

Pioneers in Ecumenicity
A Brief Pre-natal Study of the
United Church of Canada

Jan H. Boer

Calvin Theological Seminary
Grand Rapids Michigan

February 1965

Outline

- I. Introduction
- II. Causes of ecumenical climate
 - A. Solidarity in protest
 - B. Denominational consolidation
 - C. Frontier conditions
 1. Sparse population
 2. Lack of ecclesiastical manpower
 3. Leveling process through association
 4. Liberal activism
- III. Preliminary ventures of cooperation
 - A. Union churches
 - B. Interdenominational missions
- IV. Early steps towards union
 - A. Toronto, April, 1889
 - B. Joint Union Committee: Toronto, April, 1904
 1. Composition and arrangement
 2. Basis of Union
 - a. Character of doctrinal statement
 - b. Reaction
 - c. Statement on law
 - C. Denominational action and reaction
 1. Initial response
 2. Organized opposition among Presbyterians
 3. Impatience of negotiating churches
 4. 1921: crisis
 5. Reasons for opposition and its failure
- V. Final state
 - A. Securing legislation
 - B. Schism and union

Pioneers in Ecumenicity

The choice of title for this study has been made quite consciously, for the church whose pre-natal existence I am about to examine prides herself on being a true pioneer in ecumenicity. Canada is a youthful nation, largely undeveloped –not underdeveloped—and Canadians are well aware of their youthfulness. They pride themselves on their natural miracles so abundant within their borders, but they are extremely conscious of their lack of a specific Canadian culture, so conscious that they harbor a mild inferiority complex. Consequently, when they think to have any reason for boasting, they latch on to the occasion with great fervor and make the most of it. The United Church of Canada is one object of their pride, for this ecumenical denomination has made Canada an important pioneer in one of the greatest movements of the twentieth century, at least as far as Canadians are concerned. Canadians had visions of their leading the world in their union movement. Already as far back as 1875, there was a hope that the union of the Presbyterian denominations in Canada would lead a wider union. Said Presbyterian Dr. Cook: “For larger union is, I trust, in store for the Churches of Christ even in Canada than that which we effect this day.”¹ Nine years later, at the occasion of union of the Methodist churches of Canada, Dr. Rice expressed the hope “that this union would influence prejudicially or otherwise ‘the efforts for unification of the Churches on the earth.’”²

The forces that ultimately brought about the United Church of Canada were many: historical, geographical, climatic, economical, theological and temperamental. One of the earliest, though not too significant, historical factors was, as Silcox expresses it, a “solidarity in protest.”³ The earliest European settlers in Canada were Roman Catholic. By the time the first Protestants arrived, the Roman Catholics were well established. Over against this threatening giant, Protestants were driven towards each other. This is, to be sure, a very minor factor, but historians seem to agree that this common threat inculcated an

¹ Edmund H. Oliver, *The Winning of the Frontier*, p. 243.

² *Ibid.*, p. 244.

³ Claris E. Silcox, *Church Union in Canada: Its Causes and Consequences*, p. 71.

attitude which later came to the surface in union efforts.⁴ Similar solidarity was encouraged among the non-Anglican Protestants in their opposition to the Clergy Reserves.

The second half of the nineteenth century was characterized by denominational consolidation. Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians – all these groups had been divided amongst themselves, some on geographical basis, others on basis of incompatibility, whether true or pretended. The Presbyterian Church was the product of the union of nine separate bodies; the Methodist Church of eight bodies; the Congregational Church of four. Such re-unions schooled the churchmen to take their denominational eccentricities less seriously and they sowed the ecumenical seeds that were soon to sprout.

The strongest single force leading to the United Church, however, was the frontier with its rigorous demands. It was the one dominant factor that brought the three denominations together, and in this sense, too, the title of this paper accurately reflects the situation. One author asserts in regard to the frontier:

In spite of the many superficial diversities in church life in Canada, there has been a deep underlying unity in the main purpose of the churches in this land. Throughout their whole history they have all sought to do one and the same thing, -- to win the Frontier. The history of church life in Canada is, therefore, in large measure a story of the expansion and winning of the Frontier. Every major issue in the religious history of Canada has arisen on the Frontier.⁵

Cragg concurs with this opinion: "Winning the frontier has been the major responsibility of all the churches, and other matters have been remorselessly thrust aside."⁶ Grant, on the other hand, asserts that the importance of the frontier has been grossly overemphasized: "The analogy of the American frontier has been particularly misleading to Canadian writers."⁷ But Grant is quite alone in this position apparently, for all the books and magazines tasted or digested in

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁵ Oliver, p. v.

