

## **Fostering Social Awakening “along safe and sane lines”: Archbishop James Morrison and the Antigonish Movement**

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An extensive amount of literature has been written on the Antigonish Movement as well as several biographies of its leading members.<sup>1</sup> However, there is one individual who has been often misrepresented or ignored entirely within the literature of the period. This person is James Morrison, whose tenure as Bishop of Antigonish lasted thirty-eight years, over which time the foundations of the Antigonish Movement were laid. As the highest-ranking member of the Catholic hierarchy in Antigonish during the first half of the twentieth century, Morrison’s legacy drew the ire of historians who viewed him as a cautious conservative and a prelate completely closed to change and innovation. He has been depicted as man who rejected the progressive ideas of his clergy and as a bishop who restricted the success of the Antigonish Movement itself. How much of this is true?

Until recently, there was no extensive examination of Morrison’s life and career, and little was known about him outside of diocesan folklore and personal speculation.<sup>2</sup> His much-publicized feud in 1922 with Rev. James J. Tompkins, over university federation, was extremely destructive to his historical image as were the final years of his episcopate, in which he became aloof and detached from his diocese. James Morrison’s tenure in Antigonish, however, was much more detailed and significant than these two episodes reveal. A more detailed analysis of his life and career show him to have enjoyed a more amicable relationship with Tompkins than previously understood. In addition, Morrison was deeply committed to the

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<sup>1</sup> George Boyle, *Father Tompkins of Nova Scotia* (New York: P.J. Kennedy & Sons, 1953); Malcolm MacLellan, *Coady Remembered* (Antigonish: St. F.X. Press, 1985); Peter Nearing, *He Loved the Church: The Biography of Bishop John R. MacDonald, Fifth Bishop of Antigonish* (Antigonish: The Casket, 1975); Michael Welton and Jim Lotz, *Father Jimmy: The Life and Times of Jimmy Tompkins* (Wreck Cove: Breton Books, 1997); Michael Welton, *Little Mosie from the Margaree: A Biography of Moses Michael Coady* (Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> See Peter Ludlow, “Cautious but Willing: Archbishop James Morrison, Fourth Bishop of Antigonish,” (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Saint Mary’s University, 2004.)

social and economic reformation of his diocese, and was possessed of a social agenda that supported the “progressive” actions of his clergy.



Bishop Morrison, shortly after appointment as Bishop of Antigonish,  
1912 Morrison File St. Francis Xavier University Archives

James Morrison was born in Savage Harbour on Prince Edward Island’s North Shore in 1861. The grandson of Scottish immigrants, Morrison grew up in a very religious agrarian community. Educated at the Charlottetown Normal College and St. Dunstan’s University, he was able to secure a scholarship from the diocese to attend the Urban College in Rome. Morrison was grateful for his time in the Holy City, but was not keen on the large urban environment, and felt that the Italians “lacked civility.”<sup>3</sup> Ordained in 1889, he graduated from the Urban College with doctorates in philosophy and divinity. Returning to Charlottetown, Morrison served as an assistant at St. Dunstan’s Cathedral before taking a post as a philosophy professor at St. Dunstan’s University. He found academic life rewarding, especially in the Catholic environment, where, as Edward MacDonald writes, “the school motto, the daily religious instruction, the priest-professors, the morning masses and evening devotions, and the college’s growing reputation [as a] seedbed of vocations all bespoke the integral importance of faith.”<sup>4</sup> In 1892 Morrison was appointed rector of the university and successfully pursued affiliation with Laval University. In 1894, the diocese decided to replace the old cathedral in Charlottetown and appointed Morrison as rector of the cathedral parish so that he could oversee its construction. While ill-health eventually forced

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<sup>3</sup> Antigonish Diocesan Archives (hereafter ADA), Bishop Morrison Papers (hereafter BMP), Morrison to Francis J. Wall, 30 November 1937, letter # 23300.

<sup>4</sup> G. Edward MacDonald, *The History of St. Dunstan’s University, 1855-1956* (Charlottetown: St. Dunstan’s Board of Governors, 1989), 153.

him to take up a post in the rural parish of Vernon River, he found country life a “very comfortable one for a priest.”<sup>5</sup> It was from this tranquil rural setting in September of 1912, that Morrison was appointed the next Bishop of Antigonish.<sup>6</sup>

The diocese that James Morrison inherited from his predecessor, John Cameron, was one of Canada’s most important.<sup>7</sup> It had, however, become ripe with political and ecclesiastical turmoil, and was wholly unprepared for the challenges of the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> Antigonish was located in a region that had a traditionally agrarian economy, but was rapidly becoming industrialized as the booming coal and steel operations in the industrial areas of Cape Breton were drawing immigrants from the British Isles, Eastern Europe and Newfoundland. This increased urbanization and industrialization brought the church into conflict with many of the ‘isms’ of the modern age, most noticeably, socialism and communism. The decision to place Morrison in Antigonish was made, to some extent, because he was less political and more conventional than John Cameron. In retrospect, however, Rome’s confidence in Morrison’s administrative and educational talents came at the expense of a bishop without much urban experience.

The town of Antigonish was the centre of religious, theological and social thought in the expansive geography that made the Diocese of Antigonish. This was not only due to the fact that the seat of the diocese was St. Ninian’s Cathedral, but also because the diocesan university, St. Francis Xavier (St. F.X.), was located in the town. St. F.X. was a small but important institution with the potential not only to educate the youth of the area but also to act as a springboard for young men to enter the various seminaries of North America and Europe. The university was administered by two important figures: the rector, Rt. Rev. Dr. Hugh P. MacPherson and vice-rector, Rev. James J.

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<sup>5</sup> Diocese of Charlottetown Archives, Rev. James Morrison File, Morrison to Peter Curran, 19 November 1907. While in Vernon River, Morrison remained the vicar-general and in 1911 was appointed Administrator of the Diocese of Charlottetown due to the poor health of Bishop Charles MacDonald.

<sup>6</sup> The Diocese of Antigonish is located in Eastern Nova Scotia and consists of the counties of Pictou, Antigonish, Guysborough and all of Cape Breton Island.

<sup>7</sup> See Mark McGowan, “The Maritimes Region and the Building of a Canadian Church: The Case of Diocese of Antigonish after Confederation,” CCHA, *Historical Studies*, 70 (2004), 48-70.

<sup>8</sup> Bishop John Cameron, (1827-1910), born in St. Andrew’s, Antigonish county, educated at the Urban College in Rome, served as rector during one summer period. Cameron was consecrated as Bishop of Antigonish on 17 July 1877. He was extremely active in politics and his loyalty and assistance to the political career of Sir John Thompson is well known. Upon his death, Morrison wrote of him, “He was a power in his day and I think he had his full share of the trouble incident to his position. I hope he is better off in the next world.” See Raymond A. MacLean, *Bishop John Cameron: Piety and Politics* (Antigonish: The Casket, 1991); D. Hugh Gillis, “*Sir John Thompson and Bishop Cameron*”, *Canadian Catholic Historical Association Report*, (1955), 87-97; Peter, B. Waite, *The Man from Halifax: Sir John Thompson, Prime Minister* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985).

Tompkins. Tompkins, who had gained a reputation as a passionate educator, had quietly been urging the university to better educate its professors, and in 1912, left for England to attend the Conference of Universities of the Empire. Upon his return Tompkins was determined to raise the intellectual tone of the campus.<sup>9</sup> This early ambition coincided with the agenda of the new bishop, as it was Morrison's determination to have one of the best colleges in Canada, "right in Eastern Nova Scotia."<sup>10</sup> The initial meeting of the two men, shortly after Morrison's consecration, was the first opportunity for the vice-rector to size up the new bishop. Tompkins described Morrison prophetically as being "...about six feet tall and two inches in height and quite ascetic and intellectual looking. I should take him withal to be a 'canny Scot', which will not do him any particular harm in these parts."<sup>11</sup> For his part, Morrison, after discretely inquiring into Tompkins' reputation, concluded on the need for him to be handled carefully.<sup>12</sup>



Rev. James Tompkins, circa 1930s

Morrison File, St. Francis Xavier University Archives

However, as the university was to be the "apple of Morrison's eye," he was intent on securing a good working relationship with the priest,<sup>13</sup> something

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<sup>9</sup> Rev. William X. Edwards, "The MacPherson Tompkins Era of St. Francis Xavier University," *CCHA, Historical Studies*, 20 (1952-1953), 58.

