

**“The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness” or Verbal
Bigotry – T.T. Shields, *The Gospel Witness* and Roman
Catholicism, 1922-1942**

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Division and conflict in Christianity are not a modern phenomena. In fact, it is as old as the faith itself. A brief perusal of the New Testament reveals that σχισματα (schisms/divisions) were a problem that even the early church faced. Disagreement among the apostles themselves plagued the church in its infancy, particularly Paul and Peter’s conflict over whether or not Gentiles should be forced to adhere to Jewish laws and customs. However, when Luther ostensibly uttered those now fateful words, “I cannot . . . I will not . . . Recant. Here I stand,” he not only destroyed the vestige of a catholic church, in the sense of one church representing and speaking for all of Christendom, but he also ensured that diversity and conflict would be the pattern of Christianity not only amongst Protestants and Catholics, but even amongst Protestant denominations themselves. Thus, while the Reformation was in one sense an attempt to purify the church, it has left the church with a legacy of bitterness, envy, distrust and conflict. Since the utterance of those fateful words, this rift has been most clearly manifested in the relationship between Protestants and Roman Catholics.

Throughout the course of Canadian history, clashes between Protestants and Roman Catholics have been quite common. During the latter part of the nineteenth century, open hostility to Roman Catholicism was a

popularly expressed phenomenon. This anti-Catholicism was not simply politically motivated, it also had a theological and social inclination to it as well. As J.R. Miller points out, “a proper appreciation of the emotive force of anti-Catholic feeling requires an exploration and understanding of its several surfaces [nevertheless] [t]here could be no mistaking the liveliness of Catholicism as a public issue during the Victorian period.”¹

Roman Catholicism, during the Victorian era, was attacked as being morally and politically degenerate, responsible for criminal, poor and unattractive societies, a brutalizer and degrader of women, a corruptor of the minds of youth and biblically and spiritually bankrupt. In making their case against Roman Catholicism, nineteenth-century Protestants asserted “that Rome was heretic, schismatic, and riven with dissension.”² But of even greater concern to Protestants of the nineteenth century was Rome’s claims and lust for power. “Popery ‘never can be satisfied with less than complete domination, and that, too, in matters political as well as spiritual’. . . Catholics ‘always aim . . . at supremacy; and when supreme, they are even intolerant. They can never be affectionate subjects to a Protestant monarch.’”³ The natural outcome of all this, Protestants charged was centuries of persecution and tyranny on the part of Rome. Consequently, Canadian Protestants viewed Roman Catholicism, at the turn of the century, as a threat not only to basic fundamental civil liberties, but also to ties with the empire and later on, the Commonwealth. As Brent Reilly has correctly pointed out, “the maintenance of democratic freedoms and of the links with Great Britain were twin impulses which drove some Protestants to organized defence against what they perceived as Catholic’s aggression.”⁴

For most Canadian Protestants, the Roman Catholic church was little more than “a ruthless, unchanging, non-Christian organization intending world-wide socio-political control and the elimination of Protestantism.”⁵ As both John Wolffe and Richard Lougheed correctly maintain, anti-Catholicism was not merely “a racial prejudice but an integral component of evangelical theology prior to the mid-twentieth century.”⁶ As David Bebbington maintains Roman Catholicism constituted a “grand threat to evangelical values.” He states that

evangelicals shared the common British aversion to Popery as a compendium of all that was alien to national life, whether religious, political or moral. They inherited the reformation identification of the

papacy as Anti-Christ, the seventeenth-century fears that linked popery with continental autocracy and the popular suspicions that hovered round celibacy and the confessional. They [also] added their own specific sense of the spiritual deprivation of Catholics.⁷

In *The Two Babylons* (popular edition first published in 1871), Reverend Alexander Hislop captured the sentiment of Protestants of this period in their attitude toward Roman Catholics:

There never has been any difficulty in the mind of any enlightened Protestant in identifying the woman “sitting on seven mountains, and having on her forehead the name written,” “mystery, Babylon the Great,” with the Roman apostasy . . . now while this characteristic of Rome has ever been well marked and defined, it has always been easy to show, that the Church which has its seat and headquarters on the seven hills of Rome might most appropriately be called “Babylon,” in as much as it is the chief seat of idolatry under the New Testament, as the ancient Babylon was the chief seat of idolatry under the Old . . . It has been known all along that Popery was baptized Paganism; but God is now making it manifest, that the Paganism which Rome has baptized is, in all its essential elements, the very Paganism which prevailed in the ancient literal Babylon, when Jehovah opened before Cyrus the two-leaved gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron . . . Her judgement is now evidently hastening on; and just as it approaches, the Providence of God, conspiring with the Word of God, by light pouring in from all quarters, makes it more and more evident that Rome is in very deed the Babylon of the Apocalypse . . . and, finally, that the Pope himself is truly and properly the lineal representative of Belshazzar.⁸

Roman Catholicism was, therefore, viewed as the very antithesis of Christianity—namely, the Anti-Christ. Consequently, as Richard Loughheed notes, anti-Catholicism was clearly “a constant evangelical theological tenant throughout pre-Vatican II history.”⁹

Into this broader context Thomas Todhunter Shields, the militant fundamentalist pastor of Jarvis Street Baptist Church in Toronto for over forty-five years, must be placed. T.T. Shields was born in the English city of Bristol, in 1873. Throughout his life Shields retained a deep sense of affection for the country of his birth often promoting Britain as the

champion of freedom and liberty.¹⁰ This sense of pride in his British heritage played a significant role in shaping not only Shields' ideals, but also many of the rigid stands he took on issues throughout his contentious career.¹¹ Shields' convictions were also strongly influenced by the fact that he was part of a lengthy ministerial line dating back over 200 years in his family.¹² In this context, Shields inherited a broad spectrum of beliefs from his forefathers. Three in particular are worthy of note – Calvinism, a devotion to the Baptist tradition, and anti-Catholicism.

