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**“FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT”:
SALVATION, SOCIAL REFORM, AND SERVICE IN THE
UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA'S BOARD OF
EVANGELISM AND SOCIAL SERVICE, 1925 – 1945**

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emmanuel College
and the History Department of the Toronto School of Theology.

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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by

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INTRODUCTION

Since the publication of Richard Allen's classic study, The Social Passion, in 1971, the Canadian social gospel movement has been analyzed in a variety of interesting and provocative ways. Over the last quarter century, several important studies have maintained that the thinking of many social gospellers was characterized by the belief that human progress was inevitable, that the human race was capable of perfection, and that a properly transformed and redeemed society really could mirror heaven on earth. According to this view, Canadian Protestant social reformers optimistically believed that the Kingdom of God could easily be established on earth if Jesus' way was followed. However, historians conclude, Christian teachings all too frequently ended up mirroring the dominant cultural assumptions of the age. Canadian liberal Protestantism therefore became captive to the forces of modern culture it sought to challenge and was thus rendered incapable of transforming the secular forces which increasingly dominated Canadian society.

This line of thinking has been developed with greatest clarity in works by Ramsay Cook, David Marshall, and P. Travis Kroeker. In his seminal study, The Regenerators, Cook suggests that, in seeking to salvage Christianity from the twin threats of Darwinian science and historical criticism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, liberal Christians transformed their faith "into an essentially social religion."¹ Many Canadian social gospellers replaced affirmations about God's transcendence with an insistence upon God's imminence, thereby substituting "theology, the science of religion" with "sociology, the science of society." Christianity's traditional preoccupation with questions of personal salvation and the nature of God's relationship with humanity was gradually replaced by a single-

¹Ramsay Cook, The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 4.

minded concern with social salvation and a new focus on the ways people should relate to each another. According to Cook, this new theology had ironically become captive to the forces of secularization because it insisted “that Christianity was not separate from modern culture but rather should be adapted to it” and “that a society in which God was imminent was one that could eventually become the kingdom of God on earth.”²

David Marshall also argues that Protestant theology “declined” during this period and became increasingly tied to the notion of social progress. In Secularizing the Faith: Canadian Protestant Clergy and the Crisis of Belief, 1850-1940, he contends that social gossellers led the Protestant churches on a “march of progress towards the Kingdom of God.”³ Under the influence of liberal theology and the various biographical studies of Jesus’ life which appeared at the turn of the twentieth century, many liberal ministers abandoned notions of God’s mysteriousness and interpreted scripture in a different way. Clergy increasingly emphasized “economic, social and political themes in their sermons” and articulated a theology in which the “moral and social improvement of society became the chief article of Christianity, while altruism became a Christian’s highest calling.”⁴ Canadian social reformers ignored mounting evidence that such dreams were unrealistic, and were unable to abandon their “stagnant and optimistic assumption that Canada was a progressive society on the path to realizing the Kingdom of God.”⁵

Finally, P. Travis Kroeker’s recent analysis of social gospel theology in Christian Ethics and Political Economy in North America also concludes that this

²Ibid., 4-5.

³David B. Marshall, Secularizing the Faith: Canadian Protestant Clergy and the Crisis of Belief, 1850-1940 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 4.

⁴Ibid., 69.

⁵Ibid., 228.

religious approach was far too optimistic. Kroeker rejects Ramsay Cook's secularization thesis because it "represents the social gospel agenda as a strategy for saving the relevance of Christianity in the face of an intellectual crisis" rather than seeing "the movement as growing out of a substantive religious vision of reality."⁶ Nevertheless, Kroeker believes that this version of Christianity failed because it accepted "too many of the assumptions of the modern ideology of liberal progress." He suggests the social gospel naively asserted "that the Kingdom of God is gradually being realized through the instruments of human control over nature and history, and that all that remains to be done is to democratize the instruments of production, since their morally disordered organization lies at the heart of the social crisis."⁷ Thus he concludes that the social gospel represented "a positivist faith that a modern scientific society led by enlightened managers in the service of cooperative community can overcome natural and social alienation."⁸

Students of modern Protestant theology will be well familiar with such arguments, for they echo many of the criticisms that so-called "neo-orthodox" and "Christian realist" theologians leveled at the social gospel during the middle decades of this century. As the eminent American church historian Robert Handy recently remarked, one can observe "in the mid-1990s a treatment of events and writings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in part through the prism of the 1950s."⁹ Indeed, several notable similarities can be seen between the judgments found in these three monographs and the theological critiques advanced by critics of the social gospel nearly fifty years ago. Cook, Marshall, and Kroeker repeat the

⁶P. Travis Kroeker, Christian Ethics and Political Economy in North America (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 21.