<sup>10</sup> ADA, BMP, Morrison to John Beaton, 8 April 1914, letter # 1206. Tompkins' biographer, George Boyle, wrote that Morrison and Tompkins shared the belief that St. F.X. should be represented at the conference of Universities. See George Boyle, *Father Tompkins of Nova Scotia* (New York: P.J. Kennedy & Sons, 1953), 47.

<sup>11</sup> James Cameron, *For the People: A History of St. Francis Xavier University* (Montreal: McGill-Queens, 1996), 150.

<sup>12</sup> This warning had come from St. F.X. Professor, Rev. Arsene Henri Cormier, who complained that Tompkins had taken advantage of a weak President Hugh P. MacPherson and patronized and manipulated the staff. Cameron, *For the People*, 150.

<sup>13</sup> *The Casket*, 17 October 1912.

made easier due to their shared the belief that the future of the diocese would be determined by the success of the university.

A myth that has long been maintained is that Tompkins and Morrison were ideological foes from the outset. The evidence, however, suggests that this is untrue and that their relationship progressed flawlessly through the Great War and into the peace. It is true, however, that Morrison and Tompkins were very different men. While Tompkins was boisterous and inspirational, Morrison was cautious, adamant and sober. There are, of course, always minor tensions that develop between any priest and his bishop, but nothing in their relationship appears to have been out of the ordinary. Morrison quietly supported Tompkins' Antigonish Forward Movement, which sought to enhance civic awareness and responsibility. Perhaps the best evidence of the good relations between the two men is found in Tompkins own correspondence. In 1915 he told a friend that "times were never so good" and optimistically professed "the future is the brightest possible."<sup>14</sup> Morrison's appointment to Antigonish brought together two men of stubborn but strong character who would shape the diocese for the next thirty years, forging a powerful relationship between bishop and university.

In 1918, the Great War in Europe came to an end, and the resulting decrease in world demand for goods and services caused terrible damage to the Maritime economy, most notably seen in rural depopulation and out-migration. Farms and fishing villages were being deserted for the urban areas of the Maritimes, central Canada and the United States. While there was a rapid exodus of Catholics from the countryside of the Antigonish diocese, economic hardship brought Catholics in the industrial areas into close contact with atheistic socialism. The clergy of Antigonish were fully aware of these distressing new problems but were unsure how to respond. The Antigonish church was trapped in a time warp. Many of the priests in the diocese were from rural backgrounds and "could not be expected to develop instant expertise on industrialization and urbanization."<sup>15</sup> Morrison, himself lacking any practical experience with industrialization, believed that the very idea of a labour stoppage did not come from the terrible conditions, but rather, it was "thrust upon good Catholics by foreign demagogues."<sup>16</sup> This narrow attitude put the diocese in a stagnant and dangerous position.

Although some clergy in Antigonish were generally unaware of the world outside their parishes, there were a number of young clergy-

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<sup>14</sup> Beaton Institute Archives (hereafter BIA), Rev. James J. Tompkins Papers (hereafter JJTP), James J. Tompkins to T.A. Lebbetter, 12 March 1915, MG 10-2, 1A, F2A.

<sup>15</sup> R.A. MacLean, *Bishop John Cameron: Piety and Politics* (Antigonish: The Casket, 1991), 168.

<sup>16</sup> ADA, BMP, Morrison to John Hugh MacDonald, 3 November 1919, letter #6837.

intellectuals whose influence was beginning to take hold within the power structure of the diocese.<sup>17</sup> These priests, most of whom had been educated at the best Italian seminaries, and had done extensive post-graduate work at a number of elite institutions in North America and Europe, represented a philosophical awakening in the diocese.<sup>18</sup> They held traditional beliefs in the authority of the church relating to spiritual matters, but believed that it was incumbent upon Catholics to become more involved in solving many of society's social problems. Rev. Tompkins' position as vice-rector of the college put him in close contact with the students who passed through the university and this relationship made him the natural leader of these young priests. For guidance, they looked to the examples of Bishop O'Dwyer of Ireland, Archbishop Neil McNeil of Toronto and Catholic intellectuals such as Henry Somerville. Somerville was gaining a reputation in Canada as a progressive, due to his writings in *The Catholic Register*, calling on the clergy to do more for the people than preach contentment.<sup>19</sup> The clergy-intellectuals were also mindful of Leo XIII's encyclical on the labour problem, entitled Rerum Novarum. Published in 1891, Rerum Novarum was a strong papal indictment against unrestrained liberalism and socialism. The pope lamented that Catholic workers had been abandoned without defence and argued trade unionism as their most important instrument.<sup>20</sup> Although the document spoke to many issues, its most significant concerns were for the rights to private property and living wages, as well as for the role of the state and the organization of labour. It was written from the philosophical perspective that social problems could not be solved without the re-conversion of society to gospel values.<sup>21</sup> Rerum Novarum failed to recognize, however, that the text was prisoner of a certain moral reformism, which failed to see poverty as both a moral problem and an objective social disorder.<sup>22</sup> Thus, while the encyclical was helpful as a theological guideline for the more philosophical members of the clergy, its lack of concrete solutions hindered their ability to offer practical remedies to the problems of the working class in Antigonish. The church was frustrated with the endless problems between labour and

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<sup>17</sup> Rev. James Boyle, Rev. Moses M. Coady, Rev. Michael Gillis, Rev. Hugh John MacDonald, Rev. John Hugh MacDonald, Rev. Daniel J. MacDonald, Rev. Michael MacCormick, Rev. Hugh MacPherson, Rev. Patrick J. Nicholson and Rev. Alfred Boudreau. Rev. Leo McKenna was not ordained until 1924. The average age of these priests in 1918 was 34 years.

<sup>18</sup> The clergy-intellectuals of Antigonish held degrees from institutions such as the Urban College, Louvain, Columbia, London, Catholic University of America, Toronto, Lille, John Hopkins, Oxford and the Scots College in Rome.

<sup>19</sup> Jeanne R. Beck, "Contrasting Approaches to Catholic Social Action During the Depression: Henry Somerville the educator and Catherine de Hueck the Activist," in Mark McGowan and Brian Clarke, *Catholics at the Gathering Place* (Toronto: Canadian Catholic Historical Association, 1993), 218.

<sup>20</sup> John Molony, *The Worker Question* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1991), 104.

<sup>21</sup> Roger Aubert, *Catholic Social Teaching: An Historical Perspective* (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 2003), 196.

<sup>22</sup> Aubert, *Catholic Social Teaching*, 197.

capital, and the people were frustrated with the church's reliance on philosophical answers to what were very difficult economic problems. Philosophy and practicality had to come together.

Rev. Tompkins represented a new determination to unite the philosophical message of Rerum Novarum with the new thinking of people like Somerville in order to address practically the problems facing Antigonish. He wanted to develop and test ideas about regional social and economic reforms. In 1918, Tompkins began writing an article in a local newspaper, *The Casket*, entitled, "For the People," which dealt with social, scientific, economic and educational topics. The list of contributors to "For the People" included St. F.X. academics such as Rev. Dr. A.M. Thompson as well as J.A. Walker and the English intellectual, W.H. Bucknell. These articles were intended to awaken the people to the necessity of higher education and to train leaders not only for the church but other callings as well. Tompkins' optimism for what could happen in the diocese caused him to prophetically declare: "Antigonish could indeed well be the land to which the rest of the English-speaking Catholics of Canada might look up as onto the hills whence cometh great help."<sup>23</sup>

Success in this new endeavour would be entirely contingent on cooperation between the reformer and his bishop. Although considerably less exuberant, Morrison was nevertheless open to change for his diocese. His continued efforts to make small reforms in Antigonish even saw him described by one Boston newspaper as a "progressive leader in the church."<sup>24</sup> He granted the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Martha autonomy from the college, allowing them to expand into other diocesan projects, and spearheaded the raising of funds to maintain and build new orphanages. His biggest act of cooperation, however, came in 1919, when he decided to spearhead the takeover of *The Casket*. The newspaper, which had been in publication since 1852, was culturally and religiously significant. Informally a Catholic publication, *The Casket* was not directly under the control of diocesan authorities. Although its pages characterized the Catholic position on numerous issues, the publishers took great pride in the paper's "...respect for the other man's point of view."<sup>25</sup> The importance of having control of this medium was paramount. Tompkins' weekly column was transforming *The Casket* into one of the more progressive papers in the region. Writing to his cousin, Rev. Dr. Moses M. Coady, Tompkins stressed this importance: "In order to get people interested in the college here we shall have to educate them and work the thing up through *The Casket*."<sup>26</sup> Morrison and Tompkins' plan was to gain control of the paper from the current publisher, selling the shares to the clergy of the

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<sup>23</sup> BIA, JJTP, James J. Tompkins to Neil McNeil, 22 February 1918, MG 10-2, 1A, F4.