As a convinced Calvinist, Shields' doctrine stressed five basic concepts – the total depravity of humanity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace and the perseverance of the saints. Thus, Shields' theology was grounded in the principle of the sovereignty of God. For as Shields himself stated in a 1925 sermon entitled, "Kept by the Power of God," "I am a bit of a Calvinist myself. I mean by that, I Believe in the sovereignty of God, that He chooses His people."¹³ This conviction invariably led Shields into conflict with Roman Catholicism, since he believed its sacramentalism denied the individual true access to God.

[T]he sacrifice of the mass is a repetition of this – "priests standing daily ministering," doing the same thing over and over again. Sin is never taken away by that means. And so all your prayers, and your penances, and all the severe discipline of that system is but a modern manifestation of this ancient principle, standing "daily ministering," and yet never getting the thing done.¹⁴

Thus, Shields believed that Roman Catholicism "ha[d] taken every simple doctrine of grace and made merchandise of it," with the practical effect being that the church of Rome claimed to have a monopoly on salvation "and you have to have it only at [their] price."¹⁵

Though he came from an Anglican tradition, Shields throughout his life was to retain a staunch and devout commitment to the Baptist tradition he adopted.¹⁶ In 1927, when asked to become the leader of a non-denominational tabernacle movement, Shields replied – "I am a Baptist by conviction, and I shall stand for those truths which have characterized Baptists through the centuries . . ."¹⁷ Shields' commitment to Baptist tradition was in fact so strong that he stated on at least one occasion that only Baptists were doctrinally sound and thus one may conclude through inference the only true believers. In a 1923 sermon entitled, "Why Baptists should

Proselytize Roman Catholics and Others,” he stated:

I understand there are some Baptists, who do not believe in making converts of Roman Catholics . . . I frankly confess I do, not only of Roman Catholics – but you Methodists and you Presbyterians; I would like to make Baptists of everyone of you. You see, if I thought the Methodists were right, I would join the Methodists; if I thought the Presbyterians were right, I would join the Presbyterians; and if I thought the Episcopal Church were the only church, I would seek “holy orders” there. But it is because I believe the Word of God teaches the very thing you saw tonight, as well as the body of principles for which Baptists have historically stood, that I would like to make Baptists of you all.¹⁸

Why would there be any need to convert people of these various denominations unless Shields somehow believed that they were not in fact Christians in the New Testament sense of the word?¹⁹ Thus, Shields it would appear was claiming a Baptist monopoly over Christianity, the very thing he so harshly criticized Roman Catholics for doing.

Shields’ dedication to two Baptist distinctives invariably led him into conflict with Roman Catholicism. The first was the pattern of congregational polity, which was the logical expression of the teaching of the priesthood of believers and thus, a protest against hierarchial control; and the second, the consistent witness of Baptists to the principle of religious liberty, the corollary of which is the separation of church and state. As a minority group, during the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, Baptists had been subjected to serious restrictions upon religious liberty. However, in order to shield their belief in the priesthood of all believers and religious freedom, Baptists insisted upon the complete separation of church and state. Thus, Baptists throughout their history have generally maintained an anti-Catholic attitude in order to safeguard the principle of religious liberty and the separation of church and state. As Robert G. Torbet notes “[b]asically it is a fear of their intolerance and political pretensions which underlies the universal attitude of Baptists toward Catholics.”²⁰ Nevertheless, Baptists have consistently defended the right of Catholics to worship according to the dictates of their conscience, but they have refused to accept the validity of the Catholic principle of intolerance. As Torbet further contends Baptists “have opposed such pretension as was expressed by Pope Leo XIII in his Encyclical of 1 November 1885, *Immortale Dei*,

when he declared that ‘the State must not only have care for religion, but recognize the *true* religion.’”²¹

Consequently, T.T. Shields is perhaps best remembered by many Canadians as this country’s outstanding anti-Roman Catholic leader. Essentially, as L.K. Tarr states, Shields regarded the church of Rome as “the advocate of a religious system that was, at its very core, the antithesis of Scriptural truth [and he] shared the New Testament’s writers repugnance for ritualism, legalism, formalism, and sacerdotalism all of which [he believed] found expression in Romanism.”²²

I have thus far examined those factors that helped to foster Shields’ anti-Catholic bias. I will now outline how this bias was manifested in Shields’ weekly publication *The Gospel Witness*, from its inception in 1922 to the creation of the Protestant League in October of 1941.²³

Even before *The Gospel Witness* went into circulation on 20 May 1922, T.T. Shields had already gained a noted reputation as a spokesperson against the church of Rome. During the Great War of 1914-1918, Shields had been quite critical of Quebec and its Roman Catholic population for hindering the war effort. He further attacked them for not joining the Union government and for impeding the implementation of conscription.²⁴

Though written at the outset of World War Two, the following nevertheless expresses the attitude Shields held during the years of the First World War:

The Canadian Roman Catholic Hierarchy in the last war did everything in its power to restrict and retard Canada’s war effort. I know there were individual Roman Catholics who were far otherwise: I speak now of the official attitude of the Church of Rome in this country. It was decidedly against us – against France, against Britain, and for Germany. Even many of our French-Canadian fellow citizens put their religion before their social affinity, and stood for Germany as against France.²⁵

However, in spite of his criticism of Quebec and French-Canadians’ contribution to the war effort, Shields later contended that the formation of the Union government was the only time in Canada’s history that Parliament was ever independent of Roman Catholic Quebec.²⁶ In this context, it is apparent that Shields was expressing a degree of dissatisfaction that the government did not seize upon the opportunity to cast off the Roman yoke

in its entirety.

