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# The Long Crisis of Church Union

## *The Dream of a Canadian Church*

Early in September, 1902, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church and the General Conference of the Methodist Church both convened in Winnipeg. Fraternal delegates from the Presbyterian Church appeared at the Conference with greetings from the General Assembly. Among most Canadian churches this was a time-honoured ritual of witness to the spiritual unity of Christendom, Protestantism and Canadianism. This year the Presbyterian delegates were the Moderator, G. P. Bryce, and C. W. Gordon and William Patrick, a friend of James Robertson, who had been appointed principal of Manitoba College just two years earlier. Dr. Bryce spoke first to the Conference, commenting on the similarity between his church and theirs regarding social issues, polity, and religious freedom. The General Superintendent responded with a jocular offer to license Bryce as a Methodist exhorter. The second visitor, Gordon, pointed to the common task of the two churches in the West — to fight materialism. Dr. Patrick spoke last and carried the parallel between the two churches further by noting the historic trend of each toward union. Had the time not come, he asked on his own initiative, for an advance to something grander still — a great national church for Canada? Surprisingly, but perhaps not entirely unintentionally, those three short speeches rekindled such Methodist interest in church union that the Conference approved a project for organic union, with historic results for

## Canada and Presbyterianism.

The conference on church union called by the Anglican church in 1889 had produced little positive action. The General Assembly of 1890 had reappointed its committee on union but in doing so expressed serious reservations about doctrinal standards and the historic episcopate on which the Anglicans laid so much emphasis. A more promising avenue to union seemed to open in negotiations with the Canadian Congregationalists whose doctrine and polity were historically close to Presbyterianism, but the General Assembly of 1893 felt that the Congregationalists were not showing enough interest in union to justify further discussions. Despite annual expressions of regret about wasteful duplication of denominational mission efforts, no serious steps had yet been taken to eliminate overlap. Principal Patrick was concerned that the resultant competition for ministers would lead to lower standards among the clergy. The strength of denominational rivalry had been reflected by Robertson's charge in 1887 that the Methodists in the West reaped the harvest sown by Presbyterians.<sup>1</sup> Overlap also existed in the east and in the field of higher education, but as the western synods said to the General Assembly of 1894, if other denominations refused to co-operate why should Presbyterians be expected to abandon the faith of their fathers?<sup>2</sup>

Thus the "unseemly rivalry" of duplicating missions continued to the scandal of many churchmen despite discussions held with the Methodists and Congregationalists between 1899 and 1903.<sup>3</sup> By the turn of the century, however, new forces had appeared that made the idea of co-operation or even union more attractive to the churches. This was the golden age of free enterprise in Canada's secular life — the order of the day for "big business" was mergers, monopolies, expansion and efficiency. The same pressures were put on the churches to create one single, powerful, efficient religious organization that would speak with authority to governments on all matters of its choosing. The challenge of Canadianizing and Christianizing (and hence, Protestantizing) the tide of non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants was also joined to this new sense of a national calling engendered by prosperity and belief in a divinely-appointed destiny. Yet when the census of 1901 reported a decline in Methodist and Congregationalist strength and the barest advance for Presbyterianism, the fear of Roman Catholic domination was rekindled. These factors as well as the recently awakened world-wide interest in ecumenism lay behind the remarks of Bryce, Patrick and Gordon, and behind the warm reception accorded them by the Methodist General Conference. The dream of a Canadian church seized the imaginations and challenged the witness of Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists alike. In a matter of

months each of the three churches had appointed study committees which, when combined, became the joint committee on church union for Canada.

The personnel of this joint committee represented the effective leadership of three churches. The thirty-five Presbyterians appointed in 1904 included such well-known names as Caven, Patrick, Gordon, Scrimger and Falconer, each of them a college principal. The average age of the Presbyterians was fifty-seven — the average of the thirty-eight Methodists was sixty and of the nine Congregationalists, forty-nine. Of these eighty-three men more than half were dead when union was achieved a generation later. Five meetings were held between 1904 and 1908, all at Toronto, and at four of the meetings the Methodists formed the largest contingent. Within the committee, laymen were outnumbered four to one by ministers, and the smallest proportional representation by laymen came from the Presbyterian Church.<sup>4</sup> Significantly, no woman was ever included.

The committees of the three churches held their first joint meeting at Knox College in December, 1904, a few days after the death of William Caven, the Presbyterian convener. By the third and final day five sub-committees had been appointed to seek “common ground of agreement” on doctrine, polity, the ministry, administration, and law. The *Record* of February, 1905, commented that the spirit of the Infant Church at Jerusalem had been active at Toronto. “Some when they came were strongly opposed to union, but at the close the Conference was unanimous in the decision that the only course open was to go forward, slowly and carefully, of course, and only as fast and far as the membership of the different churches will approve.” The Presbyterian members reported back to the General Assembly in 1905 (by which time their second convener, Dr. R. H. Warden, had also died). To date, no opposition to the union negotiations had been seen publicly in the Church, although a report from the West in the *Presbyterian* of 13 August, 1904, indicated widespread hostility, “from one cause or another.” The committee’s minutes presented to the 1905 General Assembly recorded, however, that Prof. William McLaren of Knox College had offered a motion to limit Presbyterian participation in the discussions because of “the doctrinal and practical difficulties in the way of union and the general state of feeling in the Presbyterian Church.”<sup>5</sup> Already a cloud of dissent, no bigger than a man’s hand, had appeared in the otherwise clear sky of church union, but it was answered with the assurance of the Committee’s report that church union must “carry the consent of the entire membership,” a promise hastily made and fated to dog every step of the unionists for the next twenty years.<sup>6</sup>

The joint committee continued its work in 1905 but now a new element

had entered into the discussions. At the instigation of the General Assembly of 1906, Baptists and Anglicans were invited to join in negotiations. Despite this initiative the vote on the committee's report recorded the Assembly's first official dissent from the union project as 156 commissioners voted for, but eight voted against, the report.<sup>7</sup> The joint committee continued its deliberations with marked progress but its relations with the Baptists and Anglicans were notably less successful. The Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec met briefly with the committee and then announced in 1907 that organic church union was not "an essential condition of Christian unity or even necessarily promotive of it." The Convention believed it was the Divine Will that Baptists should "maintain a separate organized existence."<sup>8</sup> The approach to the Anglican Church did not even produce a meeting of committees. Its General Synod, which did not convene until 1908, declared that any discussions of church union must presuppose acceptance of the four principles of the Lambeth Quadrilateral; but the fourth principle, the historic episcopate, was unacceptable to the joint committee. Thus the dream of a comprehensive Canadian Protestant church was reduced to its narrower original base of a three-church union.

