

The People's University of the Air: St. Francis Xavier University Extension, Social Christianity, and the Creation of CJFX

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Des historiens de la radiotélévision ont déterminé que des règlements du gouvernement qui limitaient la propriété des licences de radiodiffusion et la programmation par des groupes religieux ont réussi à restreindre l'influence de la religion sur les ondes publiques au Canada. De telles affirmations s'appuient sur des preuves tirées principalement de l'examen des archives de Radio-Canada et non de diffuseurs privés, qui étaient beaucoup plus nombreux au Canada. À Antigonish, en Nouvelle-Écosse, les prêtres-professeurs de la St. Francis Xavier University créèrent une station de radio privée, CJFX, qui leur permit dans les faits de propager les principes des enseignements sociaux catholiques à un vaste auditoire (ce qui porte à croire que les groupes religieux faisaient un usage plutôt créatif des médias).

Broadcast historians have identified government regulations restricting the ownership of broadcast licenses and programming by religious groups as having successfully limited the influence of religion on the public airwaves in Canada. Evidence for such claims has been derived primarily from the examination of the archives of the CBC and not from private broadcasters, who were far more numerous in Canada. In Antigonish, Nova Scotia, the priest-professors at St. Francis Xavier University established a private radio station, CJFX, which effectively allowed them to propagate the principles of Catholic social teaching to large listenership (suggesting that religious groups were quite creative in their use of media).

SINCE THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMERCIAL RADIO, Canadian broadcast regulators have been wary of religious groups and their programming – sometimes for good reason. In the pioneering days of Canadian radio in the 1920s, religious groups regarded the new medium as “a means to continue a significant cultural presence in smaller towns and cities.”¹ Marshalling their resources behind evangelization through the new electronic pulpit, Canada's churches, both Protestant and Catholic, created religious talk shows, news programs, music hours, and radio

¹ Robert S. Fortner, *Radio, Morality and Culture in Britain, Canada and the United States, 1919-1945* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), 159.

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sermons as well as broadcasting live church services. Denominations with colleges in secular universities used the airwaves to offer educational programming on religious, historical, and sociological themes.² By 1930 several Christian denominations – Congregationalists, Baptists, the United Church, Christian Missionary Alliance, Roman Catholics, and Jehovah’s Witnesses – had gone so far as to apply for and were granted licenses either to broadcast on their own frequencies or to use the facilities of others as part-time “phantom stations.” There was, however, also a darker side to the new religious interest in radio. By the late 1920s religiously inspired radio programming emerged as a new weapon with which one religious group could bludgeon another. While most religious broadcasts were genial and perhaps non-controversial, the programming and tactics demonstrated by some groups, such as International Bible Students or Jehovah’s Witnesses, eventually led to the loss of their five licenses and raised questions about the federal government’s rights to censure religious broadcasting as well as the propriety of controversial broadcasting on the public airwaves in general.³

One result of the controversy over religious broadcasts was the federal government’s establishment, in 1928, of the Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting, headed by Sir John Aird. Although it was religious controversy engendered by the Witnesses’ “on air” criticism of other Christians that had, in part, sparked the creation of the Aird Commission, the finished report, one year later, described the relationship between broadcasting and religion in only a general way. The commissioners emphasized the importance of Canadian content on Canadian radio, while also envisioning radio as a potential agent for national unity. They recommended the creation of a national, publicly funded network akin to that of the British Broadcasting Commission (BBC), and allowed for the continued existence of private commercial stations.⁴ But in terms of religious programming, they simply recommended that “the representative bodies . . . advise upon the question of programs . . . to deal with religious services, and it would be for them to decide whatever might be deemed expedient in this respect. We would emphasize, however, the importance of applying some regulations which would prohibit statements of a controversial nature and debar a speaker making an attack upon the leaders or doctrine of another religion.”⁵ In 1932 the Canadian Radio Broadcasting

2 “University of Alberta Radio Program Station CKUA,” License CKUA, Edmonton, RG97, vol. 154, file 6206-176, Department of Marine and Fisheries, Library and Archives Canada (LAC); St. Stephen’s College and St. Joseph’s College, Programming, CKUA Fonds, RG 16, file 75-105 – Radio and TV Department Files, University of Alberta Archives.

3 James Penton, *The Jehovah’s Witnesses in Canada: Champions of Freedom and Worship* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1976), 94-110; Mary Vipond, *Listening In: The First Decade of Canadian Broadcasting, 1922-1932* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992), 196-204; Margaret Prang, “The Origins of Public Broadcasting in Canada,” *Canadian Historical Review* 46, no. 1 (March 1965): 4.

4 Roger Bird, ed., “Aird Commission Report,” in *Documents of Canadian Broadcasting* (Ottawa, ON: Carleton University Press, 1988), 42, 48, 50. See also Simon J. Potter, “Britishness, the BBC, and the Birth of Canadian Public Broadcasting, 1928-1936,” in *Communicating in Canada’s Past: Essays in Media History*, ed. Gene Allen and Daniel J. Robinson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 78-108.

5 Bird, “Aird Commission Report,” 50. It should be noted that such regulations did not apply to Newfoundland and Labrador, which did not join Canada until 1949. Religious groups had been

Commission was born – forerunner to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) – and it would serve as a programmer as well as regulator for the industry until the creation of the Bureau of Broadcast Governors (BBG) in the late 1950s. The new regulator would no longer permit religious groups to own their own broadcast licenses, thus setting a precedent continued by its successor regulators – the CBC, the BBG, and the Canadian Radio and Television Commission (CRTC) – until the recent CRTC concessions permitting ownership of digital television services by religious groups.⁶ Such prohibitions of religious groups holding broadcasting licenses stood in sharp contrast to the American free market in broadcasting, which included religious licensees cheek-by-jowl with other commercial broadcasters.⁷

