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### The Formation of the United Church of Canada

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SHORT TITLE

UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Historical Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Theology

by  
WILSON S. FLOWER

June 1958

Approved by: W. H. Wheeler  
1958  
W. H. Wheeler  
1958

THE FORMATION OF THE UNITED CHURCH  
OF CANADA

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
II. THE EARLY YEARS . . . . .	2
III. ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH, 1804-1810 . . . . .	10
IV. DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHURCH, 1810-1820 . . . . .	17
V. A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Department of Historical Theology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Divinity . . . . .	27
VI. THE DAY OF WISDOM, JUNE 10, 1823 . . . . .	57
VII. CONCLUSION . . . . .	76
VIII. APPENDIX . . . . .	83

by  
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June 1958

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
II. EARLY NEGOTIATIONS AND INTERNAL UNIONS UNTIL 1904.	8
III. PREPARATION OF THE BASIS OF UNION, 1904-1910 . . .	18
IV. COMMITMENT OF THE NEGOTIATING BODIES TO THE UNION, 1910-1917. . . . .	37
V. THE TRUCE, 1917-1921 . . . . .	48
VI. THE STRUGGLE TO SECURE ENABLING LEGISLATION, 1921-1925 . . . . .	50
VII. THE DAY OF UNION, JUNE 10, 1925. . . . .	67
VIII. SUMMARY. . . . .	76
BIBLIOGRAPHY. . . . .	83

The United Church of Canada was formed on June 10, 1925. This thesis shall deal primarily with the twenty-five years preceding the union. Of necessity we shall have to look briefly at the present-day characteristics of the United Church of Canada if we wish to arrive at any conclusions regarding the success or failure of the venture. Furthermore, since this is to be primarily an historical presentation, there are large areas regarding those twenty-five years before

*The United Church of Canada Year Book, 1957* (Toronto: The United Church of Canada General Council Office, 1957), p. 251.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

On June 10, 1925, a new church body appeared on the scene of world Protestantism. The organic union of three distinct denominations into a new church called the United Church of Canada was the first large-scale organic union ever attempted which crossed denominational lines.

The United Church of Canada today claims for itself 933,488 communicant members, with a total of 2,341,260 persons under pastoral care.<sup>1</sup> Out of a total population of about 16,100,000 people living in Canada, roughly a little more than one-eighth claim membership in The United Church of Canada.

After twenty-five years of negotiations between the Methodist, Congregational, and Presbyterian Churches of Canada, the organic union of these three bodies into The United Church of Canada was consummated on June 10, 1925. This thesis shall deal primarily with the twenty-five years preceding the union. Of necessity we shall have to look briefly at the present-day characteristics of The United Church of Canada if we wish to arrive at any conclusions regarding the success or failure of the venture. Furthermore, since this is to be primarily an historical presentation, there are large areas regarding these twenty-five years before

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<sup>1</sup>The United Church of Canada Year Book, 1957 (Toronto: The United Church of Canada General Council Office, 1957), p. 251.

union which shall be touched on only in passing as they relate to the historical aspects of the union. Some of these areas worthy of further study are the doctrine of The United Church of Canada, the sociological and political factors leading to the union, the role of the Local Union Churches of western Canada in bringing about the final union, and the reasons put forward by the continuing Presbyterian Church for not entering the union.

The United Church of Canada as a church body is distinctly Canadian. Perhaps this explains in part why Americans generally and American clergymen in particular are as a rule not well-informed about The United Church of Canada. Until the formation of The United Church of Christ in 1956, a union of the Congregationalist and the Evangelical and Reformed Churches of the United States, no church body in any way comparable to The United Church of Canada existed in the United States. A further question which often puzzles outsiders is why there are still Presbyterian Churches in Canada, even though the Presbyterians supposedly joined with the Methodists and Congregationalists to form The United Church of Canada. This latter question shall be dealt with at some length in this presentation.

The motives and factors which finally led to the Union of 1925 are many and various. Generally speaking, however, Samuel Dwight Chown, General Superintendent of the Methodist Church of Canada at the time of Union, was no doubt correct when he said, "The motives leading to the union of the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational Churches in Canada were manifold, but

may be classified under three divisions, as spiritual, patriotic, and economic."<sup>2</sup>

The fact that the doctrinal section of the Basis of Union, the document on the basis of which the three bodies united, was the first section of the Basis to be completed and caused the least amount of discussion would indicate that doctrine played a relatively minor and secondary role in the union considerations and negotiations.

Some observers feel that the Union was the inevitable result of the political history of the Dominion of Canada. Kilpatrick and Cousland, two writers who dealt primarily with the doctrinal aspects of the Union, remarked:

The whole history of the political and religious life of Canada is a story of the knitting together of separate units to form a larger and more complete whole. National union and Church union have gone side by side. The Canadian spirit has been moving steadily towards wider unity. Politically that spirit found expression in Confederation, religiously it was manifested in movements among the churches towards unity.<sup>3</sup>

William T. Gunn, General Secretary of the Congregational Union previous to its entry into the United Church, and third Moderator of the United Church of Canada, feels that the union came about largely because of the temperament and the necessities

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<sup>2</sup> Samuel Dwight Chown, The Story of Church Union in Canada (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, c.1930), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas B. Kilpatrick and Kenneth H. Cousland, Our Common Faith (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, c.1928), p. 3.

of Canadian life. In an address which he delivered to various conferences of the negotiating Churches in 1923, Gunn stated:

From the very first days of British occupation the foundations of our Protestant Churches have been laid in Church Union. Our forefathers found themselves drawn together by the spiritual needs of the scattered settlements, by the intermingling of members of different Churches in each small settlement and also by the fact that the grounds of difference which existed between them in the old lands were not present in the new.

To men like Gunn, church union in Canada was an inevitable step in the growth of Canada.

The factors leading to Union were many: the need to evangelize the frontier, the desire to prevent unnecessary duplication in the use of men and resources, the political confederation of Canada, and the supposed common doctrine of all Christians, based primarily on Jesus' wish "that all might be one," which was the basic theological cry of the unionists. Summarizing the motives and reasons for union, Randolph Carleton Chalmers, writing some twenty years after the actual union forming the United Church of Canada, states:

As one glances over the history of the church union movement, two reasons for union stand out above all others. One was the fact that in a large country like Canada, which even yet in many sections is in the pioneering stage, there was no room for ecclesiastical competition if the interests of the Kingdom of God were to come first. . . . The other reason for church union was the belief that Christianity itself should lead toward greater organic unity, especially among Protestant denominations, in order to manifest our oneness

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<sup>4</sup>William T. Gunn, Uniting Three Uniting Churches (Toronto: The Bureau of Literature and Information of The Joint Church Union Committee, 1923, p. 4.

in faith and in fulfillment of our Lord's prayer "that they may be one."<sup>5</sup>

From an historical point of view we shall consider the union negotiations and their ramifications as carried on by the negotiating bodies during the twenty-five years preceding Union. Our primary source book for the pre-union history of the United Church of Canada is Claris Edwin Silcox's Church Union in Canada, Its Causes and Consequences.<sup>6</sup> The Silcox book has the disadvantage of having been written only a few short years after the Union. The outline of this thesis will basically follow the outline suggested by Silcox. The work of union divides itself almost of its own accord into distinct chronological periods: (a) The union suggestions and co-operative endeavors of different Canadian Protestant bodies, plus the internal union of the bodies later to join in the United Church of Canada, up to the year 1904; (b) 1904-1910, during which the Basis of Union was virtually completed; (c) 1910-1917, during which the high courts of the negotiating denominations gave their approval to the Basis of Union and, after getting the approval of the membership of their respective denominations, committed their Churches to union; (d) 1917-1921, the war years and the years following, during which a truce was by common consent observed between the pro-union

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<sup>5</sup>Randolph Carleton Chalmers, "The United Church of Canada Comes of Age," Religion in Life, XVI (Winter, 1946-47), 36.

<sup>6</sup>Claris Edwin Silcox, Church Union in Canada, Its Causes and Consequences (New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, c.1933).

and anti-union factions; (e) 1921-1925, the crucial years immediately preceding union during which the legislation legalizing the proposed union was drawn up, sanctioned by the negotiating churches, and passed by the Dominion and Provincial Parliaments. This is also the period during which the battle between the unionists and the anti-union Presbyterians became particularly vitriolic and bitter.<sup>7</sup>

The Silcox material has been supplemented by various books dealing with specific aspects of the union, pamphlets, booklets, and a smattering of unpublished material relating to the union negotiations. These materials can for the most part be found in the Archives of the United Church of Canada, Toronto, Canada. The doctrinal stand of the United Church today is probably most clearly stated in John Dow's This is Our Faith, which is commonly regarded as the definitive United Church of Canada "dogmatics."<sup>8</sup>

The negotiations which finally culminated in the organic union of the Methodist, Congregational, and Presbyterian Churches of Canada into the United Church of Canada actually began in 1899 when the Presbyterians and Methodists arrived at a working agreement regarding home missions on the Canadian frontier. As a result of these cooperative ventures, the two Churches chose joint union committees to explore the possibilities of eventual

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<sup>7</sup>For a more detailed outline, see Silcox, op. cit., p. 125.

<sup>8</sup>John Dow, This is Our Faith (Toronto: The Board of Evangelism and Social Service, The United Church of Canada, c.1943).

organic union. The actual negotiations for union began in 1904. In overview of the entire period from 1904 to 1925, Jesse Arnup has written:

The first Joint Committee on Church Union was appointed by the Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches in 1904, and held its first meeting that year. The Anglican and Baptist Churches were invited to participate, but both declined. A Basis of Union was completed in 1908, submitted to a vote by congregations and church courts during the years 1904-1911, and approved by a large majority. Answering a demand for revision, amendments were received and adopted in 1914. The revised Basis was the subject of a second vote in the Presbyterian Church and was again adopted, though by a majority somewhat smaller than before. On the strength of this double endorsement, the Presbyterian General Assembly in 1916 by a large majority voted to enter the proposed union, but owing to war conditions resolved to postpone action until after the close of the war. In the years 1922-23 union upon the Basis proposed again received approval from the highest court of each of the three contracting Churches, and on June 10, 1925, Church Union in Canada became an accomplished fact.

We shall consider the negotiations leading to Union, the problems faced by the various committees, and the solutions arrived at by the committees of the negotiating Churches so that the United Church of Canada might become a reality. The doctrine of the United Church and doctrinal considerations will be omitted except as they affect the actual history of the union movement. Echoing the words of Silcox, we shall deal primarily with the "manifold types of problems which inevitably confront those who seek to fuse denominations all different, with marked dissimilarities in polity, doctrine, racial background and temperament."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Jesse H. Arnup, A New Church Faces a New World (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, c.1937), p. 83.

<sup>10</sup>Silcox, op. cit., p. xiii.

## CHAPTER II

### EARLY NEGOTIATIONS AND INTERNAL UNIONS

UNTIL 1904

One of the first permanent Protestant Churches in Canada was a "union" church. In 1749, two Churches were organized in Halifax, Nova Scotia, one an Established Church, the other a Dissenters' Chapel. The Dissenters' Chapel was for all practical purposes a "union" church in that its membership for the most part was composed of Congregationalists from New England and Presbyterians from Scotland.<sup>1</sup> The early church history of Canada records many instances in which people in the new country of Canada, particularly on the frontier, would join in union churches, usually for practical reasons. Two or three congregations of different denominations would together hire one pastor to serve all of them since none of the groups by themselves could afford its own pastor. The Methodist circuit riders very often served more members of other denominations than members of their own Methodist Church.

A further impetus to church union and church co-operation was given in 1867 when the various Canadian provinces united to form the Dominion of Canada. The political confederation of Canada gave rise to a rash of union suggestions and proposals before the turn of the century. The "Historical Statement" of the Basis of

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<sup>1</sup>See Claris Edwin Silcox, Church Union in Canada, Its Causes and Consequences (New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, c.1933), p. 28.

Union has summarized these early union suggestions and proposals as follows:

The desire for wider fellowship and closer Church relationships was expressed, in 1874 by the Quebec Diocese of the Church of England in the appointment of a Commission to promote Church Union, and by The Congregational Union of Ontario and Quebec in a resolution in favor of union with other Churches; in 1885 by the Ontario Provincial Synod of the Church of England inviting the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches to confer on Church Union, and arranging a Conference the following year; in 1892 by the Presbyterian General Assembly approaching the Congregational Church, and in 1893 appointing a Committee to confer with other Churches on the general subject of Church Union; and in 1894 by the Methodist General Conference proposing a plan of federation of local congregations.<sup>2</sup>

During this period the various denominations which later joined the United Church of Canada closed up their ranks internally, so that by 1906 there was only one Presbyterian, one Methodist, and one Congregationalist Church for the entire Dominion of Canada. The political confederation of the Provinces was no small factor in bringing about the internal union of the denominations. Several large bodies of Methodists united in 1874. This union of a large segment of Methodism in 1874 "left four different Methodist bodies still unrelated: (a) The Methodist Church in Canada formed in 1874 by the union just mentioned; (b) The Methodist Episcopal Church in Canada; (c) The Primitive Methodist Church in Canada; (d) The Bible Christian Church."<sup>3</sup> In 1884 these four

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<sup>2</sup>"Historical Statement," The Basis of Union (Toronto: The General Offices, The United Church of Canada, n.d.), p. 32.

<sup>3</sup>Silcox, op. cit., p. 51.

remaining branches of Methodism finally united to form one Methodist Church, called the Methodist Church of Canada. The Methodist Church of Canada as it emerged in 1884 was the result of eight internal unions, occurring in 1820, 1833, 1837, 1840, 1847, 1854, 1874 and 1884. Some sixteen separate Methodist Church bodies were affected by these various unions.<sup>4</sup> Thus the Methodist Church of Canada was able to present a united and consolidated front when it entered actual union negotiations with the other two bodies.

