to the dominant theory that the university and diocesan hierarchy showed “little interest in the ideas and agitations of Tompkins,” Morrison actively engaged with the conceptions of his priest.³² Tompkins’s personal papers demonstrate his belief that, from the launch of the “Antigonish Forward Movement” (a undertaking of civic renewal) to the inaugural People’s School, Antigonish took on a “new lease of life.”³³ The diocese was, as Tompkins wrote Morrison in the winter of 1919, “fifty years ahead of the rest of America” regarding education.³⁴ And, as Welton and Lotz note, in 1920 “everything seemed to be going well.”³⁵

In the decade before 1922 Tompkins and Morrison were united in efforts aimed at the advancement of St. FX. The college’s progress was owed in part to

him to be part saint, part dreamer, part man of affairs – set in motion a survey of the seven eastern counties of Nova Scotia The purpose of the survey was to determine whether or not an extension course of adult education could be put into effect in outlying communities.” Obviously Duncan was speaking of Tompkins – in 1928 the president of St. FX was Fr. H.P. MacPherson – but it is confusing. See Dorothy Duncan, *Bluenose: A Portrait of Nova Scotia* (Toronto: Collins, 1946), 221.

29 Leo R. Ward, “The Land, Decentralization and Democracy: Notes on Recent Publications,” *The Review of Politics* 1, no. 4 (October 1939): 479.

30 Mary Arnold, *The Story of Tompkinsville* (New York: The Cooperative League, 1940), 6; Arnold, *Father Jimmy of Nova Scotia* (Chicago: Cooperative League of the U.S.A., 1958), 1.

31 Julian Gwyn, *Excessive Expectations: Maritime Commerce and the Economic Development of Nova Scotia, 1740-1870* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1998), 11.

32 Lotz and Welton, *Father Jimmy*, 28.

33 Tompkins to Mother St. Margaret, 25 February 1914, James J. Tompkins Papers (JJTP), MG 10-2/1A/F1, Beaton Institute Archives, Cape Breton University (BIA).

34 James J. Tompkins to Morrison, 11 December 1919, incoming letter #6846, Bishop Morrison Papers (BMP), Antigonish Diocesan Archives (ADA).

35 Lotz and Welton, *Father Jimmy*, 34.

Tompkins's "enthusiasm and untiring efforts," wrote *The Casket* – the local Catholic newspaper – in 1919, determined as he was to bring "the university into close and vital touch with the public life of the country."³⁶ "We can make this place blossom like a rose," Tompkins excitedly wrote an alumnus in 1915, adding that they were "surely on the right track."³⁷ To a priest in Montreal he commented similarly: "St. Francis Xavier's is striding along unmistakably and there is no doubt that in a few years we shall be able to realize many of our wishes. I can see everything now plainly in sight. It is just a matter of patience for the present."³⁸ Tompkins was not alone in thinking that the Forward Movement was "well – ripping."³⁹ Archbishop Morrison regularly praised Tompkins's articles and wrote a vacationing priest in the spring of 1914 that the "forward movement fever is still on," adding that there was "quite an awakening along those lines."⁴⁰ There was abundant confidence in the potential of St. FX and the "transformation of rural education" in the country.⁴¹

Perhaps even more interesting, and anomalous if one follows the conventional Extension canon, is that Morrison regularly encouraged *The Casket* to carry articles by Tompkins. As early as in 1914, Morrison pressured *The Casket* to include "other contributing writers, even for editorial work." Authors such as Tompkins, he urged, would give the paper "more diversity."⁴² When the paper's editor, Robert Phalen, rejected a series of submissions by Tompkins in 1915, Morrison wrote to express his disappointment at having to read the articles in secular provincial papers. "I read them very carefully," he wrote, "and as far as my judgment goes I consider they were well worth publishing in any paper that has the educational welfare of the community at heart." Refusal to publish Tompkins's material, for Morrison, was "detrimental to the best interests of religion, education and social progress of the diocese," and if it persisted would "only intensify opposition to *The Casket*."⁴³ Phalen was nettled by Morrison's charges and insinuated that the archbishop was spreading rumors that *The Casket* was "against" Tompkins. "Father Tompkins did not tell me that you had anything against him," Morrison responded, "and I could not have said so to anyone."⁴⁴

Undoubtedly, Tompkins was determined to change aged and ineffective customs within the diocese. "The slow old ways are gradually getting licked out of the people," he wrote to an American friend in 1917, "[and] the spirit is manifest here in the college more than anywhere else."⁴⁵ A year later Tompkins began work on his most ambitious project to date: a series of articles entitled "For the People."

36 *The Casket*, 18 September 1919. See also Edwards, "The MacPherson-Tompkins Era," 60-1.

37 Tompkins to T.A. Lebbetter, 12 March 1915, JJTP, MG 10-2/1A/F2A, BIA.

38 Tompkins to Brother Jerome, 23 January 1917, JJTP, MG 10-2/1A/ F3, BIA.

39 Tompkins to T.F. Horrigan, 13 March 1914, JJTP, MG 10-2/1A/F1, BIA.

40 Morrison to H.P. MacPherson, 20 March 1914, BMP, letter#1165, ADA.

41 Morrison regularly makes confident statements concerning St. FX's future throughout his correspondence in this period. For examples, see ADA, BMP: Morrison to M.A. MacAdam, 17 May 1913, letter #512; Morrison to John Beaton, 29 May 1913, letter #545; and Morrison to J.J. Lyons, 14 June 1915, letter #2231.

42 Morrison to Michael Donovan, 22 April 1914, BMP, letter #1239, ADA.

43 Morrison to Robert Phalen, 15 April 1915, BMP, letter #2047, ADA.

44 Morrison to Robert Phalen, 10 May 1915, BMP, letter #2121, ADA.

45 Tompkins to D. McGillivray, 3 May 1917, JJTP, MG 10-2/1A/ F3, BIA.

According to George Boyle, a new banner had been raised, as “social-mindedness was the mark of nearly every contribution.”⁴⁶ Yet Tompkins had Morrison’s absolute support, to the extent that the owner of *The Casket* later complained that Morrison was allowing Tompkins to assert that his “editorials were no good” and that the editor “was putting no thought in his work.”⁴⁷ The success of the series furthered Tompkins’s confidence that “Antigonish could indeed well be the land to which the rest of the English-speaking Catholics of Canada might look up as unto the hills whence cometh great help.”⁴⁸

Morrison’s correspondence, taken together with Tompkins’s statements of confidence, belies any notion of obstruction by the hierarchy. The educational conferences of 1918, 1919, and 1920, in fact, which were chaired by Morrison (he gave papers as well), expressed the intent of “stimulating interest in true education in all the departments from primary to the university.”⁴⁹ These diocesan conferences, aimed at concentrating the attention of the college faculty on the economic problems of the region, garnered widespread support.⁵⁰ In a keynote address, Morrison argued that the series of conventions should become “a permanent institution and that good results would increase from year to year.”⁵¹ And in a letter to a friend in Michigan, he explicitly set out his intention of “developing these educational conventions” while awakening public opinion “to a full sense of what efficient education means for Catholic progress.”⁵²

One interesting example of the fertile collaboration between priest and prelate is the takeover of *The Casket* in 1919, another incident that tends to complicate the notion of “saints and sinners.”⁵³ By 1915 Tompkins had begun to advocate diocesan control of the local Catholic media. He was weary of the opposition to his articles, and was frustrated by disputes over content, and yet his friend and biographer George Boyle is clear that Tompkins “was alert to use *The Casket’s* columns in every way possible.”⁵⁴ When Tompkins launched “For the People” (he first thought of calling it “Progress and the People”), he told the archbishop of Toronto that he was going to “run the thing full blast for one year” – after which it was “up to the owners and directors” of the paper “to get busy.”⁵⁵ Yet Tompkins knew that his schemes

46 Boyle, *Father Tompkins of Nova Scotia*, 63.

47 Michael Donovan to Morrison, 28 June 1922, BMP, incoming letter #9241, ADA.

48 Tompkins to Neil McNeil, 22 February 1918, JJTP, MG 10-2/1A/F4, BIA.

49 Peter A. Nearing, *He Loved the Church: The Biography of Bishop John R. MacDonald, Fifth Bishop of Antigonish* (Antigonish, NS: The Casket, 1975), 16.

50 Cameron, *For the People*, 169.

51 Nearing, *He Loved the Church*, 15-16. See also *The Casket*, 14 August 1919.

52 Morrison to Mary MacEachern, 18 October 1918, BMP, letter #5637, ADA.

53 There is plenty of evidence to suggest that Tompkins had the ear of the archbishop. During the Great War, Morrison threatened to bring home those Catholic chaplains who had been unfairly removed from their regiments due to strict British Army regulations that forbade the attachment of chaplains to specific regiments. Fr. Miles Tompkins, although angry at the obvious prejudice he encountered, did not want to return home and asked Fr. Tompkins to “try and persuade the bishop not to recall me.” See Miles Tompkins to Tompkins, 13 June 1916, JJTP, MG 10-2/1A/F2A, BIA.