From a historiographical perspective, the lack of a profound presence of religious organizations as owner-players in Canadian broadcasting has had a significant effect on the way historians have addressed the relationship between broadcasting, regulation, and religion. Until recently, the lack of “religious” stations might lead observers to conclude that the religious influence and impact on broadcasting in Canada was minimal. In his recent comparative work on radio and religion in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom, Robert Fortner concluded that, in the final analysis, “the role of the church as a champion of moral positions in the development of Canadian radio was largely irrelevant.” He also adds that “there was no grand expectation of the medium” and “no philosophers in Canada concerned enough to articulate a set of moral values it might fulfill.” He concludes that the church “was merely another interest group, little different from labour unions, women’s organizations, or farmer’s co-operatives.” The assumption that underlies Fortner’s analysis is that, in Canada, churches lacked effectiveness in asserting their power over the new medium because there were no constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech or freedom of the press and because the central government remained cold to a

integral to the establishment of radio in Newfoundland, particularly VOWR – the Voice of Wesley Radio. VOWR had provided a balanced and non-controversial program format, and Newfoundland legislators thought there was no need for strict government regulation of religious programming in the province. Subsequently, VOWR was left untouched by Canadian regulations prohibiting the ownership of a radio station by a religious group and it retained its call letters when Newfoundland joined Confederation. See Jeff A. Webb, *The Voice of Newfoundland: A Social History of the Broadcasting Corporation of Newfoundland, 1939-1949* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 18-19, and “Broadcasting,” *Encyclopaedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, vol. 1 (St. John’s, NL: Newfoundland Book Publishers, 1981), 267-8.

6 Since the new digital services on Canadian television must be purchased by individual viewers, it has been assumed by the regulator that only those who approve of the denominational viewpoints of the broadcaster in question will subscribe to the service, hence avoiding any offense to unsuspecting viewers. Had broadcast outlets owned directly by religious groups been permitted on the old analogue dial (channels 2-13) or basic cable, it would mean all subscribers would be subject to this one religious viewpoint. Vision Television and Crossroads Television (CTS), however, have accepted the CRTC guidelines to provide balanced programming, including many faith perspectives, on what are essentially religious channels.

7 Dorothy Zolf and Paul W. Taylor, “Redressing the Balance in Canadian Broadcasting: A History of Religious Broadcasting Policy in Canada,” *Studies in Religion / Sciences religieuses* 18, no. 2 (June 1989): 157.

religious presence on the publicly owned radio network.⁸ Without such guarantees embedded in the political and legal culture, churches appeared to be in a more tenuous position in securing airtime in Canada (especially on the CBC).

This latter point underlines a second problem in discussing religious broadcasting and the way in which Canadian historians have done their work in the field. Some of the most easily accessed archives on the issue are the CBC fonds and the papers of related ministries with jurisdiction over radio (Fisheries and Communications) at Library and Archives Canada, and the documents contained therein tend to emphasize tight government regulation of religious programming under Regulation 7c, carefully controlled and balanced religious broadcasting under the auspices of the National Religious Advisory Council, and the consistent refusal given to any denominations who sought their own licenses.⁹ These collections are extensive and easily accessible, but they are very limited in addressing the creative and, perhaps, deceptive ways in which religious groups reached those who were “listening in.” Moreover, the CRBC and its successor the CBC, although the national regulators of broadcasting (until 1958), constituted only a small segment of the actual broadcast programming in Canada. The plethora of private stations that covered the airwaves from Sydney, Nova Scotia, to Victoria, British Columbia, were the principal carriers of religious programming, which was as varied in its content and delivery as the communities within which the broadcasts were produced and eventually heard. In Quebec, the CBC came to realize that the Catholic Church had a huge influence on programming across the province and, in some regions of the province, the Church had easy access to the airwaves to broadcast whatever it wished – with impunity.¹⁰

8 Fortner, *Radio, Morality and Culture in Britain, Canada and the United States*, 178, 163, 159. Other historians of early Canadian broadcasting provide little information about the engagement of religion and broadcasting that would refute Fortner’s claims. After having described the religious controversy that served as one of the catalysts for the calling of the Aird Commission, historians of Canadian radio contribute little to deepen the discussion of how religious broadcasting evolved. Most authors, should they mention religion at all, are implicit in their assumption that, after 1932, religious groups were regulated into passivity. See, for example, E. Austin Weir, *The Struggle For National Broadcasting in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1965), 100-3, 187-8. Weir considers Sir Henry Thornton, president of the Canadian National Railway (CNR), as setting the regulatory precedent in the mid-1920s, when he was disgusted by a broadcast by the Loyal Orange Lodge on one of the railway’s flagship stations, CNRO in Ottawa, and subsequently banned broadcasts by religious or quasi-religious groups on the CNR network. See also T.J. Allard, *Straight Up: Private Broadcasting in Canada, 1918-1958* (Ottawa, ON: The Communications Foundation, 1979), 20-6, 59-64; Frank Peers, *The Politics of Canadian Broadcasting, 1920-1951* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), 257-61; and Mark Raboy, *Missed Opportunities: The Story of Canada’s Broadcasting Policies* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1990), 22, 51-2. Raboy discusses the backlash against French-language programming, which was perceived by most Protestant extremists as a means of “Catholic” broadcasting operating in English Canada with impunity.

9 See Mark G. McGowan, “Air Wars: Radio Regulation, Sectarianism, and Religious Broadcasting in Canada, 1922-1938,” *Canadian Society of Church History Papers* (2008): 5-26.