⁶ G.R. Cragg, "The Present Position and the Future Prospects of Canadian Theology," *Canadian Journal of Theology*, (I, April, 1955), p. 6.

⁷ John W. Grant, "Asking Questions of the Canadian Past," *Canadian Journal of Theology*, (II, July, 1955), p.101.

preparation for this paper equally emphasize the force of the frontier. This centrality of the frontier is not confined to Canada's church history, but it is a theme that runs through all of her history, also in its economic and political aspects.⁸

The Canadian frontier was a huge territory of unknown and uninhabited thousands of square miles. Into this great wilderness the pioneers settled. Distances were great; the population extremely sparse. Towns were few and far between. Occupations were typical of frontier situations: agriculture, mining and lumbering. Those engaged in the last two industries were frequently required to break camp and move on to new locations. It takes little imagination to understand that ecclesiastical supervision over such a sparse and transient population was almost impossible.

For one thing, there was the lack of manpower. The Anglican Church, for example, had missions covering 50 to 200 miles with only one priest or deacon to serve the area, and the Anglican Church was no exception.⁹ Severe winters and lack of roads added to the impossible burdens. The result was that no institutional work was carried out beyond the minimum of baptizing, marrying, and burying.¹⁰

The inhabitants of these small communities were from different backgrounds, ecclesiastically as well as nationally. Such a mixed population "enforced a necessary toleration of creeds and cultures creating an impatience with eastern prejudices and emphases."¹¹ It was a matter of course that in these communities, neighbours should be drawn towards each other in spite of their differences, especially those whose national background and culture were identical. This growing towards each other and the hardships of daily living which allowed few luxuries combined to forget their differences. William Newton spent twenty years for the Anglican Church on the Saskatchewan River. At the end of this period he lamented:

⁸ Oliver, p. vi.

⁹ H.H. Walsh, *The Christian Church in Canada*, p. 272.

¹⁰ Silcox, p. 9.

¹¹ Walsh, p. 285.

It seems almost impossible for church ideas to take root and thrive in our colonies. The people have no historic sense. There is nothing in which it can grow. Their notions are of today or at most yesterday; their hopes and thoughts are in the future; their dreams are of coming times, so the Church of England is at a disadvantage. Her ideas and methods are not new; they are ancient; what therefore have they to do with young America?¹²

Says Grant, "...disgust with the divisiveness was almost universal. Antipathy to tradition became in these areas part of the accepted mystique of union."¹³ One could perhaps judge that the Anglican Church deserved her loss, if Newton was right in his assessment of her, but the indifference of the settlers was due also to another factor: they themselves were changing. Grant quotes the Reverend George C. Pidgeon: "You cannot transfer the spirit, the atmosphere and the distinctive character of a religious community from one land to another."¹⁴

The picture was, to say the least, most confusing. Everywhere in the West one found matchbox churches of English-speaking groups. All were inadequately equipped and heated. Their ministers were invariably underpaid, besides having to spread their efforts over three or more preaching stations.

As was to be expected, the inhabitants of these ... towns became impatient with a sectarian system which not only prevented them from enjoying adequate church facilities but also from entering into full communal life with their neighbours; never had sectarianism appeared more incongruous than in these sparsely settled towns and villages....¹⁵

What has been said so far is that the main result of frontier conditions was a blurring of differences and loss of distinctions. This was caused by lack of ecclesiastical care, spontaneous association with those of other denominations, and by the hard requirements of practical life. There is at least one additional cause of the ecumenical climate that prevailed, namely that of liberal activism. The term refers to the combination of liberal theology and activism inherited

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 277.