<sup>24</sup> *The Boston American*, 9 March 1919.

<sup>25</sup> R.A. MacLean, *The Casket: From Gutenberg to Internet: The Story of a Small Town Weekly* (Antigonish: *The Casket*, 1992), 132.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

diocese.<sup>27</sup> The majority shareholder, and manager, Michael Donovan, agreed to sell his share for \$18,000; however, he spent the rest of his days claiming that Morrison and Tompkins had, in fact, cheated him. Donovan wrote to anyone who would listen, including Canada's Apostolic Delegate, that Tompkins had threatened him, claiming that under no circumstances would Morrison allow him to continue to run a Catholic paper in the diocese. Furthermore, he claimed that Tompkins threatened that if he did not accept the cheque for \$18,000, Donovan would "lose all and go crazy in the end."<sup>28</sup> Morrison's circular to his priests on the matter points to Donovan's disappointment; "I must say that from a business standpoint he is not at all anxious to sell at that figure."<sup>29</sup> It also suggests that he agreed with Tompkins' attitude as to the importance of bringing the newspaper into closer and more universal touch with the people.<sup>30</sup>

With control of *The Casket* firmly in the bishop's hands, Tompkins had unfettered access to the homes of Catholics in the diocese. Although *The Casket* still had an editor, it was obvious that Morrison gave Tompkins a great deal of control. Henry Somerville, himself a previous columnist in the paper, warned Tompkins that running a newspaper was not an easy task. He stressed the need for one editor and told Tompkins that he could print anything that he liked but he could not make readers read it.<sup>31</sup> The takeover of *The Casket* was a shrewd and calculated move equally organized and implemented by both Morrison and Tompkins. It highlights the fact that while Morrison did not have Tompkins' zeal for educational reform, they shared a pragmatic attitude that made the take over of *The Casket* possible. Assuming control of *The Casket* created "the pulpit from which the social doctrine of Rev. Tompkins and Msgr. Coady might find expression."<sup>32</sup>

Cooperation between the bishop and the priest continued in the fall of 1919. Morrison supported Tompkins' idea that diocesan priests should congregate in order to discuss the various social and economic problems in the diocese. The first educational and social conference was held at St. F.X., where the clergy-intellectuals expressed their conviction that education could help solve some of the problems of the Maritime provinces. Not surprisingly, Morrison agreed with them, but tempered their enthusiasm in what would become his trademark fashion, stressing that any solution to the problems of the diocese would have to be feasible. Writing to Tompkins, he summed up his position:

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<sup>27</sup> Laurence K. Shook, *Catholic Post-Secondary Education in English-Speaking Canada: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 84.

<sup>28</sup> ADA, BMP, Michael Donovan to Morrison, 28 June 1922, incoming letter #9241.

<sup>29</sup> ADA, BMP, Morrison Circular, 19 March 1919, letter #6147.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> BIA, JJTP, Henry Somerville to James J. Tompkins, 25 June 1919, MG-10-2, 1A, F2.

<sup>32</sup> H.M. MacDonald, *The Builders: Biographical Sketches of the Architects of the Diocese of Antigonish* (Antigonish: The Casket, 1968), 52.

A careful survey of the present ethical, social and industrial situation convinces us of the necessity of bringing together along safe and sane lines the various elements of humanity in this North American Continent, and we are no less convinced that it is mainly through the proper channels of educational effort that this can be accomplished.<sup>33</sup>

While Tompkins continued to ponder education issues, he and Morrison began work on another project that they both found significant. The Acadian people represented 25% of the total Catholic population of the diocese, yet they made up only 6% of the student body at St. F.X. Morrison's experiences on Prince Edward Island made him aware of the ill-will that the francophones harboured for the English-dominated church.<sup>34</sup> Tompkins had a special concern for the Acadians, having taught in the village of Cheticamp as a young man. In 1919 Tompkins travelled to New York to meet with officials of the Carnegie Corporation in order to secure a \$50,000 grant for a chair in French at the university. Tompkins was eager to have Morrison come to New York to attend the meetings, something Morrison was unwilling to do, mainly because he hated the idea of begging for funds. Curiously, Tompkins' letters include references to proposed "people's schools." One letter from Tompkins asked, "Has your Lordship been thinking about the people's school (Danish Type)? I am almost certain that I could get 50 or 100 thousand for that."<sup>35</sup> Morrison felt confident enough to allow Tompkins to secure both the grant for the French chair and to probe the corporation about future monies for a people's school. Morrison did not feel the need to go to New York, telling Tompkins, "I know you will do what is best in any enterprise that you may undertake."<sup>36</sup> Tompkins' final letter from New York suggests the good working relationship of the two men: "I wish you could take a run up here. You would enjoy meeting these men, we could nail the money on the spot."<sup>37</sup>

The idea of bringing practical knowledge to the people of the diocese was undisputedly Tompkins' project, however, the evidence suggests that Morrison remained not only a supporter of the work but an active participant. By 1920, The Casket was teeming with articles about taking the university to the people and in the same year, Tompkins published a

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<sup>33</sup> ADA, BMP, Morrison to James J. Tompkins, 29 September 1919, letter #6711.

<sup>34</sup> As early as 1819, the Acadians in P.E.I. complained about the Anglophone domination of Catholic life. On April 14 1870, the *Summerside Journal* published a letter written by a frustrated Acadian Catholic: "even our priests are of foreign races, and if there are any small positions available in Acadian parishes, they are immediately filled by Englishmen." It was not until 1912, that the Maritime Acadians finally had a bishop of their own, when Bishop Edouard Leblanc was made Bishop of Saint John, N.B.

<sup>35</sup> ADA, BMP, James J. Tompkins to Morrison, 11 December 1919, incoming letter #6846.

<sup>36</sup> ADA, BMP, Morrison to James J. Tompkins, 14 January 1920, letter #7061.

<sup>37</sup> ADA, BMP, James J. Tompkins to Morrison, 13 January 1920, incoming letter #7109.

pamphlet entitled, *Knowledge For the People*, which called upon the university to become something more than an institution that educated the elite of society. Between January and March of 1921, a People's School was held in Antigonish. Fifty-one students from various walks of life came to the university to be taught on subjects ranging from economics to agriculture. The forward of the school's booklet, hold the words of an approving bishop:

Present economic conditions are bringing about a great social awakening among all classes of the people, one symptom of which is the hunger for useful and practical knowledge on the part of so many of the young and middle aged adult population.<sup>38</sup>

Tompkins was obviously pleased with the work that he and Morrison had accomplished in education, writing the bishop that, "we around Antigonish are about fifty-years ahead of the rest of America."<sup>39</sup>

While the cooperation between Morrison and Tompkins was productive, it soon became clear that they shared a very different philosophical view on the position of St. F.X. University within the diocese. Morrison believed that St. F.X. was the central institution of the diocese, guaranteeing that the students and the community could get an education so that young men could hope for something more than a "third, fourth or even lower rank."<sup>40</sup> His position was fairly parochial, but as the bishop responsible for the people in his diocese it had to be. Morrison was willing and flexible to allow progressive clergy the space to try out their ideas, providing that it did not challenge any church teaching and most importantly, that St. F.X. was the centre of the work. Tompkins had a very different view. His recent experiences at St. F.X. caused him to believe that the majority of Catholic educational leaders knew nothing about graduate work or about the tremendous advances in all subject areas. According to Tompkins, most Catholic priest-professors never "grasped the necessity of having men do graduate work who are expected to be leaders and teachers."<sup>41</sup> Tompkins' recent endeavours into education reform led him to believe that St. F.X. was still little more than a high school in comparison to other institutions in the country.

