

extinction in Britain because of this simple but devastating change. The very nature of modern farming (such as the brutal practice of live animal exports, in which animals are transported without water, feed, or rest for 24 hours) has also led to conflict and a crisis of confidence in the English countryside. The growth of organic farming and the demand for “real” or “whole” foods, itself the object of modern marketing and consumer capitalism, might be seen as an alternative version of agriculture, a different take on the uses of the English countryside.

What is interesting in all of this is that there has been a shift in the focus of political and social debate in Britain. Up to the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, British politics was driven by rural issues. By the 1880s, it was increasingly shaped by the demands of the city. But by the early twentieth century, concern about food standards, the environment, animal welfare and rights, and land usage made the rural once again important in British society and politics. The rural is no longer merely a comforting myth of national identity, a pleasant vista to dispel unsettling thoughts of contemporary life or a reassuring counterpoint to the modern. The rural now reflects modernity. The familiar signature tune of BBC radio’s soap about rural Ambridge, “The Archers”, should perhaps now be played in a minor key, with touches of dissonance.

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HUEL, Raymond J. A. — *Archbishop A.-A. Taché of St. Boniface: The “Good Fight” and the Illusive Vision*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press and Western Canadian Publishers, 2003. Pp. ix, 429.

Biography is currently undergoing rehabilitation among social historians. Whereas these historians once dismissed the genre for its traditional “great man” approach to the past, they are increasingly acknowledging the need for critical and comprehensive studies of individual lives. Underlying this prescription is a concept of the individual as a product of diverse historical forces — some social, some cultural, some political, some economic. It is the biographer’s task to identify these forces and to examine the ways in which they converge and interact over the course of a single life. Hence, according to many social historians, biography can offer rich insight into larger historical phenomena and can contribute to a wide-ranging understanding of the past.

This is the theoretical premise of Raymond Huel’s *Archbishop A.-A. Taché of St. Boniface: The “Good Fight” and the Illusive Vision*, winner of the Manitoba Historical Society’s Margaret McWilliams Award for best scholarly book (2004). Huel — professor emeritus of history at the University of Lethbridge — introduces his work as “more than the story of an individual. It is the history of the Catholic Church in Quebec and the Canadian North West.... It is the account of an attempt to create a new Quebec in the West.... It is a story of cultural confrontation and conflict” (p. xxv). By incorporating the “new directions” of biography into his study of the Oblate Archbishop, Huel presents a multifaceted, exhaustively researched, and meticulously

annotated account of the French Catholic presence on the western plains during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Although he examines several aspects of Taché's career (1845–1894), Huel focuses primarily on the prelate's vision of a "sister province" of Quebec. This vision emerged from a deep-seated conviction that the western plains were an extension of the French-Canadian *patrie* — a region explored by *voyageurs* in the eighteenth century and evangelized by francophone missionaries in the nineteenth century. In the hopes of building upon the foundations laid by his ancestors, Taché encouraged the French-speaking and French Michif-speaking Métis of the North West to settle in permanent agrarian communities. He endeavoured to enlarge these communities by recruiting colonists from his native Quebec as well as from French-speaking centres in New England. Within these budding settlements, Taché strove to replicate the traditional institutions of Quebec — notably the parish church, the confessional school, and the convent.

Yet prospects for this "sister province" grew progressively dim after 1870. In the wake of the Red River Insurrection, the Métis became disenchanting by French Canadians and felt particularly betrayed by Taché. As an emissary of the federal government, Taché had promised a complete amnesty to Métis insurgents and had been humiliated when the amnesty was not granted. This unfulfilled promise left a rift in the French Catholic community and ultimately hastened the dispersal of the Manitoba Métis. To complicate matters, Quebec grew increasingly reluctant to endorse Taché's settlement schemes. Fearful of depopulating *la vieille province, québécois* officials resolved to curb westward emigration. Thus, as Manitoba and the North West experienced a steady influx of Anglo-Protestant settlers, French-speaking Catholics found themselves in a vulnerable minority position. This demographic shift resulted in the abolition of publicly funded Catholic schools in Manitoba (1890) and the curtailment of French-language rights in the North West (1892). Nonetheless, Taché remained steadfast in his "good fight" to uphold the interests of his flock. Until his dying day, the Archbishop clung to the naïve hope that moral suasion could induce the majority to respect the religious and linguistic rights of the minority.