54 Boyle, *Father Tompkins of Nova Scotia*, 62.

55 Tompkins to Neil McNeil, 26 December 1917, JJTP, MG 10-2/1A/F3, BIA.

would be successful only if they were promoted “through *The Casket*.”⁵⁶ According to Boyle, when rumours swirled through St. FX in 1918 that the owner of *The Casket* was contemplating selling his business, Tompkins put on his hat and “walked straight to the man in charge.”⁵⁷ In truth, however, Tompkins had begun formulating plans to secure the paper as early as in the spring of 1915 “in the hope of increasing its educational influence.”⁵⁸ When the owner consented to the sale in 1919, Tompkins personally handled the negotiations on behalf of the diocese – an odd appointment for Morrison to make if he distrusted the priest.⁵⁹

The paper’s editor, on the other hand, was bitter. Robert Phalen wrote to Tompkins: “After years of sharp criticism, strong, sweeping and comprehensive, the time has come surely, to say before my face some of the things you have said forcibly behind my back.”⁶⁰ The owner, too, had hard words, especially after Tompkins had threatened at a delicate stage of the negotiations to launch a rival paper with the express purpose of putting *The Casket* out of business. In a final letter to Morrison after he had reluctantly agreed to sell, Michael Donovan asked: “Is it right for Fr. Tompkins to threaten me, to break promises to me? My Lord, has a man in this country not the right to hold his property free from the interference of others?”⁶¹ The takeover of *The Casket* validates the stereotype of Morrison the authoritarian, but it also shows Tompkins sanctioning and even intensifying the episcopal bullying – provided that it suited his objectives. *The Casket* may have provided “the pulpit from which the social doctrine of Fr. Tompkins and Fr. Coady [found] expression,” but its acquisition had required hardnosed tactics. While Michael Donovan nourished a lifelong resentment, according to Boyle, “the influence of Father Tompkins’ ideas early became evident” after the takeover.⁶²

While acquiring *The Casket*, Tompkins began formulating ideas about a People’s School. He first mentioned the concept to the archbishop in December 1919 while seeking funds from Carnegie officials in New York. In a hastily written letter, Tompkins asked Morrison if he had “been thinking about that people’s school (Danish Type)? I am almost certain I could get 50 or 100 thousand for that.”⁶³ Jacob

56 R.A. MacLean, *The Casket: From Gutenberg to Internet: The Story of a Small Town Weekly* (Antigonish, NS: The Casket, 1992), 133.

57 Boyle, *Father Tompkins of Nova Scotia*, p. 62. In fact, Tompkins and a local barrister, James M. Wall, approached Morrison with designs for the takeover. See Morrison to P. Di Maria, 7 November 1921, BMP, letter #8775, ADA.

58 Both Michael Donovan and Robert Phalen considered Morrison to be on the side of Tompkins. See Morrison to Michael Donovan, 22 April 1914, BMP, letter #1239, ADA; Morrison to Michael Donovan, 23 January 1915, BMP, letter #1834, ADA; Morrison to Robert Phalen, 15 April 1915, BMP, letter #2047, ADA; and Morrison to Robert Phalen, 10 May 1915, BMP, letter #2121, ADA.

59 Nearing, *He Loved the Church*, 17.

60 Robert Phalen to Tompkins, 27 February 1919, JJTP, MG 10-2/1A/F4, BIA.

61 Michael Donovan to Morrison, 18 July 1923, BMP, fonds 4, ser. 4, sub-ser. 1, folder 1, ADA.

62 H.M. MacDonald, *The Builders: Biographical Sketches of the Architects of the Diocese of Antigonish* (Antigonish, NS: The Casket, 1968), 52. Similarly, George Boyle argued that after the takeover “the influence of Tompkins’ ideas early became evident in the news and editorial columns of the paper.” See Boyle, *Father Tompkins of Nova Scotia*, 62.

63 James J. Tompkins to Morrison, 11 December 1919, BMP, incoming letter #6846, ADA.

Remes has recently argued that Morrison directed Tompkins “not to pursue Carnegie funding” for the scheme.⁶⁴ Is there evidence to support such a claim? Morrison was temperate, cautious, and frugal, yet he had, since 1913, “several times gone into the study of that system” and admitted that the schools had “in a very great measure transformed the Danish country life.” The problem, as Morrison saw it, was that any program such as the one in Denmark “would require a very persistent and sustaining effort for upwards of twenty years,” which in turn would “necessitate a good strong fund to see the proposition through and placed on a permanent basis.” He wanted Tompkins to determine whether or not the conditions were “too onerous” before the diocese considered establishing a People’s School.⁶⁵ In reply Tompkins wrote that Morrison’s attitude was “a very wise one to take,” but added that “such schools were coming” and Antigonish would be the “best place to start.”⁶⁶ A few days later Tompkins, “ready to fall into every plan” his bishop suggested, again wrote Morrison to pitch the proposal. By carrying “knowledge to the people – the common people,” the school would “give the college a great name all over the country” and help the institution “compete with Dalhousie.”⁶⁷

Any historian who follows Fowler’s narrative in this area has to explain how and why Tompkins was able nevertheless to launch the People’s School in 1921. For Remes, for example, it was evident that Tompkins “convinced the board of governors to overrule Morrison’s objections.” Yet the supporting evidence is a letter from Tompkins to Archbishop Neil McNeil explaining the recent conversion of Fr. Roderick MacKenzie, an inconspicuous Cape Breton pastor, to the merits of the People’s School. The letter makes no mention of Morrison, nor does it support the claim that Morrison was overruled by the college – a feat that would have been not only unprecedented but also unrepeatable.⁶⁸

The central problem with Fowler’s theme of victimization is that it necessarily impels historians to always be in search of ecclesiastical opposition to Tompkins’s ideas, even when there is none to unearth. The “debate of the People’s School,” as Tompkins termed it, was won in the first weeks of 1920, not because the archbishop was “overruled” but because he was a supporter.⁶⁹ The correspondence between priest and archbishop plainly delineates the circumstances. Despite being cautioned about the fund-raising implications at Christmas, 1919, Tompkins set up a meeting with Carnegie officials. He then wrote Morrison and asked “What amount of money would it be safe to take to get the thing going? Suppose we give 1 to 4 months in winter to farmers, fishermen etc and 1 week to 2 months in summer to women in home making.” Tompkins asked the archbishop to talk the matter over with “Dr.

64 Remes, “In Search of ‘Saner Minds’,” 61.

65 Morrison to James J. Tompkins, 16 December 1919, BMP, letter #6960, ADA.

66 James J. Tompkins to Morrison, 23 December 1919, BMP, incoming letter #6869, ADA.

67 James J. Tompkins to Morrison, 13 January 1920, BMP, incoming letter #7109, ADA.

68 Remes, “In Search of ‘Saner Minds’,” 61. The letter speaks to the “debate of the People’s School,” which was ongoing. Not every priest in the diocese thought that such a school would have success. See James J. Tompkins to McNeil, 27 January 1921, Archbishop Neil McNeil Papers, MN AP07.31, Archives of the Archdiocese of Toronto.

69 James J. Tompkins to McNeil, 27 January 1921, Archbishop Neil McNeil Papers, MN AP07.31, Archives of the Archdiocese of Toronto.

Hugh [MacPherson] and the Sisters [of St. Martha].”⁷⁰ Indeed, Tompkins had already written to Morrison to complain of opposition on the board of governors; when securing funds for the French Chair, he wrote that some of the governors “hate and despise” the Acadians. “Will you kindly let me know who these persons are and what they have said or done,” Morrison replied. “I certainly never heard anything at any meeting of the governors that could give any foundation for such an attitude.” Declining Tompkins’s invitation to the meetings in New York, Morrison added “You will do what is best in any enterprise you may undertake.” All he required was that Tompkins obtain “some specific ideas as to what definite studies would have to be taken up in accordance with the grant” so that they could decide what is “feasible or practical.”⁷¹

Yet according to the alternate narrative, despite the inauguration of the People’s School “Tompkins still despaired of his superiors.” Another of Tompkins’s letters to Archbishop McNeil is cited. “Writing of Bishop Morrison and University Rector (President) H.P. MacPherson,” argues Remes, Tompkins complained “our leaders around here are dead and apologists for the dead.”⁷² This comment has had great traction throughout the years, yet remarkably Tompkins does not mention Morrison or MacPherson in the letter. It reads:

I know you will be interested in the enclosed. The people’s school is a most wonderful success. No man can see the end of it. It opens up all kinds of things and they are coming to our vision even now after a few days. It is going to do the professors and the regular students a world of good – it will make them ashamed of themselves for one thing. We had a stunning sweeting of the governors but our leaders around here are dead and apologists for the dead. The governors could not be better disposed and more alive. They are perfect joy and the institution is sure in time to come to its own. It is really astounding to see how things are done here when one considers the great possibilities of this institution. This people’s school has set the whole country aflame⁷³

The influence of Fowler’s polemic has been such that 80 years later, despite all the evidence to the contrary, this passage can still be interpreted to identify the apologist for the dead as the archbishop himself. Moreover, considering that Tompkins regularly referred to the numerous “pinheaded fellows” who inhabited

70 James J. Tompkins to Morrison, 13 January 1920, BMP, incoming letter #7109, ADA.

71 Morrison to James J. Tompkins, 14 January 1920, BMP, letter #7061, ADA. Tompkins regularly complained to Morrison that the Board of Governors at St. FX was not progressive enough. It was not just the people’s school idea that garnered hesitation. This illustrates that Tompkins complained *to* Morrison, and not *about* Morrison. They had a close working relationship during this period.