During this same period the Presbyterians of Canada also united internally to form one national church body. At the time of the political Confederation in 1867, the Presbyterians in Canada were divided into two large groups. As Silcox points out:

After 1867, . . . there were only two important types of Presbyterians--those who were connected with the Church of Scotland and those who were not. After the Confederation of the Canadian provinces in 1867 it was apparent that a further union was inevitable.<sup>5</sup>

The "Presbyterian Church in Canada," which united the remaining branches of Presbyterianism, was formed in 1875. The Presbyterian Church in Canada which later went into the union of 1925 was itself the result of nine different unions. These various internal unions occurred in 1817, 1818, 1840, 1850, 1860, 1861, 1866, 1868 and 1875.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>William T. Gunn, Uniting Three Uniting Churches (Toronto: The Bureau of Literature and Information of The Joint Church Union Committee, [1923]), p. 7.

<sup>5</sup>Silcox, op. cit., p. 66.

<sup>6</sup>Gunn, op. cit., p. 6.

The Congregational Church, never a very large or very strong body in Canada, united to form one body in 1906, at which time the two remaining branches of Canadian Congregationalism formed the "Congregational Union of Canada."

To some observers the ultimate organic union of these three bodies was the inevitable result of their various internal unions. Many felt that in order to serve effectively the needs of Canada, especially on the frontier, it would not only be necessary that the various denominations unite internally, but that they must eventually unite organically across denominational lines. As E. H. Oliver, the fourth Moderator of the United Church of Canada has remarked:

Following 1867, the Dominion of Canada embraced all the eastern Provinces of British North, and, within half a decade, with the inclusion of the West, became continent-wide in extent. It was the effort to meet the religious needs of this new Dominion that was the impelling motive of the union of the Presbyterian Churches in 1875, of the Methodist Churches in 1874 and 1883-1884, and of the foundation of the Congregational Union in 1906. But even so the boldness of the Churches in consolidation and their foresight found them unequal to the colossal task which the new day imposed upon them upon a scale and with an abruptness unprecedented.<sup>7</sup>

During the last half of the nineteenth century the Protestant bodies of Canada had co-operated in various endeavors. Some of these joint undertakings in which they co-operated were Bible Societies, the YMCA, and the International Sunday School Convention. Hand in hand with these co-operative endeavors went

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<sup>7</sup> Edmund H. Oliver, His Dominion of Canada (Toronto: The Board of Home Missions and The Woman's Missionary Society of the United Church of Canada, c.1932), p. 137.

co-operation in home mission work, particularly among the people on the frontier. These co-operative efforts in the field of home missions played a large role in bringing about ultimate organic union. In speaking of the role of these co-operative efforts in bringing about union, Samuel D. Chown remarked:

Organic union in Canada was preceded by, and, to a large extent, grew out of a system of co-operation. In some respects co-operation was in practice years before the ideal of organic union took practical form. By it the Churches, which afterwards united, built towards amalgamation better than they knew. The leading of Providence in that direction was put into practice first in connection with the Department of Home Missions, and was afterward extended step by step to include Social Services, Religious Education, Theological Education, the publication of Sunday School periodicals, and unification in part of the work amongst foreign speaking New Canadians. These activities not only kept the ideal of union before the Churches, but they were of special advantage in permitting the coalescence of departmental activities when union took place, with little debate and with no loss of effective working power.

Co-operation began, in 1899, under an agreement between the Presbyterian and Methodist Home Mission authorities, not to send an additional missionary into any locality where either Church was already carrying on its work.

The concrete proposals for co-operation between the Home Mission Boards of the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches of Canada were unanimously sanctioned by the Boards of the two bodies in 1899. Even though this at first was nothing more than a gesture of good will, the "logic of events drove the churches through all the phases of delimitation of territory, of co-operative congregations affiliated with one, or both, or all churches,

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<sup>8</sup> Samuel Dwight Chown, The Story of Church Union in Canada (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, c.1930), p. 50.

and of local union churches and united community churches."<sup>9</sup> The attempts at co-operation were successful to such an extent that the leaders of the co-operating denominations began to think seriously in terms of organic union. The 1901 census reveals that at that time there existed in Canada 267 "union" churches and 554 "union" Sunday Schools. Of this total 70 "union" churches and 248 "union" Sunday Schools were found in the province of Ontario.<sup>10</sup>

Although the actual negotiations resulting in organic union did not begin until the opening years of the present century, various proposals for organic union were advanced during the last twenty-five years of the last century. However, most of these proposals never got beyond the proposal stage. Ironically, the first concrete proposal advocating organic union came from the Church of England in Canada. As Kilpatrick and Cousland have pointed out:

The first steps toward wider organic union were taken in 1885 when the Provincial Synod of Canada (Anglican) appointed a committee on Christian Union and invited conference with the Methodists and Presbyterians. Next year the Methodist General Conference appointed a committee to confer and the Presbyterian General Assembly appointed a similar committee in 1888.<sup>11</sup>

In 1888 the Anglicans of the world committed themselves to the

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<sup>9</sup>R. J. Wilson, Church Union in Canada after Three Years (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1929), p. 15.

<sup>10</sup>See Silcox, op. cit., p. 74.

<sup>11</sup>Thomas B. Kilpatrick and Kenneth H. Cousland, Our Common Faith (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, c.1928), p. 16.

Lambeth Quadrilateral as a confession of their faith. One of the main features of the Quadrilateral was the insistence upon the historic Episcopate. Since the Anglicans were committed to the Episcopate, it soon became apparent that they could not join in a cross-denominational union with bodies which did not accept the historic Episcopate.

The actual date for the beginning of events leading towards organic church union of the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Congregational Churches of Canada is the year 1902. In 1902 the Presbyterian General Assembly sent a delegation to convey fraternal greetings to the Methodist General Conference meeting in Winnipeg. One of the Presbyterian delegates launched into an appeal for organic union between the two bodies, although the delegate made it very plain that he was in no way authorized to make this appeal nor was he speaking officially for the Presbyterian Church in Canada. Samuel D. Chown, General Superintendent of the Methodist Church of Canada at the time of union, has described the events at the 1902 General Conference as follows:

The first important event, definitely related to the movement as such, was the fraternal visit of a deputation representing the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada to the General Conference of the Methodist Church, meeting in Winnipeg, in 1902. The deputation consisted of Principal Patrick, of Manitoba College, Winnipeg, Professor George Bryce of the same institution, and the Rev. C. W. Gordon, D.D., familiarly known in the literary world as "Ralph Connor."

Professor Bryce contented himself with the complimentary congratulations usually considered germane to such an occasion. Dr. Gordon opened the eyes of the General Conference with a marvellous revelation of the wheat producing possibilities of the then comparatively unknown Canadian North-

West. Principal Patrick, with the ardour of a great enthusiasm for Church Union, broke out into a passionate appeal for the unification of Methodists and Presbyterians in Canada. He instanced many things which the two communions held in common, and expressed his own conviction that the time had come for the organic union of the two Churches. He invited the General Conference to appoint a committee to begin negotiations with the Presbyterians with that object in view.<sup>12</sup>

The Rev. George C. Pidgeon, Moderator of the Presbyterian General Assembly at the time of union and the first Moderator of the United Church of Canada, in reminiscing about Principal Patrick's speech on the fateful day, has written:

Principal Patrick began by saying that he might be found guilty of sublime audacity, but he could not help asking if the time had not come for the two Churches to draw closer together. Both denominations believed in the unity of the Christian Church, and he claimed that in Canada there should be one great, national Protestant Church. The Presbyterians were a great body; the Methodists were a great body; but there was something better than either of them, and that was a combination of both. Mixed races were the best races. What had united Christendom in foreign lands? The great need. The resources of all the Churches together were utterly inadequate for the needs of Canada's Great West. After reminding the Conference that Canada presented the first united Methodist and the first united Presbyterianism, he closed with a forceful and eloquent appeal for the union of the two Churches.<sup>13</sup>

Patrick's proposal was most favorably received by the Methodist General Conference. The Conference went on record as favoring any concrete proposal or action which would lead to ultimate organic union. The resolution of the 1902 Methodist General Conference regarding their wish for organic union reads

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<sup>12</sup> Samuel Dwight Chown, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>13</sup> George C. Pidgeon, The United Church of Canada, The Story of Union (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, c.1950), p. 32.

in part as follows:

this General Conference is of the opinion that the time is opportune for a definite, practical movement concentrating attention and aiming at the practical organic unity of those denominations already led by Providence into such close fraternal relations, . . . looking to the ultimate organic union of the Presbyterian, Congregational and Methodist Churches in Canada, this General Conference declares that it would regard a movement with this object in view with great gratification.<sup>14</sup>

The Methodist overture for union conferences received the approval of the Presbyterian General Assembly meeting in Vancouver in 1903. The Congregational Union of Ontario and Quebec and the Congregational Union of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick also endorsed the proposal whole-heartedly in 1903. As the next step, each of the three bodies appointed a committee to represent them at a preliminary joint committee meeting in preparation for the beginning of actual union negotiations. This preliminary meeting was held in Toronto on April 21, 1904. By 1904 the leaders of these three bodies were thinking in terms of actual union rather than mere co-operation or federation. The main resolution passed at the preliminary meeting in April, 1904, reads as follows:

That this joint committee, composed of representatives of the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational Churches, assembled to confer together respecting an organic union of the Churches named, would reverently and gratefully recognize the token of the Master's presence as evidenced by the cordial, brotherly spirit and earnest desire for Divine guidance maintained throughout the entire session.

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<sup>14</sup>Resolutions of the Methodist General Conference from 1902-1922, (Unpublished MS., The United Church of Canada Archives, Toronto, Canada), p. 1.

While recognizing the limitations of our authority as to any action that would commit our respective Churches, in regard to a proposal that is yet in the initial stage, we feel free, nevertheless, to say that we are of one mind, that organic union is both desirable and practicable and we commend the whole subject to the sympathetic and favorable consideration of the chief assemblies of the Churches concerned for such further action as they may deem wise and expedient.<sup>15</sup>

Although these church bodies had first thought simply about co-operation in common endeavors, particularly in the area of their common task of evangelizing the frontier, by 1904 they were on the road to organic union. Patrick's speech before the General Conference of the Methodist Church was the turning-point which turned the thinking of the people from co-operation to thoughts of actual union. The die had been cast. In summary of the years preceding the beginning of actual union negotiations and the thinking of the early union committees, E. Lloyd Morrow has written:

It is quite evident that at the very outset the committees appointed by the several churches had entertained, during the years 1899-1903, no greater hope than that of an increased friendly co-operation, especially on the field of Home Missions. Their efforts were put forth at that time solely to prevent, as far as possible, any unseemly rivalry and waste of men and means through overlapping in the Mission work carried on by these different churches, particularly in the newer districts of the country. But as we have observed, Dr. Patrick's speech to the members of the Methodist Conference swung the scheme of co-operation into the channel of Organic Union.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Resolutions of the Joint Committee on Church Union from First Conference in 1904 to Ninth Conference in 1923 (Unpublished MS., The United Church of Canada Archives, Toronto), p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> E. Lloyd Morrow, Church Union in Canada, Its History, Motives, Doctrine and Government (Toronto: Thomas Allen, c.1923), p. 17.

## CHAPTER III

### PREPARATION OF THE BASIS OF UNION

1904-1910

The first meeting of the Joint Committee on Church Union, composed of representatives of the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Congregational Churches of Canada, was held in Knox Church, Toronto, on December 21 and 22, 1904. This Joint Committee met five times during the years 1904-1908, during which time the writing of the Basis of Union was practically completed. In order that the Committee members might not be accused of partiality and that all might be given a voice in the proceedings, each of the chairmen of the three denominational delegations presided in rotation as over-all chairman of the Joint Committee. There were three joint secretaries for each of the meetings, one from each of the negotiating denominations.

At its first meeting in December, 1904, the Joint Committee on Church Union attempted to set up its goals and also define its limitations. Perhaps not yet fully realizing the far-reaching implications of what they were trying to do, the Joint Committee passed the following resolution at its first official meeting:

It should be understood that the committees will not be engaged at present in preparing a basis of union, but will meet together for further conference, to exchange views and ascertain whether it is possible to reach a common basis that may hereafter be submitted to the Churches concerned. In the meantime a statement giving the history of the movement to the present time, and the action thus far of the Joint Committee, will be prepared and printed and a copy sent

to each minister of the negotiating bodies, so that the Churches may be fully informed as to every step that has been taken.

It was universally recognized in the joint committee that a question so important and far-reaching in its results was not one to be unduly hurried; that a union of the Churches to be real and lasting, must carry the consent of the entire membership, and that no final step could be taken until ample opportunity had been given to consider the whole question in the courts of the various Churches and by the people generally.<sup>1</sup>

It is thus quite apparent that the Joint Committee in no way looked for an early union of the negotiating bodies, but rather thought of itself as a group chosen by the denominations to explore the possibilities of such a union. Furthermore, the phrase stating that a union "must carry the consent of the entire membership" was later to cause considerable controversy and bitterness. Since a large number of Presbyterians voted against the union, the Presbyterian anti-unionists exploited this phrase to its fullest in their efforts to block the union.