On 17 May 1922, Jarvis Street Baptist Church gave Shields the authority to begin editing a paper on a three week trial basis. The paper was to have a twofold purpose – “to exercise some little influence toward a clear and unwavering witness to the truth of the gospel and to the distinctive principle for which we stand in all our denominational activities.”²⁷ Invariably, the paper became an instrument whereby Shields propagated his views on a variety of social and political issues.

During the early years of *The Gospel Witness*, Shields’ attacks upon Roman Catholicism were essentially theologically oriented. According to the stated purpose of *The Gospel Witness*, his duty was to disseminate the truth “as we may be given to see it.”²⁸ Consequently, while he claimed to have nothing to say against Roman Catholics, he nevertheless considered it his duty to point out the failures of Roman Catholicism. Shields charged that it was “a system that I venture to believe cannot stand in the light of God’s Holy Word; and yet I should accomplish nothing by mere denunciation.”²⁹ How Shields could have so much to say against Roman Catholicism and in the process avoid addressing Roman Catholics is difficult to comprehend. Nevertheless, he often tried to draw this distinction by claiming that his quarrel was not with individual Catholics, who in many instances were “most amiable people,” but with the Catholic system, its principles and hierarchy.³⁰ Though Shields may have attempted to draw this distinction, it was marginally successful at best, since his public attacks on Roman Catholicism often aroused strong emotions amongst the Catholic population of the country.³¹ Shields, however, simply regarded this as further proof of the control of the church hierarchy over its citizenry. In a 1940 sermon entitled, “The Pope’s Fifth Column – Everywhere,” Shields charged that “[w]e should have no French-Canadian problem in this country if the Roman Catholic Church, with its priests and teachers, were not constantly instilling anti-British and separatist ideas into the minds of the people.”³²

In the inaugural years of *The Gospel Witness*, Roman Catholicism was not the primary antagonist of Shields. This dubious honour fell to modernism and more specifically the McMaster University controversy.³³

As a result, Shields had some rather flattering statements to make about Roman Catholicism, particularly when judged in light of what he would say only a few years later. In terms of basic doctrine – belief in God, the inspiration of Scripture, the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, the origin

and impact of sin, the final judgement, and the atonement – Shields contended that the Roman Catholic Church “as far as it goes . . . is perfectly orthodox according to Scriptural standards [and] therefore much is to be said in favour of the Roman Catholic Church.”³⁴ He continued by stating,

that if I had to chose between being a Modernist – denying the inspiration of Scripture, denying the Deity of Christ, denying the blood atonement, denying all religious authority, and being a law unto myself – and a Roman Catholic any day . . . I can understand how amid all the darkness and superstition of Rome, men may somehow or other find their way to Christ and be saved; but this damnable philosophy . . . leaves us without any religion at all; it plunges us into darkness; it leads us straight on the way to agnosticism, and ultimately to infidelity.³⁵

Yet, within fifteen short years Shields would assert,

who that has any knowledge of the past will fail to recognize the “falling away,” the apostasy, which found, and still finds its supreme exemplification in the Roman Catholic Church was and is on a far greater, a more colossal scale than that which we call Modernism? The Roman Catholic Church, I believe is represented in the final book of the Bible as the mother of harlots, and her illegitimate progeny under the Christian name are very numerous. She has corrupted the springs of Christian teaching in all ages, from her inception. When she says she is the original church, she is right historically. She is the church that became apostate, “falling away” from the truth of Christ. But God has always had a remnant according to the election of grace . . . whenever men have broken away from the darkness, and returned to the light, they have always done so as did Luther, by recognizing the supreme authority of the Holy Scripture.³⁶

Shields believed that modernism had the tendency of reviving the Church of Rome in measure to the decline of evangelical Christianity. Nevertheless, it was a revival of apostasy not spirituality. Furthermore, Shields contended that modernism was “not comparable in its extent or in its blackness, to that of [the Church] of Rome” responsible for some of “the vilest of all iniquities . . .”³⁷ Hence, by the late 1930s Shields was claiming he would rather be a modernist than a pagan apostate Catholic.