There was another but less obvious failure on the part of the union movement at this stage — a failure which encouraged if it did not cause the decision of a Presbyterian minority to remain out of union. Although the union idea was widely discussed in the newspapers and religious periodicals of the day, insufficient attention was given to educating the minds and hearts of rank and file church members at an early date. There was a general and implicit assumption on the part of pro-unionists that union was the will of God and as such its righteousness was self-evident. Opposition to union was too often met with virtuous scorn and an unwillingness on the part of unionists to listen with charity to the voices of dissent. Dr. Patrick, for instance, alienated many younger ministers by his devastating attack on John MacKay, principal of Westminster Hall, the new seminary in Vancouver, who had expressed concern about property settlements in the light of a recent British court decision involving the nonconcurrent "Wee Frees."<sup>9</sup>

During these early years the *Record* accurately reflected the attitude of the church towards the union question. In May, 1904, it published a prizewinning essay on the topic, entitled "The United Church of Canada." The author pointed to three major difficulties — lack of confidence in the concept of organic union, the difference of "tone or manner" between Presbyterians and Methodists, and the existence of extremist elements — but emphasized that these were secondary to the acknowledged agreement on the "main and vital doctrines of Christianity." Three months later it printed another essay,

“Motive for Union,” that stressed the missionary challenge of the West and North. Reporting from the Assembly in the *Record* of July, 1906, editor Ephraim Scott offered an analysis of the Assembly’s debate that was in itself a classic statement to which nothing basic was added in subsequent years. The main reason for union was the potential effectiveness of three similar churches joined into one — the reasons against included the temperamental differences of the three communions, possible schism, the belief that righteousness, not size, was the best measure of religious influence, and that Christ’s prayer that all might be one could be fairly met by “spiritual unity.” Scott added that discussion of union by the eight western presbyteries had indicated little support for union in the very area where union was expected to be most fruitful. His editorials consistently voiced his personal doubts about the utility of and need for union, yet the pages of the *Record* always gave full coverage to the unionist position which, as Scott noted, was much more actively discussed in Presbyterian than in Methodist circles.<sup>10</sup>

By the time of the General Assembly of 1907, the outlines of the principles of union had been refined to a point where suggestions on specific topics could be invited from presbyteries, sessions and congregations.<sup>11</sup> A year later the reports of each subcommittee had been received and the draft of a basis of union was requested by General Assembly for presentation to the church at large.<sup>12</sup> The subcommittee on the Ministry had proposed a synthesis of the Methodist itinerant system and the Presbyterian-Congregationalist “call” to combine mobility with the democratic practice of allowing congregations a dominant voice in the choice of their ministers. The validity of the orders of the ministers of the three churches was accepted without question, and the Presbyterian principle of requiring a high standard of formal education in its ordinands became the future norm for the united church. The question of creedal tests for ordination caused some difficulty as the Congregationalists opposed the Presbyterian and Methodist custom of detailed questioning into a candidate’s belief; and ultimately they won their point of requiring only a general doctrinal subscription of essential agreement with the Basis of Union. The issue of a polity for the new church was more easily resolved as the three bodies preferred to overlook differences of church government in favour of stressing the fact that the functions of their church officers were similar even if titles differed. It is probably fair to say that the Methodists sacrificed more than the Presbyterians with regard to polity, and the Congregationalists more than either of the other churches.

The problems of administration — salaries, pensions, mission fields, and women’s organizations — were primarily technical and after lengthy investigation of the funds involved, the subcommittee reached a satisfactory

arrangement without encountering serious difficulty. This was not the case with the subcommittee on law where the complexity and ramifications of creating one legal entity out of three provided fuel for most of the controversies that raged until the very moment of union. Bit by bit the niceties and possibilities of the law were revealed as both unionists and anti-unionists sought to isolate and split every last legal atom in defence of their own particular position and to the permanent detriment of their opponent's case.

The first of the subcommittees had concerned itself with the sensitive and central issue of doctrine. While it might have been anticipated that defining a doctrinal basis for three churches of widely varying historical and theological backgrounds would prove a serious stumbling block on the road to union, the very reverse proved true. Despite the objections to higher criticism, most notably in the Methodist Church, the fact was that the "new theology" had barely arrived in Canada, its advocates were a small minority in all of the churches, and its ideas had not yet filtered down to the pews. The bulk of church members, both lay and ministerial, were still essentially conservative in doctrine, as was evident in the statement of faith drawn up for the new church. That the statement was conservative, even unimaginative, has been explained by one historian as the result of the advanced age of the members of the subcommittee.<sup>13</sup> It would be fairer to say that it reflected quite accurately contemporary majority Canadian theological thought, and it could be added that the generality of its tone gave it a more permanent validity than if an attempt had been made to be very modern in conception or expression of doctrine.

The actual doctrinal statement was a mixture of Calvinism and Arminianism — the belief in God's all-sufficient offer of "salvation to all men" which formed Article VI was balanced and preceded by Articles IV and V expressing unequivocal acceptance of the sovereignty of God and the total depravity of man. Although the forms of expression owed little to the Westminster Confession (which had been written in 1647 as a basis for another union), most of the nineteen articles (a twentieth, "Prayer," was added later) of the statement was in fact based on two creeds prepared by the Presbyterian Church in England in 1890 and by the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., in 1905, and predominantly on the latter. There was little positive in this new creedal document to which Canadian Presbyterians could object, and it is noteworthy that the criticism of D. J. Fraser and E. L. Morrow, both later prominent anti-unionists, was directed against its obsolete theology.<sup>14</sup> In this Morrow represented the left wing of Presbyterian opposition to union — the other wing, led by Ephraim Scott, took the very opposite position in charging that

the statement was too liberal, too modern and an abandonment of the Westminster Confession.

### *Co-operation or Union?*

The final report embodying the Basis of Union was received by the General Assembly in 1909 but a vote was deferred until after the Methodist General Conference met in September of the following year. Meanwhile the report was sent down to presbyteries, sessions and congregations "in order that they may be fully informed as to the whole question, and be prepared to deal with it when it comes before them for disposal."<sup>15</sup> This was the signal for Principal John MacKay to move that the possibility of a federal rather than an organic union be investigated, and that the church at large be assured that no binding action would be taken until "the people have agreed, with reasonable unanimity, upon the plan to be adopted." Apparently MacKay's motion never came to a vote and no further action was or could be taken until the 1910 assembly. By that time a definite change of attitude had begun to appear because of the procedures followed in the Assembly. A western correspondent of *The Presbyterian* had denounced the last Assembly for "having voted money, and practically employed the Union Committee to advocate the union." "The time had come, he wrote, for all those "who wish to maintain the Presbyterian form of worship," to take action through provincial conventions.<sup>16</sup> After a debate limited to one hour, the Assembly of 1910 voted in favour of union and then sent the resolutions down to the presbyteries as required by the Barrier Act, although this was later denounced as "unconstitutional" by anti-unionists. That law, made by the Church of Scotland in 1697 and adopted by the Presbyterian Church in Canada in 1877, required the approval of a majority of presbyteries for any change in church law relating to doctrine, discipline, government, or worship. The Assembly's prior approval of the union principle seemed in the opinion of anti-unionists to prejudice if not dictate a positive reply from the seventy presbyteries. Such a procedure, rushed through the Assembly with "unfair and unseemly haste" as the anti-unionists charged, "disregarded the rights of the people, and went directly in the face of all the assurances that no such step would be taken until the people had given their judgment."<sup>17</sup> In fact, the Assembly's action had been entirely legal and entirely presbyterian, but its implied disregard of "grass roots" feeling divided the church sharply, and for the first time, into pro- and anti-union parties. In the wake of the 1910 Assembly the Church Defence Association was formed by several leading anti-unionists.

Throughout the generation-long crisis of church union the "antis"

comprised in fact several groups opposed to union for quite different and even contradictory reasons, although the extent of their differences only became apparent with the passing years. The true “anti-unionists,” such as William McLaren (principal of Knox since 1905), and Ephraim Scott, who had close theological relations with confessionalism, were opposed to any and all mergers because of their absolute faith in the superiority of everything Presbyterian. More numerous, but less influential in the long run, were the gradualists such as Principal Gordon, A. S. Grant, D. G. McQueen and Leslie Clay who supported the ideal of spiritual unity but felt that many years would be required to achieve union if disruption was to be avoided.<sup>18</sup> Close to this position stood the American-inspired federalists, W. G. Brown and D. R. Drummond, who hoped that a federation of churches might create the desired unity without the sacrifice of valuable denominational traditions.

