

## **The Content of Faith: Morse Goodman's Christian Journalism, 1954-1994**

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In January 1954, the Reverend Morse Goodman had recently arrived in Winnipeg as the Anglican rector at St. James-the-Assiniboine parish. He was asked and agreed to audition for a daily 5 minute radio program called "Family Worship" that was broadcast on the CBC prairie region network at 8 a.m. six days a week.

Goodman had been born in 1917 in the Kawartha Lakes district of Ontario where his family operated a tourist cabins business and was educated in Lindsay, Bowmanville and at Trinity College, Toronto. In 1941 he had decided that he was not suited to a city parish and so was ordained in Algoma diocese and served Fort William and Marillo parishes.<sup>1</sup>

Though Goodman did not rate himself highly as a scholar he did have an enduring interest in communications. He had done some broadcasting in Fort William and thought that the audition process would be a good experience. As he tells in his biography "They Couldn't Call Me Mary", other "Protestant ministers" were asked to try out and his attention was on his new parish. As he relates, "Consequently, I was genuinely surprised when the CBC invited me to undertake the broadcasts. Six broadcasts were to be recorded each Tuesday for use through the following week. It was after my second recording that I was handed a cheque (\$5 a broadcast!) Up to that moment, I hadn't

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<sup>1</sup> This paper concentrates on the content of Morse Goodman's Christian journalism and is a part of a three part study of the context, content and the communications media employed by a twentieth century Anglican minister who was for most of his career clearly Protestant and evangelical and neither fundamentalist nor Anglo-catholic. Reginald Bibby and others have described the decline of the influence of the "mainline" denominations. I am interested in describing the major concerns that Goodman and others addressed as the influence began to wane, particularly in the 1960's and 70's.

realized that any pay was involved. I'd thought of it simply as another opportunity for ministry."<sup>2</sup> This association with the CBC and his listeners lasted until 1967.

In order to appeal to a wide audience the producers made a deliberate attempt to avoid denominational affiliation, so Goodman never personally identified himself on air. His voice was recognizable though, and as he notes, people sought him out.<sup>3</sup>

In 1962 Goodman began a monthly column "Let's Think It Over" in the *Country Guide* magazine – which had national circulation oriented to families living on farms and in rural communities. In his introductory column he wrote, "Day by day we are subjected to a great bombardment of ideas, of all sorts and in all directions. We let only a few of them in to become part of our thinking. I hope that now and then some of the ideas set forth here will find a home with you." The last column was published after his death from cancer.

The broadcast scripts and the columns formed the basis of a booklet, *With you in the Morning* and two books, *Let's Think It Over: A Christian's DayBook* (1986) and his memoirs, *They Couldn't Call Me Mary* (1992). His poetry, which occasionally appeared in later columns, was published privately as *Moments* (1993).

Goodman's found energy for this work in the midst of an increasingly prominent career in the Anglican Church. In 1960 he moved to Brandon Manitoba to serve as Dean of St. Matthew's Cathedral. From 1965-1967 he was Dean of Christ Church Cathedral in

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<sup>2</sup> M. L. Goodman, *They Couldn't Call Me Mary: Memoirs of Morse L. Goodman*, (Winnipeg: Country Guide Bookshelf, Farm Business Communications, 1992), 123-124.

<sup>3</sup> Morse L. Goodman, *They Couldn't Call Me Mary*, (Winnipeg: Country Guide Bookshelf, Farm Business Communications, 1993, 125. "Family Worship" was a rich experience for which I will always be thankful. It led me into correspondence with hundreds of people across the West - all Christian persuasions orthodox and unorthodox."

Edmonton. And finally he was Bishop of Calgary from 1968 until his retirement in 1983. He retired to Salmon Arm, British Columbia where he died in 1993.

While his radio audience was both urban and rural, Goodman's point of view assumed an understanding of the centrality of rural values. The 1950's saw a tremendous change in the rural landscape on the prairies. As Gerald Friesen has documented the Canadian prairie farm economy and culture that had existed from the 1880's to the end of the Second World War came to an end as farms were reorganized on an industrial model. Between 1940 and 1980 the number of farms cut in half. In 1941, 60 percent of the prairie population was rural. In 1981 just 30 percent lived on farms or in farming communities. The Canadian prairie countryside was depopulated by 750,000. Industrialization was expensive. Farm operating expenses rose by a factor of 5 but income only rose by a factor of 3.<sup>4</sup>

These changes were gradual and often only appreciated in hindsight. For many families the move to an industrial mode of farm production did not mean a shift away from traditional agrarian values. As Friesen concludes, "farm families in Manitoba continued to believe that agriculture was the foundation of civilization. There was no question in rural minds but that the entire prairie community - even Winnipeg - relied on the products of the farm. There was no doubt that the world needed farm products and that the family farm was best suited to supply them. As a result rural Manitobans focused on making improvements."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: a history*, (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 429 and 432.