10 Internal Memo from E.S. Hallman, VP Programming, to President and others, 29 June 1967, RG41, vol. 910, file PG 11-6 Comité consultatif national pour les émissions religieuses, 1962-67, LAC; Hallman Memo, 11 September 1967, file 1956-1965, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops Archives (CCCBA), Ottawa; E. Michaud, Memo on CCN, 14 March 1968, file 1956-1965, CCCBA; Robert Elie, Director, Presse et d’information to Rev Jules Godin, 26 June 1956, file 1956-1965, CCCBA. The formation of Radio-Canada is outlined in Alain Canuel, « Les avatars

Religious broadcasts could also be cleverly embedded within regular programming, particularly radio serial dramas. In Quebec, *Un homme et son péché*, based on Claude-Henri Grignon's novel, ran nightly from 1947 to 1964 and was the Montreal region's most-listened-to radio program. Set in a Laurentian village, the serial was a stage upon which Catholic values and Quebec traditions were defended by the local curé (Msgr Raudin), particularly against Séraphin Poudrier, the village miser and a virtual Quebec archetype for Ebenezer Scrooge.¹¹ This "implicit religion" was evident across Canada in both locally produced programs and in nationally syndicated shows.¹² For the historian, however, the task of bringing these cases to light is labour-intensive and selective, with the researcher having to make a choice of which private stations to examine as well as the added problem of securing the good will of local station owners and managers in order to access their archives. And even if granted entry to the collections held by private stations, a researcher would often be frustrated by the lack of cataloguing or inventories, uneven policies of record retention, and the lack of preservation and conservation of historical materials. By comparison, researching the LAC collection is a far easier undertaking for researchers of religion and broadcasting. But while government records reveal an important part of the historical encounter between religious groups and broadcast regulators, it is only part of the story.

The case of the founding of CJFX Radio in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, is one example of how a religious denomination managed to repackage its educational programs and religiously inspired social doctrine and create its own radio forum. In 1943, the priest-professors of St. Francis Xavier University (St. FX), in association with the Sisters of St. Martha as well as both Catholic and non-Catholic allies across eastern Nova Scotia, managed to secure a radio license for CJFX under the auspices of it being primarily an educational station. While on the surface the programming day at CJFX would come to look very much like any other private commercial station in Canada (with a mixture of entertainment, news, and sports), in actuality much of its educational programming was the application of Catholic social teaching as embodied in the encyclical letters of Pope Leo XIII and Pius IX as well as an expansion of the social programs that had been offered by the university's Extension Department (established in 1928) and led by its founder, Father Moses Michael Coady. While the Catholic Church did not own CJFX, nor did it apply for its own license, the station was clearly in the hands of the priests and laity of the university, and its broadcast day contained elements of both explicit religious programming (overtly devotional and doctrinally focused shows) and implicit religious programming (religious principles lay beneath the surface of information and lectures provided in programs). While not technically in violation of the policies prohibiting religious licensees as established by the regulatory arm of the CBC, the founding of CJFX exemplifies the ingenuity of some religious groups in bringing their message to a broad audience in spite of government regulation. Moreover, it also demonstrates the creativity of religious groups in adapting a traditional pedagogy of

de la radio publique d'expression française au Canada 1932-1939 », *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 51, no. 3 (hiver 1998), pp. 327-56.

11 International Surveys Ratings Books, Montreal, 1953-59, RG 41, vol. 510-12, LAC.

12 A good discussion of the radio-romance and religion in Quebec can be found in Renée Legris, « L'institution ecclésiale et les structures de l'idéologie chrétienne dans les radioromans et les dramatisations historiques (1935-1975) », *Études d'histoire religieuse* 68 (2002), pp. 41-56.

formal lectures, pamphlets, and printed texts to a new technology and, by means of this new broadcasting technology, taking their educational mission to a broader audience.

CJFX radio was a product of the Antigonish Movement, which essentially was the pioneering effort of the personnel of the Extension Department at St. FX to bring the principles of co-operation to realization among the miners, fishermen, farmers, and woods workers of the Maritimes. These efforts to apply Catholic social teachings to the working class life sought both to limit the exploitation of workers by the owners of industry, merchants, and middlemen and to stave off the influence of socialism among miners and steelworkers. Inspired principally by Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical letter *Rerum Novarum* (*On the Condition of the Working Classes*) as well as the British co-operative movement (which saw the establishment of the first modern co-operative in 1844 in Rochdale), Coady and his cousin, Father James "Jimmy" Tompkins, allied with their colleagues at the Extension Department, packaged a set of principles that promoted popular education, the dignity of the worker, the pursuit of a living wage, the necessity of worker associations, and the building of co-operative ventures in order to eliminate the exploitation of workers in primary industries. In his landmark book *Masters of Their Own Destiny*, Coady described adult education for the "masses" as the key to economic change and the surest way to assure an "abundant life" for all:

It is based on the principle that an educational program, if it is to yield permanent benefits, must be shaped to fit the needs of specific groups, each having common interests. The Antigonish Movement is founded on the idea that the learner is most important in the educative process. The educator must take men and groups of men where he finds them, and work with their background, interests and capabilities.

For Coady, co-operation was something deeply grounded in religion; people of faith, who were imbued with Christian charity, would eschew the "jungle ethics" of the marketplace and build an alternative to an economy that extolled the survival of the fittest.¹³ Inspired by their own faith and a desire to reform capitalism, the priest-professors at St. FX, who had established the "People's School" in 1921, worked with Extension staff to create a widespread network of study clubs that assisted farmers, fishermen, miners, and woods workers in studying the often-dire economic situation that they faced and how the principles of co-operation could be used to bring forth collective, co-operative solutions. By 1938, the Extension Department of St. FX had established 1,110 study clubs, 142 credit unions, 17 co-operative lobster canneries, 39 co-operative stores, 11 co-operative fish plants, and enlisted over 10,000 members of the "movement" across Eastern Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and the Magdalen Islands.¹⁴

13 Moses Michael Coady, *Masters of Their Own Destiny* (New York: Harper and Row, 1939), 1, 143-53.

14 Anne Alexander, *The Antigonish Movement: Moses Coady and Adult Education Today* (Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, 1997), 88; Jim Lotz and Michael Welton, *Father Jimmy: Life and Times of Jimmy Tompkins* (Wreck Cove, NS: Breton Books, 1997), 44-52, 107-14; James D. Cameron, *For the People: A History of St. Francis Xavier University* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 196-235.