Still another group, probably smallest in number and least united in opinion, was primarily concerned about the theology of union. Daniel J. Fraser, professor in Presbyterian College, believed that the Basis of Union was too old fashioned to challenge men in the twentieth century — what the new age needed was “vigorous and honest thinking.”<sup>19</sup> W. W. Bryden, later principal of Knox College, shared Fraser’s concern but condemned both unionist and anti-unionist for their doctrinal indifferentism. The unionist seemed to be falling into the modernist trap of “humanizing” Christianity, but the anti-unionist was in danger of an unthinking, sentimental, and verbal attachment to the “Westminster standards” that ignored theological priorities and spiritual realities. In 1910, however, such subtleties were obscured by the common denominator — objection to the policies and practices of the unionists. The *Record* reflected this polarization by giving more space than formerly to arguments for co-operation and against organic union, but the confrontation within the church was on the whole conducted as a family affair, for Presbyterian eyes and ears only. In a lengthy resume of the whole church movement, carried in the *Presbyterian* of 12 August, 1910, Patrick pointed to two reasons for church union — overlap and the will of God — but could find not one reason against it!

When the replies from the presbyteries to the remit in favour of union were received by General Assembly in 1911 it was found that of the seventy presbyteries, four had made no return and sixteen disapproved, leaving the overwhelming majority of fifty presbyteries in favour of union. Of the presbyteries that voted disapproval (the four that sent no return were counted as “Against” by the terms of the Barrier Act), ten were in Ontario, four in Saskatchewan and one each in Manitoba and British Columbia. It is surprising



to note here that in the traditionally more conservative Maritimes every voting presbytery was pro-union, whereas Saskatchewan, supposedly the centre of overlap, provided a quarter of all the anti-unionist presbyteries. In terms of votes C. E. Silcox and McNeill record that 793 (sixty-two per cent) were cast in favour and 476 against, although an examination of the manuscript records gives different totals (888 for, 478 against) for a favourable majority of sixty-five per cent. Whichever percentage is accepted, it is significantly close to the number of Presbyterians who joined the United Church of Canada fifteen years later.<sup>20</sup>

In view of this sizable opposition to union and under pressure from anti-union forces, the Assembly resolved to send “the whole matter down to Sessions and Congregations” in the form of three questions — do you favour organic Union, do you favour the proposed Basis of Union, have you any suggestions or alternatives to offer? The first two questions were to be answered by votes of the sessions and congregations, and adherents over eighteen years of age were allowed to vote with their congregation. The increasingly strained relations within the church at this point were reflected by the circulation of anonymous anti-union literature, and by conflicting pro- and anti-union statements printed in the *Record* including a summary of an anti-union pamphlet written by Ephraim Scott and sold for half a cent a copy. The plebiscite was held in the winter months of 1912 and the results were announced by the Presbyterian union committee in April. One hundred and fifty thousand, seventy per cent of those voting, had answered yes to the first question and almost the same percentage had voted yes to the second. Seventy thousand more votes, however, had been cast on the first question than on the second, suggesting that many people, whether favourable to or opposed to union, felt the Basis was less important than the principle of union itself. Numerous suggestions for changing the Basis were also received as a result of the 1912 plebiscite.

The fact that approximately one-third of the voters had opposed union and that only half of those eligible had cast their ballots strengthened the hands of Principal MacKay’s “gradualists” in their demands for delay and for co-operation, rather than organic union, although a minority led by Scott were opposed totally to the ideal of union. On the other side the unionists believed that the democratically expressed will of the majority must prevail, that a two-thirds majority was a sufficient mandate for the union to proceed.<sup>21</sup> The pro-union independent Toronto journal, the *Presbyterian*, credited itself with being a prime cause for the union majority vote, and charged that the *Record* had an anti-union bias. Scott defended his paper’s impartial treatment of the issue, indicating that he had leaned over backwards to favour pro-

unionist articles. The *Record*, he insisted, had no official policy on a question which must ultimately be decided by the will of the church as a whole and not by any church court.<sup>22</sup>

At the Assembly of 1912 some members of the union committee attempted to present a resolution in favour of union. Objections that this method was irregular (since the resolution had not been passed in the committee) was so strong that the matter was referred to a special committee representing all shades of opinion. Two long nights of arguing in this special committee at last produced a compromise resolution that was accepted with obvious reluctance by the Assembly. "In view, however, of the extent of the minority which is not yet convinced that organic union is the best method of expressing the unity sincerely desired by all the Assembly, deems it unwise immediately to proceed to consummate the union, but believes that by further conference and discussion practically unanimous action can be secured within a reasonable time...."<sup>23</sup> Apparently the moderate unionists preferred to avoid present schism in hopes of obtaining future union, yet by following the lead of John MacKay their movement lost forever that self-assured drive that had carried it so far in such a short time.

The Assembly of 1912 did, however, support several very practical approaches to co-operation in such areas as theological education, mission overlap, denominational publications, and union congregations. These last were a phenomenon already in existence when Principal Patrick rose to address the Methodist General Conference of 1902 in Winnipeg. Usually union congregations were formed locally by Christians on a community basis, rather than by a merger of denominational groups intent on eliminating overlap. By 1901 there were 267 such churches in Canada — seventy of them in Ontario and 145 in the three prairie provinces. In addition, 554 union Sunday schools were reported that year. Most union churches and union Sunday schools were of recent origin but there were ample precedents in Canadian history dating back to the Dissenters' Chapel organized at Halifax in 1749. The publication of the Basis of Union in 1908 had added yet another type of union congregation — those formed in anticipation of an organic union of the three churches in the very near future. Within three years some six interdenominational union churches had been formed, and a Joint Dominion Committee on Cooperation composed of Presbyterians, Methodists, and Congregationalists was meeting to arrange an end of overlap especially in the west.<sup>24</sup>

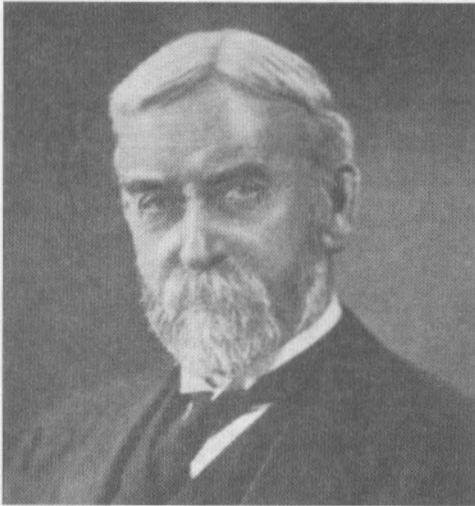
In the interval before the 1913 General Assembly met, its union committee produced a majority report in favour of another popular vote after amendment of the Basis of Union, but a minority report recommended leaving

### **Wardlaw Taylor**

Wardlaw Taylor, esteemed Assembly Clerk whose guidance stabilized the Presbyterian Church in Canada, when it was disrupted at the 51st General Assembly, June 1925; and the United Church of Canada came into existence.



Wardlaw Taylor



### **Ephraim Scott**

Among the non Unionists were Ephraim Scott, editor of *The Presbyterian Record*, who was elected the new moderator. Stewart C. Parker, minister at St. Andrew's Toronto, was a new arrival from Scotland, whose historical ties with the old land urged him to appeal to Canadians to remain Presbyterians. Frank Baird, a Maritimer, loaned scholarly opinion to the Unionists. While W.G. Brown, a Westerner, advocated a federalist type of union. These men, and many others, chartered the course the ship "Presbyterian" took.