What is reflected in all of this is Shields' utter distaste for both Roman Catholicism and modernism. In spite, of his statements to the contrary, Shields certainly would never have acquiesced to either of these positions. Modernism was quite simply judged to be the more pressing issue in the 1920s and thus received the brunt of Shields' belligerent rhetoric. However, Roman Catholicism did not go unscathed during this period. Not only did Shields occasionally point out the doctrinal (theological) errors of the Roman Church, but in August of 1924, he also brought Dr. J. Frank Norris, a fundamentalist evangelist from Fort Worth, Texas to conduct a five-day crusade on the errors of Romanism. Norris proceeded to provide a stinging attack upon Catholic doctrine and also to charge that Romanism was a tremendous political menace.³⁸ Both Norris and Shields concurred that the Catholic Church, as anti-Christ, was part of a worldwide conspiracy, attempting to set up an ecclesiastical autocracy, claiming to be supreme over all nations and people. Norris charged that the only essential "difference between Romanism today and Romanism in the dark ages is that she does not now, on this continent at least, possess the civil power to enforce her persecuting decrees."³⁹

This emphasis on the political rather than the theological dangers of Romanism became the major focus of Shields' attack by the 1930s. Three basic factors essentially account for this. The first was the recognition on Shields' part that he had essentially lost the debate with modernism, since he had ceded control of McMaster University and in the process divided the Baptist Convention in 1927. The second factor which fostered this intensified attack upon Roman Catholicism was brought about through events in the international arena. The third factor was a more local political issue within the province of Ontario.

Early in 1929, the Italian government and the Vatican came to an agreement when both parties signed the Lateran Agreements, thereby reconciling the papacy and the state after all but sixty years of enmity. Shields contended that this agreement amounted to a recognition of papal temporal power, which had a significance for world affairs. In essence, Roman Catholics owed their first loyalty to the Pope and not the country of their residence.⁴⁰

Thus, Shields harshly attacked Premier Taschereau's speeches in the Quebec legislature in praise of the Lateran Agreements, as being in direct opposition to the "principles British citizens stand for."⁴¹ Furthermore, he warned that "Protestants of all denominations need to wake up, or one [sic]

of these days they may discover the affairs of this country have passed into the hands of men who are but vassals of Rome.”⁴²

As Fascism in Italy and Spain and Nazism in Germany began to pose threats to international peace and stability, by the late 1930s, Shields came to the conclusion that both were part of an international Catholic conspiracy directed primarily against British democratic ideals.⁴³

The Roman Catholic religion differs from other forms of religion that bear the name Christian in that it believes and teaches that it should be propagated by force, that it has an inherent right to compel conformity to its doctrines. Hence it has always been a persecuting religion, even to the extent of shedding the blood of its opponents Growing out of this, Romanism, of necessity is a political system. Hence it endeavours to secure control of the state, and use the powers of the state for its propagation Moreover, the Roman Catholic Church, wherever you find it, is an enemy of human liberty: it always has been. It is the enemy of every state except a totalitarian state.⁴⁴

Shields further charged that

if any Pope could bless Franco and his bloody ways, he could bless the devil. I abhor the system that will associate the name of God, and call Heaven’s blessing upon that output of hell that you see in the civil war of Spain. The power that will do that will do anything I am, toward Roman Catholicism, absolutely intolerant. If there is an evil on earth toward which a man is justified in taking an attitude of intolerance, it is [towards] Roman Catholicism.⁴⁵

Thus, by the outbreak of the Second World War Shields was willing to be called bigoted and narrow in his attitude towards Roman Catholicism. He strongly voiced the opinion that the Roman Catholic Church was the “Anti-Christ of Scripture out of which the ultimate anti-Christ will arise”⁴⁶ In Shields’ view the Catholic Church was the world’s greatest totalitarian political organization and a “friend of neither democracy [n]or any democratic institution.”⁴⁷ His only regret in speaking out against Roman Catholicism and its unholy alliances, especially with Fascism, thus far was that he should have “spoken more frequently and more strongly.”⁴⁸

In February 1939, the Ontario government of Mitch Hepburn began drafting legislation designed to give Catholic elementary schools a greater

share of funds through a more equitable distribution of corporate taxes.⁴⁹ Hepburn hoped that the legislation would not provoke a religious controversy. Almost immediately, however, storms of protest began to flood in criticizing the government's proposal, including a dissenting voice from the pulpit of Jarvis Street Baptist Church. In spite of such opposition, the bill was passed on 9 April 1936 by a vote of sixty-five to twenty.⁵⁰

Shields in his customary manner launched a savage attack on the Premier and the entire concept of separate school legislation. He had already charged that Hepburn was the "toll" of two organizations: organized liquor traffic and the Roman Catholic Church, "both of which were blights on any state."⁵¹ The decision to go ahead with the funding legislation for separate schools only seemed to reinforce his previous assessment.

Shields was convinced that the Roman Catholic separate schools were the "prolific mother of most of the political corruption" in the country. The bill was merely further proof that the church hierarchy was hoarding national revenue in order to further the propagation of Romanism within the country. Thus, "no one at all conversant with the facts of the case can, for a moment, question that the Hepburn government is subject to Roman Catholic direction and control."⁵² This legislation was simply further proof of a world-wide Catholic conspiracy working toward the suppression of democratic ideals, since it separated the various elements of society fostering division and henceforth made national unity simply impossible, so Shields contended.⁵³

Shields charged that if he was the Premier of Ontario the entire separate school system would be abolished, since the avowed purpose of the Catholic hierarchy in Canada "is to strengthen through Separate Schools, and by other means . . . the Roman Catholic Church in Canada, that it may be in a position to dictate to the government of every Province in Canada."⁵⁴ Such a statement contradicts Shields' previous assertions that he would have extended religious freedom to Catholics and also negates the fundamental Baptist distinctive, the belief in religious toleration. Since the Catholic Church had initiated the battle cry, Shields was now convinced that the only way to deal effectively with her was through an all out declaration of war, since Romanism showed a complete lack of respect for civil law. Thus he charged, "it is with the political character of Roman Catholicism we are at war – and must ever be at war."⁵⁵ Consequently, the separate school funding question in Ontario merely affirmed Shields'

contention that Roman Catholicism

is essentially parasitical in its nature and habits . . . it fastens itself upon every state as a leech, and sucks its very life blood. It infects the blood stream of every political party, and, like a deadly bacillus destroys the red corpuscular principles by and for which the party lives, and reduces it to an anaemic mass of potential corruption. Like a cancer, Roman Catholicism insinuates itself into every government and raps its parasitical and strangling tentacles about every governmental organ, converts it into a banqueting house for political buzzards, and makes it a stench in the nostrils for every lover of righteousness . . . It impoverishes education by diverting its supplies to the support of its own system of propaganda . . . I do not exaggerate, but speak the plain, sober, truth, when I say, that the only right the Roman Church has to the title "Catholic" consists in the universality of its malignant influence.⁵⁶