¹³ John W. Grant, "Blending Traditions: The United Church of Canada," *Canadian Journal of Theology*, IX, (January, 1963), p. 51.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Walsh, p. 288.

from the frontier. The combination is perhaps a natural one. Cragg suggests that “in a country where practical demands were clamant, the attractions of the ‘social gospel’ were obvious, and it was easy to accept them as a substitute for resolute grappling with great theological questions.”¹⁶ Grant also makes reference to the leveling tendency of liberal activism: “... it indicates... that the historic controversies that had divided the negotiating denominations were now widely regarded as dead issues.” He even suggests “that the churches were not yet ready to grapple seriously with current sources of division.”¹⁷ This consolidation and its leveling influence was, as already shown, largely the result of the frontier, but Liberalism helped along. Cragg tells us that the Canadian churches at the turn of the century “were involved in the struggle to win freedom from the fetters of a narrow literalism. When that battle was won, there was no strong theological tradition to assert itself.”¹⁸ Besides this negative influence, Liberalism also had some positive impact, as shown by Walsh: “The problems of criticism by modern theology also prepared the atmosphere for union. Its advocates thought it a good opportunity to revise the ancient creeds of the church to suit the times.”¹⁹ The latter motive was stronger in the eastern part of the country where men could afford the “luxuries” of reflection.

This liberal activism found marked expression in ecclesiastical boards. The Methodist Church, for example, appointed a standing committee on Temperance, Prohibition, and Moral reform. The name was changed later to Evangelism and Social Service, its specific mandate being “to give effect to the many recommendations concerning the application of the principles of the Gospel to the economic, political, social and moral relations of life.”²⁰ The Presbyterians formed a council of Social Service and Evangelism with a goal similar to that of the Methodists, but with a name that is more expressive of its purpose, since “evangelism” comes last. The Anglicans followed a few years later with a Council

¹⁶ Cragg, p. 7.,

¹⁷ Grant, “Blending ...,” p. 52.

¹⁸ Cragg, p. 7.

¹⁹ Walsh, p. 290.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 332.

of Social Service. Once again we are confronted with a medieval ecclesiasticizing of life, a practice that Protestantism has yet to thrust aside.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, merger talks between the major English speaking denominations were beginning to take on a measure of urgency, and well they might, since impatience on the frontier was becoming increasingly prevalent. Many localities began to form their own independent union churches. There was also another type of union churches in the making, called “double affiliation churches” and sometimes even “triple affiliation churches.” They would retain their connections with all the parent bodies involved, while their clergymen would be alternately Presbyterian and Methodist. Their constitution would usually be comprised of the Basis of Union²¹ and their name frequently would be “United Church of....” In their charter they had a clause specifying that “this United Church will be incorporated with the proposed United Church of Canada when organic union is effected.”²² Their budget and mission funds were distributed to the parent denominations according to their ratio of membership. In 1923, two years before the great union, there were no less than three thousand such units of independent or semi-independent congregations, which meant approximately twelve hundred pastoral charges.²³ The prevalence of these churches emphasized the gravity of the situation and spurred the denominations on to serious negotiation.

Another form of cooperation was attempted on the denominational level, especially involving the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches. Committees from these churches met to work out some scheme to avoid overlapping on mission fields and on the frontier. The first attempt of 1886 failed, since it was killed in the ecclesiastical machinery of the Presbyterians. In 1890, it was revived by the Methodists. The Methodist Committee on Christian Union reported that

the time has come when some practical steps might profitably be taken to bring about a better understanding in reference to the work on mission fields and that an amicable arrangement might be made between the two

²¹ *Vide infra.*

²² Oliver, p. 251.

²³ Walsh, p. 295.

churches which would prevent any unseemly rivalry and the unnecessary expenditure of men and means....²⁴

It was not until 1903 that the Presbyterians finally agreed to enter into some kind of arrangement. It is not clear what exact provisions were outlined, but it is not important since again it failed "because of excess denominationalism."²⁵ James Robertson, superintendent of the Presbyterian missions in the West, accused the Methodists of leaving the Presbyterians to find the fields of labor and then sending in their own men. Furthermore, many Presbyterians refused to change to Methodist churches in some areas, while Baptists and Anglicans refused to cooperate altogether.