In order to expedite its work, the Joint Committee at its first meeting passed a resolution setting up five sub-committees to consider the various problems connected with union. On the shoulders of the men on these sub-committees fell the task of preparing a basis for union. The committee organized at the preliminary meeting in April, 1904, to explore and define the work of the Joint Committee, brought the following resolution

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<sup>1</sup> Resolutions of the Joint Committee on Church Union from First Conference in 1904 to Ninth Conference in 1923 (Unpublished MS., The United Church of Canada Archives, Toronto, Canada), p. 6.

before the first Joint Committee on Church Union at its meeting in December, 1904. The recommendation, which was unanimously adopted by the Joint Committee, read:

Your Committee, appointed to frame a list of sub-committees, define the limits of subjects to be assigned to each of them and determine the number of members of which each shall be composed, as well as the relative numbers from each of the three Churches, beg to recommend:

(1) That the number of sub-committees be five, and that the subjects allotted to them be as follows:

(a) Doctrine

(b) Polity--Under this head are to be embraced the organization and government of the Church, conditions of Church membership and rights and duties of members, ordinances of the Church, including means of grace and forms of worship, and the relation of Sabbath Schools and Young People's Societies to the Church.

(c) The ministry--This topic is to embrace the training for the ministry, the pastoral office, including period of service, the rights and privileges of ministers and their relation to the doctrine of the Church.

(d) Administration--This shall include all the missionary, educational, benevolent, publishing and other agencies of the Church.

(e) Law--Under this head will be included title to Church property, general and local, and legislation.

(2) That the three Churches be represented on each of the sub-committees in the proportion of two Methodists, two Presbyterians and one Congregationalist.

(3) That each of these sub-committees on Doctrine, Polity, the Ministry and Administration, be composed of forty members (sixteen Methodists, sixteen Presbyterians and eight Congregationalists), and that the sub-committee on Law consist of fifteen members (six Methodists, six Presbyterians and three Congregationalists).<sup>2</sup>

In the early days of the negotiations, the Anglicans and Baptists were invited to join in the union discussions and negotiations. In 1906, in accordance with a resolution adopted by

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A Brief Sketch of the Negotiations for Union of the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational Churches in Canada Together with the Official Report of the First Conference of the Three Union Committees (Toronto, January, 1905), p. 13.

the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, an invitation was sent to the Anglicans and Baptists inviting them to join in the discussions. However, both the Baptists and the Anglicans declined the invitation. The Baptists declined because they "considered 'it necessary to maintain a separate organized existence,' and the Church of England confined its action to 'cordial and brotherly replies.'"<sup>3</sup>

The chief reason advanced by the Anglicans for not being able to join with the other bodies was the fact that they could unite with other bodies of Protestantism only if the Lambeth Quadrilateral were used as the basis for union. The Anglican churches of the world had in 1838 committed themselves to the Lambeth Quadrilateral as their official doctrinal stand. The Anglicans of Canada could not, therefore, join in union discussions unless these discussions were carried on with the Quadrilateral as their basis. The fourfold conditions of the Lambeth Quadrilateral were: (1) The acceptance of the authority of the Holy Scripture; (2) The acceptance of the Nicene Creed as a basic confession of faith; (3) The divinely instituted Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion; (4) The Historic Episcopate.<sup>4</sup> Since the other negotiating bodies did not accept the historic Episcopate, one of the conditions of

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<sup>3</sup>Edmund H. Oliver, The Winning of the Frontier (Toronto: The United Church of Canada Publishing House, c.1930), p. 247.

<sup>4</sup>See E. Lloyd Morrow, Church Union in Canada, Its History, Motives, Doctrine and Government (Toronto: Thomas Allen, c.1923), p. 41.

the Quadrilateral, the Anglicans were forced to exclude themselves from the negotiations.

The Baptists, on the other hand, declined primarily because they felt that the Baptist Church had a particular mission to the world which they could carry out only if they remained separate. The Baptists, who declined primarily because of doctrinal reasons, rejected union even as an ideal. Samuel D. Chown summed up the Baptist stand when he wrote:

The Baptists, through a committee appointed for that purpose, expressed a conviction that they must maintain a distinct organization to accomplish their particular task. The word "conviction" interposed a barrier to further discussion, because the union movement was not intended to convert the views of any section participating in it, but to discover whether a sufficient platform of truth and action could be agreed upon in good faith by all the parties thereto.

Almost all of the work on the Basis of Union was completed during the years 1904-1908. The fact that the sub-committee on doctrine was the first to complete its task is perhaps a very telling commentary regarding the doctrinal foundations of the United Church of Canada. The sub-committee on doctrine neither suggested nor advocated any final or ultimate creed or test of faith for the new church body which they hoped to form. The opening statement of the sub-committee on doctrine as found in the Basis of Union reads:

We, the representatives of the Presbyterian, the Methodist, and the Congregational branches of the Church of Christ in

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<sup>5</sup> Samuel Dwight Chown, "Church Union in Canada," The Biblical Review, XIV (January, 1929), 62.

Canada, do hereby set forth the substance of the Christian faith, as commonly held among us. In doing so, we build upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone. We affirm our belief in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the primary source and ultimate standard of Christian faith and life. We acknowledge the teaching of the great creeds of the ancient Church. We further maintain our allegiance to the evangelical standards of the Reformation, as set forth in common in the doctrinal standards adopted by the Presbyterian Church in Canada, by the Congregational Union of Ontario and Quebec, and by the Methodist Church. We present the accompanying statement as a brief summary of our common faith and comment it to the studious attention of the members and adherents of the negotiating Churches, as in substance agreeable to the teaching of Holy Scriptures.<sup>6</sup>

The sub-committee on doctrine was more concerned with finding points of agreement rather than points of disagreement. The sub-committee religiously avoided any subject which might cause dispute or controversy. As Gandier has pointed out:

The meetings of the Joint Union Committee were characterized from the first, not by attempts on the part of any one of the three churches to force its polity or its doctrinal statements upon the other, but by the search for common ground. The question of first importance was, Have we a common faith?<sup>7</sup>

The practical motives for union at all times outweighed the doctrinal considerations. In all the negotiations the primary emphasis was placed on the fact that if the bodies united, they could save men and money through the avoidance of overlapping and reduplication in their work. As Chalmers has pointed out in his study of the doctrine as found in the Basis of Union:

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<sup>6</sup> The Basis of Union (Toronto: The General Offices, The United Church of Canada, n.d.), p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Alfred Gandier, The Doctrinal Basis of Union and Its Relation to the Historic Creeds (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1926), p. 35.

There is no doubt that the Basis reflects the theological (or lack of) conditions in Canada at the turn of the century . . . . The chief motive for Church Union was a practical one which meant that doctrinal matters were considered very secondary, if not irrelevant.

The sub-committee on doctrine divided itself into four sections to deal with the doctrinal part of the Basis. These four sections met periodically in Winnipeg, Halifax, Toronto, and Montreal. However, most of the work on the doctrinal part of the Basis was done by the Montreal and Toronto sections of the sub-committee. It is to these two groups that the United Church of Canada owes its doctrinal formulation as found in the Basis of Union. The doctrinal section of the Basis, and the other sections of the Basis except for the section on "Law," were completed in practically their present form by 1908. The only article to be added to the doctrinal portion of the Basis after 1908 was an article on "Prayer" (Art. XIII), which was added later at the insistence of a group of Presbyterians.

Men who have studied the doctrinal portion of the Basis in detail have discovered that there is almost no original material of any kind in the doctrinal part of the Basis. For the most part, the doctrinal portion of the Basis is simply a reworking of two ready-to-hand Presbyterian confessional statements. As Silcox has pointed out while speaking of the doctrine in the Basis:

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<sup>8</sup> Randolph Carleton Chalmers, See the Christ Stand! (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, c.1945), p. 155.

It is significant that there is little original material in the document, with the exception of an article on prayer, added later by the Presbyterian Union Committee to meet certain criticism which arose in that Church. No article seems to owe anything, as far as its wording is concerned, to either the Westminster Confession or the twenty-five articles of Methodism, but one article, XII, was taken almost bodily from the Congregational Statement of 1886. For the rest, they are a composite of the Brief Statement of the Reformed Faith, prepared by the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., in 1905, and the Articles of Faith of the Presbyterian Church in England, prepared in 1890.

On the basis of the foregoing it can be logically assumed that neither the framers of the doctrine in the Basis nor the people of the negotiating bodies generally were overly concerned or interested in the doctrinal basis of the proposed new church.

Two of the biggest questions confronting the union sub-committees were the right of the negotiating churches to join in union with other churches, and the right of the denominations to change, alter, or compromise their doctrinal position.

The Presbyterian unionists found justification for union in the rules and standards of their church. Section 120 of the "Rules and Forms of Procedure, Presbyterian Church in Canada," states:

The Assembly may pass a Declaratory Act affirming what it understands to be the law of the Church regarding any particular matter; and such act may be passed without submission to Presbyteries. But any action contemplating a change in the law of the Church is dealt with according to the provisions of the following act.

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<sup>9</sup>Clariss Edwin Silcox, Church Union in Canada, Its Causes and Consequences (New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, c.1933), p. 137. (Article XII of the Basis is entitled "Of Sanctification").

The next Section, Section 121, deals with the Barrier Act which provides that

No prepared law or rule relative to matters of doctrine, discipline, government or worship, shall become a permanent enactment until the same has been submitted to Presbyteries for consideration.<sup>10</sup>

The Presbyterians therefore assumed that the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada could, after the proposed union matters had been submitted to the Presbyteries for their approval under the terms of the Barrier Act, enact new legislation for their church in matters of doctrine, polity or worship. Thus the highest court of the Presbyterian Church, the General Assembly, felt it to be within its rights to act for the church as a whole on matters of union after these proposals had been approved by the Presbyteries.

The Congregationalists, on the other hand, believing each congregation to be autonomous and existing in its own right as a "gathered church," had no high court to act for the church as a whole. Therefore it was left to each individual congregation to decide for itself on the question of church union. Arthur S. Morton, pointing out the basic differences between the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists in their view of the church and church courts, has written:

The points in which the two differ are that most Congregationalists find the New Testament ministry to be in two degrees: Elders (including pastors) and deacons; that to

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<sup>10</sup>Quoted by Silcox, op. cit., p. 136.

all Congregationalists the visible Church is not the great mass of believers but the "gathered Church" voluntarily organized into a congregation. While Presbyterians on the one side, secure the wide-spread union which they see in the New Testament by regarding the powers of the Church as lying in the mass of Christians who are to be gathered after the manner of the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), under a legislative General Assembly, the Congregationalists, on the other hand, maintained the local liberty which is writ large on the sacred pages by reserving the supreme power of the Church for the congregation and by interpreting the Council of Jerusalem as being consultative only.<sup>11</sup>

The Congregationalists, basically an anti-creedal church, surrendered one of their basic tenets when they subscribed to the doctrinal formulation of the Basis of Union as a statement of faith prior to their entry into the United Church of Canada.

Regarding the right of the Methodist Church to alter its doctrine and join in organic union with other denominations, C. E.

Silcox summarizes:

The Methodist Church found its doctrine clearly defined in the Book of Discipline, chapter 1, section 1: "The doctrines of the Methodist Church are to be those contained in the twenty-five Articles of Religion, and those taught by the Reverend John Wesley, M.A., in his Notes on the New Testament, and in the first fifty-two sermons of the first series of his discourses." This doctrinal basis had been incorporated in the terms of Methodist union effected in 1874, and again in 1884. . . . The only way, therefore, in which the Methodist Church could act in accordance with its own genius was both to reaffirm the doctrinal standards and to approve the further articles prepared by the Joint Committee as not "contrary to existing and established standards of doctrine."<sup>12</sup>

Apparently the Methodist Church courts and the membership of the churches found nothing in the doctrine of the Basis "contrary to

<sup>11</sup> Arthur S. Morton, The Way to Union (Toronto: William Briggs, 1912), p. 232.

<sup>12</sup> Silcox, op. cit., p. 135.

existing and established standards of doctrine." The Methodists, even though their conception of the church was not deliberately modelled after any fixed pattern, had a system of church courts to act for the people. Ultimately, however, it was the people in the local congregations who decided whether the Methodist Church would or would not enter the proposed united church.

The sub-committee on doctrine was the first to finish its assigned task. Some seek to explain the comparative ease with which this sub-committee completed its task by the fact that a church must alter its creed to keep pace with the times. The members of the sub-committee felt that the creeds of the negotiating churches were outdated. The church needed a new, progressive, and up-to-date creed which was not, however, in any way final or absolute. Alfred J. Johnston, at the conclusion of a lengthy defense of the work of the sub-committee and the creed which they evolved, states:

That they did this piece of work at all is proof that they considered that a church has the right, working in a regular way, to alter its creeds; a right they could not and would not deny to their children, or to their children's children.<sup>13</sup>

The doctrinal section of the Basis in its completed form consists of twenty articles dealing with the common topics of Christianity, such as "God," "Revelation," and "Grace." The first eight Articles deal with specific doctrines, while Articles IX-XX deal primarily with the Christian life.

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<sup>13</sup> Alfred J. Johnston, A Larger Fellowship (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1926), p. 19.