W.G Brown



Frank Baird

# The Presbyterian Record

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## HOW THE RECORD MAY HELP THE CHURCH?

The Presbyterian Record was first established fifty years ago, by The Presbyterian Church in Canada, to aid in her work.

The aim and purpose of that Church and of this, its Official Monthly Record, are the same today, as they turn their jubilee post for the home run of the century.

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organic union plans in abeyance while the possibilities of a federal church union were explored. The Assembly rejected this minority report but accepted the majority one only after adding a strengthening amendment calling for union "with no unnecessary delay."<sup>25</sup> Discussion of the report occupied five full sessions of the Assembly at Toronto but in view of its reaffirmation of the union principle, "a meeting was immediately held of the ministers and elders who think the Presbyterian Church, along with other churches, has yet work to do, to confer as to its continuance and to provide for any steps that may be made necessary in order to that end." Between thirty and forty attended in St. Andrew's Church to form "The General Committee of the Organization for the Preservation and Continuance of the Presbyterian Church in Canada," which soon boasted seven hundred members.<sup>26</sup> Dr. Robert Campbell, clerk of Assembly since 1892, and author of an anti-union pamphlet in 1910, now published a book-length attack on organic union that attracted international attention.

Later in 1913 the joint union committee proceeded to incorporate certain amendments to the Basis of Union as suggested by replies to the third question in the 1911 referendum. While these changes were obviously intended to win waverers to the union cause, the Presbyterian members of the joint committee also recommended legal protection for "any rights or privileges of any minority that may be opposed to Union." Ephraim Scott, R. G. MacBeth, and W. G. Brown tried vainly for a resolution to discontinue negotiations for organic union.<sup>27</sup> At the same time another anti-union group, The Women's League, was formed in Montreal. When the next Assembly met in 1914 the dissenting minority gathered together regularly at nine a.m. to co-ordinate their defensive moves. After a three-day debate the joint committee minority recommendation to suspend negotiations was lost by a margin of two to one and instead the revised basis of union was approved for submission to the church membership in 1915. The anti-unionists were far from disheartened. A. S. Grant even resigned as Superintendent of Missions to devote more time to their cause. They could rightly point to the increasingly vocal sympathy for their position, but they could not know that within weeks of the closing of the Assembly, Canada and most of the western world would be plunged into the holocaust of World War I that would protract the discussion of co-operation *versus* organic union for several years.

### "A Cloud So Dark"

"It has come...dark, stern, terrible." With these words the *Record* of October,

1914, noted the beginning of that hideous catastrophe of modern civilization, World War I. The cause of War seemed simple enough — it was German militarism — and the reaction of all Christians was equally simple — this was a holy war. “A war in defence of weakness against strength, a war for truth and plighted pledge, for freedom against oppression, is God’s war wherever waged and with whatever weapons, whether tongue or pen or sword.” Britain had entered the war in selflessness, encouraged by the “spirit of unity” within the Empire, and the duty of Canadians was clear — “to remember...the brave men who have gone to the front,” to comfort the families of those soldiers, “to guard against unnecessary personal indulgence,” to maintain the work of the Church. “It may well be that out of the wreck and ruin of this war, when the passions of strife are stilled, there may come throughout the world a truer sense of the values that are spiritual and eternal, as compared with the material and temporal things for which self-seeking men and nations strive and fight.”<sup>28</sup>

During the next horror-filled four years of carnage members of the Presbyterian Church in Canada did their full share of service in the trenches of Flanders and on the home front in Canada. Of the nearly three hundred chaplains with the forces some sixty were Presbyterian ministers. After the Moderator, the Rev. Dr. John McNeil, visited the front lines during the winter, the *Record* of May, 1918, described vividly the many-sided role of the chaplains in providing physical and spiritual aid to their soldiers. “The battalion to which he is attached is his congregation. He has their names and home addresses in his book. He holds service with them when that is possible. He writes their letters when they cannot do so themselves, as is the case with thousands of them in the military hospitals. He goes over the top with them into the hail of death, carries back the wounded to the shelter of the trench, sometimes giving up his own life in the brave attempt to help and save his men. He comforts the dying, pointing them to the Saviour, takes their last messages and sends them to sorrowing homes far away.” In Canada Presbyterian church members provided thousands of dollars for the work of their chaplains and the Y.M.C.A. dispatched countless boxes of comforts to the men overseas, eased the agony of war widows and orphans, and contributed an estimated one hundred million dollars to the Victory Loans.

In all these efforts Presbyterians worked in close and harmonious cooperation with other Christian denominations, and immediately after the Armistice a number of Protestant chaplains issued a lengthy “Message to the Church in Canada” expressing their war-time experiences.<sup>29</sup> The Message called on the churches to recruit and train a strong ministry and dedicated Christian leaders, to end the religious ignorance that the war had

revealed, to emphasize sincerity in worship, to sanction the unity of inter-denominational spirit that the war had fostered, and to recognize in a world once more at peace that social reform is a responsibility of the church as a whole. It was a message that struck a responsive chord in Canadian Presbyterianism. As the bloody campaigns of the war dragged on Presbyterians and other Canadians had felt called upon to justify the righteousness of the war. "That our part in it is right," said the *Record* of June, 1918, "was, at the beginning, clear as noonday and it has grown clearer with each succeeding year... as the character of German aims and methods has been more fully revealed in all its blackness of treachery, hypocrisy, falsehood, cruelty, brutality and wrong."

Officially the opinion of the Church was voiced in a statement, "The War and the Christian Church," issued in 1917 by the General Assembly's Commission on the War, a body composed of such leading figures as G. C. Pidgeon, J. G. Shearer, D. G. McQueen, Principals Fraser, Baird and MacKay, and Hamilton Cassels, a prominent lawyer. War had called forth "moral qualities of the highest value" while revealing "the hollowness of a merely conventional religion." War is the consequence of sin but that sin was not Germany's alone, for the allied nations were also guilty of selfishness, hypocrisy, dishonesty, corruption, indifference and class oppression. "The War is sifting our essentials and non-essentials" — all men were being called again to salvation through Jesus Christ, and "Salvation means Service." The task ahead was the Christian reconstruction of a civilization dislocated and demoralized by its own vices. "A Peace, without a Cross, would be a worse Hell than the War itself." This Statement proved to be an accurate forecast of the spirit that infused the church in the years after World War I.

Regardless of Canada's preoccupation with the war, the Presbyterian Church could not avoid the burning question of union. Both the Methodist and the Congregationalist churches had approved the proposed Basis of Union, whereas the Presbyterian referendum of 1912 had approved of union but had also led to certain modifications in that Basis. Three years had now passed by and Presbyterian unionists felt that wartime conditions were making a decision by the Presbyterian Church a matter of urgency. Canadian values, they stated, had been so altered by the war that "matters which formerly distracted and divided men are now accounted trivial in the presence of the vast issues involved." The weakening of class distinctions, the "new spirit of self-sacrifice" and the expected increased immigration to Canada after the war were other factors in favour of immediate action. The Union Committee asked the Assembly of 1915 to approve the new Basis of Union,

to send this document to the presbyteries under the Barrier Act, and to poll sessions and congregations on the simple question of approval or rejection of the Basis of Union. The inevitable minority report recommended instead an end to negotiations because “our Church is not yet ready for organic union.”<sup>30</sup>

Despite the feeling in some quarters that another popular vote would spread rather than settle unrest, the unionists insisted successfully on a second plebiscite to prevent any charges of undemocratic procedure, even though such voting negated the fundamental principle of the sovereign power of presbyteries to speak for the church. Voting by church members was carried out in the autumn of 1915 — unlike 1911-12, the vote by presbyteries was not held until the member-voting was completed. In both cases the results contained some surprises for both the unionist and anti-unionist parties. Although church membership had risen by fifty thousand between 1911 and 1915 and the number actually voting increased by almost thirty thousand, the pro-union vote was only six hundred greater than in 1911. Almost 50,000 more voted against union this time and the majority in favour of union had shrunk to 61 per cent. This meant that the anti-unionists had been successful in “getting out the vote” for their side, whereas the unionists had failed to arouse any greater enthusiasm among the members.