Thus, while Shields may have tempered his hostility towards Roman Catholicism in the early years of *The Gospel Witness*, he was by 1940, openly critical and hostile to the point of declaring outright hatred and contempt for anything remotely associated with Romanism.

. . . We should hate the system of Romanism. I do. I make no apology for it. I hate it as one of the world's greatest scourges; and all of history is confirmatory of that assertion. To me, the Roman Catholic Church is just as much an implacable enemy of mankind as Hitler himself.⁵⁷

By the outbreak of the Second World War, Shields believed that the papacy and Nazism-Fascism were allied together as part of an international conspiracy to subvert British democratic ideals.⁵⁸ Early in 1940, Shields had commissioned L.H. Lehmann, an ex-Roman Catholic priest and editor of *The Converted Catholic*, to write a series of articles for *The Gospel Witness*, outlining the extent of this relationship. Lehmann contended that,

it can be safely said that Nazi-Fascism and Jesuitism, the two greatest reactionary forces in the world today are but two facets of the same unity – one civil, and the other ecclesiastical. Catholic Action was brought into being coincidentally with the rise of Nazi-Fascism, and

was later consolidated by the Lateran Pact with Mussolini in 1929, and by the secret treaty with Nazi Socialism in 1933.⁵⁹

Shields saw these three “isms” as forming some type of tri-partite pact bent on world domination. While it may be argued that the ecclesiastical structure of the Roman Catholic Church was hierarchial, authoritarian and expansionistic in outlook, it certainly was not formally allied with Fascist ideals. Nevertheless, it is not surprising that Shields would draw parallels between the Roman Catholic Church and Fascism, especially when the Church had signed a Concordat with Mussolini and had recognized the legitimacy of Hitler’s Germany. The Catholic Church’s failure to speak out against the realities of Fascism is one of the dark annals in her history. However, some Protestant Churches were equally guilty of this. Furthermore, the authoritarian nature of the Catholic Church, which Shields openly criticizes, was equally reflected in many Protestant circles, especially his own. In spite of several votes of non-confidence in his leadership, at Jarvis, Shields staunchly refused to resign. It was either “his way or the highway.” If there was ever a Baptist Pope, then Shields would certainly qualify. Certainly, the dictator of Jarvis Street Baptist Church had plans to “conquer” Canada with his own brand of Protestantism.⁶⁰ Though Shields’ assertion that the Catholic Church was ecclesiastically authoritarian, due to its episcopal hierarchy, his notion that it was in an alliance of world conquest with Hitler and Mussolini is ridiculous. From the earliest days of Fascism, some Catholic priests warned of the impending dangers associated with this ideology and risked their lives as members of the resistance movements in various countries. Shields’ militancy and dogma unfortunately never allowed him to look beyond the narrow confines of his own warped ideology in order to pursue the greater good.

At the outset of the war, Shields had issued a call for national unity, even though he believed the Catholic Church was behind both domestic and international problems.

We have come to a time when all differences in our national life should be forgotten or submerged, and freely and entirely subordinated to the cause of national unity. I hope we may ignore all political and racial distinction, the land of our birth, or the race of our origin, and reckon ourselves to be, all of us, Canadians, or better still, for the purposes of this war, British Canadians.⁶¹

Was Shields being sincere here or was this merely rhetoric on his part? He could hardly expect Catholics and French-Canadians to forget years of attack on his part questioning their loyalty to Britain and British institutions.⁶² Furthermore, his statement called upon Canadians to become British-Canadians, somehow implying that French-Canadians were not Canadians, thereby, adding further insult to injury. Nevertheless, the true sincerity of Shields' call for national unity can be measured by the fact that only a few weeks later he renewed his attacks upon Catholicism with as much vigour as ever.

Thus, the early years of the war developed into a sort of crusade in which Shields charged that the Roman Catholic Church was not only a threat to basic civil liberties, but also to ties between Canada and Britain. Furthermore, Rev. J.B. Thomson of Dufferin Street Presbyterian Church, speaking from the Jarvis Street pulpit in response to the Catholic mass held on Parliament Hill in September 1941, charged that Quebec's opposition to conscription was hampering the ability of Canada to make all out war against Nazi aggression.

The Roman Catholic Church, because of her influence with the Government, is hindering Canada's war effort. For example: 'No conscription'? Why? Because Quebec objects . . . We are out to win the war. But I ask you this: Is it fair that Protestant boys who volunteer to fight Canada's battle should lease Roman Catholic boys to take their jobs? (No!) . . . It is a shame. It is not British.⁶³

Consequently, Shields contended that *The Gospel Witness* assumed a sort of prophetic mission in the early years of war.