Our achievement up to date has been to point out some of the basic factors that combined to create an ecumenical atmosphere among the Canadian churches. We have also mentioned some of the preliminary ventures of cooperation among the churches. Our task is now to trace the main events that led to the eventual creation of the United Church of Canada in 1925. In doing so, we shall also have occasion to refer to the bitter hostilities that arose, particularly among the Presbyterians.

The initial step towards actual union was taken by the Anglican Church. In 1881, Canon Carmichael presented a paper at an Anglican conference in which he pleaded for union negotiations with other denominations. It took the House of Bishops and the Lower House five years to pass a resolution to appoint a committee conferring with similar committees of other denominations. The first such meeting took place in Toronto in April of 1889. The Anglicans had invited the Presbyterian and the Methodist Churches to send their delegates. The Congregational Church was not represented. Silcox suggests that the Anglican committee had simply forgotten to invite them. Millmann, on the other hand, quotes from *Organic Union of Canadian Churches* to show that their absence was not a matter of oversight so much as a deliberate act of omission on the part of the Anglicans:

²⁴ Silcox, p. 114.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

Dean Carmichael compared Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational polities and drew the conclusion that little could be expected from the great Congregational system in any initial movement towards union. It was undoubtedly this persuasion, shared by his Anglican colleagues which explains the lack of positive approach to Congregationalists and probably to Baptists as well at this stage of negotiations.²⁶

The exclusion had no serious consequences. Finally the Anglicans excluded themselves, while the Congregationalists entered the union. As to the Baptists, they soon let it be known that they would not consider union with churches that submitted themselves to human creeds and that baptized children.

Anglican Bishop Sweatman was chairman at the first joint meeting. He emphasized "that the Conference was called to discover what basis existed for agreement, and he briefly advanced the Lambeth articles as a ground of union."²⁷ Dean Carmichael read a paper comparing the respective creeds of the three participating churches and showed that "the doctrines of the Christian faith were held in common by all three confessions and expressed the conviction that differences in worship and church order were not insurmountable."²⁸ In another paper, however, John Carry, Rector of Port Perry, Ontario, made it abundantly clear that his denomination would allow for some doctrinal latitude, but that there would "be found a steady determination not to surrender or abandon an institution which... is coeval with the church, and, at any rate, has come down to this day, side by side with the New Testament, as part of her inalienable heritage."²⁹ He added: We are convinced that the position we advocate in this conference is more likely to secure Faith and Freedom and Union than existing systems....³⁰ From the point of view of union, it was perhaps fortunate that this paper, entitled "The Historic Episcopate," was merely read, not discussed. If it had been discussed, Carmichael's almost cavalier dismissal of the problem would

²⁶ Thomas R. Millmann, "The Conference on Christian Unity, Toronto, 1889" in *Canadian Journal of Theology*, III, July, 1957), p. 167.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

certainly have been exposed for what it was – one grand delusion. As it was, the meeting ended on a most cordial tone.

The denominational committees reported to their churches, the reaction of which varied considerably. The Anglican Church approved subsequent meetings, provided the Historic Episcopate receive its due. This was unacceptable to the Methodists. At the General Conference, they decided that the Historic Episcopate, as the Anglicans saw it, had to be adjusted to recognize the equality of the office of Presbyter and Bishop. They reappointed the committee and charged it with the responsibility to make this clear at the next joint session. The Presbyterian Church likewise reappointed its committee. This denomination's stand on the episcopate was less certain. Their main objection was directed against the advocating of the Nicene Creed as the basis for union; it was regarded as insufficient. The existence of committees, however, is no guarantee for accomplishment. These committees seem to have simply faded out of existence through inactivity.

During the following years there were renewed attempts at discussion, but they failed repeatedly. In the process of attempts, the Anglican Church dropped out of the picture on account of her insistence on the Historic Episcopate, while the Congregationalists joined at the "round table."