In the spring of 1921, having been besieged by requests for funding by each of the Maritime universities and colleges, the Carnegie Corporation of New York set up a commission to examine and report on the educational situation in the Maritime Provinces and Newfoundland. Most of the universities in the Maritimes were small, poor, denominational institutions, scarcely comparable to the larger institutions in the rest of Canada and the United States. Although the Carnegie report regarded St. F.X. in a favourable light, it believed that a merger of existing colleges into

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<sup>38</sup> *The People's School Booklet*, January 1921.

<sup>39</sup> ADA, BMP, James J. Tompkins to Morrison, 11 December 1919, incoming letter #6846.

<sup>40</sup> ADA, BMP, Morrison to the Knights of Columbus, 24 June 1921, letter #8453.

<sup>41</sup> BIA, JJTP, James J. Tompkins to Donald F. MacDonald, 9 March 1918, MG 10-2, 1A, F4, JJTP.

one university situated in Halifax was needed in order to assure academic excellence.<sup>42</sup> This was a direct challenge to Morrison's philosophical position in regard to the university. Tompkins immediately viewed federation as an exciting opportunity to take Catholic education to a new level. As John Reid has argued, for Tompkins, "the federation scheme represented a final opportunity for the Maritime Provinces to regain their prosperity through self-help."<sup>43</sup> Tompkins believed that Catholics could look to a new day if they were "only alive to the possibilities."<sup>44</sup>

The university federation idea soon became philosophy-charged debate in Antigonish, highlighting the differing convictions of its leading advocates, Morrison and Tompkins. Living up to his billing as boisterous and rash, Tompkins immediately gave his unconditional support to the scheme as proposed, assuming that Morrison would do the same. Tompkins' exuberance for the plan, however, allowed him to misread the bishop's thinking on the matter, with consequences that would prove detrimental to his position at the university. In opposing the federation scheme, Morrison first indicated his opposition to any proposal that would see Catholics educated with Protestants. His utmost concern, however, was that Antigonish would lose the pre-eminence of St. F.X., on which it had lavished so much time and financial resources. The university had, in fact, just completed a fundraising drive in which the college had figured as the central focus for improvement in the diocese as a whole.<sup>45</sup> Morrison and St. F.X. President, Rev. Dr. Hugh P. MacPherson, were optimistic about the future of their college and hoped that the Carnegie proposal would amount to nothing more than a distraction.<sup>46</sup> Tompkins, dismayed at what he believed was the "stupidity of a half dozen," immediately began to lobby the university faculty and the clergy in favour of federation.<sup>47</sup> Tompkins' qualities of organization and persuasion, which had previously served Morrison so well, were now working against the bishop. While Tompkins, only five years previously, had written that the university was "striding along unmistakably," he now wanted to

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<sup>42</sup> W.S. Learned, K.C.M. Sills, *Education in the Maritime Provinces of Canada* (New York: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1922).

<sup>43</sup> John Reid, "Health, Education, Economy: Philanthropic Foundations in the Atlantic Region in the 1920s and 1930s," *Acadiensis*, 14, (Autumn, 1984), 74.

<sup>44</sup> ADA, BMP, James J. Tompkins to Morrison, 11 December 1921, incoming letter #8672.

<sup>45</sup> For many Highland Scottish Catholics of Eastern Nova Scotia, St. F.X was more than a college, it was also an important cultural institution. Its graduates not only added prestige to the Catholic church in the area but to Highlanders as well. See James Cameron, "Erasing Forever the Brand of Social Inferiority:" Saint Francis Xavier University and the Highland Catholics of Eastern Nova Scotia," *CCHA, Historical Studies*, 59, 1992, 63.

<sup>46</sup> Cameron, *For the People*, 183.

<sup>47</sup> Public Archives of Nova Scotia (hereafter PANS), Angus L. Macdonald Papers (Hereafter ALMP), James J. Tompkins to Angus L. MacDonald, 11 August 1922, F1348/2.

sacrifice the college in Antigonish for the greater good of Catholic education in the Maritime provinces and Newfoundland.<sup>48</sup> He was willing to commence a bitter and prolonged fight with Morrison, a person who Tompkins had only recently regarded as making a “lasting impression on the Catholic life of the whole continent.”<sup>49</sup>

Tompkins philosophy of education had a lot of support from the local clergy and surprisingly from the majority of bishops in the region.<sup>50</sup> It has been argued that the rejection of university federation represented the conservative nature of the Catholic hierarchy in Canada. Interestingly however, the most powerful of the Catholic bishops in the Maritimes were in favour of federation. This included Archbishop Edward J. McCarthy of Halifax, Archbishop Edward P. Roche of St. John’s and Bishop John March of Harbour Grace. The support shown to federation by the bishops of Halifax and Newfoundland is not surprising, as federation represented the solution to their educational problems. Archbishop Roche had no college in St. John’s and Archbishop McCarthy’s college, Saint Mary’s, was weak and unstable.<sup>51</sup> St. F.X was obviously the most stable Catholic college in the region and therefore Antigonish had the most to lose. Bishop March, a believer in the federation idea, changed his mind after a visit to Antigonish and angered Tompkins by telling MacPherson, “why do you want to go to Halifax with such a fine university as this?”<sup>52</sup>

The debate between Morrison and Tompkins over university federation was well argued by both sides and both were concerned for the educational interests of Catholics in the region. However, it seems that both were guilty of generalizing the other’s position. Tompkins believed that those who were against federation were in fact against all things liberal and progressive.<sup>53</sup> This was hardly a fair comment, considering that he had worked so closely with Morrison and MacPherson during in the course of his efforts to reform education

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<sup>48</sup> BIA, JJTP, James J. Tompkins to Brother Jerome, 23 January 1917, MG 10-2, 1A, F3.

<sup>49</sup> ADA, BMP, James J. Tompkins to Morrison, 11 December 1919, incoming letter #6846.

<sup>50</sup> Rev John Hugh MacDonald (New Waterford); Rev Patrick Nicholson (Antigonish); Rev Dr. Alexander Thompson (Glace Bay); Rev D. Doyle (Sacred Heart, Sydney); Rev James Kiely (Holy Redeemer, Sydney); Rev Michael Gillis (Boisdale); Rev Ronald MacDonald (St Peter’s); Rev Michael McCormick (East Bay) and Rev Stanley MacDonald (Immaculate Conception, Sydney Mines). See PANS, ALMP, P.J. Webb to Angus L. Macdonald, 2 January 1922 F1348/66.

<sup>51</sup> Charlottetown bishop Louis O’Leary and St. Dunstan’s University were not sold on the idea of merger as it was originally proposed but were favourable to continued negotiations. The smaller Catholic colleges in the region were generally in favour of the proposal. They included Mount Saint Vincent University at Rockingham, N.S; The College of St. Anne at Church Point, N.S; Saint Joseph’s College at Memramcook, N.B and Saint Thomas College at Chatham, N.B.

<sup>52</sup> Archives of the Archdiocese of St. John’s (Hereafter AADSJ), Archbishop Roche Papers (Hereafter ABRP), James Tompkins to Archbishop Roche, 24 October 1922, 107/21/3.

<sup>53</sup> Cameron, *For the People*, 183.

within the diocese. Writing many years later, Moses Coady wrote that when Tompkins became possessed of an idea he pursued it with a “singleness of purpose that could not be deflected.” Coady considered this characteristic to be both a “strength and a weakness,” observing that the priest could be “illogical when an idea dominated him.”<sup>54</sup> Tompkins’ “all or nothing” attitude and his lobbying of the university staff and other members of the Catholic hierarchy in Canada, alienated him from Morrison and the St. F.X. Board of Governors, the very people he would have to convince in order to make university federation possible.