⁷Ibid., 22.

⁸Ibid., 33.

⁹Robert T. Handy, review of The Origins of Walter Rauschenbusch's Social Ethics, by Donovan E. Smucker, Church History 65 (June 1996): 306.

standard assertion that the social gospel's neglect of many central traditional themes in theology weakened the church and contributed to the decline of Protestant Christianity. Each volume also emphasizes the idealistic aspects of social gospel thought and suggests that social gospellers failed to offer a realistic analysis of the contemporary situation. Finally, all three books regard the term "social gospel" as being synonymous with "liberal Protestantism" and use the terms interchangeably.

In the same way that earlier critiques of the social gospel contributed to the emergence of a period of "rare creativity" in Protestant theology,¹⁰ each of these recent studies has enriched our understanding of Canadian religion in some very important ways. Cook's stimulating and provocative work has helped to generate a great deal of new academic interest in the nature of the Canadian social gospel, and his analysis has generated much important discussion about the nature of nineteenth and twentieth-century Canadian religion. Marshall has analyzed the thinking of various important Protestant academics and clergy who have hitherto received little scholarly attention and provided many helpful details about their work and thought. Kroeker's focus on the explicitly theological ideas of several leading North American social gospellers shows this movement had a definable range of beliefs and did more than paint a religious gloss over a set of secular ideas.

Nonetheless, questions remain as to whether such a depiction of the social gospel fairly captures all of the movement's major emphases. Several other scholars have recently suggested that many contemporary critics frequently misrepresented the social gospel and greatly overstated its weaknesses. For example, a recent biographer of Reinhold Niebuhr contends that Niebuhr's critique of the social gospel was merely "caricaturing his own earlier beliefs, as well as the beliefs of his former colleagues" because the views of many social reformers were not all that far from Niebuhr's own

¹⁰Martin E. Marty, Modern America Religion, Volume 2, The Noise of Conflict, 1919-1941 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 303.

later perspectives.¹¹ In a similar vein, historian William McGuire King concludes that “the ‘neoorthodox’ reaction against the social gospel, so prominent in the 1930s and 1940s, needs to be viewed with some caution.” In this “period of intense self-criticism” and realignment, “distinctions often got overstated and relationships ignored.”¹² Christopher Lasch also notes that the writings of social gospel theologians such as Walter Rauschenbusch “expressly repudiated” the views that critics frequently attributed to him and to other exponents of the social gospel.¹³ These critiques raise important questions for students of Canadian religious history. Did all exponents of the social gospel substitute sociology for theology and thereby reduce their faith “into an essentially social religion” as Ramsay Cook suggests? Were all advocates of the social gospel part of a naive and misguided “march of progress towards the Kingdom of God” in the way that Marshall and Kroeker contend? Or were there other elements to the movement which have been neglected by these critics who have been preoccupied with identifying the weaknesses of the social gospel?

This dissertation will examine these questions by analyzing the approach to social and religious reform taken by the United Church of Canada’s Board of Evangelism and Social Service between 1925 and 1945. John Webster Grant has noted that the work of this board, and not the United Church’s Basis of Union, became the denomination’s primary means of self-definition before World War II,

¹¹Richard Wightman Fox, “The Niebuhr Brothers and the Liberal Protestant Heritage,” in Religion and Twentieth-Century American Intellectual Life, ed. Michael J. Lacey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 96-97.

¹²William McGuire King, “An Enthusiasm for Humanity: The Social Emphasis in Religion and Its Accommodation in Protestant Theology,” in Religion and Twentieth-Century American Intellectual Life, ed. Michael J. Lacey, 50.

