

Enduring Witness

*A History of the
Presbyterian Church in Canada*

by

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To the Memories of
Neil Gregor Smith and Allan Leonard Farris
1911- 1969 1920-1977
Scholars, Churchmen, and Friends

*I will not renounce my covenant
nor change my promised purpose. ...
it shall be sure forever as the moon's return,
a witness in the skies.*

Psalm 89:34, 37

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Foreword

To know the spiritual liveliness of the church is to feel the true pulse of the nation. In this volume are God's people revealed in letters large, as the drama of the life and mission of the church, at home and abroad, is unfolded.

When the four branches of Presbyterianism in Canada joined to form a single General Assembly in 1875, dissident voices were raised in opposition to such a union. The consummation in Victoria Hall (skating rink), Montreal, it was said, promised to be a "slippery undertaking" fraught with dire consequences. In this book, the author has illuminated a spiritual pilgrimage leading to 1875, and continued through the subsequent century.

In planning for the centennial celebrations of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, a logo was designed under the theme "Remembrance, Renewal and Response, 1875-1975-2075." Its symbolism portrayed a burning bush in recognition of a biblically-centred reformed faith, as well as the inclusion of a maple leaf, emphasizing the Canadian locale. An understanding of our heritage was considered a pre-requisite for comprehending the present and for meaningful involvement in the new century.

Authorization for the writing of this history and the involvement of Professor John Moir as author was a primary decision of the General Assembly. The need for such a volume has been long felt, recognizing that the last comprehensive history of the church might well have been that of William Gregg, professor of history at Knox College, Toronto, published almost a century ago.

The church is deeply grateful and indebted to Professor Moir for accepting this responsibility and for placing his scholarship gifts at her service. He has met deadlines with alacrity, acknowledged criticism with humbleness, while at the same time facing frustrations with uncommon understanding and creditable grace.

It cannot be overly emphasized that the author has brought this project to fruition, without any monetary recompense of any kind. Here is a labour of love, or perhaps expressed more accurately as a scholarly dedication to the understanding of Presbyterianism in Canada. The completion of the volume reflects honour upon the whole Moir family for their encouragements and support, as well as the invaluable assistance of Mr. Ian MacEachern and

Presbyterian Publications for producing this book in its final form.

“Enduring Witness” is not distributed as a “popular” history of the church, although its format, illustrations and readability might so suggest. Here the mission of The Presbyterian Church in Canada is chronicled and interpreted, reflecting the pulse of Canada through its pages. Hopefully the reader will be moved by what he reads and take fire as he is awakened to the church’s deeds and needs. Here are pages offering inspiration, enlightenment, and, may I say, prayerfully, genuine spiritual growth.

John Alexander Johnston,
Chairman, Committee on History,
The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Foreword to the Third Edition

The Committee on History of the Presbyterian Church in Canada is happy to commend this third edition of *Enduring Witness*. The first edition prepared our denomination for the celebration of its centennial. The second, which appeared twelve years later, provided perspective for rapid changes in our society as Canadian Presbyterians approached the third millennium. Now this third edition will help us respond to the challenges of a new century.

As Reformed Christians we see in history the providences of a sovereign Lord who orders all events according to the pattern of His will. God has brought our church through many challenges. The story of our past reassures us as it also rebukes us: the measure of faith that previous generations possessed beggars our own lukewarnness.

The past also serves as a corrective. It is said that those who are unwilling to study their past, and learn from it, will inevitably repeat its errors. To ignore our history is to be unprepared for the future. Learning where we have been equips and prepares us for the journey ahead.