Morrison’s mistakes, like Tompkins’, were tactical. Had the bishop simply come out and argued against federation based on the facts, such as the economic situation in Antigonish, and the amount of diocesan monies already invested in the college, the situation might have ended differently and his historical image might have been spared. Unfortunately, Morrison resorted to brutish and dictatorial tactics, using falsehoods and misconceptions to insure that he did not lose his college.<sup>55</sup> The St. F.X Board of Governors decided not to pursue federation based on Morrison’s word that the Maritime bishops were against the scheme, something that Morrison knew to be false. Morrison refused to send any representatives to any of the subsequent meetings and did not allow any room in The Casket for those in favour of federation to make their case. Tompkins and a group of clergy and laity supporters refused to accept this decision and had convinced many prominent Catholics not to let federation die, appealing to Archbishop Roche in St. John’s to keep up the pressure on Morrison and Rome.<sup>56</sup> Frustrated by Tompkins’ refusal to let the federation idea go, Morrison removed him from the college and sent him to Canso as parish priest.<sup>57</sup> The Vatican eventually ruled against the university federation scheme

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<sup>54</sup> Alexander Laidlaw, *The Campus and the Community: The Global Impact of the Antigonish Movement* (Montreal: Harvest House, 1961), 147.

<sup>55</sup> Morrison wrote to Rafael Cardinal Merry Del Val that Archbishop McCarthy in Halifax had been partly won over due to his advanced years. ADA, BMP, Morrison to Rafael Cardinal Merry Del Val, 11 November 1922, letter #9767.

<sup>56</sup> The debate over university federation represented a “civil-war” of sorts within the diocese. Tompkins was extremely connected, having taught a number of the young priests and laity of the diocese, and they were very loyal to him. One of the prominent Catholics who supported Tompkins was Angus L. Macdonald. Macdonald was a professor of law at Dalhousie University and vowed to take the fight for federation to the newspapers of the region so that all Catholics would see the benefit of a new college in Halifax. This led to a life-long feud between Macdonald and Morrison that caused considerable embarrassment upon Macdonald’s election to premiership of Nova Scotia in the 1930s.

<sup>57</sup> Morrison wrote to Tompkins stressing “the first duty of the priesthood is the pastoral office, which took precedent over other employment.” However, privately Morrison told a priest that although he did not want Tompkins to leave the diocese “he has to leave the college.” ADA, BMP, Morrison to J.W. MacIsaac, 18 December 1922, letter #9885.

and the idea died.<sup>58</sup> Morrison was clearly happy that the position of the diocese was “consistent with the final decision of the Holy See,” but he paid a price.<sup>59</sup> Perhaps nothing hurt the historical image of James Morrison more than this episode. Many clergy, especially the younger ones, supported Tompkins and were shocked and angered by his dismissal. Historians of the movement have made the assumption that Morrison’s dismissal of the federation idea was “backward thinking,”<sup>60</sup> and that the debate over federation was between “liberal and conservative Catholic elements,” but this was not the case.<sup>61</sup> Alexander Laidlaw, a chronicler of the later Antigonish Movement, was quick to point out in his book that Tompkins’ transfer to Canso had nothing to do, as some believe, with his advanced views on social problems and educational reform, rather simply over the federation debate.<sup>62</sup> Morrison’s actions, dictatorial as they were, were more practical than ideological. In his biography of Tompkins, George Boyle writes that Morrison’s decision had the full support of most of the laity of the diocese, who did not want to lose the college: “Among the people in the Antigonish region, this was a popular decision. They had contemplated with horror the thought of their university being taken away.”<sup>63</sup> The debate over university federation broke the pragmatic relationship between Morrison and Tompkins, but it did not end the reform impulse of the diocese.

The early 1920s were difficult years for the bishop and Antigonish. With Tompkins in Canso, and the clergy splintered and angry, Morrison faced a looming economic collapse and a radical and strike ridden industrial sector with no immediate plan. The economy of the Maritime Provinces in the 1920s was in disarray. Massive out-migration from the rural areas and labour strife in the large industrial sectors put the church in a difficult position. While it had traditionally maintained a position of power and influence, Catholicism’s position within the industrial sectors of the diocese was diminishing. By the mid 1920s, the numbers of Catholic working men and women becoming involved with socialism was growing.

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<sup>58</sup> Supporters of federation in Antigonish were not the only ones upset with Morrison’s determination to see federation fail. Bishop Louis O’ Leary of Charlottetown argued that Morrison framed his petition to Rome in such a way that it insured rejection. He angrily told another bishop, “His [Morrison’s] question was sent off without being submitted to the others, at least as I see it. I afterward learned it asked if the proposal of the Carnegie Corporation, as first proposed, should be accepted, the forgone conclusion could only be a negative answer and it was.” O’Leary hoped that a channel would be kept open for future negotiations with the Carnegie officials. See MacDonald, *The History of St. Dunstan’s University*, 297.

<sup>59</sup> ADA, BMP, Morrison Circular, 25 May 1923.

<sup>60</sup> Michael Welton, *Little Mosie from the Margaree: A Biography of Moses Michael Coady* (Toronto: Thompson Educational Press, 2001), 41.

<sup>61</sup> Anne Alexander, *The Antigonish Movement: Moses Coady and Adult Education Today* (Toronto: Thompson Educational Press, 1997), 70.

<sup>62</sup> Laidlaw, *The Campus*, 64.

<sup>63</sup> George Boyle, *Father Tompkins of Nova Scotia* (New York: P.J. Kennedy & Sons, 1953), 107.

While the church maintained a strict policy, which refused to cooperate with socialism at any time, it failed to recognize that Catholic socialists within the Diocese of Antigonish were not necessarily giving up their faith. Catholics in Cape Breton adhered to the economic components of socialism but maintained their relationship with religion and the church. Theologian Gregory Baum has argued that religion on “one level produces symbols that protect the dominant social structures while at another level generating a critical spirituality that undermines the dominant structures.”<sup>64</sup> The political identity of Catholic workers was something more complicated than their religious leaders could ascertain. While it is true that the church’s traditional authority as an instrument of social solidarity was being taken over by the radical labour spirit, it was not complete.<sup>65</sup> The actions of Catholics in this period show that many clearly separated their religion from economic and political issues. Even when many Catholics called themselves Communists, they were not usually committed to atheism in an ideological sense.<sup>66</sup> What was clear, however, was that the church had lost its ability to influence the worker outside of religious issues. While many workers were still attending Sunday mass, they were unwilling to allow the clergy or their bishop to influence their political and economic decisions. By 1922, Morrison was so worried about his influence in the industrial areas that he was unwilling to mingle in union affairs and worried that the miners would pay “little or no heed to any such admonition in their present temper” and that any interference on his part would “lessen the authority of his clergy.”<sup>67</sup> He pressed for Catholic unions but found no support for that from either clergy or laity. Although Morrison became increasingly distressed as the situation in the Cape Breton coalfields deteriorated, he was unable to achieve any meaningful solutions and could only offer financial and material support to striking workers. This was a situation that required the immediate attention of the whole diocese.

The frustration over the situation in the industrial areas coupled with the massive out-migration from the countryside forced the church to look for ways to alleviate some of the economic and social problems that existed.<sup>68</sup> Following Tompkins’ example the clergy of the diocese continued exchanging new ideas at the annual Rural Conferences that were

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<sup>64</sup> Gregory Baum, “Social Catholicism in Nova Scotia: The Thirties”, in Peter Slater, *Religion and Culture in Canada* (Waterloo: Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion, 1977), 119.

<sup>65</sup> Hayden M. Trenholm, “Radical Labour and the Catholic Church: The Case of Cape Breton,” (Unpublished Honours Thesis, Mount Allison University, 1977).

<sup>66</sup> Gregory Baum, “Social Catholicism,” 140.

<sup>67</sup> ADA, BMP, Morrison to C.F. MacKinnon, 4 August 1922, letter #9483. The idea that the church was losing its influence was reinforced when Alex S. MacIntyre told a meeting of the Antigonish clergy that he felt “more at home with the communists than the clergy.” See Rev. Peter A. Nearing, *He Loved the Church: The Biography of Bishop John R. MacDonald* (Antigonish: The Casket, 1975), 31.