72 Remes, “In Search of ‘Saner Minds’,” 62.

73 James J. Tompkins to McNeil, 20 January 1920, Archbishop Neil McNeil Papers, MN AP07.25, Archives of the Archdiocese of Toronto (emphasis in original). This letter was misdated by Tompkins, likely because it was written in the first weeks of the new year. It is actually 20 January 1921.

northeastern Nova Scotia – he once referred to a teacher in Canso as a “lunatic” because he did not attend church – he could have been writing about any number of individuals.⁷⁴

Further evidence of Morrison’s support of the People’s School can be found not only in *The Casket* – which, as James Cameron has noted, was by now “solidly under the control of the bishop” and effectively “advertised the innovation far and wide”⁷⁵ – but also in Morrison’s “Foreword” to the school’s pamphlet. The “present economic conditions are bringing about a great social awakening among all classes of the people,” the Foreword noted, “one symptom of which is the hunger for useful and practical knowledge.” Not only had the People’s School “proved its practicality to the province,” but it would be “scarcely less than a social crime against the best welfare of the province were such schools allowed to die in their infancy.”⁷⁶ In an enthusiastic letter to J. Ryan Hughes at the North American College in Rome, moreover, the archbishop wrote of the “ambitious program of work along our educational lines” and bragged that the second People’s School was “crowded.”⁷⁷

By temperament, to be sure, Fr. Tompkins was boisterous, energetic, and passionate while his superior was aloof, reserved, and prudent. So the priest’s ability to organize a People’s School is a credit to his enthusiasm. However, it was not philosophical opposition that he habitually encountered; rather it was financial constraint. The “stand Pat” attitude of some in Antigonish “arises not so much from the desire to oppose progress,” Fr. James Boyle wrote to Tompkins, “as from their own conscious inability to get money to finance their own schemes.”⁷⁸ Thus, as long as money was available and St. FX itself – as opposed to an amalgamated university – was the focus of the reform impulses, Morrison supported “dear Doctor Tompkins.”⁷⁹ Regarding Tompkins’s efforts on behalf of popular education, he commented in the autumn of 1919 that “I know how deeply and actively interested you are in the progress of this movement, and I can assure you that in such a laudable work you have my hearty commendation.”⁸⁰

The subsequent destruction of the personal relationship between Fr. Tompkins and Archbishop Morrison was brought about by a different though related cause: the scheme to merge the colleges of the Maritimes into a centralized university in Halifax. The ensuing debate ended their collaboration, created turmoil in the diocese, and became fodder for those who have viewed Morrison and his supporters as reactionary. The amalgamation debate has been thoroughly examined by a

74 Cameron, *For the People*, 151; James J. Tompkins to Morrison, 29 March 1925, BMP, incoming letter #11928, ADA.

75 Cameron, *For the People*, 171.

76 *The People’s School* (Antigonish, NS: St. FX, January to March 1921), 1-2.

77 Morrison to J. Ryan Hughes, 3 February 1922, BMP, letter #9079, ADA.

78 Boyle, *Father Tompkins of Nova Scotia*, 78.

79 Interestingly, before the merger dispute many of Morrison’s letters to Tompkins were signed off: “I remain, dear Dr. Tompkins, sincerely in the Lord . . .” This was dropped for the more formal “sincerely in the Lord . . .” after the dispute. By the 1930s the “dear” was back in the correspondence. See Morrison to James J. Tompkins, 26 October 1933, BMP, letter #19852, ADA.

80 Morrison to James J. Tompkins, 29 September 1919, BMP, letter #6711, ADA.

number of able historians, who have provided balanced and detailed accounts.⁸¹ Crucial as the question was to Tompkins's exile, it will be examined here insofar as it shows the diverging opinions of priest and prelate.⁸² Gregory Baum has argued that Tompkins designated St. FX "as the institution that should and could" bring education to the people.⁸³ In the short term, this was true. "It is not a coincidence that today is St. Francis Xavier's day," a jubilant Tompkins wrote to Morrison after receiving a grant for the college in 1919.⁸⁴ When discussing the ongoing labour problems in Cape Breton, articles in *The Casket* argued that the college "ought to train a man" to "diffuse sound and sane views" on the problems of labour.⁸⁵ And in his 1921 pamphlet, *Knowledge for the People*, the priest exhorted "St. F.X. to carry education and training to a knowledge-thirsty public."⁸⁶ Although Tompkins had misgivings about the concept of elitist campus education, he conceded that the initiative for new ideas must "come from the Catholic church in Nova Scotia" and maintained that the clergy must be looked to more than any other group.⁸⁷ Writing to the editor of *The Casket*, he exclaimed: "I didn't know much about the subject when I started studying but I find that a wonderful case can be put up for extension teaching, and if I am a judge of public opinion, the hour has struck when St. F.X. must get into the field."⁸⁸ Antigonish, Tompkins assured Morrison, had a "wonderful future."⁸⁹

Yet, by 1921, Tompkins's belief that St. FX could offer a meaningful response to the growing problems of Nova Scotian society was waning. Despite his belief that those associated with the college were "preaching the gospel," and were effective in taking education out to the community, as a post-secondary institution the college was in reality "nothing more than a high school" – powerless to provide an adequate education in the modern world.⁹⁰ He scoffed at the practice of clergymen educated in philosophy and theology teaching natural sciences, subjects in which they had little or no training. While discussing the college with a colleague, Tompkins commented that priest-professors never "grasped the necessity of having men do

81 Cameron, *For the People*, 179-95; Malcolm MacLeod, *A Bridge Built Halfway: A History of Memorial University College, 1925-1950* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), 13-16; John G. Reid, *Mount Allison University: A History, to 1963, Volume 2* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 50-60; Peter B. Waite, *The Lives of Dalhousie University: Lord Dalhousie's College, Volume 1* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 258-81.

82 Ernest Stabler, *Founders: Innovators in Education, 1830-1980* (Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press, 1987), 149.

83 Gregory Baum, *Catholics and Canadian Socialism: Political Thought in the Thirties and Forties* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1980), 191.

84 James J. Tompkins to Morrison, 3 December 1919, BMP, incoming letter #6816, ADA.

85 *The Casket*, 29 July 1920.

86 Cameron, *For the People*, 169.

87 James J. Tompkins, *Knowledge for the People: A Call to St. Francis Xavier University* (Antigonish, NS: Author, 1921), 26.

88 Cameron, *For the People*, 171.

89 James Tompkins to Morrison, 6 March 1920, BMP, incoming letter #7144, ADA.

90 *The Casket*, 4 November 1920. Tompkins wrote: "They are only high-schools and they think themselves universities." See James J. Tompkins to MacDonald, undated, F1348A/106, Angus L. Macdonald Papers (ALMP), Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management (NSARM).

graduate work who are expected to be leaders and teachers.”⁹¹ And even if they did, it would make little difference because so few Catholic students had the financial and educational means to attend the college. Significantly, in the People’s School booklet of 1921, Tompkins did not congratulate St. FX as Morrison did; instead, he wrote that the opportunity of university education pertained “to the favoured few.”⁹²

Some scholars have viewed the university merger scheme as an outgrowth of Tompkins’s earlier ideas. In his pioneering study of the Antigonish Movement in 1978, Dan MacInnes argued that the merger question became “both an object of cathexis uniting all those with radical solutions to the problems in the church and in its resolutions it offered an escape from the restraints of ecclesiastical discussion by making the issues a question for public debate.”⁹³ Echoing this assessment, Michael Welton argued that Tompkins’s exile “cannot be reduced to a personality conflict, or to the specific question of merger. By blocking the merger of colleges, Morrison was seeking to block the new social philosophy from gaining the upper hand in the diocese.”⁹⁴ Although ably argued, this thesis is effectual only if one can prove that Morrison objected to Tompkins’s previous endeavors. If, on the other hand, Morrison supported Tompkins from 1912 to 1921 – as the evidence suggests – the archbishop’s motives for objecting to university federation become less obvious. It is also important to remember that Morrison had opposed a regional seminary in this period. He objected to the “obligation of sending all students to the regional seminary” in Halifax lest all dioceses be taxed while losing control over the direction of studies and other necessary features.⁹⁵

It is remarkable how little critical historical scrutiny has been brought to bear on Tompkins’s ideas and arguments. Few have asked what a large federated Halifax university had in common with the People’s Schools, nor how this grand institution was going to make education any more democratic.⁹⁶ Moreover, it can be argued that Tompkins’s methods during the merger debate were elitist and hierarchical, as he relied almost solely on clergy and Morrison’s religious superiors for support. Most of his colleagues at the college supported merger, as did the majority of diocesan priests and regional prelates, but the overwhelming majority of Catholics in the diocese – at least those who were aware that the debate was taking place – did not. There was also a section of opinion in the diocese that believed a centralized university would make the process of obtaining a post-secondary diploma more difficult. If St. FX were to relocate to Halifax, there were no guarantees that any more than a few students from the diocese would be able to attend. “I make the assertion, and I do not fear the contradiction,” wrote one alumnus, “that hundreds of our Cape Breton boys would never have seen the inside of this college, if it had been established in Halifax, instead of Antigonish.”⁹⁷

91 James J. Tompkins to Donald F. MacDonald, 9 March 1918, JJTP, MG 10-2/1A/F4, BIA.

92 *The People’s School*, 4.

93 Dan MacInnes, “The Role of the Scottish Catholic Society in the Determination of the Antigonish Movement,” *International Review of Scottish Studies* 8 (1978): 36.

94 Michael Welton, “‘Fraught with Wonderful Possibilities’: Father Jimmy Tompkins and the Struggle for a Catholic Progressivism, 1912-1922,” *Studies in Continuing Education* 27, no. 2 (2005): 132.