¹³Christopher Lasch, The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992), 379.

and its work occupies a central place in the story of the Canadian social gospel.¹⁴ This thesis will focus on the formal initiatives of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service, the work of board secretaries Daniel N. McLachlan, Ernest Thomas, John Coburn, Hugh Dobson, and James R. Mutchmor, and the activities of board members such as Charles W. Gordon, George Pidgeon, John Line, John M. Shaw, and R.B.Y. Scott. The work of the board was central to what historian Richard Allen has called the “progressive” wing of the social gospel, and this analysis will illuminate the work of an important and influential body.¹⁵

This particular organization was intentionally chosen for study for several reasons. First, such a defined group helps to overcome the methodological problem of trying to decide who was or was not an adherent of the social gospel. Historian William McGuire King notes that the term “social gospel” was always nebulous and that, during its peak, no one “thought to draw up a ‘Social Gospel Manifesto’ in order to separate true believers from fellow travellers.”¹⁶ Thus, most studies of the movement are plagued by questions of definition and by problems of deciding who was and was not part of the movement. The Regenerators, for example, assesses the thought of an eclectic range of intellectual figures who lived on the margins of Canadian churches. Secularizing the Faith analyzes the writings of a selected group of clergy and academics who primarily belonged to the United Church of Canada and its founding churches, and Christian Ethics and Political Economy in North America interprets the ideas of a selected group of influential North American theologians. While a great deal of important information is contained in these volumes, it is not

¹⁴John Webster Grant, The Church in the Canadian Era: The First Century of Confederation (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1972), 169.

¹⁵Richard Allen, The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914-1928 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 17, identifies “conservative, progressive and radical” branches of the Canadian social gospel movement.

¹⁶King, “An Enthusiasm for Humanity,” 74.

always clear why each author analyzed the thought and work of some individuals while ignoring the contributions of others. It also appears that sometimes rather large conclusions have been drawn from somewhat restricted examples.¹⁷ A study which focuses on the social reform work undertaken by a group of influential social gospellers within Canada's largest Protestant denomination will demonstrate that at least some Canadian social gospellers do not easily fit these standard stereotypes.

An analysis of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service also illuminates the inherently practical dimensions to the social gospel which have frequently been neglected by historians. The world of Canadian Protestantism has frequently been pictured through the "life of the mind" of a group of religious individuals whose ideas have often been divorced from their actions.¹⁸ However, many of those who were attracted to the social gospel were activists rather than systematic thinkers. While some of the men who made significant contributions to the causes of social reform were also influential writers, the majority of social gospellers who worked with the Board of Evangelism and Social Service and its antecedents were much more interested in achieving concrete results than in developing detailed theological justifications of their work. Prior to church union, the Methodist Board of Evangelism and Social Service and the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions and Social Service undertook a wide variety of initiatives. Many of these were continued by the United Church. Temperance and moral reform campaigns were undertaken and strategies for evangelism developed. Questions about the relationship between Christianity and the economy continued to be asked. The board kept on publishing a number of thoughtful studies about a range of social conditions and initiated a variety

¹⁷Ramsay Cook, "Salvation, Sociology and Secularism," The Literary Review of Canada 6 (January 1997): 10.

¹⁸This is the approach of A. B. McKillop, A Disciplined Intelligence: Critical Inquiry and Canadian Thought in the Victorian Era (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979).

of philanthropic endeavors. Ideas and initiatives were joined, and this study will highlight the inherently practical nature of the work of a defined group of Protestant social reformers who worked actively within the United Church.

This dissertation will demonstrate that the social gospel embodied by the work of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service was characterized by an ever-present desire to stem the growing tide of secularization within Canadian society, defined as the trend to “draw away from religious orientation.”¹⁹ As increasing numbers of Canadians moved away from the church, asserted that church-endorsed prohibitions against drinking, gambling and Sabbath activity be overturned, and supported an economic system that at least some Christian leaders believed was antithetical to Christ’s teachings, the board faced the daunting task of finding ways to stem the growing tide of opposition to its ideas. This group of religious reformers recognized that many obstacles stood in its way. Board members often spoke pessimistically about how difficult it was to challenge and reform many contemporary practices and policies. They repeatedly noted that great amounts of time, energy and money were required to transform Canadian society into a more virtuous one, and they rarely contended that the Kingdom of God would arrive easily or imminently. There was an inherently realistic movement which sought to challenge others in the church to open their eyes to the many changes occurring in society, take society’s problems seriously, and do their part to try to eliminate many serious forms of injustice. It was these themes, and not those of progress that are often said to have characterized the social gospel, that dominated the board’s work prior to 1945.