One of the chief problems which would of necessity confront any group trying to unite the Presbyterians and Methodists would be the problem of trying to reconcile Calvinistic and Arminian theology as it is expressed by the Presbyterians and Methodists respectively. However, the sub-committee never dealt seriously with this problem. It was overlooked in view of practical considerations relating to union. Debatable theological and doctrinal matters were at all times religiously and studiously avoided. As Chalmers has very pointedly remarked,

These two streams of Protestantism--the Calvinistic and the Arminian--were able to merge within The United Church of Canada because the practical problems facing the Christian Churches in Canada in the early part of the twentieth century were so pressing that secondary differences and theological issues which created divisions in the old world became well-nigh irrelevant as the Church confronted the tasks of the new world. Doctrinal controversies were to some degree overlooked because of the great need to witness to that which is central in Christianity, God's saving grace in Christ . . . . The Churches had neither the time nor the heart for debatable matters of theology, except in so far as they might contribute to the clarification and support of that one central Gospel which they were constrained to declare to men. To save Canada for Christ was the issue that was paramount.<sup>14</sup>

The sub-committee on polity was confronted with the task of reconciling three distinctly different systems of church government and polity. The autonomous Congregationalists did not wish to surrender their freedom and were anxious for the local congregations to carry on under the system of local self-government to which they were accustomed. The Presbyterians wished to retain for each individual congregation the right to "call" its own

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<sup>14</sup>Chalmers, op. cit., p. 118.

pastor, while also retaining the Presbyteries to serve as a check both on the local churches and the church as a whole. The Methodists, on the other hand, wished to retain for the higher courts of the church the responsibility for deciding Church policy and for placing pastors into the respective charges. The sub-committee on polity, after many lengthy discussion regarding the roles, goals, and limits of power of the various units of organization of the three denominations, wrote the following into the Basis of Union regarding the organization of the proposed new church body:

The unit of organization for The United Church shall be the pastoral charge. A pastoral charge may consist of more than one local church; a local church is a body of persons meeting for public worship on one place.

The governing bodies, or courts of the Church, higher than those of the pastoral charge, shall be: The Presbytery; The Conference; The General Council.<sup>15</sup>

The sub-committee did, however, stipulate that the congregations going into the union would be permitted to continue to operate under the system of church government, particularly in the local congregation, under which they operated before union. The sub-committee also recommended that all congregations formed after the union should be organized according to the organizational structure advocated by the Basis of Union.

The names chosen for the higher courts of the United Church of Canada in themselves speak "union" in that the names were

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<sup>15</sup>The Basis of Union, p. 10.

borrowed from the three uniting bodies. The work of the proposed new units of organization almost duplicated the work of the higher courts of the respective churches. As Silcox has pointed out while speaking of the names chosen for the higher church courts,

The Presbytery was similar to the Presbytery in the Presbytery Church, to the District Meeting in Methodism, and to the Association in Congregationalism. The Conference was similar to the Annual Conference in Methodism, or to the Synod in Presbyterianism. The General Council was similar to the Union in Congregationalism, to the General Conference in Methodism and to the General Assembly in Presbyterianism. The choice of the names for these respective units was in itself significant, the Presbyterians contributing the name of the Presbytery; the Methodists that of the Conference, while the name of the General Council was contributed by the Congregationalists, but reflected as well the experience of the Church Catholic.<sup>16</sup>

For the most part, the polity of the United Church of Canada is Presbyterian. Presbyterianism steered a middle course between the high centralization of the Methodist Church and the complete autonomy of the Congregational Churches. The polity of the United Church is "practically Presbyterian."<sup>17</sup>

The sub-committee on the ministry dealt primarily with three problems: (1) The pastoral office, including term of office; (2) The training and ordaining of pastors; (3) The relationship of the individual pastors to the doctrines of the Church. In the Congregationalist Churches, each autonomous local congregation reserved for itself both the right and privilege of calling and ordaining its pastor. The Presbyterians, on the other hand,

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<sup>16</sup> Silcox, op. cit., p. 155.

<sup>17</sup> Chalmers, op. cit., p. 130.

permitted the local congregations to call their pastors, but reserved the work of examining and ordaining pastors to the Presbyteries. The Methodists left the work of assigning and ordaining their men to the "placement board" of their Church, the Annual Conference. The Methodists also practiced a system of itineracy, which meant that a pastor was obliged to change to a different congregation after a specific numbers of years in a particular charge. The sub-committee on the ministry attempted to arrive at a system which would retain the best features of all three denominational systems.

The Basis assigns to the Conference, the second highest court of the United Church of Canada, the task of examining new candidates for the ministry. The Conference is also responsible for ordaining and settling new pastors. Regarding the relationship of the individual minister to the doctrines of the church, the Basis states:

These candidates shall be examined on the Statement of Doctrine of The United Church, and shall, before ordination, satisfy the examining body that they are in essential agreement therewith, and that as ministers of the Church they accept the statement as in substance agreeable to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures.<sup>18</sup>

At the time of the writing of the Basis, the members of the sub-committee on the ministry apparently took for granted that the ordination of the three negotiating churches was valid ordination. However, in 1926 the General Council of the United Church, in answer to some questions regarding the validity of the ministry of

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<sup>18</sup> The Basis of Union, p. 23.

the newly-formed United Church, issued a lengthy study to prove the validity of the ministry of both the United Church and the ministry of the three Churches involved in the Union. After a review of the doctrine of the ministry as found in the doctrinal standards of the three uniting churches, the 258-page study concludes,

1. That the existing ministry of the United Church of Canada is a true ministry of the Church of God; and
2. That those ordained by the United Church of Canada have a true ministry in the Church of God.<sup>19</sup>

The sub-committee on administration dealt primarily with such questions as home missions, publishing interests, the schools and colleges of the three churches, and the benevolent, endowment, and retirement funds of the three churches. After lengthy and involved negotiations, the sub-committee arrived at a workable system whereby the people who had contributed to the funds of the individual churches were assured of receiving their equitable share of the various funds after the Union. The sub-committee sought to protect both the present and prospective claimants to these various funds. The sub-committee also unified the home mission endeavors of the three churches.

In the final analysis, the sub-committee on law faced the most difficult task. Especially during the four years before

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<sup>19</sup> A Statement Concerning Ordination to the Ministry in the Presbyterian Church in Canada, The Methodist Church (Canada), and The Congregational Churches of Canada and The United Church of Canada (Toronto: The General Council of the United Church of Canada, 1926), p. 258.

union this sub-committee was the target for much criticism because the sub-committee had early in the course of negotiations decided that the Union should be legalized by an Act of Parliament. By 1921 the anti-union forces had closed their ranks and effected an organization to fight the legalization of the new church by Parliament. However, as one of the pamphleteers of the time has pointed out, this proposed legalizing legislation was not a last-minute thought, but had been decided on in the early days of the negotiations. The pamphlet states:

In 1908 the Joint Legal Committee had come to the unanimous conclusion that if that Union was to be accomplished it should be done in the following way:

1. The United Church of Canada should be incorporated by Act of Parliament.
2. It should be made clear that the United Church possessed spiritual freedom and was independent in all matters of doctrine, discipline and polity.
3. The negotiating Churches would take with them into the Union all the denominational property, and the legislation would vest all this property in the United Church. Where a congregation held property solely for its own benefit such property would not be affected by the legislation without the consent of the congregation.
4. Provision would be made in the case of congregations holding property other than solely for their own benefit, by a new model trust deed.
5. In reference to colleges, they should bear the same relation to the United Church that they bear at present to their own denominations.
6. Federal legislation should be supplemented by Provincial legislation.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Church Union and the Bill, A Popular Digest and Discussion (Toronto: The Bureau of Literature and Information of the Joint Committee on Church Union, [1924]), pp. 4-5.

The legislation was also to be brought about in such a way that the three denominations would go into the Union "without loss of identity."

By 1908 the Joint Union Committee had for all practical purposes completed its task of drawing up the Basis of Union. On December 11, 1908, the Joint Committee unanimously adopted a resolution which read in part, "The Joint Committee regard their work as now substantially completed."<sup>21</sup> The changes made in the Basis after this date, except for the addition of the Article on "Prayer" and the actual drawing up of the Bill legalizing the Union, were minimal and negligible.

The Basis of Union attempted to fuse three different and distinct denominational streams of thought. These three streams of thought are very apparent in the Basis: the Congregational dislike and distrust of final and ultimate creeds and commitment to creeds, the recoil of the Presbyterians from using the Westminster Confession and other traditional Presbyterian confessional statements as ultimate and absolute standards of religious truth, and the Methodist zeal for evangelism and evangelicalism. These three tendencies have written themselves into the Basis.<sup>22</sup> Although the Congregationalist Church was the smallest of the negotiating bodies, its influence is particularly noticeable at one point--the relationship of the minister to the doctrines of

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<sup>21</sup> Resolutions of Joint Committee, p. 21.

<sup>22</sup> For a fuller discussion, see Silcox, op. cit., p. 450.

the Church. That a minister need only be "in essential agreement with" the confessional standard of the Church and need only regard the statement of faith as "in substance agreeable to the teaching of the Holy Scripture," is very definitely a Congregationalist attitude and approach to doctrinal statements and creedal formulations.

E. Lloyd Morrow, after a rather thorough study of the Basis of Union, particularly of its doctrinal statement, has summarized the work of the Committees as follows:

1. The Committee or Committees did not overwork themselves . . . the compilers depended on two ready-to-hand documents as norms.
2. That they either considered the drawing up of a "Creed" or "affirmation of common faith" a very simple or an extremely difficult task.
3. That the old school of theology predominated.
4. That the Basis was not changed to meet the progress in modern and social theology, that was forging ahead during all these years.
5. That very inadequate attention and respect was given to the up-to-date professors and ministers, who claim to have sent in suggestions which were turned down by the Committee, on the score that the purpose of the Committee was not the drawing up of a creed but the finding of points of agreement, and the setting aside of contentious differences.
6. That the Basis should still be thoroughly revised, or a new one drawn up to meet modern thought and needs.
7. That there is a certain amount of hopeful emancipation from objectionable dogma even in this Basis, despite its deficiency.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Morrow, op. cit., p. 129.

## CHAPTER IV

### COMMITMENT OF THE NEGOTIATING BODIES TO THE UNION

1910-1917

During the years 1910-1917 the three negotiating denominations committed themselves to Union on the Basis of Union as approved by the higher courts and the membership of the three bodies. It was also during this period that the General Council of Local Union Churches, which later shared in the work of union, was organized in Western Canada. These Local Union Churches were organized with the Basis of Union as their basic union document. They were the outgrowth of the cooperative mission endeavors of the churches negotiating for union and organized into a Local Council while waiting for the ultimate organic union of the three church bodies involved. It was also during this period that the anti-union forces began to make their voice heard in the country, particularly in the Presbyterian Church.

The General Council of Local Union Churches of Western Canada played a prominent part in bringing about the final Union of 1925. These union churches were originally organized with a view toward the ultimate union of their sponsoring denominations. But after numerous delays in the consummation of the union, these local union churches finally threatened to form an independent denomination with the Basis of Union as their organizational guideline and confessional statement. The threat of the rise of

a new denomination in the West played no small role in forcing the Union of 1925. Although these Local Union Churches never formally broke relations with their sponsoring denominations, they for all practical purposes existed as an independent denomination.

C. E. Silcox, while speaking of the co-operative endeavors of the home mission boards of the denominations which later joined in the Union and the formation of the Local Unions, has outlined the period of pre-union co-operation into four chronological periods:

In summary it may be said that there were four distinct periods of co-operation:

1. The period of informal conversation between superintendents of home missionary work, 1905-1911. In this period we have also the beginning of the independent local union churches, formed on the proposed Basis of Union.
2. The period of formal agreements, 1911-1917, enforced particularly in the western provinces, under the general direction of provincial and district co-operating committees, and with the subsequent delimitation of fields, but in which the resulting church, however mixed its membership, was always a strict Presbyterian or a strict Methodist Church.
3. The period of the formation of local union charges, formed on the proposed Basis of Union, but definitely affiliated with one or the other of the negotiating Churches, 1917-1922.
4. The period of the formation of local union charges, formed on the proposed Basis of Union, but affiliated with two or more of the negotiating churches, 1922-1925.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Clariss Edwin Silcox, Church Union in Canada, Its Causes and Consequences (New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, c.1933), p. 229.

At first the cooperating bodies had simply divided the territory with the result that the mission congregations were affiliated only with the church active in that particular area. But as Silcox has pointed out, in the years directly preceding union these churches were sponsored by two or more of the cooperating churches.

Early in the year 1911 committees of the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Congregational Churches set to draw up an "Agreement for Co-operation in Home Mission Work." The primary purpose of the Co-operation Committees was to devise a system whereby there would be no unnecessary duplication in home mission work. This "Agreement for Co-operation" was revised in 1917. In this revised agreement, the cooperating churches attempted to stifle the threat of a new denomination composed of union churches which were the products of cooperation. In the 1917 revision of the original "Agreement," the Committee stated:

In the judgment of this Committee the principle of union in different localities, until the organic union of the negotiating churches is consummated, should find expression in the organization of charges under this plan of co-operation jointly adopted by the negotiating churches, rather than by the organization of local union churches.

Many of these cooperating churches grew impatient because of the delay in the consummation of union. As Wilson has pointed out, the result of this impatience was that "in 1916 already a number of churches had broken off from denominational control,

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<sup>2</sup>Agreement for Co-operation Between the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational Churches in Canada, Pending their Organic Union (Revised January 3, 1917), p. 6.

and had formed a General Council of Union Churches. By 1924 their Annual Conference had grown to almost a hundred, wholly in the Prairie Provinces."<sup>3</sup> Representatives of the General Council of Local Union Churches were later invited to participate with the other bodies in the union negotiations. In a very real sense, these Local Union Churches played an exceedingly large role in bringing about the eventual union since these Local Unions were organized with that goal in mind.

The completed Basis of Union was referred to and accepted by the supreme courts of the three churches during the years 1909-1911, and was then sent on to the lower courts and the membership of the respective churches according to the constitutional procedure of each church. The "Historical Statement" of the Basis of Union has summarized the voting of the different churches regarding the Basis as follows:

In the Presbyterian Church, 50 Presbyteries voted approval, and 20 Presbyteries non-approval (793 votes for, and 496 against); in the Methodist Church, 11 Conferences voted approval, and one Conference non-approval (1,579 votes for, and 270 against).

