Bradley Truman Noel was involved in a fatal motorcycle accident on September 10, 2022, not too far from his home in the Canadian province of Newfoundland. He was fifty-one, survived by his spouse, Melinda. He was my friend. I will feel this tragic loss most acutely whenever SPS convenes, for although our paths crossed elsewhere, it was at SPS that our friendship was nurtured and sustained. His untimely death comes at a point when, from my vantage point at the SPS banquet held at Vanguard (2022), it appeared that a new chapter had begun for him within the Society.

We both revelled in our relative anonymity at SPS. Attribute some of this to the Canadian virtue of keeping a low profile. But attribute it mostly to our shared experience of SPS as a community in which many benefits accrue without one having to stand up to read a paper or to stand out in debate. All of us in SPS have “celebrity” status within our fields of influence, within the schools and churches where our distinct giftings set us apart from others, conferring status and responsibility. SPS meetings are a temporary oasis.

I doubt any of us is as honored within our circles of influence as Brad was and continues to be in his. Brad and I shared a long-running joke, initiated by my insistence that I was a “man of the people.” The joke had staying power because he was the one who fit the description, insofar as that phrase means naturally social and easily approachable and widely influential.

This was apparent at Tyndale University (Toronto), where we both served: he as the director of the undergraduate Pentecostal Studies program on behalf of his denomination, The Pentecostal Assemblies of Newfoundland and Labrador (PAONL); and I as the dean of Master’s Pentecostal Seminary@Tyndale Seminary on behalf of my denomination, The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC). When I strode down the corridors of Tyndale University, it was always in the passing lane, but Brad was typically in the slow lane, or even on the shoulder, standing within various clusters of students and IT wizards and faculty.
Every mental picture I can summon of Brad has others in the frame, which reflects his character, certainly, but even more his leadership. His style of ministry was to lead by coming alongside. Although he played a leading role in devising the innovative arrangement that the PAONL struck with Tyndale in 2009 and he was the one who carried it out, when describing his role in the process it was always in the first-person plural. More than any faculty member I have known, his ministry extended from the classroom to the chapel to the cafeteria. He was “the doc” to the many students from his home province that he mentored. And, my sources tell me, back home in Newfoundland (affectionately known as The Rock) he was a fixture at summer youth events and in churches across the island.

From what I am told, Canada is a cold country. As all who have never actually visited Canada know all too well, the ice cap only recedes across the southern parts of the country for a few weeks every July. Understandably, then, Brad and all other Canadians treasure their time in the sun; but maybe Brad a bit more than most. Whenever we landed at airports for SPS meetings in southern U.S. locales, Brad had a tradition. He would disappear into the washroom closest to the luggage carousel, and then reemerge as a man transformed: sandals, shorts, a tropical-themed shirt, and the widest grin imaginable. Gone were the layers: off with the old, on with the few. There was life to be lived, and no time to be wasted.

If there were sights to be seen in the vicinity of a SPS venue, he wanted to see them and he took me with him. We began a tradition of staying an extra day after each meeting, affording time to attend a local church and see a few sights—like the time after SPS in Springfield, when he drove me over the border into Arkansas. He had always wanted to go to the city of Little Rock because of its association with the U.S. civil rights battle to desegregate schools. With too little time, however, we settled on taking a picture of the sign “Welcome to Arkansas” and planting our footprints in the gravel on the highway shoulder.

As with many friendships, we expressed our affection and support in many small ways and means, but occasionally on a grander scale. Brad traveled halfway across the country to get to the 2022 biennial General Conference of the PAOC. He had flown to Winnipeg with some colleagues from the PAONL to observe the final discussion and vote on a proposed refreshed statement of faith for the PAOC. He wanted to be there in person, he told me, to get a ringside seat. Apropos our habitual manner of “encouraging” one another, he assured me in advance that the proposal advanced by the committee I served on would face no obstacles—after all, the only controversial elements were to drop “initial evidence” in favor of “sign” language, and to remove Dispensationalism as the official eschatological system of our fellowship! As it turned out, there was sur-
prisingly little discussion and the conference voted overwhelmingly to adopt a revised Statement of Essential Truths. He texted me from ringside: “KO in the first round. Waste of my entertainment dollars.”

At SPS, we invariably chose different elective sessions to attend, resulting in wide-ranging discussions at many dinners. The exception was our mutual commitment to the Canadian section of the preconference meetings. The section was birthed out of concern that the Canadian pentecostal story required attention and scholarly research because the ubiquitous term “North American Pentecostalism” had come to denote only the U.S. experience. And it was largely due to Brad’s influence that the Canadian section was rapidly becoming the Newfoundland section, as a growing number of contributors from the island were presenting their history of Pentecostalism.

When I first met up with Brad at Vanguard last March, he told me he had circled the listing for my paper in the Biblical Studies/NT section, because “when a man of the people gives an address, one must be there.” I was skeptical he would show up: I had managed to secure the coveted time slot of last paper in the final interest group section on Saturday afternoon. I wasn’t surprised, then, when I stood up at the lectern and looked for him that he wasn’t there. It was sunny and warm; Newport Beach was a short drive away. He and his sandals were probably on the beach alongside those of other still-thawing Canadians. That moment is a warm memory of his absence, because it is fused with joyful anticipation of seeing him at the banquet and questioning him about his whereabouts. The cold reality of his absence, however, will register painfully at the next SPS and those that follow. No Brad at the baggage carousel or in the Canadian section, and no Brad around any table.

I saw him that night at the banquet, but I did not tease him about his no-show in the afternoon. That was to be saved for the right time and the right audience, when I would proclaim my superiority as “a man of the people.” Besides, he was preoccupied. Peter Althouse had asked Brad to oversee the order in which each table would join the buffet line. As I watched him in action, I thought, so much for his anonymity. Brad didn’t just point to a table when it was time to join the queue. He was himself, coming alongside each table, joking, laughing, making each table—even the last chosen—feel valued. He took a short break from working the room to come over to me, and with the widest grin imaginable, told me how much power he had been given, over me and everyone else in the society. Indeed, he did have power over me, more than he probably knew.