<sup>5</sup> Gerald Friesen, "Afterword. Stuart Garson, Harold Innes and Adult Education in Manitoba" in Gerald Friesen ed. and P. James Giffen, *Rural Life: Portraits of the Prairie Town, 1946*, (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2004), 201-262

Farm periodicals and radio broadcasts were important means of communicating these values. Gerald Friesen has concluded that weekly community newspapers and monthlies like the *Country Guide* had more influence on readers thinking and behaviour than the large city produced daily newspapers. For the weeklies, the points of reassurance included columns and features that regularly re-enforced agricultural values.

While I have been unable to locate any studies that analyze the influence of the *Country Guide* in the mid-1960s James Giffen's 1946 study of three rural Manitoba communities found that for the primarily British and eastern Canadian origin community of "Elgin" fifty-seven percent of households subscribed and in the heavily Ukrainian speaking community of "Rosburn" 229 of 550 identified households subscribed. Giffen notes that the actual readership was much wider than subscriptions figures showed because many subscribers passed issues on to neighbours and relatives. Also, the *Country Guide* circulation was almost equal to the six Ukrainian weeklies combined. He attributed subscription rates to *Country Guide* and the [Winnipeg] Free Press weekly in "Rosburn" to the education of second generation Ukrainian speakers in Canadian schools.<sup>6</sup>

My review of thirty years of the *County Guide* columns revealed that Goodman's writing focused on four consistent themes: personal belief in Jesus, individual virtues, community values, and the ecology movement.

### **Personal belief in Jesus**

Goodman was clear that an individual experience with a person was at the heart of his faith and that this experience was available to anyone and operated independently of a person's character or worth. "No one is good enough to be a Christian. You don't become

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<sup>6</sup> Gerald Friesen ed. and P. James Giffen, *Rural Life: Portraits of the Prairie Town, 1946*. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2004), 51,110-111

a Christian by being good. You become a Christian by giving yourself to Christ.” (Sept. 1964) He believed that Jesus was present in the everyday world of home and work. And that, (t)hough He is everywhere we must meet him somewhere in particular. We must recognize him in personal relations with ourselves. (June 1968).

For believers the attraction was that Jesus was good. “People wanted to be as close to him as possible. They would go hungry and travel far from home to follow him because they realized he was good. “(Feb. 1971) “The real significance of Jesus is not in His program, His ethical principles, or His preaching. His real significance lies in the fact that He was a person knowing and knowable. “(Dec. 1969)

Because for Goodman there was an objective standard of morality,” carelessness is destructive”. (Feb, 1966) He accepted that there were God given moral laws and that God could punish. This was for him the inevitable consequence of human actions. He accepted the validity of modern biblical scholarship and particularly of the archeological discoveries but denied it posed any challenge to the content of belief. Though he never mentioned the existence of hell or eternal damnation although he had an active belief in heaven: “We will never be completely at home till we find ourselves in heaven. Here on earth we are sojourners, pilgrims not intended to fell absolutely at home...Timelessness is a better word than eternity and timeless life is a more helpful phrase than everlasting life. (Mar. 1969)”

### **Individual virtues**

Goodman’s radio broadcasts and his columns were addressed to the individual reader. He did not envision an audience of more than one at a time. This was reflected in his personalist approach to the spread of ideas. In October 1962 he wrote, “The thoughts

which really help us, convict us, rebuke us are the thoughts we think ourselves. Whatever we read may be enjoyable or interesting, but it remains apart from us until we begin to think about it as personally significant.” Knowledge began with the self. For example, “The only real contribution you make to a marriage is yourself. You need to know what the self is like.” (June 1964)

Individuals did have choices but Goodman believed that there were imposed severe limits to these choices. “True freedom is not the liberty to do what you please but the liberty to please God, the liberty to do the good thing rather than the bad thing. “(Jan. 1965) within those limits planning and progress were possible. “We must be dissatisfied with where we are and what we are, so that we may be prepared to grow...Real peace is a sort of dynamic contentment.” (Sept. 1965)