Huel adroitly delineates the cultural, political, and social forces that gave shape to Taché's "illusory vision". Drawing from three decades of archival research in Quebec and the Prairie provinces, Huel identifies various currents of thought which Taché absorbed during his youth in Lower Canada and his early adulthood in Rupert's Land. Like most French-Canadian clerics in the nineteenth century, Taché was conditioned to understand language and religion as interdependent concepts. He therefore regarded any threat to the French language as a threat to the Catholic faith. This principle informed his struggle to obtain constitutional guarantees for French language rights in the West. Furthermore, Huel reveals the influence of an obsolete political culture on Taché's thinking. Born into an old patrician family in Lower Canada, Taché inherited a sense of *noblesse oblige* and felt honour-bound to serve his co-religionists and his compatriots. He was cast in the mould of the statesman — a gentleman of high moral standing who never went back on his word. Consequently, Taché was ill-suited to the Canadian political arena of the late nineteenth century, in which the statesman had been replaced by the politician. According to Huel, Taché

“was never able to comprehend the motives of politicians or their need to be evasive and tread delicately when confronting controversial issues that had political ramifications” (p. 319).

While examining Taché within a broad historical context, Huel identifies characteristics that are extremely difficult to historicize. He notes, for instance, that Taché displayed a natural gift for managing material affairs. The Archbishop resolved complex logistical problems associated with delivering supplies to far-flung missions or acquiring vast tracts of land for settlement. Unfortunately, Taché had no knack for human resources. He was incapable of delegating authority and was excessively critical of his clergy. His domineering style generated tension within the Catholic community and exacerbated difficulties with the Oblate General Administration. Taché was not a born leader, but rather “a manager who used power to bargain with, threaten or coerce subordinates” (p. 328).

Despite the sophistication of his analysis and the extensiveness of his research, Huel glosses over certain topics in the interests of maintaining clarity and focus. It is regrettable that he devotes little attention to relations between the Archbishop and non-francophone Catholics. For instance, Indian missions fade into the background of Huel’s account after 1859, and Taché’s role in the development of industrial schools receives only a cursory mention. Moreover, Huel does not acknowledge Irish discontent with the French-dominated Church until the second-last page. This last-minute reference to the Irish contains an editorial error: the first Bishop of Calgary was John Thomas McNally, not James Thomas McNally as indicated on page 342. Such oversights are surprising considering that Huel has published seminal works on ethno-linguistic relations in the western Church — notably *Proclaiming the Gospel to the Indians and the Métis* (1996) and “The Irish French Conflict in Catholic Episcopal Nominations” (1975).

Nonetheless, *Archbishop A.-A. Taché of St. Boniface* is an outstanding study combining “new directions” in social history with three decades of research on the western Church. Huel has made a worthy contribution both to Prairie historiography and to the rehabilitation of scholarly biography.

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KESHEN, Jeffrey A. — *Saints, Sinners and Soldiers: Canada’s Second World War*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004. Pp. x, 389.

As Jeff Keshen tells us in the introduction to his *Saints, Sinners and Soldiers*, the Second World War has had a good press in Canada. Public and academic histories have positioned it as a golden period in Canada’s past during which the nation and its citizens accepted sacrifices for an indisputably humanitarian goal. His book explores the validity of this national myth. Was it, indeed, “a good war” (p. 11)? Individual morality, altruism, and generosity are the key signposts by which Keshen judges the virtue of Canada’s war.