95 Morrison to Henry J. O’Leary, 28 December 1917, BMP, letter #4795, ADA.

96 For a good explanation of Tompkins’s motives, see Cameron, *For the People*, 182.

97 Boyle, *Father Tompkins of Nova Scotia*, 107; V. Mullins to Morrison, 14 November 1922, BMP, incoming letter #9568, ADA. Boyle writes that the people of the region had “contemplated with

It remains a reasonable argument that both Tompkins and Morrison had lucid, balanced, and compelling arguments for their positions, and that each had the best interests of Catholic education at heart.⁹⁸ But the dispute itself was messy. Morrison undoubtedly appealed to sectarian prejudice in defense of the “Catholic atmosphere” and, as Remes has rightly pointed out, he did not hesitate to impugn the “motives and mental fitness of Church leaders in other parts of the Maritimes.”⁹⁹ In a letter to the rector of St. Dunstan’s College in Charlottetown, Morrison wrote of “college discipline” and “Catholic morals”; but he also fretted over “the financial outlay,” which would “demand a very substantial support” from the diocese.¹⁰⁰ Morrison could have presented his case on educational and economic grounds, or reminded his episcopal colleagues that St. FX was a leader in Catholic education; but as support for Tompkins increased, he retreated to tired religious polemics. “The religious objection is the only one that is stressed,” wrote Fr. James Boyle, “for through the door of religion one is always able to appeal to sectarian prejudice.”¹⁰¹

Michael Welton has asked how the astute Tompkins could have “underestimated his opponents’ will and guile to thwart this bold venture.” Similarly, Remes admits that Tompkins believed that the merger scheme would “sail through on the support he perceived among the people of the diocese” and the clergy.¹⁰² Yet these statements are inconsistent with the argument that Morrison had previously been hostile to Tompkins. Tompkins undoubtedly had the support of the majority of regional prelates, and most of the prominent priests of the diocese (though some may have been playing both sides), but complacency would have been unlikely if he had been battling Morrison in earlier years.¹⁰³ Why would a beleaguered and persecuted priest, forced to fight hard for the People’s School be confident (only months later) that the archbishop would permit the relocation of the college to Halifax (leaving Antigonish as feeder institution)? The mere fact that Tompkins was shocked by Morrison’s opposition is salient evidence of their earlier collaboration.

In reality, Tompkins was removed from St. FX because he refused to submit to the diocese’s anti-merger edict, and because he supplied a youthful Angus L. Macdonald with fodder to attack the diocese in the secular press. When Macdonald exchanged heated letters with the editor of *The Casket*, the lawyer was so well informed about merger it was obvious that the “ammunition” was being “supplied from elsewhere.”¹⁰⁴

horror the thought of their university being ‘taken away’.” See Boyle, *Father Tompkins of Nova Scotia*, 107.

98 Preston King Sheldon, an American expert on consumer cooperatives and religious writer for the *New York Times*, called the federation debate “friendly differences of opinion – not altogether accurate, yet indicative of the varied opinion on the issue.” See Preston King Sheldon, “In Memoriam: James J. Tompkins, 1870-1953,” *American Journal of Economics and Society* 12, no. 4 (July 1953): 410.

99 Remes, “In Search of ‘Saner minds’,” 63.

100 Morrison to G.J. McLellan, 3 June 1922, BMP, letter #9368, ADA.

101 James Boyle to Macdonald, 30 December 1922, F1348/53, ALMP, NSARM.

102 Welton, “Fraught with Wonderful Possibilities,” 128; Remes, “In Search of ‘Saner Minds’,” 62.

103 Morrison to J.H. Nicolson, 3 June 1923, BMP, letter #10376, ADA.

104 Morrison to Charles MacDonald, 7 December 1922, BMP, letter#9833, ADA.

The decision was extremely controversial and even Morrison admitted that the entire episode was “not pleasant.”¹⁰⁵ Several historians write that Tompkins’s banishment was merely discipline for disobeying his superior.¹⁰⁶ Others concede that university merger was at least the “ostensible” reason for his transfer.¹⁰⁷ Others yet offer less plausible scenarios.¹⁰⁸ More importantly, however, the transfer has provided historians with their only evidence that Morrison and Tompkins were ever in conflict. Tompkins might well have “loathed” Morrison’s “backward thinking,” as one scholar has argued, but only after Morrison objected to university merger and not before.¹⁰⁹ This is a fundamental point. The evidence submitted as proof of Tompkins’s bitterness and disgust with Morrison comes after 1921. Not until the merger debate did Tompkins exhibit any antipathy towards his superior, when he referred to the “powers of darkness and reaction” and the “ignorant spasm of a few backwoods fellows.”¹¹⁰ Yet to argue that Morrison wanted to “put a stop to the reform impulses of his diocese” assumes a linkage in the archbishop’s mind between university merger and Tompkins’s other initiatives that are simply not evident from the archival sources.

What is clear is that by 1923 the once-cordial relationship between priest and prelate had been destroyed. Tompkins referred to his superior as the leader of “a little gang of hobos,” while the archbishop argued that Tompkins’s restless nature had gotten the better of him.¹¹¹ “I really feel sorry for him,” Morrison wrote in 1925,

105 Morrison to J.H. Nicholson, 3 June 1923, BMP, letter #10376, ADA. Despite continuing his duties, the pastor at Canso, J.W. MacIsaac, resigned the parish in May 1919 for personal reasons. Canso was indeed retribution, but also happened to be vacant. Morrison to J.W. MacIsaac, 31 May 1919, BMP, letter #6369, ADA.

106 Anne Alexander, *The Antigonish Movement: Moses Coady and Adult Education Today* (Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, 1997), 69; Baum, *Catholics and Canadian Socialism*, 203; Cameron, *For the People*, 190; D. Campbell and R.A. MacLean, *Beyond the Atlantic Roar: A Study of the Nova Scotia Scots* (Ottawa: Carleton Library, 1974), 220-1; John Webster Grant, *The Church in the Canadian Era* (Burlington, ON: Welch Publishing: 1988), 139; Francis J. Mifflin, “The Antigonish Movement: A Revitalization Movement in Eastern Nova Scotia (Ph.D. thesis, Boston College, 1974), 11, 22; John G. Reid, *Nova Scotia: A Pocket History* (Halifax: Fernwood, 2009), 13; John G. Reid, *Six Crucial Decades: Times of Change in the History of the Maritimes* (Halifax: Nimbus, 1987), 174.

107 Examples of this argument are contained within Mary Ellicott Arnold, *Father Jimmy of Nova Scotia* (Chicago: Cooperative League of the U.S.A., 1958), 3; Jim Lotz, *Understanding Canada: Regional and Community Development in a New Nation* (Toronto: NC Press, 1977), 105; Jim Lotz and Michael Welton, “‘Knowledge for the People’: The Origins and Development of the Antigonish Movement,” in *Knowledge for the People: The Struggle for Adult Learning in English-speaking Canada, 1828-1973*, ed. Michael Welton (Toronto: OISE Press, 1987), 103; and Jim Lotz, “The Historical and Social Setting of the Antigonish Movement,” *Nova Scotia Historical Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (June 1975): 108.

108 The writer and adult educator Edward “Ned” Corbett published an interesting but fanciful account of Tompkins’s “banishment” in which Tompkins himself resigned from the university in disgust to devote himself to parish work. See E.A. Corbett, “Dr. James Tompkins,” in Harriet Rouillard, *Pioneers in Adult Education in Canada* (Toronto: Nelson & Sons, 1953), 30. For another unlikely scenario, see Michiel Horn, *Academic Freedom in Canada: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 25.

109 Welton, *Little Mosie from the Margaree*, 41.

110 Welton, “Fraught with Wonderful Possibilities,” 128-30.

111 James J. Tompkins to Macdonald, 17 March 1923, ALMP, F1348A/105, NSARM.

as he is “forever in search of some novel or startling idea which he supposes will be the final and permanent remedy for some of the world’s ills.” Usually he “forgets about the splendid idea,” the archbishop continued, “only to be equally absorbed for a similar brief period in some other new idea.”¹¹² Tompkins’s admirers might scoff at such heresies, and the priest’s friends and colleagues would have found Morrison’s judgment harsh, yet Msgr. Coady wrote that when Tompkins became possessed of an idea he pursued it with a “singleness of purpose that could not be deflected” – a characteristic that Coady considered both a “strength and a weakness.” His double-cousin, he admitted, could be “illogical when an idea dominated him.”¹¹³ George Boyle, friend and biographer, argued plainly that “Fr. Tompkins’ drive and swift progress from one idea to another were often disconcerting.”¹¹⁴

Morrison’s active role in the controversy was, of course, also evident. This article does not aim to create new saints or sinners; it asks merely that historians deal with archival realities. Clearly the banishment of Tompkins to Canso (the poorest parish in the diocese) was an act of retribution, and there is evidence to suggest that Morrison expected Tompkins to leave the diocese.¹¹⁵ Moreover, Catholic intellectuals throughout the country were undeniably outraged. “I did not think that they would fly so directly into the very teeth of all logic and all sense of decency as to take you away from the college and condemn you to a Canso exile,” an angry Angus L. Macdonald wrote to Tompkins; “before the thing is finally cleared up, some of those who now strut their authority before the world may have cause to regret bitterly that authority was ever placed in their hands.”¹¹⁶ Resentment towards Morrison persisted long after Tompkins’s exile in Canso had ended. This lingering antipathy, aided by Morrison’s cautious nature and personal aloofness, made Fowler’s blending of Tompkins’s educational pursuits, university federation, and his transfer to Canso all the more plausible. The narrative of a callous and reactionary prelate persecuting a saintly and progressive clergyman was seductive, despite Coady’s later assurance that Tompkins’s removal to Canso “had nothing to do with the Antigonish Movement of adult education and economic cooperation.”¹¹⁷

The confusion over the origins of Tompkins’s banishment provides a key illustration of the reality that, thorough as scholars have been in assessing the theoretical concepts of Extension and weighing its achievements and failures, finding a balanced description of the movement’s personalities has proved elusive. One of the difficulties is that many of the early chroniclers were too emotionally connected to be dispassionate. For many “outsiders,” such as Evelyn Tufts,

112 Morrison to P. Di Maria (Apostolic Delegate), 24 September 1925, BMP, letter #12529, ADA.

113 Alexander Laidlaw, *The Campus and the Community: The Global Impact of the Antigonish Movement* (Harvest House: Montreal, 1961), 147.