Our Committee is grateful for the provision of the General Assembly Council that has financed this edition. As a textbook for our theological colleges it has proved a useful and definitive volume. We are grateful to its author, Professor John Moir, for his generous assistance, his scholarly professionalism and his passionate commitments. May this volume find continuing wide acceptance both within and beyond the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

A. Donald MacLeod,
Convener, Committee on History,
The Presbyterian Church of Canada

Author's Preface

Sir John A. Macdonald, Canada's first prime minister, remarked in 1861, "I am satisfied that the best civilizers are our missionaries." Certainly in the history of this country the servants of the church have always stood in the front ranks of its cultural and social development, as explorers, colonizers, educators, men of letters, promoters of social justice and collective conscience of the state, but first and foremost as spiritual guides of the people. Religion has played a central role in shaping the Canadian character and making the Canadian experience. In obvious, but also in subtle, almost indefinable ways, the influence of the Christian church has made Canadians into religiously motivated individuals. The whole Judeo-Christian tradition is so deeply infused into the fabric of Canadian life that even modern secularists have unconsciously accepted its values and its forms of expression. Religion has been such a vital life-force in creating present-day Canada that no apologies are needed for our attempts to examine and explain its influences on ourselves. This history then is offered in the hope that it will illuminate in some measure the particular contribution of Presbyterianism to our national growth.

The writing of a denominational history inevitably poses many and peculiar problems. At all times the author is faced with differences of interpretation of material. Opposing viewpoints must be reflected as objectively as possible while the whole story is placed in perspective against the secular and religious trends surrounding and influencing the church's development. The author must constantly remind his readers and himself that the church is more than buildings or organization, that the church is essentially people in action. He must also seek and listen to the opinions of others, yet in the last analysis the judgements expressed will be his own, and he alone must accept responsibility for any weaknesses or errors in the book.

The writing of this particular volume has encountered two major difficulties which are in a very real sense related to the history of Canada and of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. Aside from the unavoidable necessity of telescoping such a long period and so many themes into a given space, without, it is hoped, sacrificing accuracy or readability, the historian who undertakes to recount this story faces the very real problem posed by the geographical dispersion of his various sources. Much of the raw material of

the church's history found its way into the archival depositories of the United Church of Canada at the time of, and since, the union of 1925. Other materials have been gathered more recently into the Presbyterian Church Archives, but some remain in the hands of synods, presbyteries and congregations, and still more may yet be with private individuals. Perhaps this new edition will further encourage those who now have the papers of past Presbyterian ministers, laymen, and organizations, to deposit them in the church's archives for safe-keeping and for the enrichment of the church's self-understanding.

After the problem of scattered or inaccessible sources, the next difficulty facing the would-be historian of the Presbyterian Church in Canada is the relative scarcity of published biographies, memoirs, or scholarly studies during the past half century. Of the endless themes begging for investigation only a handful have been examined, and the results are almost invariably buried in academic theses which cannot normally be seen by the average reader. It is the hope that this edition may inspire a greater interest in the church's history, and lead to much wider efforts at research and publication.

In a book of this limited size it is obviously impossible to do justice to all the factors and all the personalities that have contributed to the growth of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. Some familiar figures may have been omitted; some developments or themes may not have been given their due attention. Just as completely objective history is humanly impossible, so the inclusion of every fact, every name, every date, is both impossible and undesirable. Recognizing these limitations, it is the historian's task to explain the present by examining the past — to reconstruct in words those forces and events that have produced the continuity of human activity which we call history.

The honour roll of persons to whom I am indebted for assistance and inspiration in writing this book is so long that I shall begin by apologizing for any accidental oversights or omissions. First and foremost I must record my appreciation to Professor Allan Farris of Knox College and Dr. John A. Johnston, Chairman of the General Assembly's Committee on History, not merely for their unfailing moral support but also for their helpful criticism of the manuscript, since they kindly consented to act as an editorial board. Dr. W. H. Fuller was a most diligent copy editor, and also provided valuable suggestions drawn from his own broad experience in the church.

John S. Moir

Preface to the Third Edition

This book was originally offered on the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of the Presbyterian Church in Canada to all those seeking to understand the enduring witness of Presbyterianism and its particular contribution to the building of Canada. The printing of this third edition has provided the opportunity to update the contents to the beginning of this century. In addition to the individuals and institutions thanked for their contributions in the previous editions, I wish to record here my appreciation to Ms. Kim Arnold, Archivist of the Presbyterian Church in Canada and Robert Anger, Assistant Archivist, for their frequent help, to Blair Keller for her careful editing and to Michael Keller for technical assistance in creating this new electronic text. Once again my thanks for their constant encouragement and support are extended to the Reverend Doctors John A. Johnston and T. Melville Bailey.

John S. Moir