The vote of the elders, office bearers and membership in the respective Churches was as follows: In the Congregational Church the vote was on the Basis, when of 10,689 members, 2,933 voted for, and 813 against. In the Presbyterian Church two questions were submitted, seeking the attitude first toward organic union, and second toward the Basis. The vote on the first question was,

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<sup>3</sup>R. J. Wilson, Church Union in Canada after Three Years (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1929), p. 21.

of 9,675 elders, 6,245 voted for, and 2,475 against; of 287,944 communicants, 106,755 voted for, and 48,278 against; of adherents, 37,175 voted for, and 14,174 against. The vote on the second question was 5,104 elders voted for, and 2,192 against; 27,756 adherents voted for, and 10,316 against. In the Methodist Church the vote concerned the Basis only. The result of the vote was, of 29,820 officials, 23,475 voted for, and 3,869 against; of 293,967 members eighteen years of age and over, 150,841 voted for, and 24,357 against; of 29,373 members under eighteen years of age, 17,198 voted for, and 2,615 against; of adherents, 42,115 voted for, and 7,234 against.<sup>4</sup>

The Methodist General Conference officially approved the proposed Basis of Union at its meeting on August 14-31, 1910. At that meeting the General Conference adopted the following resolution on the recommendation of its Joint Union Committee,

Your Committee, therefore, recommends that the General Conference declare its approval of the documents [Basis of Union] agreed upon by the Joint Committee as a basis upon which the Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational Churches may unite.<sup>5</sup>

The General Conference passed the resolution by a vote of 220 for and 35 against.

The Congregationalist Union accepted the Basis in principle at its 1910 meeting. But because of the autonomous nature of the Congregational Churches, the Congregational Union first needed the approval of each individual congregation before the Congregational Union could act for the church as a whole. The Congregationalists also suggested several slight changes in the

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<sup>4</sup>"Historical Statement," The Basis of Union (Toronto: The General Offices, The United Church of Canada, n.d.), pp. 34-5.

<sup>5</sup>Resolutions of the Methodist General Conference from 1902-1922 (Unpublished MS., The United Church of Canada Archives, Toronto, Ontario), p. 6.

proposed Basis, particularly regarding the question of the relation of the minister to the doctrines of the Church. A further Congregational objection was that the Congregationalists did not wish to bind themselves to any final, absolute creed as their confession of faith. In 1915-1916 the Congregational Union officially approved the amended Basis, even though they had already approved the principle of Union as expressed in the Basis in 1909. The 1916 resolution stated,

That this Union express its approval of the Basis as now submitted, its gratification that the negotiations so long pending have now advanced another stage, and its hope that there will be no unnecessary delay in bringing the proposed Union to a successful consummation.<sup>6</sup>

The Presbyterian General Assembly approved the Basis in 1910. This Assembly further resolved that the Basis should next be sent to the Presbyteries and the membership of the local congregations for their approval under the terms of the Barrier Act. The 1910 General Assembly resolved,

The Assembly declare their approval of the Documents [Basis of Union] agreed upon by the Joint Committee as a basis upon which this Church may unite with the Methodist and Congregational Churches, and they direct that this resolution, along with the above mentioned Documents, be transmitted to Presbyteries for their judgment under the Barrier Act, instructing Presbytery Clerks to report the decisions arrived at to the Clerks of the General Assembly not later than the first day of May, 1911.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Resolutions Re Church Union of the Congregational Union from 1903-1923 (Unpublished MS., The United Church of Canada Archives, Toronto, Ontario), p. 22.

<sup>7</sup> Resolutions of the Presbyterian General Assembly Re Church Union Together with Protests and Dissent from 1899-1923 (Unpublished MS., The United Church of Canada Archives, Toronto, Ontario), p. 17.

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church meeting in 1912 studied and reviewed the vote which had been taken in 1911. After the Assembly perceived that the vote for union was far from unanimous, the General Assembly reaffirmed its wish for organic union, but added,

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>8</sup>

The 1915 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, answering the demand from some quarters for another vote on the question of union, again submitted the question to the Presbyteries and the congregations for their approval. By this time the Article on "Prayer" had been added to the Basis in answer to Presbyterian demands for inclusion of this Article. The Appendix on Law had also been completed and added to the Basis. This revised Basis of Union was submitted to the Presbyteries after the following resolution had been adopted by the 1915 General Assembly:

this Assembly hereby declares its approval of the "Basis of Union" now submitted, as a Basis on which this Church may unite with the Methodist and Congregational Churches, and directs that the said basis be transmitted to the Presbyteries for their judgment under the Barrier Act, and that the appendix on law be also transmitted to Presbyteries for their judgment.

The people are reminded that the decision on this question

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

must be reached on the basis of the votes cast.<sup>9</sup>

Of the 76 Presbyteries, 52 voted their approval of the 1915 version of the Basis, while 13 Presbyteries voted non-approval. The votes of the remaining 11 Presbyteries were discounted because of ties or because no returns were filed. Of the communicant members of the Presbyterian Church voting in 1915, 106,534 voted for union and 69,913 voted against approval of the Basis. Of the adherents, 36,942 voted approval while 20,004 voted non-approval.<sup>10</sup>

On the basis of the results of the vote in the churches and Presbyteries in 1915, the 1916 General Assembly passed the following resolution by a vote of 406-90,

That in accordance with its recommendations this General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada do now resolve to unite with the Methodist Church of Canada and the Congregational Churches of Canada to constitute "The United Church of Canada," on the basis of Union, approved by the General Assembly of 1915, and by the majority of Presbyteries since consulted under the Barrier Act.

That a Committee be appointed to carry out the policy of the Assembly, and to act in co-operation, with committees of the Methodist and Congregational Churches of Canada in obtaining the necessary legal advice and in taking such steps as may be deemed proper to prepare for making application to the Dominion and Provincial Legislatures for such legislation as may be necessary to secure the conveyance of property to the United Church. That this Committee report to the first Assembly following the end of the first year after the close of the war, and that with the consent and authority of that Assembly, application be made for the legislation proposed at the following session of the Dominion Parliament and the Provincial Legislatures.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

That the union be consummated as soon after the securing of legislation as the regular steps can be taken.<sup>11</sup>

Thus the Presbyterian Church in Canada had committed itself to organic union with the Methodist and Congregational Churches of Canada.

The name for the proposed new church body had been decided on at the Sixth Conference of the Joint Committee on Union, meeting on December 16-17, 1914. The minutes of this meeting read, "The question of names was then taken up and it was, after some discussion, and without a dissenting voice, agreed that the name of the united church shall be 'The United Church of Canada!'"<sup>12</sup>

The opposition to the proposed union was rather sporadic and relatively silent until the year 1916. The opposition to union became more organized and more vocal following the organization of the Presbyterian Church Association in Toronto in October, 1916. Up to this time the organized opposition to union had been under the direction of the Committee for the Preservation of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. This Committee, while not directly opposed to union, agitated and campaigned for co-operation and federation rather than organic union. In 1916 this Committee organized itself into a new organization, called the Presbyterian Church Association, which pledged itself "to maintain and continue the Presbyterian Church in Canada" at all costs

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>12</sup> Resolutions of the Joint Committee on Church Union from First Conference in 1904 to Ninth Conference in 1923 (Unpublished MS., The United Church of Canada Archives, Toronto, Ont.), p. 22.

and at any price.

The Presbyterian Church Association, at its first convocation in Toronto in October, 1916, passed the following resolution regarding its goals and objectives,

For: --

Whereas the Union Committee in its first report, and the General Assembly of 1905 in adopting that report, laid down as a condition of Organic Union "that a Union of the Churches, to be real and lasting, must carry the consent of the entire membership," and

Whereas the first vote of the people in 1911 was taken on the understanding that the proposed Union "must carry the consent of the entire membership" and out of a total membership of 298,916; 113,000 voted in favor of Union and 50,733 against; and

Whereas the Assembly of 1912, on receiving that vote, declared it unwise, owing to the extent of the minority, to proceed immediately to Union; and

Whereas in the vote of 1915, out of a total membership of 338,322; 113,600 voted in favor of Organic Union and 73,735 voted against; and

Whereas according to the foregoing, from 1911 to 1915, the membership of the Presbyterian Church in Canada increased approximately 40,000, the vote for Union increased only 600, while the vote against Union increased 23,000; and

Whereas only about one-third of the entire membership has declared itself in favor of the proposed Organic Union; and Whereas the action of the General Assembly at Winnipeg was manifestly untimely and ill-advised; and

Whereas the foregoing facts indicate that a case in favor of the proposed Organic Union has not been established; Therefore, in view of these facts, as well as for other reasons, it is hereby resolved that our present duty is to maintain and continue the Presbyterian Church in Canada, and to this duty we solemnly pledge ourselves.<sup>13</sup>

During the few years immediately preceding the Union, the Presbyterian Church Association kept up a continuous campaign

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<sup>13</sup> A Statement of the Case of the Presbyterian Church Association in Its Opposition to the Proposed Union of the Presbyterian, Congregational and Methodist Churches ([Toronto]: The Presbyterian Church Association, 1923), pp. 4-5.

against the proposed Union. They were successful in their opposition to the extent that only a portion of the Presbyterian Church in Canada entered the United Church of Canada.

The working with resolutions adopted by the High Courts of the respective Churches and by the Union Committees, both the pro-union and anti-union groups continued from year to year, meeting and conferring during the war years and the years immediately following. The attention and energy of the people was directed towards the war effort. The respective resolutions of the respective bodies had accepted the suggestion of the Union Committee in 1918 that all negotiations should cease until one year after the close of the war. A further resolution passed by the Union Committee in 1919 called for the negotiating of a new union in further action regarding union until the Committee on the part of the respective Churches had finished the task of drafting a Bill incorporating the United Church of Canada as a corporate body.

During the end of this tense period, the General Council of the United Church of Canada began to send official representatives to the local Union Committees meetings. The local Union Churches were increasing rapidly in number and were indirectly threatening to elect their own representatives. Even though these local Union Churches were still affiliated with their sponsoring churches, at least nominally, an invitation was officially extended to the General Council of local Union Churches inviting them to send representatives to the Union Committee meetings. After 1921 these

## CHAPTER V

### THE TRUCE

1917-1921

In keeping with resolutions adopted by the high courts of the negotiating churches and by the Joint Union Committee, both the pro-union and anti-union groups desisted from any overt, active propagandizing and negotiating during the war years and the years immediately following. The attention and energy of the people was directed towards the war effort. The respective assemblies of the negotiating bodies had accepted the suggestion of the Joint Committee on Union that all negotiations should cease until one year after the close of the war. A further resolution passed by the Joint Committee at this time asked the negotiating churches to take no further action regarding union until the Committee on Law had had an opportunity to finish its task of drafting a Bill legalizing the United Church of Canada as a corporate body.

During the end of this truce period, the General Council of Local Union Churches began to send official representatives to the Joint Union Committee meetings. The Local Union Churches were increasing rapidly in number and were indirectly threatening to start a new denomination. Even though these Local Union Churches were still affiliated with their sponsoring churches, at least theoretically, an invitation was officially extended to the General Council of Local Union Churches inviting them to send representatives to the Union Committee meetings. After 1921 these

representatives took an active part in the negotiations leading to union. Representatives of the General Council of Local Union also signed the Basis at the consummation of union in 1925. The resolution adopted by the General Council of Local Union Churches accepting the invitation of the Joint Union Committee to participate in the union negotiations reads as follows:

This Council of Union Churches of Western Canada has received with pleasure the invitation from the Chairman of the Committees on Church Union of the Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches of Canada, to be represented at the Joint Church Union Committee meetings. . . . We appreciate this opportunity to meet with the representatives of the Parent Churches in planning for the greater Church to come. We accept this invitation gladly and agree to appoint our three representatives.

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<sup>1</sup> Resolutions of the Joint Committee on Church Union from First Conference in 1904 to Ninth Conference in 1923 (Unpublished MS., The United Church of Canada Archives, Toronto, Ont.), p. 27.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE STRUGGLE TO SECURE ENABLING LEGISLATION

1921-1925

Roughly one year after the close of the war actual union negotiations were again resumed. As many observers have pointed out, it was the Frontier and the Union Churches on the Frontier who finally led the way to union and revived the fires of union whenever they burned low. The plans of co-operation had achieved a large measure of success. However, these plans for co-operation had been approved and put into operation with a view toward ultimate organic union between the co-operating bodies. In a study of mission endeavors on the Frontier, E. H. Oliver has written the following regarding the role of the Western Union Churches in bringing about union,

In 1922 an effort was made to take stock of the result of the various plans of co-operation. It was found that there were already organized upon a united basis and looking forward to organic union over 1,000 pastoral charges with approximately 3,000 churches and preaching stations.

It was the Frontier that led the way. When the parent Churches hesitated it was the Frontier that persisted. It was there in hundreds of small communities that through co-operation and delimitation of territory, through independent unions and plans of affiliation, Church Union became an accomplished fact. It was the Frontier that continued the pressure for organic union when difficulties of sentiment and prejudice asserted themselves in more populous communities. And it was the Frontier that voted overwhelmingly in favor of Church Union, and rejoiced, with pride and hope,

when Union was so happily consummated on June 10th, 1925.<sup>1</sup> It must be remembered that a large number of these union churches were not members of the General Council of Local Union Churches, but retained their close ties with their sponsoring churches.

If the cooperating denominations had been more indulgent with the local union churches, there no doubt would have been many more such churches in existence at the time of the Union in 1925. The negotiating denominations feared greatly that these Churches would start their own denomination, in which case the parent churches would stand to lose the investment which they had made in property and manpower. As a result, the parent denominations attempted to keep these local union churches in tight check until the time of the consummation of Union in 1925. The parent churches did, however, make a concession to the General Council of Local Union Churches by inviting the Council to send representatives to the Union meetings.