The Maritimes and Quebec showed increased support for union but Manitoba and Saskatchewan gave a six to one advantage to union, a slight rise over the 1911 ratio. There is some evidence to suggest that persons whose traditions were Kirk rather than Free Church were more generally anti-union but there is also the puzzling fact that the upsurge in anti-union votes came largely from adherents — persons who did not feel strongly enough about Presbyterian doctrine to join the church although they were willing to support it financially. A multiplicity of elements were obviously involved in individual decisions — social status, age, sex, family and congregational connections, personal belief on such matters as prohibition and social welfare — but their proportional weight in forming public opinion on the union question can never be measured.

Since 1911 six new presbyteries had been formed but this did not seem to alter the picture appreciably in the second vote by the presbyteries. Three more presbyteries favoured union this time — only one more expressed disapproval. No returns were given in by four presbyteries although the presbytery of Winnipeg later signified its approval. The report of these replies when received by the Assembly in 1916 was immediately challenged by Robert Campbell and seven others on the grounds of irregularities in voting which, they said, should have nullified the results. The preponderantly pro-



union vote by the church courts in favour of union could not obscure the fact that one-third of the rank and file members and adherents still believed the Presbyterian Church in Canada must continue as a separate entity. Thus the two votes of 1915-1916 were at best a hollow victory for the union cause, but for the anti-unionists they brought a surge of renewed hope that union could be stopped. They also provided a wealth of statistical data that could be used in later years to support or reject the argument that organic union would be a catastrophic mistake.

When the 1916 General Assembly began discussion of the majority report of the union committee several anti-unionists submitted a signed protest challenging the competence of the Assembly to receive the committee's proposals "as looking to the setting aside of the Constitution of the Church." Ephraim Scott followed with a minority report from the committee which again declared the time was not ripe for union and added that overlap, the supposed excuse for organic union, existed in only a handful of western congregations. Robert Falconer moved an amendment that union be deferred and the issue not raised again until "the first Assembly after the close of the war."<sup>31</sup> This amendment was passed in preference to Scott's but lost in the final vote on the motion to adopt the majority report. That report, calling for consummation of the union at "the end of the first year after the close of the war" when federal and provincial enabling laws had been obtained, was approved by 406 to 90, with a slightly higher proportion of ministers than elders voting for union.

Despite Falconer's attempt to buy more time for the cause of unity and despite all the complex procedural manoeuvres that had been tried, the unionists had finally forced the issue and apparently carried the day in the belief that further postponement could only harm, not help their objective. A majority of the Presbyterian Church had repeatedly pledged allegiance to organic church union in Canada, and the Methodists and Congregationalists were still awaiting evidence of that moral commitment. Schism was in the offing and probably unavoidable, although it remained to be seen if all those who had opposed organic union would remain steadfast in their convictions when faced with the reality of Principal Patrick's dream. Meanwhile, as soon as the result of the vote was announced, thirty-one anti-unionists registered their "Dissent and Protest," claiming that "by the adoption of this new constitution" the majority had "ceased to be a General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada...and have no legal right to take part in transacting the business of the General Assembly..."<sup>32</sup> The long crisis of church union had now passed from arguments about utility to arguments about legality — at last attention was centred on the question, "What is the

Church?”, rather than “What is the Church’s job?”

The die of union was irrevocably cast by the General Assembly of 1916 but the opposition had now been whipped into such a paroxysm of energy that the next twelve months were marked with unprecedented activity and bitterness. A new organization, the Presbyterian Church Association, was formed at a mass rally in St. Andrew’s Church, Toronto, in October, 1916, to fight for a continuing Presbyterian Church in Canada. Fraser, principal of The Presbyterian College since the previous year and an avowed “anti-disunionist,” was chosen president, and a solemn league and covenant was signed by supporters. Unlike the Presbyterian Association for the Federation of the Churches of the Protestant Denominations which had emerged in 1911 but whose call for federal union had proved unattractive, or the Organization for the Preservation and Continuance of the Presbyterian Church in Canada whose anti-unionism had been restrained to the point of ineffectiveness, this new group had no interest in the federal alternative as a middle road between organic union and schism but was dedicated to propagandizing its anti-unionist tenets throughout the whole church by the most efficient and militant public relations techniques at its disposal. Led by Dr. Andrew Robertson, its vice-president and secretary, the Association started its campaign for the perpetuation of the Presbyterian Church immediately and gathered increasing steam during the early months of 1917.

“Uncertainty,” “anxiety and foreboding” was the mood of the Assembly which met in 1917 under the shadow of “impending crisis.”<sup>33</sup> More than twenty overtures on union had been received, two-thirds urging measures to prevent schism of the church. A committee to whom these overtures were referred brought back to Assembly the now almost automatic majority and minority reports. Face to face with the moment of truth about union — that any further motion must cause an immediate disruption of the Presbyterian Church in Canada — a compromise resolution was produced which effectively stopped union activities in exchange for a moratorium on all debate and propaganda by either party.<sup>34</sup> “Never in Assembly,” rejoiced the *Record* in July, 1917, “has there been a cloud so dark, or so long impending strain and shadow, so simply and quickly gone.” For the moment the Presbyterian Church Association ceased to function, but the long crisis of church union had not been ended — it had only been postponed once more.

### *Uneasy Truce*

In November, 1918, the guns of war that had thundered along the Western

Front fell silent. Four years of carnage had ended and the world was ready either to return to “normalcy” or to enter a “brave new world.” In fact it did neither. The “good old days” could never be restored — the events of the war had destroyed the age of European expansion and domination — but the dream of peace and justice in human affairs also proved illusory as nationalism and dictatorship replaced imperialism and aristocracy. The world was entering instead a twenty-year armistice — dislocation, unrest and uncertainty were the hallmarks of this interregnum between global wars.

For Canada peace meant the return of half a million veterans, all scarred physically or psychologically by their experiences in battle. It also meant the renewal of the tide of immigration, as over a half million new Canadians arrived between 1920 and 1925 seeking to escape to a new life in the new world. The problems of employing, housing and settling these two groups in Canada were compounded by cycles of inflation and depression and by the “Red Scare” — a widespread fear of conspiracy engendered by the recent Bolshevik revolutions in Russia and elsewhere. Labour unrest was usually denounced as the work of foreign agents intent on replacing Canadian institutions with socialist ones. Social reforms advocated by supporters of the Social Gospel were similarly suspect in some quarters. All these factors as well as such others as the political and social emancipation of women, increased urbanization and industrialization, the fluctuating state of party politics caused by the recent conscription crisis, and the emergence of farmers’ protest movements, contributed to that general unsettled feeling of Canadians that formed a backdrop to the continuing crisis of church union.