114 Boyle, *Father Tompkins of Nova Scotia*, 76.

115 Although he wrote that it “was far from my wishes to cause any priest to leave the diocese, especially when there is work for him to do,” Morrison prepared for Tompkins’s departure. See Morrison to J.W. MacIsaac, 18 December 1922, BMP, letter #9885, ADA.

116 Macdonald to Tompkins, 20 December 1922, ALMP, F1348/41, NSRAM. For a good account of the relationship between Tompkins and Angus L. Macdonald, see Stephen Henderson, *Angus L. Macdonald: A Provincial Liberal* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 22-7.

117 Moses M. Coady to D.A. MacInnis, August 1949, RG 30-2/1/2726, STFXUA.

Antigonish had become a “sacred city” and Msgr. Coady the “new messiah.” Or, as Welton has noted, “they wanted Antigonish to be the Promised Land and Father Coady to be their modern Moses.”¹¹⁸ Contemporary scholars have at times relied on the accounts of journalists such as Mary Arnold, whose personal involvement – despite her solid work on Tompkinsville – was often partial.¹¹⁹ “Her affection for Coady,” writes Rusty Neal, was evident “from the beginning of their correspondence.”¹²⁰ She once admitted that “the road to the stars always seemed smoother” when talking with Coady, while on another occasion, wrote of the difficulty articulating how much Tompkins influenced all she did and said.¹²¹

This kind of hyperbolic imagery proliferated in the subsequent decades. In 1953 Harriet Rouillard wrote that Tompkins would “use a whip to cleanse the temples of God,” while Ned Corbett, the first director of the Canadian Association of Adult Education and “hooked by the charisma of Coady and Company,” saw Tompkins as a “flaming prophet.”¹²² Even Dorothy Day, the indefatigable editor of *The Catholic Worker*, wrote that Antigonish was “sending light over the continent.”¹²³ When memoirs of Extension workers were published in the 1970s, the rhetoric gained in intensity. In *We Fought for the Little Man*, Waldo Walsh admitted leaving a meeting with Tompkins thinking about “that other Man who lived 2,000 years ago in Israel.”¹²⁴

One of the difficulties with this strain of thinking was that any critique of Tompkins could be seen as sacrilegious. As the persecution of the prophetic Tompkins became the core of the Extension narrative, any criticism of the cadre of intellectuals, regardless of the nature of that criticism, was considered reactionary. All roads in the Extension story, it seemed, led to Canso. In a biography of the priest published in the 1990s, for instance, the authors open with the statement that Tompkins “vigorously promoted the cause of university amalgamation in the Maritimes, and paid for that with exile from St. F.X.” Four pages later, however, they quote Joe Laben – a miner, early cooperator, and sometime Extension staff member – who recalled that Tompkins had been viewed as a nuisance at St. FX for criticizing “everything that was going on” and for telling the archbishop “‘Fellows down there are all going communist, they’re starving – why don’t we do something for them?’ The bishop wouldn’t move – then he did move. He sent Father Tompkins to Dover, a little place in Canso the poorest parish in the diocese. He punished him.”¹²⁵ Laben met Tompkins years after the priest was sent to Canso, and his problems with chronology are all too evident.

118 Welton, *Little Mosie from the Margaree*, 95, 101.

119 A good summary of this hyperbole is provided by Welton. See Welton, *Little Mosie from the Margaree*, 94-101.

120 Rusty Neal, “Mary Arnold (and Mabel Reed): Co-operative Women in Nova Scotia, 1937-1939,” *Acadiensis* XXVII, no. 2 (Spring 1999): 62.

121 Jim Lotz, *The Humble Giant: Moses Coady, Canada’s Rural Revolutionary* (Toronto: Novalis, 2005), 70; Mary Arnold to Coady, October (n.d.), 1938, RG 30-2/1/82, STFXUA.

122 Welton, *Little Mosie from the Margaree*, 103; E.A. Corbett “Dr. James Tompkins,” 31.

123 Mark Zwick and Louise Zwick, *The Catholic Worker Movement: Intellectual and Spiritual Origins* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2000), 292.

124 Waldo Walsh, *We Fought for the Little Man* (Moncton, NB: Co-op Atlantic, 1978), 29.

125 Lotz and Welton, *Father Jimmy*, 1, 5-6.

In his memoirs, the missionary priest Harvey Steele wrote that Tompkins's "ideas about co-ops and adult education for the poor were considered pretty radical," but what "upset people even more was his campaigning for the amalgamation of all the Maritime universities into one."¹²⁶ But considered radical by whom? The obvious inference is that opponents of university merger also objected to Tompkins's other ideas. This may have been true for a handful of clergy (Steele offers no evidence), but certainly not for others. The inconsistencies in Steele's memoir – he confused the People's School with the Extension Department, placing the former after the latter – are emblematic of a muddled understanding of Extension's history in much of the literature. Such inconsistencies might be seen as inconsequential had they not been employed as the foundation for other studies. In 1998 one writer even made a quixotic attempt to link Tompkins with liberation theology, surmising that the priest "appealed to St. F.X. to create a popularly based adult extension programme linked effectively to the co-operative movements of the Maritime Provinces. Sadly, Tompkins's crusty personality alienated some of the big wigs and others, which led to his dismissal from the university."¹²⁷

The manufacture of "saints and sinners" has also created a number of significant paradoxes. Gregory Baum has argued that Tompkins's first attempt to create an Extension Department to "propagate his adult education programme was unsuccessful."¹²⁸ Perhaps, but Extension as Tompkins envisioned it, and the organization that came to fruition under Msgr. Coady and A.B. MacDonald, were very different entities. In fact, Tompkins strenuously objected to the pedagogy of the department after 1930 and, according to Coady, "knew nothing about the discussion circle nor the application of economic co-operation to the educational process." The study action group was "the technique of the present day Extension Department, which Dr. Tompkins did not found and the founding of which he opposed from 1922-1930."¹²⁹ As a matter of principle, Tompkins condemned "the Extension Department for its concentration on economic-cooperation and the study club technique."¹³⁰ Tompkins believed, as Jim Lotz has ably illustrated, that "institutionalizing education would sap its vitality."¹³¹

Remes has recently mused that the Extension Department "institutionalized the Antigonish Movement, which Tompkins had created from the ashes of his defeated university federation struggle."¹³² Fowler would have enjoyed such language. As the foundation for a "large-scale social reconstruction," however, the Extension Department was influenced far more by the sinner Morrison than by the saintly Tompkins. Tompkins might well have been the symbolic founder, but at least one

126 Harvey Steele, *Dear Old Rebel: A Priest's Battle for Social Justice* (Lawrencetown Beach, NS: Pottersfield Press, 1993), 35.

127 Oscar Cole-Arnal, *To Set the Captives Free: Liberation Theology in Canada* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1998), 137.

128 Baum, *Catholics and Canadian Socialism*, 192.

129 Coady to student, RG 30-1/4543, STFXUA.

130 Donald Moggridge, *Harry Johnson: A Life in Economics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 52.

131 Jim Lotz and Gertrude Anne MacIntyre, *Sustainable People: A New Approach to Community Development* (Sydney: Cape Breton University Press, 2003), 86.

132 Remes, "In Search of 'Saner Minds'," 74.

person has argued that the priest wanted to “divert the whole thing into pushing for regional libraries.”¹³³ Morrison chaired the first Rural Conference, advocated for a second, led the drive for rural resettlement and fretted over “ways and means.”¹³⁴ He also composed formal letters of introduction for Extension leaders, including one for Msgr. Coady, whom he praised as having “a laudable ambition to do a real and lasting service to Canada.”¹³⁵ When Extension suggested the selection of Cyrus MacMillan as federal minister of fisheries, Morrison wrote to Prime Minister Mackenzie King “along the lines” that they suggested.¹³⁶ Although at times Morrison apparently sustained his own opinions and concerns with what seemed to others to be undue stubbornness,¹³⁷ there is no denying that he routinely conveyed words of encouragement for priests advocating co-operatives and for any scheme to help the fishermen “get their fair share of the price” while realizing “the necessity of meeting their new conditions and circumstances of their respective industries.”¹³⁸

Another flaw in the “saints and sinners” motif is the role attributed to hierarchy, despite the reality that resistance to Extension came from various quarters.¹³⁹ As a “thorn in the side of the more conservative hierarchy” or the “Catholic establishment at St. F.X.,” it seemed to some historians that Tompkins had found it impossible to promote democracy within a “hierarchical setting.”¹⁴⁰ The reality is that many of the clergy-intellectuals who supported Tompkins’s reforms between 1912 and 1940 also served in the hierarchy in one form or another. In fact, as vice-rector of St. FX in 1922, Tompkins was as much a part of this group as anyone else. In reality, the term “hierarchy” within the Extension narrative is employed as a metaphor for Archbishop Morrison. Creating a hierarchy of sinners has simplified the narrative but muddled the history. For instance, Welton argues that in 1927 even the “arch-conservative Church hierarchy admitted that something had to be done in the industrial and fishing communities. Pressing their beleaguered Church to respond to

133 Sister M. Anselm, “The Antigonish Movement: A Talk Given at St. F.X., 6 November 1963,” RG 30-3/8/1, STFXUA.

134 Minutes of Priests’ Conference on Rural Problems, 24 January 1924, BMP, letter #10792, ADA.

135 “Letter of Introduction for Fr. Moses Coady,” 8 February 1929, BMP, letter #15686, ADA.