<sup>68</sup> For an account of how the industrial problems led to the implementation of the Antigonish Movement, see Peter Ludlow, “Fanning the Smouldering Fires: The Catholic Church and Labour-Capital Relations in Industrial Cape Breton, 1909-1930,” (Unpublished MA Thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2005).

held each year in Antigonish. These conferences, although supported and chaired by Morrison, were influenced and dominated by the clergy-intellectuals of the diocese. The priests probed the idea of credit unions, short courses and adult education. Morrison was pleased with the progress of the conferences, and was especially gratified when the provincial authorities began adopting some of their proposals via legislation. There were always differences of opinions as to what kind of response the church should take to social and economic matters, but Morrison strongly believed that the diocese would benefit from frank discussions.<sup>69</sup> Although Morrison was careful enough to leave much of the discussion to those priests who had the expertise, he demanded results.<sup>70</sup>

While the clergy-intellectuals had at least some autonomy, Morrison still had a lot of influence over the direction that the diocese took in regards to social and economic reform. It was his belief that the answer to many of the problems of the diocese lay in the reform of the rural areas. He attributed the growth of the more “godless” urban areas to the fact that there was not a viable rural alternative. Thus, while he had trouble regaining influence in the urban areas of his diocese, he was determined to gather up support in his rural parishes, as well as firmly establish a pool for vocations into the priesthood.<sup>71</sup> He was especially interested in the suggestion by Rev. Michael Gillis of Boisdale that the diocese sponsor twenty-five young men to attend a winter farmer’s course at the Agriculture College in Truro. Morrison wrote to his priests, careful to connect the work being done within the diocese, to the church’s social teaching.

Our Reverend Clergy have unfailingly taken a deep and active interest, putting forth their best efforts to ameliorate conditions, and thus to contribute to the general social and economic betterment of the community at large. In the pursuit of this laudable object, effect is being given to the frequently expressed wishes of the Supreme Pontiffs of the Church relative to such social and Catholic action.

Morrison did not stray too far from the fold and made sure that the ideas of his clergy were in agreement with the magisterium. Interestingly, it was difficult for the diocese to get the students to go to the agricultural college, and many of the priests in the rural areas

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<sup>69</sup> St. Francis Xavier University Archives (Hereafter STFXUA), Rural Conference Reports, 10 November 1926, RG/30-3/28/15.

<sup>70</sup> On 16 December 1925, Morrison told the conference, “We have had several conferences already in which we have exchanged ideas on the rural problem, and benefited by one another’s experiences, but we are gathered here today to get results, and to arrive at something practical as the outcome of our past discussions.” See STFXUA Rural Conference Reports, 16 December 1925, RG/30-3/28/9.

<sup>71</sup> The position of the church was that, “Rural life has fewer distractions and the absence of commercialized amusement presents a more favourable field for the development of religious vocations.” *The Casket*, 3 March 1921.

paid no attention to the initiative, highlighting the division between those clergy-intellectuals and the rest of the priests.<sup>72</sup>

Morrison pressed the Nova Scotia government to attach greater importance to agricultural issues and encouraged interest in rural life.

While Morrison was cooperative, he was a man who moved cautiously, perhaps too slowly for some, especially for Tompkins.<sup>73</sup> In October of 1927, when the Royal Commission reported on the problems of the fishery in Nova Scotia and the Magdalen Islands, it was recommended that cooperatives be set up within the fishing communities. At the 1927 rural conference, Tompkins, again the catalyst, stressed that reviving the rural communities within the diocese was not enough and it was paramount that they begin to address industry, commerce and manufacturing.<sup>74</sup> Cooperatives were a popular concept in Antigonish as they would not only stabilize society, by giving communities a larger share in the profits from their labour, but also at the same time they supported the capitalist system and maintained the right to private property.<sup>75</sup> The clergy-intellectuals, supported by the attitudes of the hierarchy, argued that cooperatives were the answers to both their philosophical and economic problems. Morrison agreed with the necessity of cooperatives and had been a supporter for a number of years. Addressing convocation at St. Dunstan's University in Charlottetown in 1926, he noted:

There is nothing that this country needs more [than cooperatives]. It needed the people to stand by it. Moreover, they should be loyal to the island both by earnest co-operation and by a spirit of optimism.<sup>76</sup>

In a letter to Rev. Alfred Boudreau, Morrison summed up his position regarding the organization of industry:

It seems to me that the fishing industry could organize some of its markets nearer home, right in the province itself. It seems to me that it would pay the fishermen to have some kind of distributing agencies in the inland parts of the province, which would bring the fishermen and the purchasing public more closely tied together in the matter of business, with better results for both.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> STFXUA, Interview with Rev. Michael Gillis, recorded at Antigonish, 1967.

<sup>73</sup> Even Morrison's good friend and ally, Rev. H.P. MacPherson, noted that Morrison was overly cautious. Writing to Sister M. Faustina, General Superior, Congregation of the Sisters of St. Martha, he noted, "I presume his lordship finds it difficult to make changes immediately." STFXUA, Rev. Hugh. P. MacPherson Papers, MacPherson to Sister M. Faustina, 25 September 1933, RG/5/9/3486.

<sup>74</sup> Rev. Peter Nearing, *He Loved the Church: The Biography of Bishop John R. MacDonald, Fifth Bishop of Antigonish* (Antigonish: The Casket, 1975), 31.

<sup>75</sup> Scott MacAulay, "The Smokestack Leaned Toward Capitalism: An Examination of the Middle Way Program of the Antigonish Movement," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 37, (Spring 2002), 53.

<sup>76</sup> *The Casket*, 3 June 1926.

<sup>77</sup> ADA, BMP, Morrison to A. Boudreau, 20 February 1926, letter #12949.

Morrison's clear support for the idea of cooperatives suggests that the bishop was actively interested in alleviating the economic hardships of people within the diocese and that he was at the forefront of the discussions, however the Antigonish priests still wanted more.

For many years the idea of a Catholic extension department within the Antigonish diocese had been contemplated, but a plan was yet to be formulated. This had much to do with Morrison's careful nature. Clearly if his instincts had ever impeded the progressive growth of Antigonish, it was in this period. This was not due to any inherent conservatism on Morrison's part; rather he was unsure that the diocese would be able to maintain such a project.<sup>78</sup> The push to activate Morrison came from Rev. Michael Gillis a Parish Priest from Boisdale, Cape Breton. At the time, Gillis was active within the Scottish Catholic Society of Canada (SCSC), whose aims were the preservation of faith among Catholic Scots, the propagation of a more accurate knowledge of the history of Scotland, the preservation of the Gaelic language and the advancement educationally, morally and socially of all Catholics of the Scottish race.<sup>79</sup> It was through this organization that Gillis promoted the idea of extension in the diocese. At an annual meeting held at Judique, Cape Breton, on 17 July 1928, the society voted to raise a sum of \$100,000 over five years for rural education purposes. When it approached Morrison with its idea, he assured them that any undertaking that aimed for the improvement and encouragement of rural education in the general community had his approval and wholehearted support.<sup>80</sup> Morrison was willing to support anything that benefited the welfare of farmers, fishermen and miners of eastern Nova Scotia.<sup>81</sup> However, Gillis' action presented Morrison with a problem. The bishop did not necessarily want to get into extension work because of the economic repercussions that might be attached. The terrible depression looming in the western dioceses made Morrison determined to stay clear of any such occurrence in Antigonish.<sup>82</sup> As well, Coady would later write, "There was also the question of how people would respond."<sup>83</sup> The clergy-intellectuals were banking on the belief that Morrison would not want to allow any society not under his direct control, to begin such a project.<sup>84</sup> In this sense, the proposal of

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<sup>78</sup> STFXUA, Extension Department Papers (hereafter EDP), Moses M. Coady to R.J. MacSween, 24 March 1953, RG 30-2/1/2963.

<sup>79</sup> STFXUA, Scottish Catholic Society of Canada Papers (hereafter SCSCP), RG/13/SC/F1.

<sup>80</sup> STFXUA, SCSCP, 3 November 1928, RG/13/SC/F2.

<sup>81</sup> STFXUA, SCSCP, Morrison to J.H. MacNeil, 31 January 1930, RG 13/SC/F3.

<sup>82</sup> In 1931, the Canadian Catholic church requested that each diocese contribute to paying off some of the enormous debt of the Diocese of Regina. Antigonish gave \$10,000 over a period of 5 years.

<sup>83</sup> Moses M. Coady, *Master's of Their Own Destiny* (New York: Harper's Brothers, 1939), 13.