The board responded to the secularization of Canadian society by developing a three-fold commitment to evangelism, social reform, and Christian service which it hoped would attract a strong, committed constituency that would support and promote the church’s agenda for social change. Throughout this period, it was greatly

¹⁹The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (1973), s.v. “secularize.”

disturbed by reports of declining church attendance, growing apathy in congregational life, and an increasing unwillingness or inability on the part of church members to make the gospel more central to human existence. Consequently, it devoted much attention to the question of how people could experience God through Jesus Christ anew, share their enthusiasm for their faith with others, re-invigorate the church, spread the gospel throughout the land, and remain true to the teachings and example of Christ. At the same time, the board was sharply critical of many aspects of the existing social order that, in its view, reflected society's growing repudiation of Christianity. Therefore, it attempted to identify, analyze, and address the many serious problems facing Canadian society, contrast the contemporary situation with the type of world Jesus had envisioned, and develop some ideas of how Canada's laws and practices could more closely approach Biblical ideals. This group of social reformers also continued the church's long-standing commitment to reaching out in tangible ways to serve the needy and marginalized of the world. The board sponsored a number of homes for juveniles and single mothers, initiated a major campaign to send food and clothing to areas of the Canadian prairies devastated by drought, established and administered a number of other institutions, upheld the right of conscientious objectors to opt out of wartime service, and offered some opposition to the persecution of Japanese-Canadians during wartime.

By 1945, the Board of Evangelism and Social Service had failed to stem the tide of secularization that still dominated Canadian society. The scarcity of human and financial resources for this work throughout the 1930s thwarted many desired initiatives, and left much desired work undone. Nevertheless, the board believed it had a responsibility to continue to encourage a social and spiritual transformation within Canada, and it continued to "fight the good fight".

In developing its case, this thesis will build on the recent scholarship of Richard Allen, Phyllis Airhart, Roger Hutchinson, and Nancy Christie and Michael

Gauvreau. In The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914-1928, Allen analyzes the social reform impulses in Canadian Protestantism from the height of the movement in 1914 to its decline in 1928. He suggests that the great strength of Canadian social gossellers lay in their determination to become actively involved in various practical measures of social reform and "to embed ultimate human goals in the social, economic and political order."²⁰ His study analyzes the way in which many Protestant reformers addressed social questions such as immigration, war, poverty and labour relations, and explores the relationship between the social gospel and various other social and political reform movements. This thesis will examine the work of many individuals featured in this book through the 1930s and 1940s, and will show how many of the church's later reform activities built on these earlier initiatives.

Phyllis Airhart's Serving the Present Age examines the careers of a wide range of Canadian Methodists and demonstrates that the early twentieth-century manifestations of social Christianity represented a significant transformation of piety which reshaped but did not completely abandon older religious assumptions.²¹ Although the social gospel transformed traditional Methodist notions of conversion from the personal to the social realm, the church's social reform work remained grounded in an acknowledged need for personal and social transformation. However, the understanding of what personal salvation entailed gradually emphasized the nature of Christian social responsibility to the world, and this thesis will suggest that these emphases continued to dominate United Church social reform work long after union.

²⁰Allen, The Social Passion, 3.

²¹Phyllis Airhart, Serving the Present Age: Revivalism, Progressivism, and the Methodist Tradition in Canada (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992).

Roger Hutchinson's study of the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order (FCSO) offers an important analysis of one group within the United Church that articulated a theological vision for a new social order and a reformed Canadian church.²² Hutchinson shows how this group of United Church social reformers developed a serious critique of Canadian society, and how it often challenged the United Church to think and act differently. During the 1930s, FCSO members John Line and R.B.Y. Scott were also active on the Board of Evangelism and Social Service, and assisted their colleagues in the task of critiquing society and offering instead a range of faithful alternatives.

Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau's recent A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada, 1900-1940 argues that the Methodist, Presbyterian and United Churches made major contributions towards the development of the Canadian welfare state.²³ Although this book fails to emphasize the degree to which Protestant social reformers were critical of many aspects of the existing social order, it helpfully shows many of the ways that social gospel advocates interacted with other harbingers of cultural change before 1940. It also demonstrates that Canadian social reformers were interested in securing both individual and social transformation.

The years between 1925 and 1945 provide a workable time-frame for this study, and this topic lends itself to a seven chapter presentation. Chapter one briefly examines the denominational roots of the United Church board by identifying some of the similarities and differences between its Methodist and Presbyterian antecedents. It provides a brief overview of the reform work that was undertaken by

²²Roger Hutchinson, "Introduction," in Towards a Christian Revolution (Burlington: Welch Publishing, 1936, 1989). As well, Roger Hutchinson, "The Fellowship for a Christian Social Order: A Social Ethical Analysis of a Christian Socialist Movement" (Th.D. thesis, Victoria University, 1975).

²³ Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada, 1900-1940 (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996).

both denominations, challenges the widely-held perception that Methodists were more sympathetic to the social gospel than their Presbyterian counterparts, and also shows that the United Church board continued many of the emphases and initiatives developed prior to 1925. Finally, it provides a brief prosopographical analysis of those people appointed by the United Church to staff the new board. Background, education, age, family status, and work experience will be analyzed. A socio-economic profile of the congregations of those board members who were ordained and serving pastoral charges is also offered.

Chapter two analyzes the organization and character of the United Church board. It will examine the mandate that the board was given by the United Church and the structures by which it operated. This chapter will also analyze the board's approach to the questions of temperance, gambling, and the Christian family. The church's views on these issues were becoming increasingly unpopular, so the board struggled to determine appropriate and faithful ways of educating the population and communicating with people both inside and outside of the church.

Chapter three examines various strategies for evangelical renewal which were developed during the 1930s. Spiritual renewal had been a central concern of both the Methodist and Presbyterian departments, and the United Church board continued this commitment. It coordinated the activities of a Committee on Evangelism established in 1931, supported George Pidgeon's plan to form an interdenominational movement called the Joint Committee for the Evangelization of Canadian Life, and helped the church assess the merits of the Kagawa and Oxford movements. Board members also re-articulated their understanding of the relationship between evangelism and social service in response to critiques offered by some members of the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order.

Chapter four discusses the church's analysis of the economic and cultural dislocation of the 1930s. These endeavors complemented the church's concern with

spiritual questions and testified to the denomination's belief that the Christian gospel had social as well as individual implications. Many within the United Church believed the economic collapse of the time was due to structural flaws within capitalist economics and attempted to articulate a new Christian basis for social reconstruction. Thus the board studied the question of the relationship between Christianity and labour, took an active role in developing the major 1934 report on Christianizing the Social Order, and made a presentation to the Rowell-Sirois Commission hearings on the character of federal-provincial relations.

Chapter five examines several of the board's philanthropic initiatives to serve the socially disadvantaged. In an age before the establishment of the social welfare state, the church provided a range of institutions that addressed the needs of society's poor and unfortunate, and continued this work in spite of mounting financial pressures and frequent suggestions that the state should run all such institutions. The board administered the work of several homes for single mothers, orphaned children and senior citizens, and thereby offered residents basic educational and medical services along with a definite moral and social worldview. The board also encouraged other responses to specific needs. Evangelism and Social Service secretary John Coburn helped organize the activities of the National Emergency Relief Committee to coordinate the church's relief work in the prairies during the depression. Many western communities faced severe shortages of food, clothing and supplies during the worst years of the drought. Churches from other parts of the country responded by sending boxcars full of goods westward. The board helped coordinate these endeavors and encourage eastern communities to participate.