136 Morrison to James J. Tompkins, 8 March 1929, BMP, letter #15790, ADA; Morrison to James J. Tompkins, 15 March 1929, BMP, letter #15815, ADA. When the federal government requested that Msgr. Coady be released in the fall and early winter of 1929 to organize the fishermen of the Maritimes, Morrison “very willingly” gave his consent and wrote that “if the fishermen are to make a lasting success of their calling,” they need to be organized “as is practically every other industry that counts for anything.” See P.J. Arthur Cardin to Morrison, 23 August 1929, BMP, incoming letter #16104, ADA, and Morrison to P.J. Arthur Cardin, 30 August 1929, BMP, letter #16187, ADA.

137 See A.B. MacDonald to James J. Tompkins, 21 November 1931, RG 30-2/2/2358, STFXUA.

138 See Morrison to Charles Forest, 29 February 1932, BMP, letter #18444, ADA; Morrison to J.A. DeCoste, 19 December 1929, BMP, letter #16428, ADA; and also Morrison to J.B. Kyte, 12 January 1931, BMP, letter #17370, ADA.

139 See, for example, Welton, *Little Mosie from the Margaree*, 35.

140 Rusty Neal, “Mary Arnold (and Mabel Reed),” 62; Lotz and Welton, *Father Jimmy*, 38. There are several other sources that follow this pattern: Steele, *Dear Old Rebel*, 35; David Frank, “The 1920s: Class and Region, Resistance and Accommodation,” in *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, ed. E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muise (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 263; Reid, *Six Crucial Decades*, 174; and Welton, “Decoding Coady,” 82.

the new industrial order, reformers such as Father D.J. MacDonald insisted that the Church would 'lose ground unless it did something to satisfy the aspiration of the workingman'.¹⁴¹ The problem with exhibiting Daniel Joseph MacDonald as a saint in 1927 is that he was one of the leading sinners in 1922, opposing Tompkins and authoring St. FX's denunciation of the Carnegie proposal.¹⁴² In 1936 the archbishop – who considered MacDonald extremely steadfast – personally selected him as president of the college.¹⁴³

MacDonald is a fine example of the paradox of "saints and sinners." Remes argues that the "ideological similarity between university federation and the Extension Department was obvious."¹⁴⁴ Certainly many supporters of Extension had also been supporters of merger, but others had not. Fr. MacDonald, for example, was a reformer and a brother of prominent Extension leader A.B. MacDonald, yet he was a leading opponent of a university of the Maritimes.¹⁴⁵ There was no inherent contradiction in his attitude, and the appointment of MacDonald as president also contradicts the assertion that Extension was "undervalued by the university" – as though the institution, like the hierarchy, was detached from the saints who taught in its classrooms, sat on its committees, and raised its monies.¹⁴⁶ Extension was expensive, and the college constantly fretted over finances; however, Morrison assured Coady that it was nonetheless "well worth the effort being put forth for the welfare of the general community."¹⁴⁷ To Tompkins himself, in 1932, Morrison wrote of "financial limitations," but nevertheless promised to find \$1,000 to support social service work by the sisters of St. Martha in Canso: "I hope to have it available for you by the time the plan begins to function," he added, "I only wish I could multiply it over and over again for the same purpose, but you know that is impossible."¹⁴⁸

To ignore the contributions of the sinners furthers the romanticization of the Antigonish Movement and ensures that the Extension story lacks historical clarity. Moreover, the sinners hold answers to questions that have continued to baffle historians. For instance, the archbishop was instrumental in the recruitment of the labour leader Alexander MacIntyre, the push for co-operatives as early as 1926, the appointment of Coady as head of the new department, and the demand that Extension assume a non-partisan approach.¹⁴⁹ Coady was very insistent on the "political neutrality" of the Antigonish Movement, as Gregory Baum has argued, but not because it was a "fundamental principle of the cooperative philosophy" but

141 Welton, *Little Mosie from the Margaree*, 43-4.

142 Edwards, "The MacPherson-Tompkins Era," 64; Henderson, *Angus L. Macdonald*, 25; Cameron, *For the People*, 187.

143 Morrison to D.J. MacDonald, 10 June 1936, BMP, letter #22029, ADA.

144 Remes, "In Search of 'Saner Minds'," 74.

145 Another example is the case of Glace Bay lawyer Neil McArthur. He supported Tompkins's idea for a "chain of schools" throughout the industrial sector, advocated for People's Schools in Cape Breton, and yet strongly opposed merger. See Cameron, *For the People*, 169, as well as Morrison to Neil McArthur, 5 January 1924, BMP, letter#10937, ADA.

146 Lotz, *Humble Giant*, 76.

147 Morrison to Moses Coady, 12 August 1932, BMP, letter #18768, ADA.

148 Morrison to James J. Tompkins, 28 November 1932, BMP, letter #19029, ADA.

149 Morrison to Alfred Boudreau, 20 February 1926, BMP, letter #12949, ADA.

rather because Morrison insisted on such a policy.¹⁵⁰ Jim Lotz has argued “Coady never explained how he hoped to run a revolution without moving his people into politics”; while the clergy intellectuals “talked about radical change at the world level” they ensured that their actions at the community level did not “threaten politicians.”¹⁵¹ There were good reasons for this phenomenon – Coady was a life-long Liberal and so were many of the Extension staff – but Extension was non-partisan primarily because Morrison demanded that they avoid “all suspicion of political partisanship.”¹⁵²

In his memoir, Harvey Steele wrote that “few of the priests of the diocese” backed Msgr. Coady and fewer still were his friends. He was “labeled a troublemaker.”¹⁵³ If this hostility existed, it did not emanate from the hierarchy. “The university Extension work up to the present time has more than justified the undertaking,” Morrison wrote to Msgr. Coady in 1932, and despite the great financial cost to the university “the public service rendered to the country at large is such that we may all feel encouraged in the effort being put forth for the general educational up-building of the country, and in giving the people a new outlook on life that will raise new hopes and a new endeavor to successfully solve their economic problems.”¹⁵⁴ As Coady’s profile grew, Morrison received complaints from time to time that the priest was intemperate or that he had insulted the complainant. In each case the archbishop sided with his priest.¹⁵⁵

Ironically, one of Coady’s principal detractors considered him a pawn of Morrison. Fr. Stanley Macdonald, brother of Nova Scotia Premier Angus L. Macdonald and supporter of Fr. Tompkins, maintained that Extension was elitist. “There is jealousy there,” he wrote in 1937, “and of course the Antigonish clique are against me.”¹⁵⁶ During one bitter skirmish with Morrison over his parochial assignment, Fr. Macdonald protested: “Coady wouldn’t do anything to help,” being “too thirsty for glory.”¹⁵⁷ Complaining of Morrison’s autocratic style, he mused that Extension was “concerned with maintaining the status quo and the Antigonish (St. FX) supremacy.”¹⁵⁸ Later he asserted that Coady and A.B. MacDonald wanted men who would “sit at their feet and slobber over them,”¹⁵⁹ and also alleged that

150 Baum, *Catholics and Canadian Socialism*, 196; Baum, “The Relevance of the Antigonish Movement Today,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1980): 114-15.

151 Lotz, *Humble Giant*, 75.

152 Moses M. Coady to Hon. J.E. Michaud, 10 December, 1941, RG 30-2 / 7/ 36, STFXUA; Morrison to H.P. MacPherson, 28 November 1932, BMP, letter #19028, ADA; Morrison to Neil R. McArthur, 1 July 1925, BMP, letter #12340, ADA; Morrison to James McKenzie, 25 September 1933, BMP, letter #19790, ADA. There are plenty of letters from Morrison to Coady (and others) demanding that Extension remain neutral, and that message is certainly passed on by Coady although he simply refers to it as a policy of Extension.

153 Steel, *Dear Old Rebel*, 36.

154 Morrison to Msgr. Moses Coady, 12 August 1932, BMP, letter #18768, ADA.

155 Complaints against members of Extension were fairly commonplace. Almost always, Morrison thought that they were laid by detractors and gossips. See Morrison to D.J. MacDonald, 28 June 1940, BMP, letter #25214, ADA.