The Extension Department's growing educational and co-operative influence was sustained by the intensive labour of Extension staff, religious, and volunteers and was dependent entirely upon a flow of paper (texts, pamphlets, and workbooks) and personnel from the Extension Department into the countryside and back. This infusion of Catholic social teaching into practical life applications was essentially working within a traditional print culture and had not been advanced by experimentation with the new media agencies that were increasingly available in Canada; but this traditional approach was soon to change. In the mid-1930s, several priests of the Diocese of Antigonish had become openly critical of what they considered to be the poor quality of religious programming produced by the only radio station in eastern Nova Scotia (CJCB in Sydney).¹⁵ Around the same time, Coady and then-rector and president of St. Francis Xavier University, Father D.J. MacDonald, began to discuss the possibility of turning the "People's School" into the "University of the Air." With the help of J. Clyde Nunn, a lay radio broadcaster and alumnus of the university,¹⁶ and priest-professor Joseph A. MacDonald, St. FX administrators created a plan by which the Catholic university could move beyond its current limitations and, through radio, bring the co-operative message to a world mired in a "pagan philosophy of life." According to the rector, "We could do our bit to counteract this pernicious philosophy by a fairly strong broadcasting station."¹⁷ Using the arguments that the existing AM station in Sydney, CJCB, was neither sympathetic towards the Catholic Church nor could it consistently deliver its signal south because of signal interruption and distortion due to the Cape Breton Highlands, the St. FX team formulated a proposal to acquire a broadcast license and, in so doing, further the reach of the "applied Christianity" they were propagating through the Extension Department.¹⁸ The application to the CBC Board of Governors claimed that if the prospective station broadcast at a power of 1000 watts its potential listenership would be approximately 185,000 people, which included the citizens of South and Western Cape Breton Island; those of Pictou, Guysborough, Colchester,

15 Cameron, *For the People*, 247. Priests of the diocese had a history of making inroads in social communications. In 1852, a layman, John Boyd, established *The Casket*, a weekly newspaper that served the general interests of eastern Nova Scotia and that was often considered the mouthpiece of the Catholic Church in the region. Priests from the Diocese of Antigonish worked at the *Casket* as publishers, editors, and features writers. In 1881, the Reverend Professor Neil McNeil (later archbishop of Toronto), having perceived a need for a journal that tapped more specifically into Catholic themes, social justice issues, and international Catholic Church news, created and edited *The Aurora*. This weekly newspaper quickly became a popular source of up-to-date information for both the Catholic and non-Catholic residents of eastern Nova Scotia. When *The Aurora* ceased publication in 1885, McNeil became an editorial writer for *The Casket*. See George Boyle, *Pioneer in Purple: The Life and Work of Archbishop Neil McNeil* (Montreal: Palm Publishers, 1951), 22-34, and R.A. MacLean, *The Casket: 1852-1992 – From Gutenberg to the Internet: The Story of a Small Town Weekly* (Antigonish, NS: Casket Printing and Publishing, 1998), 7, 22, 50.

16 Bruce Nunn, "Life was his Podium: A Biography of J. Clyde Nunn" (Bachelor of Arts thesis, St. Francis Xavier University, 1984), 1-2.

17 Dr. D.J. MacDonald, President, to Dr. Alexander Johnston, 25 September 1940, RG5/10/1882, St. Francis Xavier University Archives (SFXUA).

18 Coady, *Masters of Their Own Destiny*, 139-53.

Cumberland, and Antigonish counties on the mainland of Nova Scotia; and even people in sections of Prince Edward Island and the Magdalen Islands.¹⁹

In terms of programming, the application was clear that the new station would be an extension of St. Francis Xavier's educational mandate:

The proposed station will have as its chief objective the offering of programmes of a broadly educational character, which would be directed toward making the people it would serve better citizens and more appreciative of the spiritual, social, and economic advantages of our democratic way of life. Such a programme would have a special significance in the work of social reconstruction which will go on after the war was over. It would facilitate the work of the Extension Department of the University in the field of adult education, economic action, and social reconstruction. This work is the matter of record and has won international recognition.²⁰

This self-proclaimed "University of the Air" promised to fulfill its mission through a litany of projects that included fostering the growth of credit unions, libraries, group housing and other co-operative ventures; sponsorship of women's programs; promotion of local music, sports, and culture; initiation of study clubs for miners; broadcasting of local news and public events; and airing of local dramas and stage productions. Implicit at the heart of the application was the mission of the local Roman Catholic Church and its commitment to Catholic social teaching through the broadcasting of the work of Extension. Key to this mission was "social reconstruction," coincidentally the title of Pope Pius IX's encyclical in 1931 (which provided a scathing criticism of industrial capitalism and an unrepentant condemnation of communism). It is not hard to find Catholic principles of social and economic justice underlying the application's avowed purpose to serve the citizens of Canada and further the democratic way of life. Certainly this element was not lost on Catholics themselves. In 1943, Toronto broadcaster Father Charles Lanphier commented to Rector MacDonald: "I think the Antigonish answer is the best of all for the Post-War period. . . . The Church must give leadership in these matters because we have the best answers to all these problems."²¹

There were two major obstacles within Extension to shifting its emphasis on print media to the radio broadcast medium. First, the university, even though claiming an educational mission for the prospective station, did not intend to engage in a commercial operation under the guise of educational programming (nor would the CBC allow it to do so). Its initial license was simply that of a license to broadcast for educational purposes and not for the raising of revenue.²² Secondly, the Catholic

19 "Application for a License to Build and Operate a Transmitting Station by St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia," 16 November 1940, RG 5/10/9749, SFXUA.

20 "Application for a License to Build and Operate a Transmitting Station by St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia," 16 November 1940, RG 5/10/9749, SFXUA.