Officially the Presbyterian Church did not comment on the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919 or the violence that it produced, but a special committee on “Social Unrest” (the Church’s term for industrial conflicts) reported a series of resolutions to the General Assembly of 1919 that were adopted and printed in full in the *Record* of July, 1919. These resolutions rejected the idea of inevitable class conflict between labour and capital — “their first obligation is jointly to *serve the people* as a whole,” but their tone was sympathetic to the plight of the workers. Reasonable working hours, better safety precautions, adequate pensions and state-organized insurance against unemployment, accidents and illness, a voice in determining working conditions and the control of industry, and “an equitable share in the wealth jointly produced” — all these pro-labour aims were included. Finally the Assembly resolved, “without attempting to dogmatize at length in regard to economic details,” to reaffirm its belief that “the only permanent cure for the evils of our time, is the practical

application of Christian principles to the whole conduct of life.”<sup>35</sup> Adoption of the report was obviously a victory for the Social Gospellers in the Assembly, but it could not pass unnoticed that most of those men were also leaders in the church union party.

The truce between the pro- and anti-unionists was still being scrupulously observed by both parties. No reference was made to union at the General Assemblies of 1918 and 1919, and although the agreed “time of silence” elapsed in 1920, the unionists postponed any action for yet another year. In the meantime, however, difficulties had arisen because of the formation of more union churches. Early in 1917 the Joint Committee on Co-operation had encouraged the organization of separate but affiliated charges, rather than co-operative charges controlled by one of the uniting churches. By 1921 a system of double affiliation to both the Presbyterian and Methodist churches had become the approved system in the West but many congregations preferred to be independent and call ministers from any Protestant denomination. In 1921 there were sixty-seven independent congregations in the west and three in Ontario, and their talk of forming an independent church disturbed the unionists. In one or other of these three main forms — co-operation under denominational supervision, double affiliation, or independence — over 1,200 “union churches” existed by 1923. More than a thousand were co-operative and of this total Saskatchewan and Alberta alone accounted for sixty per cent.<sup>36</sup>

The lines separating unionists and anti-unionists had been clearly drawn by the time of the first vote in 1911, and although a few individuals subsequently changed sides, no basic alteration of strength or of arguments took place between the parties from then until union occurred in 1925. Anti-unionists played on the “Scottishness” of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, with an eye to obtaining international recognition and support through the Church of Scotland. The Canadian church was indeed still predominantly Scottish in its origins, traditions, and loyalties, but not all Presbyterians were Scots (a high proportion were Irish), and by no means were all Scots Presbyterians. The Roman Catholic, Baptist and Anglican communions could justly claim a large Scottish element in their ranks. That historical identification on the part of Canadian Presbyterianism with Scotland and Scottish traditions, against which William Proudfoot had warned in the 1840s, was still painfully apparent. Nevertheless, to Canadian Scotophiles the history of Canada was pre-eminently the story of Scottish explorers, Scottish business men, Scottish educators, who had risen from poverty through adversity to positions of influence in the social, intellectual, political, and economic elite of Canada where they moulded Canada in the best image of Scotland.

This pride of race was reflected negatively in a Presbyterian distaste for Methodists. Predestination *versus* free will was largely a dead theological issue in Canada; Methodist revivalism and informality in worship was a thing of the past; yet Presbyterians, especially laymen, preferred to see these as living proofs of Methodist religious inferiority. There was perhaps more evidence for the fear that Canadian Methodism was theologically liberal, nondoctrinal and preoccupied with Social Gospel ideas, but even this attitude revealed a deep theological split in Canadian Presbyterianism itself. Anti-unionists discovered in their own midst a strong minority whose anti-Methodist statements were embarrassingly unChristian, however sincere. "The Methodist Church is an Apostate Church....[which] today has no longer any message for a sin-burdened world". Such was the printed opinion of one Presbyterian group in Toronto.<sup>37</sup> The aggressive evangelism of Canadian Methodism and the unjustified reputation of Methodists as unreliable and hypocritical were additional factors in the minds of some anti-unionists. Being numerically weak but theologically "sound" the Congregationalists did not attract nearly as much attention as the Methodists from their Presbyterian brethren.

The fear of "one big church" was held by anti-unionists who anticipated a union dominated by the Methodists and hence oriented towards social activism, prohibition, political involvement, and perhaps even socialism. This fear was shared by certain non-Presbyterians, although probably for different reasons. Many Anglicans, sensitive to their church's traditions of social leadership and legal establishment, and perhaps distrustful of any project for a "Canadian Protestant Church" in which they were not involved, could be numbered among the opponents of union. More ironical, however, was the open sympathy of Roman Catholics for anti-union Presbyterians, since Canadian Presbyterianism had always viewed the Church of Rome as second only to sin among the enemies of Christianity and had consistently worked to Canadianize Catholics through conversion. Like politics, church union made for strange bedfellows.

Underpinning all these convictions was the basic question of the nature of the Presbyterian Church. Dominion-wide, democratically organized (in its own opinion), the largest and perhaps most influential of Canadian Protestant denominations, the Presbyterian Church was at times trapped by its own enduring witness to the traditions of Calvin, Knox, Melville, the Covenanters and "Presbyterian Standards." Much of the Scottish Presbyterian experience had been hardened by the passage of years into semisacred "unalterable standards" of debatable historicity and questionable theological priority. Melville, not Knox, had created the presbyterian system; Knox's confession

had been replaced after three generations by the Westminster Confession; democratic practices were in conflict with hierarchic, elected church courts. An incipient congregationalism, which had infiltrated the Presbyterian Church in Canada long before church union was even proposed, was now brought into the open in a basic internal division of opinion over Presbyterian polity.

The democratic doctrine of popular sovereignty — the voice of the people is the voice of God — was proclaimed by the anti-unionists who sought to make the church courts accountable to the “people.”<sup>38</sup> When unionists pointed out that the church had altered its standards in the past and could do so again in the future, anti-unionists replied that these standards were unchanged and unchangeable, and that even if they were changeable it had been agreed in 1905 that only unanimous consent could carry the Presbyterian Church into union. Granted that the church courts could modify the church’s constitution, yet they could not terminate the church’s existence by entering into a union without the consent of the “people.” Carried to its logical conclusion this meant that a minority of only one could control the destiny of the church and would in fact constitute the church since every other member would be “withdrawing” into union.

The very practical dangers of such a philosophy (aside from its conflict with Christian tradition of the church as a Christ-created institution possessing full authority to define and regulate its own life) had been driven home to Canadians by the 1905 Overtoun case in Scotland. Although the Free Church of Scotland had voted itself into the United Free Church by 643 to 27, the civil courts had awarded all Free Church property to the dissenting “Wee Free” minority on the grounds that a change of constitution was a breach of trust. Although the injustice of this decision was corrected by later legislation to share the Free Church property, the legal pitfalls on the road to church union had hung like Damocles’s sword over the church union movement in Canada almost from its inception. Arguments for or against union might not alter the balance of power within the Presbyterian Church, but the letter and spirit of the law in defining the nature of the church provided a strong bulwark behind which the anti-unionists could fight.