After the war the participating denominations became increasingly more impatient of the delay in the consummation of the Union, as evidenced by the resolutions passed by the various bodies urging that the Union be consummated as quickly as possible. The denominations felt that the delay in union was definitely hindering their work among their own people, especially in the field of

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<sup>1</sup>Edmund H. Oliver, His Dominion of Canada (Toronto: The Board of Home Missions and the Woman's Missionary Society of the United Church of Canada, c.1932), p. 141.

home missions. For instance, the Congregationalist Union in 1922 passed a resolution urging immediate union, because, as the resolution states, they "would deplore any further delay as detrimental to our own work."<sup>2</sup>

During the years immediately preceding Union, the opposition of the anti-union Presbyterians became increasingly more pronounced and more bitter. Up until 1916, this opposition had for the most part been academic and had been carried on primarily by means of literature. By 1922 the Presbyterian Church Association, the primary anti-union organization, had become a full-fledged organization, complete with press agents, publicity heads, and unlimited finances. A steady stream of literature flowed from the Association's presses. The newspapers were full of announcements and advertisements urging all Presbyterians to vote against the Union. The Presbyterian Church Association's propaganda campaign was so successful that the unionists were led to organize their own publicity organization, the Bureau of Literature and Information of the Joint Committee on Church Union. In its efforts to combat the Presbyterian propaganda, the Bureau indulged in propagandizing of its own. Both organizations electioneered for votes among the members of the local Presbyterian congregations, supplied the newspapers with reams of pro- and anti-union materials, and hired full-time publicity men to carry

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<sup>2</sup>Resolutions Re Church Union of the Congregational Union from 1903-1923 (Unpublished MS., The United Church of Canada Archives, Toronto, Ont.), p. 32.

on their campaigns.

The 1921 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, growing impatient of delay and also in answer to a demand from some quarters of the Church for another vote on the question of union, passed the following resolution by a vote of 414-107,

That whereas the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada has already by a large majority expressed itself in favor of organic union with the Methodist and Congregational Churches of Canada,

That whereas two appeals to the members and adherents of the Presbyterian Church in Canada have resulted in a similar way,

That whereas, during the time when by General agreement, the matter of union was not discussed, nothing has occurred to change the mind of the Church, but rather to confirm and strengthen its previous decision,

Therefore be it resolved that this General Assembly take such steps as may be deemed best to consummate organic union with the above named Churches as expeditiously as possible.<sup>3</sup>

The fateful meeting of the Presbyterian General Assembly which committed that body irrevocably to the union was held at Port Arthur, Ontario, in 1923. The debate between those for union and those opposed to union raged violently on the Assembly floor. By this time the legislative Bill which was to be presented to the Dominion Parliament had been virtually completed and had been submitted to the negotiating bodies for approval. The Presbyterian anti-unionists challenged the legal authority of the State to create a new church body by legislative act. Most of the discussion centered around the drafts of the pro-

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<sup>3</sup>Resolutions of the Presbyterian General Assembly Re Church Union Together with Protests and Dissent from 1899-1923 (Unpublished MS., The United Church of Canada Archives, Toronto, Ont.), p. 43.

posed legislative Bill which had been presented to the Assembly for its approval.

At this Port Arthur meeting a final effort was made to prevent the breaking up of the Presbyterian Church in Canada over the question of union. However, it was too late in the day. The "Drummond Proposal," proposed by the Rev. Drummond of Hamilton, sought to prevent the split in the ranks of Presbyterianism by urging the Assembly to slow down in the movement toward organic union. Drummond suggested that the Churches continue their policy of co-operation with a view to federation rather than organic union. Silcox, speaking of the "Drummond Proposal" and Drummond's opposition to organic union, has remarked:

The outstanding figure among the opponents of union was the Rev. D. R. Drummond, D. D., of Hamilton, who had previously issued a pamphlet entitled Is There Not a Way Out? Dr. Drummond again urged the postponement of union with the continuance of co-operation to prevent overlapping--a sort of federal union as opposed to organic union.

It is quite evident from various testimonies that Dr. Drummond was in favor of union but averse to any action that would cause a serious disruption in the Church. Hence he sought a via media, but he failed in his attempt to win support for a further postponement of the decisive and divisive issue.

The 1923 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church finally committed the Presbyterian Church in Canada to union, despite growing opposition. In order to explain the action of the Assembly committing the Church to union, the Assembly printed and distributed to all Presbyterian Churches in Canada a statement which

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<sup>4</sup>Clariss Edwin Silcox, Church Union in Canada, Its Causes and Consequences (New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, c.1933), p. 191.

read in part:

After a very full discussion, the Assembly of 1923, by a vote of 427 to 129, decided to proceed forthwith to the consummation of Union with the Methodist Church and the Congregational Churches of Canada upon the terms of the draft Bills presented, which were approved in principle and generally as to form. In accordance with this decision, a Committee on Church Union was appointed to act for and on behalf of the Presbyterian Church in Canada in co-operation with similar Committees from the other negotiating Churches, with authority to put the Bills in final shape and to procure the enactment of the proposed acts of the Parliament of Canada and of the Legislatures of the Colonies and countries outside of Canada as may be necessary to consummate the said Union. The Assembly also provided for the appointment of one hundred and fifty members to represent our Church in the first General Council of the United Church of Canada.

This means that the question of Church Union is now fully settled by the Church herself; and the proposed legislation when secured will simply give effect in civil law to the Union as agreed upon by overwhelming majorities of our people, our Presbyteries and our Assemblies.<sup>5</sup>

Thus the highest court of the Presbyterian Church in Canada had officially committed the church to union with the other two bodies. For the Presbyterian unionists, the majority vote of the membership of the church as a whole in favor of union committed the Presbyterian Church in its entirety to the union. But it was especially after this 1923 Assembly that the bitter, vitriolic, and oftentimes underhanded campaign between the two camps in the Presbyterian Church in Canada began in earnest. Many of the staunch Presbyterians wished to stay out of the

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<sup>5</sup>The Presbyterian Church in Canada, Statement as to the Assembly's Action on Church Union (sent out to the Churches in Sept., 1923, by the Presbyterian Church in Canada), p. [2].

union for purely doctrinal reasons. On the other hand, many others wished to stay out and fought violently for this privilege because of purely selfish, personal reasons. The anti-unionists attempted to stop the union by every means imaginable--psychologically, socially, theologically, and finally legally. Silcox has summarized the feelings and the reasoning of those who opposed the union as follows:

So the opposition to Union in Presbyterian circles drew to its banners, as might be expected, heterogeneous elements, including some of the best and some of the worst. There were those whose devotion to the church of their fathers was deep and sincere, and when the decision had to be made, they voted to "stay by the stuff," and there were those who would have gone with the majority on the local church, however it voted, but who had no desire to break their connection with the particular church which had become dear to them. On the other hand, among the camp-followers of the anti-unionists (as for that matter, among those of the unionists) were some who had personal grudges to settle--"a pious grievance" and sometimes a grievance that was not pious. There gathered saints and Adullamites, modernists and fundamentalists, wets and dries, as the skirling of the pipes sounded, if not over the braes of Mar, at least in the hearts of men.<sup>6</sup>

The Presbyterian anti-unionists felt that the new church, especially if it were to be legalized by Act of Parliament, would rob them of their Presbyterian birthright and their heritage as a distinctive church body. They felt furthermore that the proposed United Church would not preserve any distinctly Presbyterian characteristics, even though the various churches would join the union "without loss of identity." They feared most of all that the word Presbyterian would become a mere empty

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<sup>6</sup> Silcox, op. cit., p. 213.

name, while the unionists claimed that none of the churches would have to give up any of their cherished beliefs and practices. Regarding this point Ephraim Scott, one of the most vocal of the anti-unionists, has written,

Now that selection of what these builders deemed best has been made, the result may be stated in a sentence. The doctrinal position of the new church, its attitude to the great truths of the Christian faith, has been taken from the Congregationalists; its polity has been taken from the Methodist Church; and four empty names,--"elder," "session," "presbytery," "call," all of them stripped of their meaning, rights and powers, from the Presbyterian Church.

While the Presbyterians were battling among themselves over the question of union, the Methodist and Congregationalists were patiently biding their time. Both the pro-unionists and anti-unionists kept up a steady propaganda and advertising campaign. Men of both parties went into local congregations in an attempt to take straw votes. Both parties tried to obtain information as to whether individual local congregations would or would not enter the union. A typical example of the kind of campaign which was carried on is a pamphlet issued by the unionists showing what dire consequences would befall any Presbyterian Church which did not enter the Union. Some of the consequences of not joining the union would be:

1. Separation from the Mother Church. The Presbyterian Church in Canada as an organic unit goes into the United Church of Canada.
2. Separation from the Great West.
3. Separation from Foreign Missionaries and their Work.

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<sup>7</sup>Ephraim Scott, "Church Union" and the Presbyterian Church in Canada (Montreal: John Lovell and Son, Ltd., 1928), p. 111.

4. Visionless Isolation.
5. Unrest and distraction because of the difficulties involved in distributing property to the non-concurrents.
6. Perpetuation of Strife.

One of the chief complaints of the anti-union Presbyterians against the proposed union was that this new church was to be legalized by Act of Parliament. They claimed that no government body could take away the existence, the right to existence, or the name of a church body. They claimed that this would be the case if the Presbyterians joined the United Church. The Presbyterian Church in Canada, no matter what might happen on the question of union, would always continue to exist. But this existence would be meaningless if the Presbyterian Church were to be swallowed up in the United Church. The argument is probably best summed up by Scott when he writes regarding those Presbyterians who wished to join the United Church and the continuing existence of the Presbyterian Church,

If nine-tenths of them change their belief, the one-tenth who still maintain their profession of adherence to that doctrine and polity are the Presbyterian Church. The nine-tenths who change cannot prevent the one-tenth continuing their acceptance of it and thus continuing the Presbyterian Church, the fellowship based upon and pledged to Presbyterian principles.

Members of the Presbyterian Church may withdraw from that Church and join another, but they cannot take with them the Presbyterian Church. By their act of accepting another church, of a different attitude in doctrine and polity,

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<sup>8</sup> A Choice and a Challenge (Toronto: Bureau of Literature and Information, Joint Committee on Church Union, [1924]),

they leave behind them the Presbyterian Church.<sup>9</sup>

Some of the other arguments advanced against the union were: the votes which had been taken did not give a true picture of the wishes of the people, the various confessions of the Presbyterian Church barred the church from seeking organic union, and the union was doomed to failure because it did not carry the "consent of the entire membership." However, the decision of the 1923 General Assembly, and the reaffirmation of this resolution by the 1924 Assembly, committed the Presbyterian Church in Canada to organic union with the Methodist and Congregationalist Churches of Canada. All of this simply led the anti-union forces to challenge still more vigorously the right of the Assembly to act for the church as a whole.

A further development in the effort to block the union occurred on January 25, 1924, when twenty-nine non-concurring Presbyterians issued a writ in the Ontario Supreme Court against the individual members of the Presbyterian Church Union Committee. The writ asked for "an injunction restraining the defendants from purporting to act as the agents or authorized representatives of the Presbyterian Church in Canada" in the matter of church union.<sup>10</sup> Ostensibly, the writ was issued in order to detain the Union Committee from petitioning Parliament to enact the proposed legislation. However, the action never proceeded beyond the filing of

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<sup>9</sup>Scott, op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>10</sup>Silcox, op. cit., p. 258.

the writ.

One of the questions much debated during this period was whether it would be necessary for Parliament to legalize the proposed new church. However, since the beginning of the negotiations the sub-committee on Law had been suggesting that the United Church be made a legal corporation through an Act of Parliament. In a pamphlet issued to all the congregations effected by the proposed union, the men of the sub-committee on law tried to explain their reason for making the new church a legal corporation. The pamphlet, issued shortly before the actual union, stated:

The question at once arises, since the Presbyterian Church is not now incorporated, why should the United Church be incorporated? The reason appears in the following quotations from counsel: "In the present case the Basis of Union expressly provides that the United Church is to be an incorporated body. It is also necessary to incorporate in the Union large numbers of existing corporations. Many of the individual congregations, in all of the churches, are incorporated bodies. The Congregational denomination consists of separate autonomous units having no central governing body authorized to act on their behalf. The Methodist Church is a corporate body. All of the churches administer their funds and schemes largely through the medium of incorporated bodies. In order to combine and co-ordinate properly the various funds and schemes of The United Church it is necessary to have all these organizations combined, and, in our opinion, this can be done only through legislation which unites and merges these many corporations into one body."<sup>11</sup>

The Joint Union sub-committee on Law engaged two lawyers to draft the necessary Bills and fight them through Parliament.

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<sup>11</sup> Church Union and the Bill, A Popular Digest and Discussion (Toronto: Bureau of Literature and Information of the Joint Committee on Church Union, [1924]), p. 3.

Although the sub-committee had been considering the legal aspects of the union already since 1905, it was not until after the close of the war that any real work was done on the drafting of the necessary Bills. The two lawyers engaged to draft the Bills were Kerwin Young and Gershom Mason. The latter has recently published a book in which he recalls some of the difficulties encountered in the drafting of the Bill and in getting the Bill passed by the Dominion Parliament. Mason also explains the necessity of the legalizing legislation.

As Mason points out, one of the main reasons for seeking legalizing legislation was the fact that the constitutions of the three uniting bodies differed radically. The Methodist Church had been incorporated by Act of Parliament in 1884. The Presbyterian Church was incorporated on neither the national or provincial level, although in the minds of the people the church existed as a legal corporation. The Presbyterians had, however, incorporated some of their church boards and committees in order to make it easier for these boards and committees to hold and administer money and property. The Congregationalists, because of their insistence on local autonomy, did not exist as a legal corporation, although the Congregationalist Union of Canada and two Congregationalist Missionary Societies had been incorporated.<sup>12</sup>

On August 31, 1922, the first draft of the Bill was ready

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<sup>12</sup>See Gershom W. Mason, The Legislative Struggle for Church Union (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, c.1956), p. 7.

for presentation to the Union Committees of the negotiating churches for their approval. Among other things, the Bill included a draft of the Act of Incorporation, a Model Trust Deed for the holding of property on the local level, memoranda regarding the legislation required in the individual provinces, and means of dealing with the property held by the dissenting churches who might choose to remain out of the union.