A decisive break in the deadlock occurred on April 21, 1904. At the invitation of the Methodists, they and the Presbyterians and Congregationalists met in Toronto. A joint committee was formed, with chairmen of each denomination presiding in turn. Five sub-committees were formed, consisting of forty members each, sixteen of whom were Methodist, sixteen Presbyterian, and eight Congregational. The rationale behind this ratio was the comparative size of the denominations. The Congregational Church was rapidly dwindling away, a factor which likely was mainly responsible for her eagerness to participate in the discussion. Each committee was assigned one of the following topics: Doctrine, Polity, Training of the Ministry, Administration, and Law.

Silcox has made a statistical study of this joint committee and has come to the conclusion that its composition has had remarkable influence. For every ten ministers, the Congregational Church delegation had 2.8 lay members; the

Methodist Church 4.9; the Presbyterian Church 2.6. He suggests that “this fact may have some significance in the light of the final outcome when the percentage of Presbyterian ministers entering the United Church was larger than the percentage of Presbyterian churches.”³¹ The advanced maturity of the members has also had its impact, as will be shown later.

The sub-committees submitted their reports to the joint committee in 1908. These reports were put together in a document known as the Basis of Unity. Its doctrinal statement underwent minor changes at the insistence of the Presbyterian Church, but on the whole it was acceptable to the participating churches. The preamble to the Basis emphasized the desire to be considered not as a novelty but as a continuation of the three streams:

We further maintain our allegiance to the evangelical doctrines of the Reformation, as set forth in common in the doctrinal standards adopted by the Presbyterian Church of Canada, by the Congregational Union of Ontario and Quebec, and by the Methodist Church.³²

The articles are phrased in conventional terms. While eliminating many details found in the doctrinal statements of the three denominations, it has sought to retain the basic elements of the ancient faith in such a way that the distinctive traits of each would be recognized, though the Presbyterian influence dominates and Congregational influence is minimal.

In view of what was said previously regarding the prevailing impatience with conventional theology on the part of both frontier men and Liberals, one may well wonder at the conservative character of the statement. Silcox seeks the cause of this conservative character of the Basis in the age of the committee members. The average age of the Methodist section was sixty; that of the Congregational members forty-nine; that of the Presbyterian members fifty-seven. These men were all prominent leaders in their denominations, but they had reached their full maturity and no radical departure could be expected from them.³³

³¹ Silcox, p. 128.

³² The General Council of the United Church of Canada, *The Manual of The United Church of Canada*, p. 13.

³³ Silcox, p. 127.

The reaction to the doctrinal statement was strongest among Presbyterians. One group thought it too liberal; the other, too ancient. This reaction foreshadowed the struggle that eventually was to split that group almost into two halves. The conservatives thought too many essentials had been eliminated. The liberals were able to accept the statement in view of the Congregational victory in its battle to prevent the requirement for absolute subscription to the statement by office bearers. For this provision “many an Ordinant in the United Church has since, in his secret thoughts, thanked the Congregational members of the Joint Union Committee for their faithful witness on this important matter.”³⁴ Anyone who has had the opportunity to acquaint himself with the United Church in the post-union years, immediately recognizes the force of Chalmers’ observation. Its members have called the statement obscurantist, medieval, reactionary, irrelevant, too elaborate, stale – and the list of derogatory comments can go on. “As it stands, it is of little value religiously or theologically to our Church’s life.”³⁵

The greatest stumbling block was not the doctrinal statement, as could be expected in view of the background described previously. The statement on law caused the greatest difficulty – another indication of the prevailing doctrinal indifference. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss in detail what the differences were and how they were finally settled. Many problems were left unsolved in the hope that they would solve themselves in the course of time, an arduous course to follow and one that did not always go smoothly.

Now that the Basis of Union was presented to the churches, it was up to the denominations to act upon it. The Congregational Church, in 1910, took a straw vote in which eighty per cent voted in favor of union as defined by the Basis. Presbyterians voted roughly two-thirds in favor as well. Since the opposition was substantial, the general Assembly in Edmonton decided not to push the matter, but to have further discussion and more conferences in order to achieve greater unanimity. The reaction among the Methodists was largely in favor of union.