21 Letter from Father Charles Lanphier to Rector D.J. MacDonald, 7 July 1943, RG5/10/2076, SFXUA.

22 "Talk Prepared for Father A.A. Johnston, Marking the 20th Anniversary of Atlantic Broadcasting Limited, 10 June 1963," CJFX Archives (CJFXA), CJFX Broadcasting Centre, Antigonish.

character of the founders and the backing of the local institutional Church would run headlong into the longstanding CBC prohibition on approving broadcast licenses for religious groups. In addressing the first issue, in May 1941, the St. Francis Xavier University Board of Governors, with the approval of the Chancellor, Bishop James Morrison of Antigonish, approved the station in principle, but as “a private station run by members of the university.”²³ This required no direct university governance over the station – only the establishment of a separate arms-length corporation to own and manage the station. There was confusion, however, in Ottawa as the CBC was having difficulty sorting out the educational purpose and the commercial implications of the license. The university would have to make it clear that it would provide the educational content for a station that would be independent from the university and privately owned as a commercial venture since, in reality, there was only one standard of license available from the CBC – that being a private commercial license.²⁴

Key to the eventual success of the application was the intercession of two St. FX alumni, the Honourable Angus L. Macdonald and Senator Alexander Johnston. Macdonald had been premier of Nova Scotia and, in 1941, was a member of Prime Minister Mackenzie King's cabinet. Johnston was perhaps even better placed. A former MP and Ottawa mandarin, Johnston had been deputy minister of the Department of Fisheries between 1910 and 1932 and had been in charge of the department's radio branch, which administered radio licensing before the creation of the CRBC. The rector had kept Johnston in the loop regarding the proposed station since 1940, and had asked the alumnus to scout out key men in Ottawa “with regard to the possibility of getting a permit that would allow us to broadcast, for example, national and special advertising.”²⁵ For his part Johnston worked behind the scenes in Ottawa to ease the license application through red tape, including obtaining the support of Gladstone Murray (the general manager of the CBC). Rector MacDonald then approached Angus L. Macdonald to make certain that the designated frequency was not going to cause problems with American broadcasters in border areas.²⁶ Negotiations continued throughout 1941, with the rector, Moses Coady, and J. Clyde Nunn (who also happened to be a member of the Liberal Party and a future candidate) venturing to Ottawa to “sell” the application.²⁷

Another crucial factor to the eventual awarding of the license was the manner in which the Nova Scotian priest-professors stick-handled around the university's ownership of the station and the obvious direct ties of the application to the Roman Catholic Church. In November 1941, Clyde Nunn and some members of the St. FX faculty applied their own co-operative principles and created a “neutral” body that could take ownership of the license.²⁸ With the sanction of Rector MacDonald, the ownership and management of the licensed station would come from a group called Atlantic Broadcasters Limited [ABL], a joint stock company that pooled the

23 Nunn, “Life was his Podium,” 10.

24 Cameron, *For the People*, 247; Nunn, “Life Was His Podium,” 11.

25 D.J. MacDonald to Alexander Johnston, 25 September 1940, RG5/10/1882, SFXUA.

26 Johnston to MacDonald, 6 January 1941 and 2 February 1941, and MacDonald to Johnston, 5 May 1941, RG5/10/1885-7, SFXUA.

27 Nunn, “Life Was His Podium,” 12.

28 Meeting of Atlantic Broadcasting Limited, Morrison Hall, 4 November 1941, CJFXA.

resources of local citizens who bought shares in the company at a price of \$100 each. No shareholder could own more than five shares. The object was to raise the required \$35,000 to pay for the license and then build the facility and produce the intended programs.²⁹ True to the origins of the Antigonish Movement, the initial 323 shareholders came from all walks of life: farmers, school teachers, steel workers, coal miners, barbers, engineers, several labour leaders, and two Jewish theatre owners. The Catholic stamp on the ABL, however, was unmistakable and would be clearly indicated by the large number of clergy, religious, and Catholic laity attending annual shareholders' meetings. The president of ABL and most of the executive were priests. Bishop James Morrison of Antigonish owned shares as did the Sisters of St. Martha, the Congregation of the Sisters of Notre Dame, the local Catholic newspaper *The Casket*, and dozens of clergy, either those serving in parishes or those teaching at St. FX. Of the 35 shareholders in Glace Bay, 7 were priests; in Antigonish County 6 priests were among the 65 shareholders; and at St. FX itself 14 of the 19 shares were held by priests.³⁰ Further Catholic support and influence was exercised by the local members of the Knights of Columbus, the Catholic Women's League, the Ancient Order of Hibernians, parent-teacher associations, and local parishes that donated hundreds of dollars to the station in its early days.³¹ Independent from the university and neutral in terms of its "religion," Atlantic Broadcasters Limited was, however, Catholic in its conception and primarily Catholic in its support; the Reverend Dr. Daniel McCormack was ABL's first president, and a Catholic priest, experienced as an electrician, built the first studio and sound board.³² Nevertheless, on paper it met the CBC criterion and in early 1942 the board of governors of the national regulator issued a commercial license to ABL (which was to work in partnership with St. FX in operating CJFX radio and which would broadcast at 580 kilocycles).³³

On 25 March 1943, with a license in hand and J. Clyde Nunn at the helm as station manager, CJFX in Antigonish went on the air. For an annual fee of around \$4,500, CJFX purchased non-commercial programming from the CBC while also affiliating with the public broadcaster through its Dominion Network. This allowed CJFX to complement its local programming with national news, public affairs programming, and the religious programming produced through the National Religious Advisory Council (NRAC) in Toronto.³⁴ It had been hoped that this national affiliation and the ensuing variety of programs it offered would boost station listenership and in the long

29 Notes of Charles M. Tierney, Programme Director, CJFX, 1954, RG30-3/10/1810-1813, SFXUA.

30 Shareholder Notes, 1947, CJFXA.

31 Letter of Walter Roberts, Radio League of the Diocese of Antigonish, 24 February 1945, CJFXA; CJFX Annual Meeting of Shareholders, 13 April 1943, CJFXA, indicates that the president was Father Daniel McCormack and the meeting was "filled" with priests.

32 Cameron, *For the People*, 248. Father Ernest Clarke, professor of physics, did most of the technical work in the first studio, including the assembly of the first sound board.

33 Agreement Between St. Francis Xavier University and Atlantic Broadcasters Limited, 20 April 1942, CJFXA.

34 Shareholder letter, 17 August 1944, CJFXA. The National Religious Advisory Council of the CBC provided the English language service with advice on religious programs and sponsored Sunday broadcasts of their own, which rotated from denomination to denomination – United Church, Anglican Church, Presbyterian Church, Roman Catholic Church, Baptist Church, and

run enhance general revenues.³⁵ In the station's inaugural broadcast, university president and rector, Father D.L. MacDonald, was clear to his listeners on the importance of this new venture: "Public opinion determines the kind of democracy we shall have. If public opinion is not well informed, democracy is a failure. The members of a democracy should be endowed with social knowledge. . . . Radio will be a great help in moulding public opinion so that democracy will not only be for the people, but by the people."³⁶ Quite simply, CJFX was envisioned by its Catholic founders to be a prophetic agent of social change.