For the last six months we feel *The Gospel Witness* has exercised a very special ministry in calling attention to the danger which resides in the intrigues and machinations of the Papacy throughout the world. In no country is it more active than the Dominion of Canada, and it is doing more to hamper Canada's war effort than all other enemy agencies combined.⁶⁴

The complete control of Quebec by the Catholic hierarchy had precipitated such an action Shields vowed. The Federal government's error in advertising a special mass to be held on Parliament Hill on Sunday, 14 September 1941, which excluded any mention of a concurrent Protestant service,

proved too much for many Protestant clergy and laity to handle.⁶⁵

On Tuesday, 16 September 1941, Shields called the leaders of Toronto's Protestant community together to voice their outrage and concern at the government's recent action. A resolution was presented attacking the mass on parliament hill "as an insult to the conscience of the majority of Canadian citizens and destructive of national unity."⁶⁶ In essence, the sponsoring committee charged that this was merely further proof of the Catholic hierarchy controlling the political affairs of the country.⁶⁷ It is somewhat surprising that Shields would criticize the government for destroying national unity when his own personal attacks upon Roman Catholicism had in many respects been responsible for creating division within the country.

In order to combat this devilish horde and defend British civil leaders, they eventually came to the consensus that a "Protestant Vigilance League" needed to be created. Thus, on 18 September 1941, the Canadian Protestant League was born. The League had a three-fold purpose:

- i) the preservation, maintenance, and assertion of the traditional, civil and religious liberties of British subjects;
- ii) to practice, defend, maintain, and to propagate the great doctrines of the Protestant Reformation;
- iii) [and to oppose], the supreme authority, falsely claimed by the Roman Catholic Church; and also against the Roman Church's political methods of propagating its tenets, and of extending and exercising this illegitimate authority.⁶⁸

What is evident here is that the founders of the League saw "British," "Protestant," and "democratic" as interchangeable terms. In the process, they placed loyalty to the British cause before issues of doctrine and anti-Catholic rhetoric.⁶⁹

While many Protestants sympathized with the purpose and goals of the League "they were constrained from too close an attachment to anything that involved the leadership of Dr. Shields."⁷⁰ Nevertheless, The Protestant League provided Shields with the opportunity to spread his militant anti-Catholic message throughout the country during the remaining years of the war. For the most part, Shields repeated the same old platitudes, though with fervent hostility, that the British liberties in Canada were being threatened by the Catholic hierarchy, who were in complete

control of the government of W.L. Mackenzie King. This fact was evidenced according to Shields by King's failure to establish conscription in 1942, even though widespread popular support was expressed through a national plebiscite.⁷¹ Thus, what conclusions can be drawn with respects to Shields' anti-Catholic bias?

First of all, Shields may be commended for his efforts in pointing out doctrinal errors in Roman Catholicism and most certainly the Church's official position with respect to Nazism and Fascism. The failure of the Catholic Church to condemn neither Mussolini nor Hitler in any official public statement during the war years has been a blight upon her history. Nevertheless, Shields' notion of a world-wide Catholic conspiracy in alliance with Nazism and Fascism is certainly nothing more than sheer fantasy. The signing of Lateran Treaty in 1929 between Mussolini and Pope Pius XI, while recognizing Catholicism as the sole religion of the state and providing for Catholic religious instruction in schools was hardly the forging of an imperialistic alliance. Its primary motive was to marginalize the Church's role in Italian politics to the hundred acres of its independent sovereignty, Vatican City. By settling the outstanding disputes between the church and the state, Mussolini had effectively limited a major source of opposition and criticism to his regime, in the process transforming the office of Pope from one which had been influential in European politics into essentially a spiritual leader. Nevertheless, Mussolini's interference with the Catholic Action, the church's youth program, did result in a public denouncement by the Pope in the Encyclical of 1931. Within Germany, the Nazi Party initially tried to harness the German churches, both Catholic and Protestant, to the service of nationalism, self-sacrifice for the national cause, belief in a chosen people and the removal of Jews from national life. While petitions to self-sacrifice and destiny were expedient to some aspects of Christianity, by 1937, Hitler had lost all faith that the churches could be of any use to his goals for Germany. Though German resistance to Nazism was divided and weak, it nevertheless convinced Hitler of the worthlessness of Christianity, since it represented an obstruction to his geo-political goals of world domination. Therefore, Hitler's intention was to eradicate the church from European affairs, following his victory over the Soviet Union. In the interim, the church was subjected to a series of persecutions largely carried out by local Nazi officials. These persecutions helped to further fuel the resistance movement, which in early 1940 Pope Pius XII secretly supported, when he

allowed himself to be used as a channel of communication between the conspirators and the British government on the grounds that it would save lives.⁷² Thus, notions of a tri-partite pact between Roman Catholicism, Nazism and Fascism bent on world conquest and domination are completely unwarranted. What it merely confirms is the tendency on the part of Shields to associate anti-Christ with any position or view differing from his own. Such predilections can be extremely dangerous and damaging to all religions, something Shields often failed to recognize and when he did tended to ignore in any event.

Shields himself charged that his anti-Catholic attitude was aroused during the Great War, when he entered Westminster Catholic Church and saw a book written by Cardinal Mercier entitled "The Duty of Catholics." The book essentially argued that it was the duty of all Catholics to marry at maturity and produce a population for the Church. Parents were to encourage their offspring in this capacity. Shields held that, "I have never seen the distinction between Christianity in the New Testament sense, and Roman Catholicism more clearly defined."⁷³ The Roman Catholic Church was thus propagated through human initiative, while a truly New Testament church was fostered through the infinite grace of God. Whether it was this particular incident, his strong association with British democratic ideals and Britain herself, or the other factors discussed at the outset of this paper, that shaped his attitude towards Roman Catholics, the fact still remains that T.T. Shields was militantly anti-Catholic.