Mr. Mason has outlined the principal features of the Bill as follows:

The general principles of the legislation may be summarized briefly, thus:

1. The incorporation of The United Church of Canada with appropriate powers;
2. The vesting of general property of the negotiating Churches in The United Church;
3. The vesting of congregational property in trustees for the congregations as part of The United Church either,
  - a. under the terms of a Model Deed or
  - b. for the sole benefit of the congregation;
4. The substitution of The United Church for the respective uniting churches in their relation to their colleges;
5. The clothing of The United Church and its congregations with appropriate civil rights in each Province;
6. The right of each congregation to decide by majority vote as to entering the union and to retain its property no matter what the result of the vote; and
7. The division of the general property of a negotiating church between The United Church and the congregations voting not to enter the union.<sup>13</sup>

Application for the reading of the Bill was made to the Dominion Parliament in April, 1924. The "United Church of Canada Act," as the Bill was called, passed the lower House on July 4, 1924. The first reading in the Senate took place on July 8, 1924.

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<sup>13</sup>Mason, op. cit., p. 9.

The Bill passed the Senate a few days later. The Royal Assent was given and the Bill became law on July 19, 1924.

During the Parliamentary debate, the non-concurring Presbyterians tried various methods of blocking the Bill, usually through the introduction of amendments which would test the legality of the Bill before it became Law. These amendments demanded that the Supreme Court of Canada make a ruling as to whether (a) Parliament had the right to enact legislation incorporating a new church body, (b) The high courts of the negotiating churches had the right or the power to act for the church as a whole in keeping with the constitutions and confessional statements of the negotiating churches.

The "United Church of Canada Act" provided that a vote be taken in each individual congregation to decide whether that congregation would or would not enter the union.

The Presbyterians felt that the Act as passed by Parliament robbed them of their church homes, their church name, and their church possessions. E. Scott, first Moderator of the General Assembly of the continuing Presbyterian Church, has summed up the feeling of the Presbyterians on this matter when he writes:

Parliament did two things which might and did affect the Presbyterian Church. One was that it created a new corporation, the United Church of Canada, into which any from the Presbyterian Church (as from other Churches) might enter if they so desired. The other thing was that, subject to the action of the provincial legislatures, it authorized the promoters of that new corporation to seize the church homes and possessions of Presbyterians, wherever, in a congregation, those promoters were in a majority. But

Parliament did not do anything to or with the Presbyterian Church.<sup>14</sup>

Contrary to Mr. Scott's opinion, the Presbyterian unionists claimed that the Presbyterian Church in Canada as it existed on June 9, 1925, existed no more after June 10, 1925, because the Presbyterian Church as a body by majority vote of its membership had entered the United Church of Canada, even though it had entered this new body "without loss of identity."

In order to protect the rights of the minority which might vote not to enter the union, the "United Church of Canada Act" provided for the setting up of a commission of nine men to decide on the equitable distribution of property to those who stayed out of the union. The Commission was made up of nine members: three from non-concurring congregations, three from the United Church of Canada, and three to be elected by the other six members of the Commission. The men selected were to be approved by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada. The Supreme Court was furthermore given permission to make into Law whatever decisions might be reached by the Commission.<sup>15</sup> There was also provision made that any church which entered the union could within six months of the time of union vote itself out of the United Church, in which case that congregation would be given its fair and equitable share of local and denominational property.

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<sup>14</sup> Scott, op. cit., p. 73.

<sup>15</sup> Proposed Legislation Respecting The United Church of Canada (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, [1923]), pp. 5-7.

The Commission on Property Distribution issued its final report in April, 1927. As recorded by Kilpatrick and Cousland, the final distribution of property and assets as decided on by the Commission was as follows:

Out of assets (of the Presbyterian Church in Canada) totalling approximately \$10,500,000.00, the non-concurring congregations received property and funds valued at \$3,261,000.00 (apart from their share of legacies vested as at June 10, 1925) or about thirty-one percent of the whole. This corresponded generally to the proportion of congregations and members of the Presbyterian Church in Canada which did not enter the union. Of this total the non-concurring congregations received approximately fifty percent, of the College Buildings and endowments of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.<sup>16</sup>

Questions of doctrine never played a great role in the discussions between those for and those against union. There was some parleying regarding theological matters, but it never played an important role in the objections of the non-concurrents against the union. As Silcox very pointedly remarked: "for the most part the arguments came down to a question of law, the rights of the General Assembly and the rights of Parliament, and what constituted a square deal for those who wanted to go into the Union and for those who wished the contrary."<sup>17</sup>

In summary of the controversy in the Presbyterian Church before union, George Pidgeon writes,

The right of the Church to go into Union as a Church was the issue at stake. Anti-unionists always insisted that those who wished to enter another Church were free to do so, but in doing so, they left their Church and renounced their claim on

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<sup>16</sup>Thomas Buchanan Kilpatrick and Kenneth H. Cousland, Our Common Faith (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, c.1928), p. 49.

<sup>17</sup>Silcox, op. cit., p. 265.

her heritage, spiritual and material. They held that "that bill as it stands and with any modifications that have been recommended or adopted by the Union Committee, wipes out, blots out forever the existing Presbyterian Church in Canada." There was no authority in the Courts of the Church that enabled them so to do.

Against this position Unionists affirmed and reaffirmed their position that the Church of Christ is free, that she has the inherent right to restate her own faith, that in moving towards Union the Churches had acted in a perfectly constitutional manner with every safeguard observed and every condition fulfilled, and that, on the principle involved in every previous Union of Churches, organic union does not mean the disintegration of the religious bodies uniting, but that those distinct entities come together as such in full possession of their rights and privileges, <sup>18</sup> and in the exercise of powers properly belonging to them.

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<sup>18</sup> George C. Fidgeon, The United Church of Canada, the Story of the Union (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, c.1950), p. 62.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE DAY OF UNION

JUNE 10, 1925

The consummation of the union between the Methodist, Congregational, and Presbyterian Churches of Canada took place on June 10, 1925. On that day the United Church of Canada officially took its place among the Protestant Churches of the world. Chalmers, while speaking of the significance and importance of that day, writes:

June 10, 1925, witnessed the coming into existence of a new emergent in the body of Christ. Church union in Canada attracted the attention of the Christian world. At that time nothing quite like it had occurred in any other land. That Calvinist and Arminian, for instance, could live together in peace within the one household of faith, was a<sup>1</sup> tremendous achievement of twentieth-century Christianity.

For the people in the United Church of Canada, June 10, 1925, marked the beginning of a new era in Canadian Christendom. For others the day has simply designated the beginning of the big split. The non-concurring Presbyterians were and are still insistent that the Presbyterian Church as a Church did not join the United Church. As Silcox puts it:

The year 1925 is, in the religious life of Canada, a new "Anno Domini." But for one group it marks the time since "union"; for the other it designates the years since "disruption." The exact terminology is important, since the minority claims that the Presbyterian Church in Canada never

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<sup>1</sup>Randolph Carleton Chalmers, "The United Church of Canada Comes of Age," Religion in Life, XVI (Winter, 1946-7), 36.

went into Union, but the unionists went out from her to form a new denomination; the majority insists that the Presbyterian Church in Canada went into Union; that the non-concurrents created whatever "disruption" there was; that the continuing church, under the terms of the legislation, may call itself a Presbyterian Church but not the "Presbyterian Church in Canada."<sup>2</sup>

This is the argument which is still raging today between the United Church of Canada and the continuing Presbyterian Church.

The Dominion Act legalizing the United Church of Canada, which had been passed and signed on July 19, 1924, officially came into force on June 10, 1925. By this date the Bill had also been passed in all the provincial legislatures except the Province of Quebec. The first meeting of the General Council of the United Church of Canada, in keeping with the terms of the Bill, was held in Toronto on June 10, 1925. The first General Council was composed of 350 members, of whom 150 were Presbyterians, 150 Methodists, 40 Congregationalist. The remaining ten men were the representatives of the General Council of Local Union Churches.

The Inaugural Meeting and Opening Services were held in Toronto on June 10, 1925. At the Inaugural Meeting, the heads of the uniting denominations stated briefly what their respective denominations were bringing into the Union. Following this, the heads of the churches cited the authorities in their confessions and standards of faith on the basis of which they had the right

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<sup>2</sup>Claris Edwin Silcox, Church Union in Canada, Its Causes and Consequences (New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, c.1933), p. 197.

to enter organic union with other church bodies. After the following pronouncement had been read to the General Council, the heads of the three denominations and the representative of the Local Union Churches signed the Basis of Union in the name of their respective Churches. The pronouncement to the General Council read as follows:

Whereas the Presbyterian Church in Canada, the Methodist Church and the Congregational Churches of Canada by their free and independent action through their governing bodies, and in accordance with their respective constitutions did agree to unite and form one body or denomination of Christians under the name of "The United Church of Canada," on the Basis of Union set out.

And whereas the supreme courts of these three Churches and the General Council of the Local Union Churches did by resolution approve in principle a Bill to be submitted to the Parliament of Canada for the purpose of incorporating The United Church.

And whereas The United Church of Canada Act has been passed by the Parliament of Canada constituting the three Churches as so united, a body corporate and politic under the name of "The United Church of Canada," and the congregations represented by the General Council of the Local Union Churches have been, by the said Act, admitted to and declared to be congregations of The United Church of Canada. And whereas the said Act ratifies and conforms the Basis of Union above set out as the basis upon which the said Churches have been united.

And whereas the three uniting Churches have appointed the undersigned as their respective representatives on the First General Council of the United Church.

Now, therefore, we, the duly appointed representatives of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, the Methodist Church, and the Congregational Churches of Canada, and the General Council of the Local Union Churches respectively, on the First General Council of The United Church of Canada, do hereby subscribe our names to the said Basis of Union.

George Campbell Pidgeon, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Samuel Dwight Chown, General Superintendent of the Methodist Church of Canada.

William Henry Warriner, Chairman of the Congregational Union of Canada.

Charles Spurgeon Elsey, Chairman of the General Council

of the Local Union Churches.<sup>3</sup>

After the four representatives of the uniting churches had signed the Basis for their churches, Samuel D. Chown, who had brought the Methodist Church into the union as a body, spoke the words which officially brought the United Church of Canada into existence,

I hereby declare that the Presbyterian Church in Canada, the Congregational Churches of Canada, and the Methodist Church, Canada, along with the General Council of Local Union Churches are now united and constituted as one Church, to be designated and known as The United Church of Canada.<sup>4</sup>

After the words above had been spoken, the 350 representatives of the various churches to the First General Council signed the Basis of Union. This was followed by a mass Communion celebration in which 7,646 people communed in 27½ minutes. Thus the United Church of Canada came into existence as a church body.

The non-concurring Presbyterians fought to continue the Presbyterian Church in Canada, although the unionists insisted that the Presbyterian Church in Canada no longer had any legal right to that name, and for that matter, no longer existed. The feelings of the Presbyterians were probably best summed up by Scott when he wrote, ". . .neither membership nor Assembly had any right or power to blot out, wipe out or merge the Presbyterian

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<sup>3</sup>Samuel D. Chown, The Story of Church Union in Canada (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, c.1930), p. 126.

<sup>4</sup>George C. Pidgeon, The United Church of Canada, the Story of the Union (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, c.1950), p. 79.

Church in Canada."<sup>5</sup>

The non-concurring Presbyterians met in Knox Church on the evening of June 9, 1925, after the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Canada had officially adjourned the last Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. The non-concurrents filed the following petition shortly before the close of that Assembly, explaining their stand on the union question and also serving notice that they would continue as the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Notwithstanding the Action of the Assembly in 1916, or any further action by the prevailing party in this Assembly, it shall be lawful for us, together with such other commissioners as may adhere to us, to continue in session in St. Andrew's Church, Toronto, on Thursday, June 11th, 1925, as commissioners to the fifty-first General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, and there, in humble dependence on God's grace, and the aid of the Holy Spirit, and maintaining with us the confession of Faith and standards of the Church as hitherto understood, to adopt such measures as may be competent to us, for the continuance of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, to the advancement of God's glory, the extension of the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour throughout the world, and the orderly administration of Christ's House according to His Holy Word. And finally we do protest before the great God, Searcher of all hearts, that we, and all those who shall adhere to us, are not responsible for this schism in the Church or for any consequences which may flow from the enforced separation. In humble submission to His will, we give this our testimony. To Him, we commend our cause, and we pray that in days to come His richest blessing may rest upon the Church of our fathers, which Church we are resolved by His help to maintain.<sup>6</sup>

Since that day the Presbyterian Church in Canada has claimed that the Presbyterian Church in Canada as a church body never

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<sup>5</sup>Ephraim Scott, "Church Union" and the Presbyterian Church in Canada (Montreal: John Lovell and Son, Ltd., 1928), p. 49.

<sup>6</sup>Quoted by Silcox, op. cit., p. 196.

entered the union, but rather that a group of people broke off from the Presbyterian Church and joined with others to form a new church. By the same token, the continuing Presbyterians claim that those Presbyterians who did not join the United Church still constitute the "Presbyterian Church in Canada."