From all external appearances and broadcasts, CJFX's programming day appeared to be like that of any other private radio station: news, weather, sports, special events coverage, local music and culture, and several overtly religious programs and devotional minutes (balanced between Catholic and Protestant programming, with some of it produced locally and the rest provided by the NRAC through its "Church of the Air" and "Catholic Hour" programs).³⁷ Careful examination of the station's program logs over its first decade, however, reveals a significant number of explicitly religious programs, either produced locally or in syndication, that exceeded the CBC's national assessment of religious programming as having only consumed three per cent of air time, when it sampled programming across Canada for the 1943-1944 broadcast year.³⁸ Sermons, concerts, pre-packaged religious hours, and Sunday programming placed CJFX above this national tally when it came to explicitly religious programming.³⁹ Local listeners appeared interested enough in such programming that parish bulletins in the Diocese of Antigonish frequently printed radio schedules for the week, encouraging members of their congregations to listen to distinctively Catholic programming.⁴⁰

In addition to the explicitly religious programs there were those shows that had a religious sub-text, like Father Patrick Peyton's syndicated *Family Theatre* (with its motto "The family that prays together, stays together") as well as programs that were driven by the applied Christianity of the Extension Department and the station's

Evangelical Lutheran Church – on a prearranged formula set by the council members. Protestants shared the "Church of the Air Program" while Catholics had the "Catholic Hour" (which was renamed "The Devotional"). In 1946, and again in 1955, the priest-professors of St. Francis Xavier University, many of whom were actively engaged at CJFX, were invited to present five weeks of programs on the "Catholic Hour." In 1946, the series was called "The Spiritual Foundations of the Nation," and in 1955 the theme was "The Antigonish Way." The lectures were broadcast across Canada on the CBC's Dominion network and were later published for mass distribution. See Charles Lanphier to President and Rector P.J. Nicholson, 8 January 1946, and Nicholson to Lanphier, 2 February 1946, SFXUA, RG5/11/7200-7202. See also H.J. Somers to Charles Lanphier, RG5/12/856, SFXUA. Charles Lanphier, the radio priest featured in the Radio League of St. Michael's broadcasts from Toronto, was one of two Catholic priests sitting on the NRAC.

35 Letter from Clyde Nunn to Father A.A. Johnston, New Waterford, 21 September 1944, CJFXA.

36 "Radio address by President D.J. MacDonald," 25 March 1943, RG5/10/680, SFXUA.

37 Broadcasting Program Logs, 25 March 1943 to 27 March 1943, and 25 February 1950 to 27 February 1950, CJFXA. These are random samples of the logbooks dating back to 1943.

38 Program Statistics, *Program Statistics Magazine*, statistics for April 1943 to 1944, CBC Papers, RG 41, vol. 170, file 11-15, LAC.

39 Program Logs, Samples from 1943 and 1956, CJFXA.

40 Parish Bulletins, RG1874, St. Ninian's Parish Archives, SFXUA.

founders' dream of a "University of the Air." Initially the Extension Department produced a single program called "Labour School of the Air," which appeared twice per week for one half hour each broadcast.⁴¹ The program was produced and hosted by Father J.A. MacDonald, a professor of economics at the university, and was researched and staffed by members of the Extension Department. The broadcasts were supplemented by the organization of at least 15 "listening groups" among steelworkers and miners. Accompanying the broadcasts were printed materials for group discussion to be used locally after the broadcast. The teaching method was straightforward: MacDonald and his students from the university would engage in on-air discussion of a "topic of the day" while the study groups, as guided by a group leader, would continue the discussions locally after the broadcast.⁴² According to Alexander Laidlaw, future director at the station, the radio listening group was "a variation of the study club, using radio broadcasts to disseminate general ideas and to stimulate discussion of vital topics of local interest."⁴³ In this way the "Labour School of the Air" took the adult education methods employed by the Extension Department and its antecedents since 1921 and added to them a radio dimension, which in effect serviced not only the formally organized study clubs off campus but provided information and social teaching to a wider audience whose members might also be potential members of new study clubs. CJFX had become a vehicle through which the co-operative message could be spread widely by the broadcast medium, while being focused locally on the medium of print.

In 1945 and 1946 two new programs appeared and divided the work that had been pioneered by "Labour School of the Air." The first of the new programs was "Life in These Maritimes," which focused on agriculture, the farm economy, the farmer as worker, and the applicability of the principles of social co-operation. Producers drew together 21 weekly broadcasts that began in the autumn, and some of the topics included "Can a Family make a Living on the Farm?" "Why Stay on the Farm?" "Life From the Land," and practical advice on subjects ranging from dairying, woodlots, poultry, chemical fertilizers, small farm enterprises, and rural education. Prior to every broadcast, members of the Extension Department prepared a *Bulletin* to accompany the program, and these were distributed to the 201 discussion groups that met across Nova Scotia and PEI – whose members would listen as a group to the broadcast, discuss the panel that they had heard, and then report back to the Extension Department. In addition, the department distributed over 425 bulletins to individual listeners each week. According to the program's producers: "It is a return to the Socratic method of learning, as opposed to tutorial teaching, and it is probably the only possible way for mass education required by a modern democracy. . . . The radio is a marvellous new technique that should give great impetus to adult learning in this way."⁴⁴

The program was a hit and letters of appreciation poured into the station and the Extension Department from all over eastern Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island,

41 Program Log Book, 1943, CJFXA.

42 Nunn, "Life was his Podium," 24.

43 Alexander Fraser Laidlaw, *The Campus and the Community: The Global Impact of the Antigonish Movement* (Montreal: Harvest House, 1961), 117.