While the truce of 1917 remained in force — and until the consummation of union in 1925 — the normal functions and interests of the church still continued without serious interruption. Existing foreign missions prospered and a new one at Gwalior, India, was taken over from Americans in 1918. Social and moral reform programmes were maintained as before the war, and the task of welcoming the stranger to Canada continued to have priority. French evangelization and the mission to Canadian Chinese, both relatively unsuccessful, were now virtually abandoned in favour of this more promising

field of immigration. A new force in church life also appeared in the form of the Forward Movement, a programme of evangelism, service, stewardship, missionary education, and social concern, modelled on an American Social Gospel-oriented programme already taken up by several Canadian denominations. The 1919 General Assembly officially adopted the Forward Movement, at the same time launching a campaign to double the church's maintenance budget within five years and raise a "Special Peace Thank Offering" of four million dollars for missionary and education work. A one-week canvass oversubscribed the Thank Offering by twenty-eight per cent for a total of \$5,138,000 and by 1923 over four million dollars had actually been received in "devout gratitude to God for victory and the possibility of a new start for the British Empire, and a war-cursed world."<sup>39</sup> (Later it was charged that huge sums from the Fund had been used to pay for pro-union propaganda.) By that date, however, the Forward Movement had lost its momentum — no progress had been made towards its first objective, the church maintenance budget, and the committee was not reappointed by General Assembly.

Neither the successes nor the failures of the Forward Movement, however, could resolve the union crisis. Writing to Ephraim Scott before the Assembly of 1921, the Rev. George Pidgeon, a moderate unionist, warned, "I do dread the raising of the Church union question again....But I fear it must come up. I talked privately with the Western men who brought it up at the Assembly and they were quite emphatic in their statements that they in the west were going to unite anyway."<sup>40</sup> The truce between the contending parties was ended in 1921 by the Assembly's decision, 414 votes to 107, "to consummate organic union...as expeditiously as possible."<sup>41</sup> Nothing had occurred "to change the mind of the Church, but rather to confirm and strengthen its previous decision." The union committee was now authorized to prepare a bill for parliament that would enable the merging of the three churches. For the anti-unionists, who re-iterated their protests of 1915 and 1916, the uneasy truce was ended. The first phase of "great paper war" had begun.

### *Legal Right, Moral Wrong?*

Twice the church through its presbyteries had voted in favour of union; twice its members and adherents had voted with the same results. Yet these votes had been for or against the principle of church union and the Basis of Union. The actual terms of union had never been put before the church — in fact they could not have been because as late as 1923 those terms had not been defined. This sequence may appear illogical and even impolitic in

retrospect, but it is doubtful if any other procedure than the one followed between 1910 and 1925 would have produced any different results. The long crisis of church union was due more to the temporizing tactics of the unionists than to the question, to unite or not to unite. Between 1905 and 1910 Canadian Presbyterians had chosen sides on the question — from 1911 to 1925 nothing changed but the intensity of their convictions.

Late in 1921 the paper war opened with the Presbyterian Church Association's publication of a speech by the Rev. W. G. Brown, a member of the union committee for five years. Brown was sympathetic to the idea of spiritual union or co-operation but dreading the very real prospect of disruption he argued for more discussion. The union committee replied in similarly moderate tones. The paper war was still scarcely lukewarm, nor did it heat up appreciably in 1922 when, despite opposition, the General Assembly appointed legal counsel to draft enabling legislation for the federal and provincial parliaments. Not until the eve of the 1923 Assembly when the draft bills were to be presented did serious progaganda appear, and then it originated with the union committee. Its publication asserted that the people had been consulted, that the Assembly had kept its promise to act only with majority support. In any case, the committee concluded, the Assembly was not bound by presbyterian polity to consult the people — union would go forward with or without its opponents. Of this pronouncement the opinion of two outside assessors of Canadian church union is particularly valid — "Never in the history of negotiations for Church Union has the question of the moral, as against the legal, rights of a majority been more acutely raised."<sup>42</sup>

"Full scale, bitter and unrelenting war was unleashed with the pronouncements of the 1923 General Assembly held in Port Arthur."<sup>43</sup> The draft bills presented there (and approved a year earlier by the Methodist Church) provided that the whole church would enter union — the sizable dissenting minority could vote themselves out of union afterwards if they wished. The very name, "Presbyterian Church in Canada," would legally disappear, beyond the reach of any anti-unionist who might try to perpetuate a separate Presbyterian church. The enormity of their fate — to be marked for all time as schismatics and sectarians, retaining only the property of nonconcurring congregations and such share, "if anything," of general church property as a commission might assign to them — horrified the anti-unionists and others as well. Their reaction was naturally loud and emphatic. Their minority in the union committee protested that the church stood pledged to obtain "consent of the entire membership," that only one-third of all church members had voted for union, that the proposed legislation, which had never



been voted on, amounted to “coercion of the people and confiscation of Trusts and Endowments,” that organic union must be delayed until “practical unanimity” was achieved.<sup>44</sup>

A masterly debate ensued which the Rev. D. R. Drummond, author of the pamphlet *Is There Not a Way Out?* and at that time still a moderate unionist, again vainly urged consideration of federal union for the churches. “If any one wants to dub me a name,” he said, “call me an Anti-disunionist.”<sup>45</sup> The Moderator, Alfred Gandier, supported by the Assembly, insisted that organic union had already been agreed to and hence all “sidetracking” amendments were ruled out of order. The draft legislation was then approved by 427 to 129, with 229 ministers and 198 elders in favour and seventy ministers and fifty-nine elders opposed. As a result of this Port Arthur decision the Presbyterian Church Association moved into high gear. Principal D. J. Fraser of The Presbyterian College, president of the Association, aided by the Revs. J. W. MacNamara and W. F. McConnell, began a propaganda campaign by distributing anti-union pamphlets and placing advertisements in newspapers. Next they created in three months a nationwide organization whose canvassers collected 114,000 pledges from members determined to maintain a continuing church.<sup>46</sup> The third phase of the campaign aimed at blocking union legislation in the federal and provincial parliaments, and if this failed, at obtaining the best terms possible for the nonconcurring minority. Presumably because union was now a certainty, attention was concentrated on arguments over the terms of union, the authority of church courts, and the nature of Presbyterian doctrine.

A periodical, *The Presbyterian Standard*, first appeared in July, 1923. In it Fraser warned that the proposed continuing church might “degenerate into a mere sect” and “cease to be a missionary institution.” The sword of division would sunder congregations, friends, and even families but the “motive of self-preservation” must not be allowed to rob Presbyterianism of its catholicity and its evangelism. The second issue was more militant in tone as unionists were described as “men destitute of the spirit, and ignorant of the history of Presbyterianism”; Methodists and Congregationalists were accused of breaking their promises; Scottish Presbyterianism was praised as the fountain of religious and civil liberty, and the United Church condemned as an ecclesiastical tyranny.<sup>47</sup> Later Association pamphlets explicitly compared the United Church to the Church of Rome.

The first concrete step of the Association to block union legislation was an appeal by twenty-nine individuals in January, 1924, to the civil courts for an injunction declaring the Port Arthur decision null and void. This statement stressed the departure of the Basis of Union from Presbyterian standards,

outlined the differences of polity between the Presbyterian Church and the other uniting denominations, and founded its claim on the supposed unlawfulness of the union negotiations. The doctrinal basis of the statement was “extreme” in the opinion of friends, “ultra-conservative” in the opinion of opponents.<sup>48</sup> The Association had blundered tactically in issuing this inflammatory and reactionary statement and the unionists were quick to take advantage of the error. The statement was such a self-damning indictment of anti-unionism that the unionists printed and distributed a thousand copies of it without comment.<sup>49</sup> The whole affair was so reminiscent of the “Wee Frees” in the Overtoun case that the Association’s action convinced many waverers to join the union side.