An analysis of the congregations effected by the union shows that out of a possible 9,483 churches of the three denominations which could have entered the union, a total of 8,691 entered the United Church of Canada. Of the 792 congregations which stayed out of the United Church, 784 were Presbyterian Churches and 8 were Congregationalist Churches. At the time of union, there were 174 Congregationalist, 4,797 Methodist, and 4,512 Presbyterian churches in Canada. The 784 Presbyterian congregations which voted to stay out of the union constituted 17.37 per cent. of the congregations and about 30.18 per cent. of the membership of the Presbyterian Church in Canada.<sup>7</sup>

The communicant membership of the three uniting churches just before the time of union, as summarized by Silcox, was as follows:

Congregationalists . . . . .	12,586
Methodists . . . . .	415,054
Presbyterians. . . . .	410,142

Total 837,782

The United Church of Canada at the time of the Union in 1925

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<sup>7</sup> Analysis of Votes on Church Union and Numerical Strength of The United Church of Canada (Toronto: Bureau of Literature and Information of the Joint Committee on Church Union, [1925]).

claimed for itself 609,729 communicant members. The continuing Presbyterian Church claimed 154,243 communicant members. This gives us a total of only 763,972 communicants, which compared to the figure above leaves roughly 70,000 communicants unaccounted for. But Silcox has pointed out that this discrepancy proves nothing more than that a purging of the membership roles was sorely needed in all bodies concerned.<sup>8</sup>

Of the 655 foreign missionaries working for the uniting churches at the time of union, all but 17 voted to affiliate themselves with the newly formed United Church of Canada.<sup>9</sup>

Thus three historic streams of Christian thought and tradition were molded into one. Many spoke in highly emotional and glowing terms of the reunion of divergent parts of the body of Christ. Unfortunately it was a Union which also caused much bitterness and many hard feelings, particularly among the non-concurring Presbyterians. The scars remain to this very day. The United Church of Canada attempted to achieve what no church had ever attempted before--a large-scale union across denominational lines. This Union attempted to fuse three streams of tradition into one, hoping to retain the best features of each and discarding that which was outdated and irrelevant. In speaking of the contributions of the three uniting denominations to the United

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<sup>8</sup> Silcox, op. cit., pp. 435-6.

<sup>9</sup> See Jesse H. Arnup, A New Church Faces a New World (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, c.1937), p. 97.

Church of Canada, S. D. Chown, who spoke the historic words which brought the United Church of Canada into existence, has written:

The Presbyterians stood for and brought into The United Church as one of the cardinal principles confidence in the Divine Sovereignty. As correlative to this faith there was the rejection of moral responsibility to either Pope, Bishop, or Priest, or the right to governance on the part of any of them. The Presbyterians contributed to the new body a consciousness of spiritual independence, which had been historically secured in defiance of secular despotism and ecclesiastical tyranny. Amongst its revered treasures was the story of the Solemn League and Covenant, and the unswerving fealty of the Covenanters to their faith, even resisting unto blood.

Presbyterians also brought into The United Church a strong sense of Christian democracy, expressed, in part, by an eldership chosen by the people, and sharing in the administration of all courts of the Church. It insisted upon equality of ministerial orders and identified Bishop and Presbyter as of one order only. It stood also for freedom from state control, believing that Church and State are coordinate powers, mutually independent, but at the same time mutually helpful. . . .

The Congregational contribution included faith in the living Holy Spirit as able and willing to guide man today, as in the past, both in faith and conduct. It stood for spiritual freedom, and against state interference or control in the government of the Church. From time to time it formulated creedal statements as worthy of consideration, but it scorned the voice of authoritarianism in that realm. It combined independence of the local congregation with denominational fellowship. It accented the priesthood of all believers, the minister only first among equals. It exercised a spirit of toleration and co-operation with all who strive to advance the Kingdom of God. . . .

The Methodist Church brought in the legacy of a confirmed belief in the universal possibility of salvation for every soul of man. The value of the witness of the spirit, to the fact of adoption into the family of God, was much in evidence in its early preaching. Its high appreciation of the fact of conversion, and the worth of testimony, linked it in the spiritual realm to the canons of scientific discovery and propagation of truth. It believed in a divine creative activity acting upon the human mind in revealing power, they that were willing to do the will of God being taught the will of God. It sought so to supply the spirit and life without which practical theology would have little data to work upon.

Its emphasis was upon life and work rather than upon scholastic theology.

Such, in brief, were the principal characteristics of the three denominations which became one Church of the living God in June, 1925. In many respects their Christian convictions coalesced previously to union, and in no essential principle did they conflict. By the Holy Spirit they were led to declare their unity, and to manifest and seal it in organic union before the world at large in a supremely impressive inaugural service.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, on June 10, 1925, after almost twenty-five years of negotiations, the United Church of Canada became a reality.

But the union got off to a bad start when not all the Presbyterians joined the United Church. Perhaps the problem could have been avoided if the first vote of 1911 had officially committed the congregations voting in favor of union to union. As it was, only about 70 per cent of the membership of the Presbyterian Church joined the United Church. The Union of 1925 left in its wake a legacy of bitterness which broke up families, friends, and congregations. The wounds caused because of the split remain to this very day.

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<sup>10</sup>Chown, op. cit., p. 116.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SUMMARY

The reasons put forward for church union in Canada are many and various. Generally speaking, however, the reasons are practical, political, sociological, and theological. Some observers feel that the work of the church in Canada and the Canadian temperament generally were such that church union was inevitable. For instance, a pamphlet issued two years after the consummation of union states,

One must remember that, in Canada, the ideal of union has been working as a leaven for a hundred years, and that here it was possible, as nowhere else, to build a union on the work the Church is called to do rather than on theological compromises and philosophical deductions--on a common task and a common spirit rather than on a common tradition.

The whole history of the political and religious life of Canada is a story of knitting separate units into one, to form a complete whole.<sup>1</sup>

Another factor which probably played an important role in the bringing about of union, although never openly stated, was the effort on the part of Canadian Protestantism to unite and consolidate its defence against the inroads and advances of Roman Catholicism.

A further factor leading to organic union of the churches was the political confederation of the Dominion of Canada in

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<sup>1</sup>Church Union in Canada, Two Years' Progress in The United Church of Canada (Toronto: Bureau of Literature and Information, The United Church of Canada, 1928), p. 5.

1867. After the confederation of the provinces, people began to apply the principle of confederation, co-operation, and union also to their churches. As Silcox has pointed out, a study of the political union of the country and the union of the churches "indicates marked parallelisms between the political confederation of the country and its ecclesiastical consolidation."<sup>2</sup>

No doubt one of the chief reasons for union was the question of need. The uniting churches considered the evangelizing of the Frontier a common task. It was on the Frontier that the three denominations began co-operating in home mission endeavors. In order to save manpower and money, the denominations delimited and parcelled out the Frontier settlements so that the Churches would not be working in competition. With the formation of the Local Union Churches, which were organized with a view toward the ultimate organic union of their sponsoring denominations, the Frontier eventually forced the negotiating churches into organic union. As Oliver has summarized:

The needs of the Frontier inspired the vision and raised the issue of Church Union. It was the Frontier that led the way, when the Churches hesitated, through co-operation and delimitation of territory, through independent unions and "Affiliation Plans," and made Church Union an accomplished fact in hundreds of small communities. It was the Frontier that continued the pressure for Church Union when difficulties of sentiment and prejudice asserted themselves in more populous communities. It was the Frontier that voted overwhelmingly in favor of Church Union. As a major issue in the religious

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<sup>2</sup>Clariss Edwin Silcox, Church Union in Canada, Its Causes and Consequences (New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, c.1933), p. 26.

history of Canada Church Union is the gift of the Frontier.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile the Presbyterian Church in Canada has continued to the present day its fight for the right to exist as the "Presbyterian Church in Canada." The sentiments expressed by Ephraim Scott one year after the Union are still the feelings of the Presbyterian Church today. Scott wrote:

Of the many fictions attendant upon the main fiction of "Church Union" one of the most fictitious is that the Presbyterian Church in Canada, which on June 10, 1925, emerged triumphant from her twenty years' conflict for liberty and life, . . . is, by Act of Parliament, a shadowy, ghostlike existence, invisible, intangible, but "without loss of identity," somewhere, somehow, in the new corporation,<sup>4</sup> created by Parliament, "The United Church of Canada."

The United Church people, on the other hand, take the position that the Presbyterian Church in Canada as it existed on June 9, 1925, no longer exists because that church by a large majority voted to enter the union. They feel, therefore, that they have legal right to the name, the property, and the goodwill of the one-time Presbyterian Church in Canada.

The point at which the United Church of Canada is most open to criticism is its theology. Observers within the United Church of Canada readily admit the inadequacy of the doctrinal statement of the Basis of Union, and admit further that the doctrinal statement of the Basis is irrelevant and useless for the United Church

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<sup>3</sup>Edmund H. Oliver, The Winning of the Frontier (Toronto: The United Church of Canada Publishing House, c.1930), p. 252.

<sup>4</sup>Ephraim Scott, "Church Union" and the Presbyterian Church in Canada (Montreal: John Lovell and Son, Ltd., 1928), p. 108.

of today. A group within the United Church of Canada tried to remedy the situation in 1940 by presenting to the General Council a "Statement of Faith," which was an expansion of the doctrinal section of the Basis of Union. While the General Council accepted the "Statement," the Council in no way committed itself to the "Statement" as an official doctrinal statement of the United Church of Canada. In its attempt at inclusiveness the United Church has no doubt minimized its doctrinal and confessional demands. Speaking of the doctrinal statement in the Basis, Morrow has pointed out that:

there is a strong tendency to minimize the importance of sound doctrine. The document [Basis] indicates a determination to find some base of union no matter how many unsolved problems are left to future reconcilers. Nothing however more invites criticism than the fact that the doctrinal basis was the most easily achieved part of the work.<sup>5</sup>

Chalmers, after a lengthy defense of the doctrinal formulation of the Basis of Union, admits:

In conclusion we may state that the best that can be said about the Doctrinal Basis of Union is that it proclaims certain basic truths about God, Christ, man, the Church, sin and salvation which all creeds worthy to be called Christian have set forth in all ages, though we believe that the manner in which these truths are therein expressed leave much to be desired.

However, it is nevertheless true that leaders of religious thought in the United Church give very little attention to the Doctrinal Basis of Union. As it stands it is of little value religiously or theologically to our Church's life. It would appear to this writer that in order to arrive at a creedal position that is both theologically satisfying and

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<sup>5</sup>E. Lloyd Morrow, Church Union in Canada, Its History, Motives, Doctrine and Government (Toronto: Thomas Allen, c.1923), pp. 215-6.

religiously prophetic for the age there must come about a whole clarification of the status of religion in the modern world, its place, its purpose, and its truth, together with a crystallization of the thought--forms which may best express the faith of such a clarified--and we hope, glorified--religion.<sup>6</sup>

One of the main reasons for the bitter controversy immediately preceding union was the fact that in the early stages of the union negotiations there was no real effort on the part of the denominational leaders to educate and inform the laity as to what was being done about the question of organic union. Even though the Joint Union Committee published and distributed the results of its meetings, and although the press kept up a running commentary on the union negotiations, no real effort was made to reach the laity. Finally, with the organization of the Presbyterian Church Association and the Bureau of Literature and Information, the question of Union was brought to the attention of the individual members of the individual congregations. However, by then it was too late because the discussions had already entered the stage of bitter controversy. Silcox was probably right when he remarked, "In all the procedure followed, the weakest link is in the lack of appreciation of the fundamental need of education and educational technique to create better understanding and a receptive attitude towards the whole problem."<sup>7</sup>

The United Church of Canada since its formation in 1925 has

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<sup>6</sup> Randolph Carleton Chalmers, See the Christ Stand! (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, c.1945), p. 137.

<sup>7</sup> Silcox, op. cit., p. 133.

played a prominent role in the world ecumenical movement. Immediately after the Union in 1925, the United Church of Canada was accorded membership in the Pan-Presbyterian Alliance, the Methodist Ecumenical Conference, and the world-wide Union of Congregational Churches. Accordingly the United Church of Canada holds membership in the world-wide organizations of the denominations which joined to form the United Church. The United Church of Canada also plays a prominent role in the Canadian Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches.

The work of the United Church of Canada today is carried on through its four basic units of organization: the Pastoral Charge, the Presbytery, the Conference, and the General Council. As of January 1, 1957, there were 2,678 Pastoral Charges with 6,190 preaching stations in the United Church of Canada. The Pastoral Charge serves as the basic unit of organization. The Presbytery, of which there are 104, is the next unit of organization. The Presbytery meets several times every year. Among their duties are the reception of new candidates for the ministry, the induction of ministers, and the supervision of the church program in the local congregations. The next court is the Conference, of which there are 11. This group meets annually and elects its own President. All ministers are members of the Conference plus an equal number of laymen elected by the Presbyteries. The Conference ordains ministers and is responsible for the general oversight of the religious life of the Church within its bounds. The highest unit of organization is the General Council. This

group meets every two years and is composed of 386 members, an equal number of ministers and laymen. The General Council, the supreme legislative body of the United Church, elects a new Moderator every two years. The General Council carries on its work through fourteen different Boards and Committees.<sup>8</sup>

The goal of the United Church of Canada, that which the United Church considers to be its ecumenical mission to the world, is probably best summed up in the final report of the Joint Committee on Church Union, as quoted at the conclusion of the "Historical Statement" of the Basis of Union:

We draw attention to the fact that the spirit of unity has characterized the Churches of Canada from the dawn of her history. Each of the Churches now uniting is itself a United Church. The present Union, now consummated, is but another step toward the wider union of Evangelical Churches, not only in Canada, but throughout the world.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See The United Church Observer, XVIII (Jan. 1, 1957), 18.

<sup>9</sup> "Historical Statement," Basis of Union (Toronto: General Offices of the United Church of Canada, n.d.), p. 37.

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