44 Extension Department, "Life in These Maritimes," Report on the 1946-47 series, RG30-3/11/2048, SFXUA.

New Brunswick, and eventually Newfoundland (after the station boosted its power from 1,000 watts to 5,000 watts).⁴⁵ From Ingonish, Cape Breton, one letter writer appeared to be representing the voices of many in the community when he commented “the program had a very large and enthusiastic listening audience in this area and in my opinion it was the finest educational programs ever broadcast by any Radio Station.” Another listener, from Glencoe Mills, Antigonish County, echoed these thoughts with equal enthusiasm: “I wouldn’t miss it for anything as I am trying to farm myself by applying what we get from your broadcasts.” And the priest-professors who created the program were no doubt delighted by the comments of a listener from Newport, PEI, who wrote “your broadcasts we feel are of vital interest and stimulating to agriculturalists and the farming profession everywhere. Your discussions and forums are an earnest of better things to come and a fuller life for all our people.”⁴⁶ In this last phrase, the writer was acknowledging that while the programs were explicitly about farming and fishing, at their core was a more important principle: answering the Gospel’s call for a full and abundant life for all people. It is not surprising, given these testimonials from listeners, that in 1949 “Life in These Maritimes” received an honourable mention in the Canadian Radio Awards in the “Community Service” category and, a year later, it shared the Henry Marshall Tory Award given by the Canadian Association for Adult Education.⁴⁷

The second program that took the place of “Labour School of the Air” was the “People’s School,” which emerged in 1946 as CJFX’s premier Extension Department broadcast targeting urban labourers – specifically steel workers and coal miners in the Sydney area.⁴⁸ The program utilized the study club format evident in “Life in these Maritimes,” remote broadcasts from industrial areas of Cape Breton, and debates and panel discussions on politics. According to program director Charles M. Tierney, the topics selected for the bulletins mailed in advance of the broadcasts on Sunday afternoons were “carefully chosen to give the people the meaning and background of the social and economic conditions and factors which affect their living and livelihood.”⁴⁹ In 1951, for example, listeners were treated to a Sunday evening debate on “Should Canada Outlaw the Communist Party?” Station manager J. Clyde Nunn chaired the debate, while the participants included Freeman Jenkins, president of United Mine Workers District 26 (Glace Bay); Dr. Watson Kirkconnell, president of Acadia University; George MacEachern, Sydney Garage Workers Union; and Allan J. MacEachern, professor of economics, St. Francis Xavier University. The program was a joint university-CJFX production, and the “battle royal” essentially concluded that the Communists should not be banned but should be watched all the same.⁵⁰ The “People’s School” broadcasts on Sundays were more

45 Nomination for Radio Award for “Life in these Maritimes,” 1950, RG30-3/11/2005-2010, SFXUA. The range of the station is identified in CJFX flyer, RG5/12/255a, SFXUA.

46 “Life in these Maritimes, Report on the 1946-47 Series,” RG30-3/11/2054-5, SFXUA.

47 Notes of Alexander Laidlaw, RG30-3/11/2013, SFXUA.

48 It had succeeded “Labour School of the Air” and political programs that featured Economics Professor Allan J. MacEachern, who would eventually abandon his CCF roots and take major cabinet positions in the Pearson and Trudeau Liberal governments in Ottawa.

49 Notes from Charles M. Tierney, Program Director, c.1954, RG30-3/10/1810-13, SFXUA.

50 *Xaverian*, 9 March 1951.

highly politicized than the Monday night broadcasts of “Life in These Maritimes,” with the former program tackling such issues as the recognition of Communist China, the role of the Soviet Union in the Cold War, labour’s right to organize, union security, the future of coal and steel, and the state of international development.⁵¹ The “People’s School” also became a prominent advocate for the building of the Canso Causeway linking Cape Breton Island with the Nova Scotia mainland – citing the many economic advantages it would bring to eastern Nova Scotia.

On the surface, and in reality, “Life in These Maritimes” and the “People’s School” were not religious programs. Nevertheless, they were considered a substantial achievement of the priest-professors who wrote them, produced them, and participated in them on air in the thick of the discussions that were heard throughout the listening region. At the heart of each topic was a principle of Catholic social thought, which sought to provide both a critique of economic and social conditions while offering alternative economic activities to the solutions proposed by western capitalists or revolutionary socialists. The programs were clearly a Catholic enterprise, and embodied a joint commitment by both clergy and laity, mostly within the St. Francis Xavier University community, to reconstruct society in a just, humane, and inherently Christian fashion. CJFX was one tool used by priest-professors and their lay collaborators (J. Clyde Nunn and Allan J. MacEachen among others) to adapt the successful methods of adult education within the Extension Department, and bring them to a new medium where the results might be even more effective because of the size of the audience “listening in.”

During its first decade CJFX managed to do more than just enhance the educational mission of the Extension Department and provide a friendlier voice for religious programming in the region; it also became a training ground for social activists and broadcasters who would make their names outside of Antigonish. As early as 1944, Father G.L. Kane, a professor of English, founded the “Radio Workshop.” Kane saw CJFX as a school in its own right that could “familiarize students with the techniques and methods of modern broadcasting.”⁵² With the strong backing of new university rector and president, Father P.J. Nicolson, Kane created his own program – “University of the Air” – which directly engaged St. FX students by providing practical training in radio technology, sound effects, performance, program production, script writing, and articulation and elocution for on-air announcing.⁵³ Kane also managed to acquire a Rockefeller Foundation grant to send students each summer to the CBS radio workshop in New York. Kane believed profoundly that radio could enhance the educational enterprise, and to that end he frequently represented CJFX at the American Institute for Education by Radio (and was the only representative from private Canadian radio). “Radio,” asserted Kane, “is not only an unparalleled medium of communication; it also has incalculable possibilities for creating, forming and moulding public opinion.”⁵⁴

51 *Xaverian*: 12 November 1954, 27 February 1959, 10 February 1961; Notes from Charles M. Tierney, Program Director, c.1954, RG30-3/10/1810-13, SFXUA.

52 *Xaverian*, 14 October 1944.

53 “A Proposed Outline of Programs and Plans for Radio Broadcasting from the Campus of St. Francis Xavier University,” c.1945, Nicolson Papers, RG5/11/2277-93, SFXUA; J. Clyde Nunn to Nicolson. 11 January 1947, RG5/11/2286, SFXUA.