A more effective pamphlet issued in the summer of 1923 and entitled “A Statement of the Case of the Presbyterian Church Association” emphasized the coercive methods and the betrayal of promises by the unionists. One hundred thousand members had joined the church since 1915 (almost 300,000 between 1911 and 1921 according to the Census of Canada) and they should be given an opportunity to vote. Here, and repeatedly thereafter the Association praised co-operation and even organic union, but insisted that the church was not ready for the latter. The Association actually published over fifty pamphlets (most of them after 1920), as well as a newspaper, the third to be produced by the successive anti-unionist groups. As the paper war grew hotter nonsensical arguments were produced on both sides, but the most extreme expressions probably came from the Association as it reacted desperately to a seemingly hopeless situation. Unionists were variously described as “arsonists”, thieves, traitors, and pirates — anti-unionists were invariably pictured as victims. Dr. Stuart Parker, a recent arrival in Canada, declared that “those who come from good Anglo-Saxon stock” could never forget their native land — “that is all right for those who come from Poland.”<sup>50</sup> “Despicable,” “scurrilous,” “inflammatory,” “rabble-rousing” and “racist” are adjectives applied to this literature, not by unionists but by continuing Presbyterians!

Statistics were used by the Association to show that only a third of the church had declared itself in favour of union, but this game of numbers could be played by both sides. An historian sympathetic to the anti-unionists describes the “dishonesty” of the Association as “not quite as blatant as that of the Union Committee,” but adds that each party was using that “most odious tactic of the successful progagandist, the quotation of that which is factually correct to leave an impression that is factually incorrect.”<sup>51</sup> Ironically this game of statistics depended not on those who had voted for or against union but on the large silent majority who had not voted at all. In the juggling of figures, the use of innuendo, half-truths and “dirty tricks” generally, the unionists were every bit

as adept as the anti-unionists, and the whole affair reflects little credit on either party.

On one point at least the Association scored a victory. The “opting-out after union” clause had appeared so unfair that the legislation was changed in the Senate to allow congregations to vote once more before union took place. The enabling law was sought and obtained first in provinces where success seemed assured (by March, 1924, it had been passed in the three prairie provinces and in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick) to exert pressure on the federal parliament and on those provincial legislatures where trouble was expected. Ontario was crucial to these plans since it was the numerical stronghold of anti-unionism and of Presbyterianism. At this point in time the Ontario government was about to repeal its wartime prohibition laws and the church union controversy provided a convenient diversion for public attention. Thus when the enabling bill was introduced, it was amended so drastically that the unionists withdrew it pending the passage of the federal act.<sup>52</sup> At Ottawa the bill had a rough passage — an amendment to test in the Supreme Court the constitutional power of parliament to pass such a law was rejected by the House of Commons. The United Church of Canada Act finally received royal assent in July, 1924.

Provincial acts were later obtained in British Columbia and Prince Edward Island after some difficulties, but the major and final battlefields were in Ontario and Quebec. In Ontario the anti-unionists won two major concessions. Legal provision for a continuing church was inserted into the bill although the use of the title “Presbyterian Church in Canada” seemed to be prohibited by the federal act. The second concession involved Knox College, which was ceded to the non-concurrents as the price of getting the bill passed at all. This concession in turn was copied in 1926 by the Quebec legislature, which transferred The Presbyterian College to the continuing church. The antipathy of Roman Catholic members of the Quebec Parliament towards the unionists thus produced some limited benefits for the non-concurrents, thanks to the precedent set in Ontario.

While these last four provinces were grappling with the thorny legal issues of union, the third and final vote was being prepared by the Presbyterian Church. The mills of the Presbyterian Church Association were running at full steam to strengthen the resolve of anti-unionists and inform them of how to manage the balloting. The voting proceeded under different rules and at different times in the various provinces, thus adding confusion to bitterness. The one big question was the real strength of antiunionism. Ten years had passed since the last vote and much had happened and much had been said that led each side to believe its own cause had gained in popularity. In some provinces the vote was taken by secret ballot, in some by show of

hands, in others a simple resolution was passed without a recorded vote. When the ballots were counted 144,000 had been cast against union and only 113,000 for. In the opinion of the anti-unionists this was a clear rejection by the voters of organic union. They refused to take into account the heavily pro-union results from congregations where union had been approved by other means than the ballot, results which would increase the unionists to 152,000 or to 179,000 if congregations which entered a union without a vote were included.

Once again statistics could be and were juggled to prove whatever one wanted to prove and as in 1915 the voice of the anti-unionists (now thirty per cent of total membership) had been heard, whereas thirty-two percent still kept silent in 1924. The proof of the union pudding must, however, be in the final separation, when one-third of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, the same fraction as in 1911, rejected organic union in favour of perpetuating a distinctive Presbyterian denomination in Canada. The face of this continuing church can best be delineated by analysis of the distribution of nonconcurring congregations. Of a total of 784 such congregations, 492 were in Ontario, 135 in the Maritimes, 52 in Quebec and only 104 in the four western provinces. In terms of the total number of Presbyterian congregations in these regions the nonconcurrents represented thirty-eight per cent in Ontario, twenty-one per cent in the Maritimes, twenty-five per cent in Quebec and less than five per cent in the west. This distribution indicates how strong continuing Presbyterianism was in the older eastern provinces and suggests also that its hold was tightest in urban as opposed to rural areas. Of self-sustaining congregations twenty-seven per cent voted against union, but just under ten per cent of aid-receiving congregations remained out of union. It is interesting to note that the number voting for union in nonconcurring congregations was almost equal to those voting against in concurring congregations — 32,000 to 36,000.

Before the voting had been completed in all the provinces the union was consummated at Toronto on June 10, 1925. One week earlier, amid steaming hot weather, the fifty-first General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada met in the same city. Anti-unionists charged that this Assembly had been "packed" but in any case almost twenty-three years after Patrick's address in Winnipeg the "parting of the ways" had come at last, and the anti-unionists prepared for the worst by holding a pre-Assembly congress. In preparation for the union the Assembly thanked Ephraim Scott for his long service as editor of the *Record* and relieved him of his duties. Representatives of the church were then appointed to the first General Council of the United Church. The anticipated dissent from the Assembly's action on union was

presented, followed by official answers to that dissent, and then the final proceeding of the Assembly was introduced. As the noon-hour approached on June 9, the Assembly received a motion from Leslie Pidgeon to adjourn until the 24th, “unless in the meantime its rights, privileges and powers” should be transferred “to the Union form[ed] by the free and independent action of the negotiating Churches.”<sup>53</sup> This formula was merely part of the legal ritual — there was no possibility that the union would not take place as scheduled the following morning.

The ritual continued as a protest against adjournment was offered by T. Wardlaw Taylor and a claim of right by seventy-nine members to continue in session as the same Assembly of the same church was handed to the Moderator, George Pidgeon. Permission to read the claim of right was refused by the chair but addresses in answer to the protest “were permitted and were loudly cheered.”<sup>54</sup> The Moderator rose, pronounced the benediction and declared the Assembly closed. As Principal Fraser rose to read his protest, the organist (on the whispered suggestion of C. W. Gordon) launched into the Hallelujah Chorus full-blast to drown out all further discussion. “That organ played out the old regime, not with honour but the opposite.” To Ephraim Scott, reporting in the *Record* of June, 1925, “that closing act” was typical of “the Disunion Movement” as it “withdrew from the Presbyterian Church at ‘The Parting of the Ways’.” As the unionists retired amid the deafening notes of the organ the dissenters remained in place, elected D. G. McQueen moderator, prayed briefly and then adjourned to meet at 11:45 that same night in Knox Church. In the belief of the majority, the Presbyterian Church in Canada was passing into the United Church of Canada; in the belief of the minority, the Presbyterian Church in Canada was marching forward in enduring witness, decimated but not consumed. Like Martin Luther before the Diet of Worms, each party could in good conscience say, “Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen!”, and each parted without charity for the other.