Supporters of Shields might attempt to justify his view by arguing that he was simply expressing the commonly held attitudes of the day. With that type of reasoning one could invariably proceed to justify the holocaust, since the Nazi were after all merely expressing the attitudes that many held towards Jews!

Nor can one accept the argument of Dr. Olive Clark, one of Shields' close associates at Toronto Baptist Seminary, that Shields promoted an anti-Catholicism of love aimed at liberating laity and priests who had been duped by the diabolical Roman system and its authoritarian bishops during his attacks upon Roman Catholicism. Love is not expressed through bigoted and outright racist attacks upon individuals and their values. Furthermore, the fact that many people were "saved" does not mark some type of God-ordained blessing upon the means and efforts of Shields in this capacity.⁷⁴ The fact that people were "saved" is not any testimony to justify Shields' prejudiced vendetta against Roman Catholics, nor a sanctioning

of his methods, which he claimed were correct, but rather it points to the power of the gospel to affect change even beyond the shortcomings of human endeavour. God, at times, brings about wondrous events, like salvation, in spite of human motives and shortcomings. The damage that T.T. Shields and other fundamentalists like him caused is still being felt by the church today. Sectors of Protestant Christianity, particularly within Baptist circles, have never sufficiently redressed these matters nor apologized for its often extremist attitudes on these issues and so below the surface bitterness often still remains.

Was T.T. Shields a prophetic voice crying in the wilderness in his attacks against Roman Catholicism or was he guilty of verbal bigotry? Let the words of Shields himself answer that question – “We are willing to be called bigoted and narrow, if we must be . . . !”

Endnotes

1. J.R. Miller, “Anti-Catholic Thought in Victorian Canada,” *Canadian Historical Review* 66, No. 4 (December 1985): 474.
2. Miller, “Anti-Catholic Thought in Victorian Canada,” 487.
3. As cited in Miller, “Anti-Catholic Thought in Victorian Canada,” 491.
4. Brent Reilly, “Baptists and Organized Opposition to Roman Catholicism 1941-1962,” in *Costly Vision: The Baptist Pilgrimage in Canada*, ed. Jarold K. Zeman (Burlington: G.R. Welch, 1988), 181.
5. Richard Lougheed, “Anti-Catholicism Among French Canadian Protestants,” *Historical Papers: Canadian Society of Church History* (1995): 162.
6. Lougheed, “Anti-Catholicism Among French Canadian Protestants,” 162.
7. *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 101.
8. A. Hislop, *The Two Babylons* (London: S.W. Partridge and Co., 1903), 1-3.
9. Lougheed, “Anti-Catholicism Among French Canadian Protestants,” 163.

10. *The Gospel Witness*, 2 January 1941, 9 (“We repeat what we have said in this paper during the war and before the war, that the greatest enemy of all free countries, particularly Britain and the United States, is the Italian Papacy.”)
11. C.A. Russell, “Thomas Todhunter Shields, Canadian Fundamentalist,” *Ontario History* (December 1979): 264.
12. Russell, “Thomas Todhunter Shields, Canadian Fundamentalist,” 264.
13. *The Gospel Witness*, 19 March 1925, 4.
14. *The Gospel Witness*, 16 November 1922, 3.
15. *The Gospel Witness*, 20 December 1923, 4.
16. His father’s call to pastor a Baptist Church in Plattsville, ON in 1888 had brought the family to Canada (Russell, “Thomas Todhunter Shields, Canadian Fundamentalist,” 264).
17. As cited in Russell, “Thomas Todhunter Shields, Canadian Fundamentalist,” 265.
18. *The Gospel Witness*, 20 December 1923, 2-3.
19. Shields even went so far as to characterize Pentecostalism as a cult; its beliefs were taught in the curriculum of Toronto Baptist Seminary in a course dealing with such phenomena (see *The Gospel Witness*, 30 January 1930, 1; and *The Gospel Witness*, 2 July 1931, 6).
20. Robert G. Torbet, *A History of Baptists* (Valley Forge: Judson Press 1950), 455.
21. Torbet, *A History of Baptists*, 520.
22. L.K. Tarr, *Shields of Canada* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1957), 160.
23. In the archives of Jarvis Street Baptist Church, there is a collection of books from Dr. Shields’ personal library which contains volumes of books on the pitfalls of Roman Catholicism, which also certainly influenced Shields’ attitude to that particular Church – some of the authors and titles are as follows: A. Hislop, *The Two Babylons* (1903); John Canning, *Errors of Romanism* (1851); Jeremiah J. Crowley, *Romanism: A Menace to the Nations* (1912); Jeremiah J. Crowley, *The Pope* (1913); E.H.

Landon, *A Manual of Councils of the Holy Catholic Church* (1909); C. Lattery, ed. *The Papacy* (1925); Robert Fleming, *The Rise and Fall of the Papacy* (1849); W.M. Collier, *At the Court of His Catholic Majesty* (1912); and others.