54 Institute for Education by Radio, transcript of G.L. Kane, 9 May 1947, CJFXA.[]

Perhaps no other statement summarizes so succinctly the importance the priest-professors and their allies accorded CJFX as a vehicle for adult education, as an agent of disseminating the principles of applied Christianity as embodied in Catholic social teaching, and as a means of furthering the mission of the Church itself within a liberal democracy. While programs often did not appear explicitly religious, they fulfilled a religious mandate to bring Gospel-inspired values of co-operation, community-building, and justice to a broad audience.

The dream of a Catholic school “of the air,” as envisioned by the priest-professors and their colleagues in the Catholic community, did not last much beyond the 1960s. Many of the original personalities, the driving forces behind CJFX, left the scene. Moses Coady died in 1959. Clyde Nunn, although he retained his position as station manager, had his loyalties and energies divided after he was elected as a Liberal for Inverness County in the Nova Scotia Legislative Assembly. Professor Allan MacEachen won a seat for Cape Breton in Parliament and began a long career as a powerbroker in Ottawa. Others who departed included Danny Gallivan, who left the station to become one of Hockey Night in Canada’s most famous announcers, and E. Finlay MacDonald, who became a household name in Canadian broadcasting as president of the Canadian Broadcasters Association in 1956 as well as one of the founders, in 1961, of the CTV Television Network.⁵⁵

Internally, the Antigonish Movement itself was changing just at the moment when CJFX was reaching a wider audience. Ian MacPherson has argued that “the English-Canadian co-operative movement had reached its natural limits by 1945.”⁵⁶ The end of the Great Depression, the onset of post-war prosperity, the lukewarm interest of unions in co-operatives, and the general failure of co-operatives in urban settings, appeared to limit the vitality of the co-operative movement except in the rural hinterlands. In 1959 the university created the Coady Institute, which would focus primarily on bringing the message of co-operation to countries in the developing world. The Extension Department continued to exist, but with its focus limited to local co-operative endeavours.⁵⁷ In time it was eclipsed in prestige and energy by the new institute and the excitement generated by increasing numbers of students who were engaged in international development projects in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Moreover, the post-war period marked an exodus from the farms and towns in the Maritimes and the Antigonish Movement and its programs suffered as a result. And the federal government’s introduction of the social safety net served to mute the urgency of movements dedicated to “self-help.”⁵⁸ In this context, the radio programs like “People’s School” and “Life in these Maritimes” slowly lost their listenership during the late 1950s, particularly when a new medium – television – established

55 Paul Rutherford, *When Television Was Young: Prime Time Canada, 1952-1967* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990): 109-10.

56 Ian MacPherson, *Each For All*, 217.

57 Cameron, *For the People*, 332-3.

58 MacPherson, *Each For All*, 213-5; Scott MacAulay, “The Smokestack Leaned Toward Capitalism: An Examination of the Middle Program of the Antigonish Movement,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 37, no. 1 (April 2002): 43-67; F.S. Mifflin, “The Antigonish Movement: A Summary Analysis of its Development, Principles and Goals,” *Canadian Journal of Public and Cooperative Economy* 10 (Jan./Dec. 1977): 77-95.

itself in Sydney under the auspices of radio rival CJCB. In 1960 Atlantic Broadcasters Limited attempted to create its own television station in order to take Extension work to Maritimers, who were slowly tuning out of radio.⁵⁹ This expensive venture lasted five years and eventually was purchased by rival CJCB, who used the Antigonish facility as a relay station for the CJCB signal. By the 1970s CJFX had officially separated from the university, when Atlantic Broadcasting Limited terminated its partnership with St. FX – acknowledging that its programming had changed and there was little to distinguish the station from other broadcasters.⁶⁰

The story of the early years of CJFX provides insights into two aspects of Canadian media history. First, the work of the priest-professors in the university's Extension Department provides a Canadian example of how educators used radio to enhance teaching and also how the new medium could be employed hand-in-hand with the print media to pioneer distance education in Canada. Programming like "The Labour School," "Life in These Maritimes," and "People's School" all used radio as both a medium of instruction and as an agent to bring communities together in "group sessions" to continue to discuss and understand what the radio broadcasts had initiated. Radio expanded the audience for adult education, applied Catholic social teaching, and offered greater opportunities for engagement within the broader community in Atlantic Canada. At St. FX, the transmitter tower, as opposed to the ivory tower, epitomized the distinctive character of the school and the communitarian nature of its mission during the 1940s and 1950s.

Secondly, the early history of CJFX provides a counter-case to that made by Robert Fortner in his assessment of the engagement of churches with radio broadcasting in Canada. Albeit for a short time, CJFX provided evidence of how Catholic priest-professors and their lay colleagues developed a well-defined philosophy for the use of radio that included programming that was explicitly religious or implicitly so. The station demonstrated how the Catholic Church could exercise its religious mission, without necessarily looking "overtly" as if it was engaged in "evangelization." The long-term danger to the Catholic Church of such an approach, particularly in the 1960s, was that without some explicit religious presence such programming ceased to be recognized by listeners as anything but secular, particularly when the priest-professors began to withdraw from the production and on-air presentation. This secularization phenomenon is not unique to the Catholic Church in Canadian history. Buckets of ink have been spilled on the manner in which the Protestant social gospel in Canada was slowly secularized into trade unions, political parties, and more generic social activism by the mid-20th century. The early CJFX story demonstrates how members of a mainline Canadian church, which normally would have been shut out of owning its own frequency, creatively won the opportunity to have its voice heard through what was essentially its own station. The case of CJFX tests the dominant historical narrative of "regulation over religion" and suggests that religious groups in Canada may not only have been far less supine in the face of government regulators, but also far more ingenious than historians have been willing to credit.

59 Cameron, *For the People*, 347. See also "Notes" of J. Clyde Nunn on the potential of the CJFX television station, 1959, RG44/1/1411-1454, SFXUA.

60 Memorandum to the Board of Directors, Atlantic Broadcasters Limited, 1 December 1975, CJFXA.