156 Stanley Macdonald to Angus L. Macdonald, 12 February 1937, ALMP, F422/2, NSARM.

157 Stanley Macdonald to Angus L. Macdonald, October 1937, ALMP, F422/16, NSARM.

158 Stanley Macdonald to Angus L. Macdonald, October 1937, ALMP, F422/18, NSARM.

159 Stanley Macdonald to Angus L. Macdonald, 26 October 1937, ALMP, F422/25, NSARM.

“Extension thinks Rev. J.J. Tompkins is looking for too much personal publicity and stealing some of their glory.”¹⁶⁰ Fr. Macdonald’s comments are corroborated by the statements of Bishop Francis Marrocco, an auxiliary bishop of Toronto. “When I went to Antigonish one of the things that bothered me was the treatment that Jimmy Tompkins received,” Marrocco recalled of his time spent at St. FX in 1946. “I couldn’t understand how a man who had really been the creative mind behind so much of what happened in the Antigonish Diocese, how he could now, when I was on campus, be talked about as though he were a nut.”¹⁶¹

Fr. Tompkins, as Fowler wrote, may well have been the “the spiritual father of the whole magnificent movement.” Yet there is evidence to suggest that he was, at times, outside of the Extension circle.¹⁶² Moreover, if some priests perceived Extension as an instrument of the archbishop’s office this further complicates the “saints and sinners” motif. Throughout the narrative, Extension personalities oscillate between being opponents and supporters of Tompkins. It is quite common to read Tompkins’s criticisms (post-1921) of Morrison, but what of his criticisms of his fellow saints? For example, in 1918 Tompkins castigated Fr. John Hugh MacDonald, a future archbishop of Edmonton, for criticizing an article by the leading Catholic journalist, and advocate of social Catholicism, Henry Somerville. According to Tompkins, MacDonald exemplified “the attitude of mind we have had to fight in men here, some of whom ought to be gathering with us instead of scattering.” Yet, this poor attitude did not prevent MacDonald from becoming a supporter of university merger, taking a key role in the creation of Extension, and remaining a key supporter when a member of the episcopate.¹⁶³

Contradictions are abundant within the Extension narrative. For instance, it is commonly assumed that Fr. James Boyle was banished from St. FX in 1922 due to his support of university merger.¹⁶⁴ The idea was plausible – both Fr. Tompkins and Msgr. Coady believed it – although speculative.¹⁶⁵ Nevertheless, while Boyle enters the Extension narrative as a saint in 1922, in 1950 he faced strident criticism for his conservatism and charged with “failing to spearhead a progressive movement” as

160 Stanley Macdonald to Angus L. Macdonald, October 1938, ALMP, F422/48, NSARM.

161 Bishop Marrocco, interview by Peter Nearing, 1964, Peterborough, ON, Peter Nearing Papers (PNP), folder 42, ADA.

162 Fowler, *The Lord Helps Those*, 16.

163 Tompkins to Neil McNeil, 22 February 1918, JJTP, MG 10-2/1A/F4, BIA.

164 It has been widely argued that Fr. Boyle was transferred from the college in October 1922 as a warning to Fr. Tompkins. See Stewart Donovan, *The Forgotten World of R.J. MacSween: A Life* (Sydney, NS: Cape Breton University Press, 2008), 127; MacInnes, “Role of the Scottish Catholic Society,” 36; Remes, “In Search of ‘Saner Minds’,” 63; and Ernest Stabler, *Founders: Innovators in Education, 1830-1980* (Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press, 1987), 143.

165 After Boyle’s death in 1954, Msgr. Coady wrote that his transfer “looked at the time like defeat but it turned out to be a stroke of providence.” See *The Casket*, 10 June 1954. Yet various organizations requested Boyle’s services during this period, and Morrison was always reluctant to release him. In 1932 the archbishop consented to adding Boyle to the Extension team. See Morrison to G.J. McShane, 23 May 1924, BMP, letter #11312, ADA; Morrison to G.J. McShane, 19 July 1924, BMP, letter #11438, ADA; and Morrison to Moses Coady, 12 August 1932, BMP, letter #18768, ADA.

bishop of Charlottetown.¹⁶⁶ Moreover, in a 1953 address at St. FX, Boyle argued that Extension was “encouraged and supported by the late Archbishop Morrison.”¹⁶⁷ These comments were obviously written for public consumption, but other insiders, especially Coady, held similar sentiments in private.¹⁶⁸ A similar contradiction is manifest in the career of Bishop John R. MacDonald. Some argue that he was also a casualty of university merger.¹⁶⁹ He left for Alberta at the height of the fractious debate. Yet, despite their complicated relationship, MacDonald was Morrison’s handpicked successor. It is also well known that, from an administrative standpoint, MacDonald “was more cautious than Morrison on certain matters.” In fact, recalled Fr. John H. McLaughlin in 1965, he “pretty well followed the course laid out by Morrison,” believing that if he followed “Morrison’s procedure generally that he was on safe ground.”¹⁷⁰ If MacDonald was indeed an agitator, Morrison would never have selected him as his coadjutor with right of succession.

Compartmentalizing Extension personalities into “saints and sinners” also ignores the reality that the Antigonish clergy in this period were closely-knit through occupation, kinship, and camaraderie. The saints shared their residences, meals, and even parishes with the sinners. The “Old Rector” Fr. Hugh Peter MacPherson, the long-time president of St. FX, is an apt case-in-point. Despite a couple of sympathetic accounts – mostly at the expense of the archbishop – the “Old Rector” is considered a stalwart component of the hierarchy, a “ready ally” of his archbishop and a cornerstone of the cadre of sinners.¹⁷¹ MacPherson’s narrative, however, is much more complex. He vehemently opposed university merger in 1922, considered Fr. Tompkins to be “most effective where he is not,” and was occasionally petty and confrontational. Yet his leadership was seen at St. FX as generally benign. Despite MacPherson’s antipathy toward Tompkins, historians must at least acknowledge that the “Old Rector” and Msgr. Coady were inseparable friends; they were “just two in

166 Coady to Adolphus Gillis, 16 January 1950, MG 20/1/917, STFXUA.

167 “Bishop James Boyle Address at St. F.X.,” 3 December 1953, RG 25-3/14/385, STFXUA.

168 Coady to Adolphus Gillis, 16 January 1950, MG 20/1/917, STFXUA.

169 Bishop MacDonald’s biographer, Fr. Peter Nearing, is clear that the priest went to Alberta in 1921 of his own accord and suggested that it was an act of kindness for Morrison to let him leave. The evidence from Morrison’s papers support this claim. However, later he considers whether or not MacDonald’s eventual posting – after his return from Alberta – to a rural parish was punishment for the priest’s support of Tompkins. “It was difficult to rule out the possibility,” Nearing writes, but without any evidence one has also to consider that “it may never have entered the mind of the archbishop who simply had the practical problem of finding replacements for pastors he wanted to move.” See Peter Nearing, “Rev. John R MacDonald, St. Joseph’s College and the University of Alberta,” *CCHA Study Sessions* 42 (1975): 71-2, and Nearing, *He Loved The Church*, 24.

170 Peter Nearing, interview with Rev. John J. McLaughlin, 11 August 1965, Antigonish, NS, PNP, fonds 9, ser. 2, sub-ser. 1, ADA.

171 David Frank argued that MacPherson had been “unable to do anything to protect his second-in-command, the redoubtable Jimmy Tompkins, when his experiments in educational and social reform were ended by the bishop”; see David Frank, *J.B. McLachlan: A Biography* (Toronto: James Lormier, 1999), 400-1. Raymond MacLean described MacPherson as “a sympathetic and kindly man, a scholar who was himself an example for those of Scottish ancestry; see Douglas Campbell and R.A. MacLean, *Beyond the Atlantic Roar: A Study of the Nova Scotia Scots* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1974), 161. Despite these sympathetic accounts, MacPherson is chiefly remembered as Morrison’s henchman. See, for example, Henderson, *Angus L. Macdonald*, 16, and Welton, *Father Jimmy*, 52.

one.”¹⁷² Not only was the “Old Rector” intelligent, Coady commented, but he also had the “gentlemanliness to listen to you.”¹⁷³ On most matters MacPherson supported Morrison and is therefore labeled a sinner yet, as Coady argued, MacPherson was “quite favorable” to the idea of Extension – he and Coady visited Morrison together on a number of occasions to advocate adding to the Extension staff – although he would “never have come to the decision of launching such a department.”¹⁷⁴

As historians scrutinize Extension personalities more assiduously, the complexities of inter-department relationships become clearer. For instance, Rusty Neal has illustrated that two celebrated Extension workers, Mary Ellicott Arnold and A.B. MacDonald, routinely quarreled. So problematic became the bickering – primarily over MacDonald’s lack of interest in housing projects – that Arnold soon wondered whether “she could continue to work within the confines” of the department.¹⁷⁵ Jim Lotz has noted that Arnold sensed that A.B. was “not supportive of her efforts in organizing co-operative housing,” and indeed he later eliminated it from the Extension program altogether.¹⁷⁶ Malcolm MacLellan is clear that Msgr. Coady and Fr. Tompkins had “many heated arguments about differences,” such as Tompkins’s “bias against institutionalism” and Coady’s “speeches favoring new structures.”¹⁷⁷ There was, as Welton argues, “an element of edginess” between the cousins.¹⁷⁸

Fortunately, historians have dealt with these differences without creating new “saints and sinners.” Mary Arnold has not been portrayed as a victim, nor A.B. MacDonald unduly chastised for his position on housing. Moreover, Fr. D.J. MacDonald has escaped vilification for his opposition to university merger, and the differences between Coady and Tompkins have been downplayed. Archbishop Morrison has not been so fortunate. While, as noted above, the archbishop’s reserved personal style may account for this in part, a further important reason has been the presence of important ambiguities within the Extension movement. The Antigonish Movement, as Welton has argued, served “different ideological purposes” for its followers. Welton is concerned, for instance, that adult educators “have been able to live so comfortably with Coady, the authoritarian Roman Catholic thinker and educator.”¹⁷⁹

Many subsequent writers, however, have struggled to explain such apparent contradictions, and have attempted to separate Coady and Tompkins from their priestly reality. The presence of the Roman Catholic Church – especially the pre-

172 Peter Nearing, interview with Fr. Michael Gillis, 1964, Antigonish, NS, PNP, fonds 9, ser. 2/1, ADA. According to Fr. Sam Campbell, the Old Rector “loved Coady and hated Tompkins.” See Peter Nearing, interview with Fr. Sam Campbell, 1965, Antigonish, NS, PNP, fonds 9, ser. 2, subser. 1, ADA. When the Old Rector died, it was Coady who authored the “write-up” for *The Casket*. See Coady to Adolphus Gillis, 16 January 1950, MG 20/1/917, STFXUA.