³⁴ Randolph C. Chalmers, *See the Christ Stand! A Study in Doctrine in The United Church of Canada*, p. 121.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

The Joint Union Committee met again in 1914 to consider a number of changes in the Basis of Union, changes suggested for the most part by the Presbyterians, but which were minor in importance. The changes were accepted. It was at this meeting, too, that the name of the proposed union church would be The United Church of Canada. The committee did not meet again till World War I was over.

The matter was once again submitted to the membership of the Presbyterian Church in 1915. Taken by presbyteries, the positive vote had increased by some margin, but when taken individually, the votes showed an increase in negative reaction to the proposal. Silcox traces this down to two main factors. The first is that while discussions were going on and resolutions made, the churches in the eastern part of Canada were getting increasingly settled and organized to greater perfection. The needs of the frontier was fast becoming foreign to them and, consequently, indifferent. They were reaching the stage where they “were sitting pretty.” The second factor is that the vote was taken at a time when many of the young men were in service overseas and could therefore not vote.³⁶

The General Assembly in Winnipeg faced a dilemma in 1916. If, on the one hand, the Presbyterians would not join the proposed union, they would lose a large number of congregations that had cooperated in the union churches at the frontier. On the other hand, they faced mounting opposition within their ranks, with the possibility of schism. A vote was taken by the assembly and the resolution favorable to union was carried 406 to 90. Now the die had been cast. The machinery towards union was set in motion. What was there to do but iron out the legal difficulties involved?

The situation was not as simple as it sounded. The opposition began to grow more masculine in its efforts. Already in 1912, Presbyterian opposition organized the Presbyterian Association for the Federation of the Churches. The purpose of this association was to defeat union efforts by suggesting an alternative in the form of a federation of churches along the pattern of some American experiments. No doubt, this organization left its marks upon the second general plebiscite among Presbyterians.

³⁶ Silcox, pp. 174-175.

When the Presbyterian Church committed herself to union in 1916, thirty-two members of the assembly signed a protest to the effect that those who had voted in favor had, by that very act, lost their rights of membership in the Church, since they had voted to do away with the name and the creed of the denomination. The Presbyterian Association for the Federation of Churches was replaced by the Presbyterian Church Association. Silcox catches something of the excitement stirred up among the opposition: “The non-concurrents revealed a grim resolution to continue the Presbyterian Church in Canada as a separate entity – ‘Bring on the bluid an’ the stane,’ said one of them.³⁷ Tension within the denomination mounted steadily. It was plain that the result of the contemplated union would be disunity and that of a kind much worse than that which brought on the union movement.

To alleviate the tension and hate, a truce was called within the Presbyterian Church in 1917. The term “truce” is actually used to describe the nature of the agreement, and it indicates something of the militant character of the opposition. The truce was meant to leave the matter at rest till after the war and to cultivate a spirit of prayer and understanding. It lasted till 1921, when the fires broke out once again.

While this truce kept the fire down to a smoulder, impatience among the Congregationalists and Methodists increased. In 1918, a resolution was passed by the latter to proceed to actual union and so force the Presbyterians to make up their minds, but it was voted down in favor of extended longsuffering towards the troubled denomination. That impatience was strong is evident from a speech given by the General Superintendent of the Methodist Church:

Surely the ecclesiastical mind could have been trusted to attain a largeness of vision and endeavor proportionate to the growth of the commercial and political intellect of the country. Why should the church doom herself to depreciation in the eyes of the advancing world? Was it necessary publicly to admit that the trammels of traditionalism were fatal to an attempt to keep step with the cohorts of freedom marching forward to the heights of

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 176-177.

opportunity revealed by the shining lights which bathe the hilltops of achievement today?³⁸

This excerpt shows little sympathy for brothers in difficulty and it shows even less a sympathetic understanding of these difficulties. A decision had to be made; it could no longer be postponed. A small group sought a *via media* to prevent a schism, but to no avail. The situation had become intolerable. And so, in 1921, the Presbyterian Church in Canada authorized the Church Union Committee to proceed.

This authorization caused the fire of the Presbyterian Church Association to flare up again. The battle was now to reach its highest pitch. Every minister who had so far declined to take a firm stand could no longer escape making his decision. In some churches, the non-concurrent majority excommunicated unionists, or at least purged them off the membership lists. Newspaper advertisements, door-to-door campaigns – all methods were used to advance the cause of the opposition.