Goodman constantly encouraged his readers to make what he saw as positive choices. Work was a given and could be a positive experience. Leisure, whether intellectual or athletic, was complimentary to work. (Mar. 1968; Aug. 1969)

Goodman avoided condemnation and pointed out the negative consequences of choices. Individual choice not societal norm or material necessity formed the basis of his concept of responsibility. “The individual who indulges in excessive alcohol, psychedelic drugs and promiscuous sex is really seeking more life but he or she has made a tragic mistake. Actually, less life has been chosen, the negative rather than the positive.” (Aug. 1969)

Consumerism was a danger because it took individualism past acceptable boundaries. “In our day there are many more appeals to our desire to have than our desire to give. “(July, 1964) For Goodman, the icon of consumerism was the automobile. “The

whole spendthrift complex of expressways...is designed so that each of us can go as he pleases in his own private vehicle. This may well be the most cherished freedom of Western man – his automobile and the right to drive it. “(Jan. 1971)

### **Community values**

We have become accustomed to equating individualism with social liberalism. Although we are less sure of its political descriptor whether it is big-L liberalism or neo-conservatism, the assumption is that the former allows a smaller role to the enactment of expressions of religious values than the latter. Goodman did not support this view. For example he continued to encourage explicit religious instruction in public schools stating that “One of these days we may pay a terrible price for the attempt to educate in a vacuum, outside the environment of faith”. (July 1968) His politics was predicated on the value of individual responsibility and “One of the principles of responsible behaviour is that we must concern ourselves with what unites or binds together”. (Oct. 1969)

He set a strict limit on the role of clergy in public life. “Some parsons are sensitive to this idea of being out in the world. So they devote a great deal of time and energy to public action so that the man in the street will see that “the Church” is interested and alive. Beyond a certain point this is probably a mistake. The parson cannot do the work of witness for the whole Body of Christ. It is probably not even his primary responsibility. His primary responsibility is to teach, train and encourage lay members so that they witness effectively in their daily lives. This is where the church really touches the world – in the lives of its members as they encounter other lives in the circumstances of every day. “(Sept. 1967)

He argued for limits on Freedom of the Press urging “the need for discrimination (judgment, common sense) and a highly developed sense of responsibility... There are certain kinds of evil which are nourished by publicity and which languish and die when they are given the least possible notice”. (April 1966) In this he was urging individual journalists to exercise restraint because as he saw it the true job of censorship (if we dare to use the word) is to protect the vulnerable from the infection of negative and deadly ideas. Yet censorship doesn’t work in today’s society and with today’s attitudes. The only practical censorship is that which you can exercise yourself”. (Nov. 1971)

These limitations did not mean that he would not express opinions about public policy issues though he rarely commented on specific political events. There were three priorities – peace, pollution, poverty (Mar. 1970) And he defended critics of the Church including Pierre Berton’s Uncomfortable Pew and especially those like the Rev. Ernest Harrison whose radical views attracted hate mail. We’re (i.e. Goodman was) much more inclined to listen to the critics when they themselves get down into the arena where the work is being done, where the struggle is taking place and make a few mistakes with the rest of us. (May 1965)

Goodman wrote unfailingly of peace and war every Remembrance Day. During the Cuban Missile crisis he stated: “...there is nothing new to fear...There must be more than monuments. There must be a people dedicated to truth and goodness, a people with a sober sense of responsibility, a people who have renounced selfishness and materialism. (Nov. 1962) (Cuban Missile crisis) While not a pacifist he asked, “When will we get to outlawing war itself? “(Aug. 1966) Though he worried that in opposing war we would forget the sacrifices of others he was aware of the economic costs, “Rich and poor alike,

we spend our treasure on the means of violence, while millions live in abject poverty.

(Jan. 1974)

Regarding poverty, he stated at a time when homelessness was not an issue, “No one would want to go back to the old haphazard ways, when, for everyone who somehow gained attention and sympathy, there might be another who received no help at all”. (Dec. 1966) Individual effort and responsibility were still paramount, “We are not relieved of our duty because there are welfare services. We cannot take for granted that everyone is cared for and no one needs our help. The most comprehensive laws cannot take the place of personal concern. (May 1967)

What scope did he allow for political change? While he supported the rights of employees who were engaged in specific actions he stated, “I have long been convinced that strikes are now outmoded...the right to strike was once a vital force in the struggle for economic justice. The situation is different now and we must find better ways to settle labour management disputes”. (May 1972)

Using the language of an earlier generation he supported “rebellion” by Indians and Negroes because they were “treated not as individuals but en masse, had little if any involvement in the decisions that effected their lives and had nothing to say about their environment...It is time that we started rebelling ourselves, on our own behalf for the threat of depersonalization hangs over all of us. (Feb. 1972)

If there is a point at which Goodman struggled whether or not he should continue within the mainstream of his faith community it could perhaps be best located in his reflections on the student revolution.