173 Boyle, *Father Tompkins of Nova Scotia*, 38.

174 Moses M. Coady to R.J. MacSween, 24 March 1953, RG 30-2/1/2963, STFXUA; Morrison to Moses Coady, 12 August 1932, BMP, letter #18768, ADA.

175 Neal, “Mary Arnold (and Mabel Reed),” 64; Rusty Neal, *Brotherhood Economics: Women and Co-Operatives in Nova Scotia* (Sydney, NS: UCCB Press, 1998), 133.

176 Jim Lotz, *Humble Giant*, 71.

177 Malcolm MacLellan, *Coady Remembered* (Antigonish, NS: St. FX Press, 1985), 84.

178 Welton, *Little Mosie from the Margaree*, 92.

179 Welton, “Decoding Coady,” 91.

Vatican II Church – in the Extension narrative creates patent difficulties. Although Msgr. P.J. Nicholson, president of St. FX from 1944 to 1954, argued that Extension was exalted because it corresponded “to the teachings of the Church,” many such as John Chafe preferred a secular slant – declaring “instead of commandments,” Tompkins “spoke of co-ops and credit unions.”¹⁸⁰

Furthermore, if Fr. Stanley Macdonald’s assertion that Extension was elitist and closely affiliated with Morrison’s office is taken at face value it must surely alter the perception that Antigonish was an agent of radical social change. If Morrison was reactionary, as some have argued, yet constituted an “Antigonish clique” along with Coady and other members of Extension, the contradictions are all too evident. Gregory Baum has written that the Antigonish movement “harbored paradoxes” regarding its political relationships, yet Morrison’s close involvement with the department creates even greater inconsistencies. Can Extension be considered a “left populist” movement, as Welton supposes, with a cautious Roman Catholic archbishop at its head?¹⁸¹

To circumvent this dilemma, Fowler depicted the Extension story as a struggle between Morrison and the open-minded Tompkins. This was echoed by generations of scholars. Attempts to illustrate that Coady and Tompkins were staunchly ecumenical, or that they went “beyond” Papal teachings, are widespread.¹⁸² When historians hasten to maintain that “the corporatist tendency of Pius XI” that allied itself so easily with fascism “did not appeal to Coady,” it creates a representation of Extension as detached from the Catholic intellectual ethos of the period. Perhaps, as Welton has argued, Coady was only being sarcastic when he said that “a whiff of Mussolini would wake the Maritimes up,” and yet Tompkins was clear in the 1920s that Il Duce was a model to be followed.¹⁸³ In a letter to Angus L. Macdonald in 1923, for example, Tompkins stated: “How long are the young men of this country going to permit the state of affairs to last that has kept us as we are for the past thirty years. We need a league of youth and a few Mussolini’s.”¹⁸⁴ Tompkins was

180 P.J. Nicholson, “The Antigonish Movement,” *Farmers Elevator Guide*, No. 8 (August 1946): 13; John R. Chafe, “The Most Unforgettable Character I’ve Met,” *Reader’s Digest* 81, no. 486 (October 1962).

181 Welton, “Knowledge for the People,” 107-8. According to *The Encyclopedia of Canadian Social Work*, the Antigonish Movement was “a liberal Catholic movement at a time when conservatism was dominant in the Roman Catholic Church.” Such vague statements further complicate the general understanding of Extension. See Francis Turner, *The Encyclopedia of Canadian Social Work* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), 14, and George Parkin Grant, Peter Emberley, and Arthur Davis, *Collected Works of George Grant: 1933-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 96.

182 Alexander, *The Antigonish Movement*, 172. In his memoirs, Brian Mulroney suggested that St. FX’s political orientation was left wing and that Msgr. Coady was “largely responsible.” Incredibly, others have branded Msgr. Coady as a socialist. See Brian Mulroney, *Memoirs: 1939-1993* (Toronto: Random House, 2008); Emery Hyslop-Margison and Alan M. Sears, *Neo-Liberalism, Globalization and Human Capital Learning: Reclaiming Education for Democratic Leadership* (New York: Springer, 2006), 139; and Harold Lewack, *The Quiet Revolution: The Study of the Antigonish Movement* (New York: The Student League for Industrial Democracy, 1955), 13-15.

183 Welton, “Decoding Coady,” 82-3; Welton, *Little Mosie from the Margaree*, 132, 10.

184 James J. Tompkins to Macdonald, 23 November 1923, ALMP, F1348/20, NSARM.

ecumenical and wanted Catholic men (he said very little about women) to be leaders in areas other than clerical, yet he also complained about Protestants on the Canso School Board and ensured that Protestant women marrying Catholic men in his parish joined the Church.¹⁸⁵

The hierarchy of 1920s Antigonish may be no more palatable for current scholars than it was for Fowler. However, to equate a traditionalist episcopate with hostility toward Tompkins or Extension distorts both the evidence and the impetus behind the movement.¹⁸⁶ “To be fair to the bishop,” wrote Francis Mifflin, Coady did say “that he gave the best kind of leadership.”¹⁸⁷ Writing in the 1970s, Fr. Anthony Johnston – a historian intimate with Extension personalities (but admittedly not one to cause trouble) – argued that Morrison “encouraged the initiative” of his clergy, and weighed well their proposals. If they were likely to succeed, the archbishop “generally gave his approval, and sometimes his support.”¹⁸⁸ Often when the clergy-intellectuals had good ideas they went ahead without Morrison’s approval, knowing full well that he would support the venture. “If I had asked Bishop Morrison whether we should be working at credit unions, he probably would have told me to play it safe, but I said nothing to him,” recalled Msgr. Coady. “We just went ahead and organized them and, when credit unions were going, he liked the whole idea.”¹⁸⁹

In 1953, Bishop James Boyle argued that the Antigonish Movement was not the brainchild of one or two men but was the “collaboration of many.”¹⁹⁰ Much like the *Extension Bulletin* 15 years previous, Boyle was calling for a “proper perspective.” As Coady wrote in 1950:

We in Antigonish waited thirty-five years criticizing Bishop Morrison for not giving us leadership, but when all was said and done, I see now that the kind of leadership he gave was the best. If he had been the kind of man who would take the bit in his mouth, he would want to have things done his way and to the extent that he willed. I feel that a bishop just can’t spearhead too radical a movement in the economic and social field. He can’t do what you and I can do. It is not necessary in any case. If he is broad-minded enough, as Bishop Morrison was, to give the green light to the rest of us, that is all that is required. This Bishop Morrison did.¹⁹¹

185 James J. Tompkins to Morrison, 29 March 1925, BMP, incoming letter #11928, ADA; Morrison to Tompkins, 14 April 1928, BMP, letter #14930, ADA.

186 From a reading of Extension literature one might gather the impression that the clergy-intellectuals were not priests at all. In reality, many of the reformers shared ecclesiastical similarities with the “hierarchy.” Fr. Michael Gillis was the diocesan director of the “Priests’ Eucharistic League” and worked with Morrison to hold the diocesan eucharistic congresses where, among other things, the clergy prayed for the conversion of Soviet Russia. See A.A. Johnston, *A History of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nova Scotia*, vol. II (Antigonish, NS: St. FX University Press, 1960), 555-6.

187 Mifflin, “The Antigonish Movement,” 14.

188 Johnston, *History of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nova Scotia*, II:555.

189 Laidlaw, *Man from Margaree*, 17.

190 “Bishop James Boyle Address at St. F.X.,” 3 December 1953, RG 25-3/14/385, STFXUA.

191 Coady to Adolphus Gillis, 16 January 1950, MG 20/1/917, STFXUA.

The complexities and paradoxes of the Extension narrative are vast. Just as the narrative was more recently revised by scholars to include the contributions of women and the laity, historians must widen the collaboration tent and discard the familiarity of “saints and sinners.” Antigonish, as Harold Lewack argued in 1955, is really not “the story of two remarkable men.”¹⁹² The impact of clergy, field workers, supporters, and even the hierarchy can be examined, as one insider mused, “without detracting from Dr. Tompkins’ honor.”¹⁹³ After all, as Msgr. Coady wrote to his Michigan friend on that August day in 1949, despite the myths regarding banishment to Canso, Tompkins had “many titles to glory, any one of which would make a man famous.”¹⁹⁴

192 Harold Lewack, *The Quiet Revolution: The Study of the Antigonish Movement* (New York: The Student League for Industrial Democracy, 1955), 3.

193 *Extension Bulletin*, 18 October 1938.

194 Moses M. Coady to D.A. MacInnis, August 1949, RG 30-2/1/2726, STFXUA.