The reason for opposition was presented in various ways by non-concurrents. The Presbyterian Church Association published a pamphlet in which it gave four different reasons:

1. Dislike of coercive methods employed by unionists.
2. Notion that strength lies in diversity.
3. Legal objection that the church has no power to exchange the Westminster Confession for the Basis of Union.
4. Disruption is too high a price for union.

One needs to look only briefly into these objections to notice that they sound more like excuses than reasons. There may be more to the story that follows than one is inclined to believe at first.

A visiting Presbyterian minister from overseas, discussing the Canadian situation with one of the leaders of the non-concurring group, stated that in his opinion the whole issue was at bottom one of temperamental

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

incompatibility, to which the non-concurring immediately replied: "It is, but we cannot say that."³⁹

The opposition was strong, but it was unable to prevent The United Church from becoming a reality. Their failure was partly due to the fact that their opposition had little theological backbone and partly to its being directed against the very spirit of the times in Canada. Silcox asserts: "Churches unite because they must. If they do not hang together, they must hang separately."⁴⁰ The theology of the claim may be questionable, but in a situation where liberal activism had all but wiped out the important differences, nothing could really stop the forming of the union.

While the opposition continued to assert itself, the ecclesiastical machinery had been set in motion towards the grand union. There was the struggle to secure legislation, necessitated by the properties involved in the union. There was a certain degree of drama involved in this phase of the preparation, since Prime Minister W.L. Mackenzie King spoke in favor of the non-concurrents, while the leader of the opposition, Arthur Meighen, defended the unionists. The latter won.

Finally, in 1925, the union became a reality, but it left a bitter mark upon the ecclesiastical landscape. The 51st General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church met for the last time on June 9, 1925, in Toronto, to make the final preparations for the amalgamation to take place the following day. As soon as the Assembly was adjourned, the anti-unionists re-opened the meeting and declared themselves to be a continuation of the Presbyterian Church in Canada and of its 51st General Assembly. They protested:

We ... are not responsible for this schism in the Church or for any consequences which may flow from this enforced separation. In humble submission to His will, we give this our testimony. To Him we commend our cause, and we pray that in the days to come His richest blessing may rest upon the Church of our fathers, which Church we are resolved by His help to maintain.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 202.

⁴⁰ Silcox, p. 311.

The next day, June 10, 1925, while the non-concurrents were in session as the 51st General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, the majority of her former members joined the Methodists and Congregationalists to form the United Church of Canada. Finally, after years of negotiation they became ecclesiastically what they had been in fact: one – in liberal activism.

The name of the new denomination was chosen with a definite end in view. It reflects the hopes of her engineers that it may “foster the spirit of unity in the hope that this sentiment of unity may, in due time, so far as Canada is concerned, take shape in a Church which may fittingly be described as national.”⁴¹ It always has been the desire of The United Church to have all Protestant churches in Canada within her bosom, especially those of English origin. The name expresses her desire and her policy.

⁴¹ *Manual*, p. 13.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Chalmers, Randolph C. *See the Christ Stand! A Study in Doctrine in The United Church of Canada*. Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1945.

Cragg, G.R. "The Present Position and the Future Prospects of Canadian Theology," *Canadian Journal of Theology*, I, (April, 1955).

Grant, John W. "Asking Questions of the Canadian Past," *Canadian Journal of Theology*, I, (July, 1955).

_____. "Blending Traditions: The United Church of Canada," *Canadian Journal of Theology*, IX, (January, 1963).

Millmann, Thomas R. "The Conference on Christian Unity, Toronto, 1889," *Canadian Journal of Theology*, III, (July, 1957).

Oliver, Edmund H. *The Winning of the Frontier*. Toronto: The United Church Publishing House, 1930.

Silcox, Claris E. *Church Union in Canada: Its Causes and Consequences*. New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, 1933.

United Church of Canada, General Council. *The Manual of The United Church of Canada*. Toronto: The United Church Publishing House, 1946.

Walsh, H.H. *The Christian Church in Canada*. Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1956.