<sup>84</sup> Many years later, Coady wrote that while Morrison was very favourable towards the idea of extension work, his cautious nature would never have allowed him to start such a movement. According to Coady, Morrison and university president, Rt. Rev. Dr. Hugh P. MacPherson, would have considered extension to be a "dangerous new venture" and the "economic obstacles in the way would, in the minds of these two men, block it

the SCSC to get into extension work did scare Morrison into action, as it forced the bishop's hand. When the St. F.X. Alumni Association came before the Board of Governors to force the issue, Morrison pressed the Governors to get into extension work "before another institution did so."<sup>85</sup> Eventually the SCSC agreed to step back and allow the university, under the guidance of Coady to take over the work.<sup>86</sup>

Although enthusiastic about the new department within his college, the bishop's prudent nature was again apparent when he asked Coady "if he thought it could make a go?"<sup>87</sup> In the end it was the persuasion of the prominent Catholic lawyer, Neil McArthur who told Morrison "we have no definite ideas about finance, but I think we can take for granted that if we do something worthwhile for the people, we will easily get remuneration."<sup>88</sup> This finally convinced Morrison to go ahead with extension. The extension department at St. F.X. came about through the actions of clergy who recognized that they would have to push the bishop if they wanted success. Morrison was not a man to move mountains and his cautiousness was frustrating, however, once he was convinced that the department could be a success, he offered no objections.

Morrison approached the new extension department in the same way that he had the People's School and the Rural Conferences. He kept a watchful eye on what was happening but stood by and allowed his clergy the room to work. He displayed a willingness to give his advice and his influence to the majority of the ideas that flowed out of the department. When Tompkins wanted the prime minister to appoint Prince Edward Island native Cyrus MacMillan, as the first federal minister of fisheries, Morrison was only too happy to help with his influence. Afterwards he wrote to Tompkins, "I may say that a letter has gone forward to the Prime Minister along the lines you suggest. I take it that the Fishermen's unions themselves are taking active measures with the Ottawa authorities in support of the same proposition."<sup>89</sup> Morrison shared the optimism that the farmers and fishermen would quickly realize the necessity of meeting the new conditions and circumstances of their respective industries, so that they might achieve a reasonable return for their labours.<sup>90</sup> The results were swift;

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during their lifetime." STFXUA, EDP, Moses M. Coady to R.J. MacSween, 24 March 1953, RG 30-2/1/2963.

<sup>85</sup> STFXUA, St. Francis Xavier University Board of Governors Meeting Minutes, 14 January 1930.

<sup>86</sup> STFXUA, SCSCP, RG/13/SC/F9. The society did not raise the \$100,000 that it had originally proposed but instead made a donation of \$1000 to the university extension department.

<sup>87</sup> STFXUA, EDP, Moses M. Coady to Mr. R.J. MacSween, 24 March 1953, RG 30-2/1/2963.

<sup>88</sup> STFXUA, Interview with Rev. Michael Gillis, recorded in 1967. Rev. Michael Gillis commented that the bishop always listened very attentively to what laymen had to say and was not as easily impressed when a priest spoke.

<sup>89</sup> ADA, BMP, Morrison to James Tompkins, 8 March 1929, letter #16790.

<sup>90</sup> ADA, BMP, Morrison to J.A. Decoste, 19 December 1929, letter #16428.

money came in from the diocese to support the building of cooperatives in Canso, and by 1930, Tompkins was able to report to the bishop “it looks as if we have the fish barons beaten.”<sup>91</sup> Morrison wanted changes in the industrial areas as well. Writing Tompkins, he argued that the capitalist system eventually would need to be overhauled and that the sooner it came the better for the community at large.<sup>92</sup>

While Morrison stood aside and allowed his most progressive priests to handle the Extension Department, his personal influence is extremely evident in some of the philosophy of the movement. The Extension ethos promoted the need for individuals to help themselves, something that Morrison, who harboured a strong distaste for welfareism, believed in strongly.<sup>93</sup> Morrison saw the department as more than a tool for economic progress and considered it useful for drawing Catholic immigrants into the rural areas, where they would be free from urban atheistic influences. For Catholics who remained in the urban areas, the movement was a stabilizer; a tool with which the diocese could offset communism. By 1932, the Duncan Commission on the State of the Coal Industry in the Maritime Provinces released its report, which painted a bleak picture of the industry’s future. Morrison, convinced that the industrial areas were near collapse, pressed the provincial government to make plans to assist the many miners who would make it back to the farms too late to plant a crop.<sup>94</sup> Morrison’s belief in the collapse of industry was premature, but he was so convinced that he began instructing parish priests in the industrial areas to clear their debt so that it would be gone before the parish was closed.<sup>95</sup> Morrison had a romantic view of the rural lifestyle and his insistence on rural repopulation pushed the Extension Department to discuss the idea of a colonization association that would try and accomplish that task. The clergy and laity who worked with the Extension Department were not active in partisan politics, precisely because Morrison forbade them from taking any active participation, warning his priests that no one should make “political capital out of our social educational endeavours.”<sup>96</sup>

He dismissed the possible association between the Extension Department and the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF). In a letter to a CCF official in Ontario, Morrison stressed “Catholic action undertaken by the Catholic priests in this part of the country is solely on its own merits, and has no association whatever either directly or indirectly with the CCF or any other political party.”<sup>97</sup> When Extension field worker Alex MacIntyre was accused of campaigning for the CCF in Cape Breton,

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<sup>91</sup> ADA, BMP, James J. Tompkins to Bishop James Morrison, 11 February 1930, incoming letter #16507.

<sup>92</sup> ADA, BMP, Morrison to James Tompkins, 4 November 1932, letter #18959.

<sup>93</sup> ADA, BMP, Morrison circular, 26 September 1931, letter #17993.

<sup>94</sup> ADA, BMP, Morrison to G.S. Harrington, 16 March 1932, letter #18482.

<sup>95</sup> ADA, BMP, Morrison to Miles Tompkins, 28 April 1932, letter #18594.

<sup>96</sup> ADA, BMP, Morrison to Leo J. Keats, 25 September 1933, letter #19789.

<sup>97</sup> ADA, BMP, Morrison to James McKenzie, 25 September 1933, letter #19790.

Morrison ordered a full investigation. This was a signal that the department, like the church itself, was above partisan politics and that its active members were to be Catholics first.<sup>98</sup>

By the middle of the 1930s, the bad blood that existed between Morrison and Tompkins over the federation debate was subsiding. As Tompkins' friend and biographer, George Boyle, wrote, there were "instances of good will between the bishop and Tompkins, despite their former disagreements."<sup>99</sup> Time had softened some of the bad feeling between the two men and they began to seek each others' council on matters pertinent to the diocese. Tompkins' successes in Canso were well known and Morrison expressed his pleasure at Tompkins work.<sup>100</sup> Their increased correspondence also suggests that Morrison had been influenced by Tompkins' philosophy. In one letter, Morrison told the priest, "it can scarcely be wondered at that the whole capitalist system is being placed on trial before the public conscience," and that it certainly needed a "fundamental overhauling."<sup>101</sup> In one moment of candour, Morrison praised Tompkins for his work on behalf of the people of the diocese, writing, "I need not tell you how pleased I am that you continue to maintain an unfailing interest in the improvement of these conditions, and that as far as circumstances permit, you are making a real effort to remedy this situation."<sup>102</sup> In 1932, Tompkins requested financial help in order to secure members of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Martha in Antigonish to move to Canso to aid his work. The bishop not only supported this drive but also secretly promised \$1000 of his own money as assistance. They also began corresponding on political and economic matters. Many of Tompkins' letters warn Morrison of communist activities and of newspaper and magazine articles that the former deemed too extreme.<sup>103</sup> In December of 1933, Tompkins requested that he be able to leave Canso for Bethany to act as chaplain to the Marthas; Morrison offered no objections. Understating the complicated relationship between the two men is rather important as it has historically been misrepresented and misunderstood. There were still philosophical differences to be sure; however, their goal of building a stronger and healthier church through economic and social reform remained unchanged.

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<sup>98</sup> ADA, BMP, Morrison to H.P. MacPherson, 30 March 1933, letter #19418.

<sup>99</sup> Boyle, *Tompkins*, 147.

<sup>100</sup> ADA, BMP, Morrison to James J. Tompkins, 28 November 1932, letter #19029.

<sup>101</sup> ADA, BMP, Morrison to James J. Tompkins, 4 November 1932, letter #18959.

<sup>102</sup> ADA, BMP, Morrison to James J. Tompkins, 28 November 1932, letter #19029.