24. Russell, "Thomas Todhunter Shields, Canadian Fundamentalist," 266.
25. *The Gospel Witness*, 4 January 1940, 1. Dr. Frank Norris, while conducting a crusade in Massey Hall on invitation from Shields, went as far as to state that "the great war was instigated by the Pope and the Kaiser who were intimate friends." He further blamed the Catholic influence for delaying America's entry into the war by two years. Undoubtedly, Shields would have concurred with this assessment, since he provided the commentary on Norris' message ("The Doom of the Papacy Foretold in the Word of God," *The Gospel Witness*, 28 August 1924, 7).
26. *The Gospel Witness*, 21 July 1938, 5.
27. *The Gospel Witness*, 8 July 1922, 7.
28. *The Gospel Witness*, 20 May 1922, 1.
29. *The Gospel Witness*, 16 November 1922, 3.
30. *The Gospel Witness*, 17 December 1925, 4. "It is against principles and not against personalities we protest" (see *The Gospel Witness*, 8 August 1940, 3).
31. See *The Gospel Witness*, 4 September 1924, 12; and *The Gospel Witness*, 11 September 1924, 7.
32. *The Gospel Witness*, 8 August 1940, 7.
33. For a discussion of this crisis see G.A. Rawlyk, "A.L. McCrimmon, H.P. Whidden, T.T. Shields, Christian Education and McMaster University," in *Canadian Baptists and Christian Higher Education* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1988); Russell, "Thomas Todhunter Shields, Canadian Fundamentalist," 269-273; Tarr, *Shields of Canada*; and L.K. Tarr, "Another Perspective on T.T. Shields and Fundamentalism," in *Baptists in Canada: Search for Identity Amidst Diversity*, ed. Jarold K. Zeman (Burlington: G.R. Welch, 1980), 209-223.
34. *The Gospel Witness*, 20 December 1923, 4.
35. *The Gospel Witness*, 20 December 1923, 4.

36. *The Gospel Witness*, 7 July 1938, 3.
37. *The Gospel Witness*, 10 November 1938, 5.
38. *The Gospel Witness*, 28 August 1924, 6.
39. *The Gospel Witness*, 28 August 1924, 6.
40. *The Gospel Witness*, 21 February 1929, 6.
41. *The Gospel Witness*, 21 February 1929, 8.
42. *The Gospel Witness*, 21 February 1929, 8.
43. *The Gospel Witness*, 15 August 1940, 3 (“Great Britain, to begin with, is the chief object of the Vatican’s Hostility and has been for many years.”)
44. *The Gospel Witness*, 21 July 1938, 2-3.
45. *The Gospel Witness*, 21 July 1938, 8. “The civil war in Spain was a Catholic war, fomented by the Church, financed by the Church, blessed by the Church – witness the recent establishment of the Church in Spain” (*The Gospel Witness*, 4 January 1940, 5).
46. *The Gospel Witness*, 16 February 1939, 1.
47. See *The Gospel Witness*, 8 August 1940, 1; and 4 January 1940, 5.
48. *The Gospel Witness*, 8 August 1940, 3.
49. See Neil McKenty, *Mitch Hepburn* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967), 76-89.
50. McKenty, *Mitch Hepburn*, 80.
51. See *The Gospel Witness*, 5 September 1935; 16 April 1936; 9 April 1936; and 30 April 1936.
52. *The Gospel Witness*, 16 April 1936, 14.
53. *The Gospel Witness*, 8 April 1936, 5-6.
54. *The Gospel Witness*, 30 April 1936, 12.
55. *The Gospel Witness*, 23 April 1936, 9.
56. *The Gospel Witness*, 23 April 1936, 9.

57. *The Gospel Witness*, 5 September 1940, 2. Though the separate school legislation was eventually repealed, Shields charged that the Roman Church would stop at nothing “since [she was] like a burglar [who] would return under the protection of darkness, and break in some quieter method” (*The Gospel Witness*, 16 February 1939, 1; and 29 September 1937, 9).
58. *The Gospel Witness*, 2 January 1941, 9. (“We repeat what we have said in this paper during the war and before the war, that the greatest enemy of all free countries, particularly Britain and the United States, is the Italian papacy.”)
59. *The Gospel Witness*, 6 November 1940, 6.
60. John G. Stackhouse, *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century: An Introduction to Its Character* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1993), 26.
61. *The Gospel Witness*, 7 September 1939, 3. See his statement about not wanting to hamper the war effort in *The Gospel Witness*, 28 September 1939, 6.
62. See *The Gospel Witness*, 7 July 1938, 1; and 21 July 1938, 4.
63. As cited in Reilly, “Baptists and Organized Opposition to Roman Catholicism 1941-1962,” 183.
64. *The Gospel Witness*, 13 February 1941, 3.
65. Reilly, “Baptists and Organized Opposition to Roman Catholicism 1941-1962,” 182. One was nevertheless held later that week.
66. Reilly, “Baptists and Organized Opposition to Roman Catholicism 1941-1962,” 183.
67. See *The Gospel Witness*, 18 September 1941.
68. *The Gospel Witness*, 23 October 1941, 1-2.
69. Reilly, “Baptists and Organized Opposition to Roman Catholicism 1941-1962,” 185.
70. Reilly, “Baptists and Organized Opposition to Roman Catholicism 1941-1962,” 185.

71. Reilly, "Baptists and Organized Opposition to Roman Catholicism 1941-1962," 186.
72. Owen Chadwick, "Great Britain and Europe," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 354-367.
73. *The Gospel Witness*, 16 April 1936, 7.
74. L.K. Tarr, *Shields of Canada*, 161.