He was a worried observer of the 'student revolution'. As a pastor in Winnipeg he had enjoyed success with youth ministry and made connections with the Inter-varsity Christian Fellowship, the more evangelical of the two Protestant groups on the campus of the University of Manitoba. "We often wish that the rising generation would be more willing to learn from us. In reviewing the contribution of youth from all over the world to Expo 67 he noted, "Consciously or unconsciously, they actually want to learn, but not from what we say. They are watching closely to see what we do." (Oct. 1967) "These situations and these rebellions concern us all. As people of good will we want to hear what the rebels are saying (be they old or young) and we would of all in our power to meet their needs".

"Yet there is another side to this. We may soon face a crisis in leadership. Under these circumstances who wants to be a leader. "(Jan. 1969) It was a question he asked of himself as he assumed the position of bishop at a time when the Anglican Church was undergoing profound structural and dogmatic change.

### **The Ecology movement**

In the midst of these challenges I would argue that if a person wants to stay within the mainstream he or she must find a point of reconnection to the interests of the group. Goodman found this, I believe, in the ecology movement. Theologically it fit with his belief in an active presence of the Divine. "Every creature has a purpose." (July 1966) He was an early support of the efforts to reduce pollution. In writing about the need to eliminate DDT "Every Canadian must wake up to the danger of pollution and the urgency of conservation; to the possibility that the beauty which we have taken for granted can go from us because of our folly and greed." (Sept. 1969)

He rated this concern above concern for nuclear disarmament. “It is an inescapable fact that pollution is a greater danger than the nuclear bomb. They haven’t dropped the bomb yet but pollution is running wild. (Nov. 1969)

He realized that getting Canadians to notice this would be an uphill struggle. “We have heard a great deal about our delicate environment in recent years but perhaps we’ve never quite realized how sensitive it is. In our country there is so much of everything that we have been very slow to accept the absolute necessity of care and conservation. “If we are to walk responsibly amid the trees and flowers we are also to walk responsibly with our brothers and sisters.” (Oct. 1975)

One of the few wider political events that Goodman explicitly acknowledged was the death of Martin Luther King but within a Christian rather than an overtly political context. ““The death of King was Christ-like but without Christ it would be a hopeless death. It is only in Christ that we see the other side, the dawn breaking through the dark night. One of the finer points of living is to appreciate and build on what has already been done by others. Some of us seem able to express ourselves only in a vacuum. We must destroy and build anew or we cannot build at all. Carried to its extreme and applied universally, this attitude would mean the end of human progress in complete anarchy and chaos. What is wrong generally is also wrong for me personally and individually. Therefore, it is undeniably wrong for me to destroy, neglect, or fail to appreciate the achievements of others in order that I may express myself.” (May 1968)

If I may venture a preliminary assessment of Goodman’s political theology it would be to say that it was conservative in that he acknowledged the continuum of

change but individually and personally chose not to change. His stance is distinguished from today's neo-liberal (conservative) agenda in that was inclusive and not exclusive. Goodman never assumed that dialogue should cease even with those with whom he profoundly disagreed.

### **An Archives Endnote**

This paper was not originally meant to be an archival project. I was asked to consider writing a new introduction to Bishop Goodman's memoirs. My thanks to Shirley Onn for suggesting this project. I had assumed that what I had to work with was the *Country Guide* files (housed at the University of Manitoba Library), the books and possibility some interviews with family and friends. I expected that the radio scripts had long since disappeared. But I was wrong. When the Goodman's moved after retirement from Calgary to Salmon Arm, B.C. the bishop gave his radio scripts to his son David who has kept them. Through his sister Judy Powell, David has graciously shared these with me. I hope that the family will eventually donate the collection to make its research value more widely available. Not one script is missing and all are in their original order, numbered and dated. It is clear to me that Goodman used everything he wrote and kept careful track of when he reused materials. What is also clear is Goodman's consistency of thought and expression. I believe that this consistency is the key to his longevity as an author and broadcaster. To that extent his work can be said to chart the "mainline", in a period of constant change.