<sup>103</sup> In October of 1933, Tompkins sent Morrison *The Catholic Worker* (Volume one, #5) which contained articles that Tompkins felt were too radical. Morrison wrote back to Tompkins, "I quite agree with you that it is rather extreme and radical." ADA, BMP, Morrison to James Tompkins, 23 October 1933, letter #19842.

In the 1930s the diocese continued to work towards its vision of economic and social justice but remained committed to Morrison's goal of remaining debt-free. Along with involvement through the Extension Department the diocese continued to support its hospitals and orphanages. The Sisters of St. Martha were engaging in various social tasks including the operation of a social work agency in Holy Redeemer Parish in Whitney Pier, Cape Breton. Morrison supported all diocesan projects but worried constantly over debt. In 1934, although the economy had not yet improved, Morrison asked the people of the diocese to give money to support the work of the Extension Department. The \$16,000 a year it was costing the diocese to run the department was considerable. In a circular Morrison stressed that the department was not offering mere platitudes or theoretical ideas, but was tackling social and economic problems at the root.<sup>104</sup> This statement was a clear indication of how far the diocese had progressed since 1912, and Morrison himself represented this transformation. He was certainly a believer in the actions of his clergy and was seen as a firm supporter of their work. Although it has been argued that Morrison was aloof from the actions of the Extension priests, many of the clergy during the period saw them as one and the same. Rev. Stanley Macdonald of Cape Breton wrote his brother, Premier Angus L. Macdonald, that Morrison and Coady were only "concerned with maintaining the status quo and the Antigonish supremacy."<sup>105</sup> Rev. MacDonald argued that "Coady and A.B. MacDonald want men who will sit at their feet and slobber over them," and that real extension work could not begin until there was a bishop in Cape Breton.<sup>106</sup> Regardless of the legitimacy of Macdonald's charges, it is evident that Morrison was clearly regarded as being close to the leaders of the Extension Department and those priests on the outside looking in did not see a division between Morrison and the Extension workers.

The crowning moment for Morrison and indeed the diocese as a whole came in 1938. In that year the co-operative membership was over 100,000, there were over 142 credit unions, 11 fish plants and 17 lobster canneries in operation.<sup>107</sup> This work did not go unnoticed and in the late spring of 1938, the diocese received word that the Pope Pius XI had favourably recognized the work of the Extension Department with an apostolic benediction. An elated Morrison wrote to the Apostolic Delegate:

The distinguished communication from so eminent a source is surely an inspiration for all who have at heart the religious, moral and economic welfare of the community at large, and will be productive of many salutary results throughout the country in general, and wherever the message is known.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> ADA, BMP, Morrison Circular, 30 July 1934, letter #20482.

<sup>105</sup> PANS, ALMP, Stanley Macdonald to Angus L. Macdonald, unspecified date, October 1937, F422/18.

<sup>106</sup> PANS, ALMP, Stanley Macdonald to Angus L. Macdonald, unspecified date, October 1937, F422/25.

<sup>107</sup> Alexander, *The Antigonish Movement*, 88.

<sup>108</sup> ADA, BMP, Morrison to Umberto Mozzoni, 12 April 1938, letter #23626.

It was an important moment for Morrison and his clergy and represented the recognition of lifelong achievement in Antigonish. The papal affirmation came in Morrison's seventy-seventh year and one year short of his fiftieth in the priesthood. He had experienced, as a young priest, the difficulties that a diocese could face when it was administered by an elderly bishop and such an honour from Rome would have presented him with a good opportunity to retire honourably. This, however, did not happen and his decision to stay on hurt his historical image and more importantly the progression of the St. F.X. Extension Department and the diocese.



Bishop Morrison, Blessing the new bells at Immaculate Conception Church, Bridgeport Cape Breton, 1949  
St. Francis Xavier, University Archives

By 1945, Morrison's episcopate had reached thirty-four years and he was slowing down. His final years in Antigonish seemed long and frustrating for those priests who were anxious to push the extension work to even greater heights. It was these final years that helped contribute to the bishop's image as an obstinate conservative. The Antigonish Movement was famous and Morrison happily watched as many of his former clergy were made bishops in other parts of the country.<sup>109</sup> However, many people both inside and outside the diocese wanted a change and Morrison's promotion to a personal Archbishop in 1944, which for him came like a "bolt from the blue," was a move made with the hope that he would step

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<sup>109</sup> Rev. John Hugh MacDonald, Bishop of Victoria, 1934; Rev. John R. MacDonald, Bishop of Peterborough, Ontario, June 1942; James Boyle, Bishop of Charlottetown, March, 1944; George Leo Landry, Bishop of Hearst, January, 1946.

aside for a younger bishop.<sup>110</sup> It did not work, and Morrison caused considerable frustration for his priests and his new co-adjutor bishop, John R. MacDonald, by remaining in complete control, refusing to give up any responsibilities. Many priests in the diocese, especially the younger ones, hoped that MacDonald would be given more responsibility but Morrison refused to budge. When MacDonald told Morrison that some of the priests wanted MacDonald to have more jurisdictions, Morrison asked, “And who are they?”<sup>111</sup>

From 1946, until his death in 1950, Morrison remained fairly inactive. Although he moved around fairly well, he was but a shell of his former self and became cantankerous and aloof. Unfortunately for Morrison, this image of him remained with many of the younger and future leaders of the movement. One of Dr. Coady’s young assistants, Sister Irene Doyle, recalled that they “saw Morrison, through Bishop John R. MacDonald’s eyes and that they knew very little of his previous actions.”<sup>112</sup> It was this picture of Morrison as inactive and conservative; his vim and vigour of youth long forgotten that was portrayed after his death in April of 1950.

Bishop James Morrison was arguably the most important prelate in the history of the Diocese of Antigonish. The Antigonish Movement defines Morrison’s career. He was in many ways a paradox. Although he represented the last of the powerful, austere Catholic bishops, he also accepted the changing role of the church within Canadian society. Morrison was not a charismatic man, he was not beloved, and could be difficult and aloof. However, he allowed the St. F. X. Extension Department and later the Antigonish Movement to work within the boundaries of his diocese; he lent his priests to endeavours outside the diocese and generally left the clergy-intellectuals to complete their work. The question must then arise as to why James Morrison does not play a prominent role in the literature of the movement? Perhaps, more importantly, why is Morrison remembered so negatively?<sup>113</sup> The Antigonish Movement has different meanings to many people. Certainly, there is a great deal of hagiography, especially where Tompkins and Coady are concerned. Where there is a saint, there must also be a sinner, and Morrison fits the role perfectly. The evidence is clear, however, that while Morrison and Tompkins had very pronounced philosophical differences, they were able to overcome them to some extent, and

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<sup>110</sup> The title of Personal Archbishop made Morrison an Archbishop in honorary terms only. He did not receive the powers and responsibilities that normally come with the title. Nearing, *He Loved the Church*, 56.

<sup>111</sup> Nearing, *He Loved the Church*, 63.

<sup>112</sup> Interview with Sister Irene Doyle, Bethany, Antigonish, May, 2005.

<sup>113</sup> In Michael Welton’s biography of Morrison, he writes “Morrison wanted to put a stop to the reform impulses in his troubled diocese.” See Welton, *Little Mosie from the Margaree*, 41. A senior essay, winner of a 2002 Canadian Studies award at Yale University, surmises that Bishop Morrison “ironically swallowed his conservative leanings and dislike of Jimmy Tompkins to promote a progressive movement he distrusted.” See, Jacob Remes, *The Conservative Origins of Progressive Social Change: Catholics, Communists, and Cooperatives in Cape Breton*, (Unpublished Senior Essay, Yale University, 2002.)

in doing so ensured the success of their endeavours. In recognizing the generally good relationship between Morrison and Tompkins, Morrison's role in the implementation and maintenance of the movement becomes clearer, as do the motives behind the Antigonish Movement itself. While unique in many ways, the Antigonish Movement cannot be separated from the theological position of the Catholic church in the early twentieth century. By recognizing Morrison's generally good relationship with Tompkins, his cautious support for the work of the Extension Department and most of the social and economic reforms brought about during his episcopate, the movement and the bishop present a different image – one in which the Antigonish diocese emerged as a leader of Canadian Catholic social action along “safe and sane lines.”