Chapter six deals specifically with the board's response to World War II. It places the board's approach to war in the context of the theological reformulation that had been initiated prior to the outbreak of hostilities. In light of the dual tragedies of depression and world war, the theological liberalism that dominated North American

Protestantism during the early decades of the twentieth century came under increasing attack from continental neo-orthodoxy and American Christian realism. These currents were felt in the United Church, and the church launched a major Commission on the Christian Faith under the auspices of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service. The final report reflected many of the beliefs that informed various aspects of the wartime initiatives that the board coordinated. Mutchmor helped to recruit United Church chaplains for service with the Canadian armed forces, and the board developed a number of devotional resources for use by chaplains and clergy. At the same time, however, the board supported the rights of conscientious objectors and self-declared pacifists, and responded to the vicious attacks leveled at Japanese-Canadians living in British Columbia.

Chapter seven outlines the church's various attempts at postwar reconstruction in Canada. It conducted major studies of labour relations and the farm crisis, and defended the rights of labour to bargain collectively during wartime. It initiated a Committee on Church, Nation and World Order that General Council later established as a full commission, and Mutchmor and other board members made significant contributions to this major document. The board also returned to the issue of the "Christian family" and maintained that the family was the fundamental social unit upon which postwar society could best be founded. Finally, it made plans for initiating a major evangelistic campaign that was eventually called the Mission to the Nation, and also gave attention to the question of how Canada could return to normal after years of upheaval and deprivation.

Thus, this thesis will argue that, rather than unwittingly supporting the forces of secularization, the United Church's Board of Evangelism and Social Service consistently condemned these developments, challenged these forces, and sought to reform Canadian society in ways that were consistent with its understanding of the gospel. In the face of significant obstacles, board members undertook a wide variety

of strategies and initiatives to bring Canadians to Christ, care for the unfortunate, and transform the country into one which was more just, compassionate and righteous.

CHAPTER ONE

THE BOARD OF EVANGELISM AND SOCIAL SERVICE AND ITS ANTECEDENTS

During the early part of the twentieth century a subtle but significant transformation occurred within Canadian Protestantism. As society became increasingly modernized, urbanized, and industrialized, leading Canadian Protestants began to fear that the dream of Canada becoming "God's Dominion" was in peril.¹ Therefore, a number of concerted efforts were made to identify, analyze and challenge those forces that were inhibiting the eventual realization of this vision. While the decentralized form of Congregationalism in Canada prevented members of this denomination from addressing these challenges in any sustained way, the country's Methodist and Presbyterian churches established specific departments to undertake this work. After union, the United Church of Canada's Board of Evangelism and Social Service continued this legacy of social reform activity.²

The Methodist and Presbyterian attempts to awaken the church to the serious moral, economic, and social challenges that confronted Canadian society were defined by several central characteristics. First, officials of both boards believed the Christian gospel directly related to both the personal and social dimensions of life. "We believe that Jesus Christ is the final authority over all human life, in its social as well as its individual aspects," board convenor C. W. Gordon of St. Stephen's Presbyterian Church in Winnipeg told the General Assembly of 1911. "We believe that righteousness can be realized in the complex conditions of modern life only through the

¹N. K. Clifford, "His Dominion: A Vision In Crisis," Studies in Religion 2 (1973): 315-326.

²The Methodist and Presbyterian churches used the terms "board" and "department" interchangeably in referring to the agency undertaking this work.

application to all human affairs of the principles of the Kingdom of God, as taught by Jesus Christ.”³ Methodist board secretary T. Albert Moore agreed. God sent Christ “not to provide an ark or a life-boat in which to save one here and another there, but to inaugurate a movement to save both the individual and corporate life of humanity.” By studying a range of contemporary social and spiritual problems in light of Biblical teaching, he believed that Christians would find the direction they needed. Therefore, the church believed itself equipped to undertake

a multitude of related efforts, including fighting the liquor traffic, race track and other gambling, habit-forming drugs and many other evils; promoting child welfare, and the redemption of girls and women who have gone astray; the censorship of moving picture films, theatres and their posters, vicious magazines and books, the establishment of community centres, the defence of the Lord’s Day, the Christianization of industry, and many other activities for human betterment, the uplift of citizenship, the development of right relations between man and his brother and between man and his Maker.⁴

Second, social reformers affirmed that Jesus incarnated God’s love for the world and called all persons to live according to God’s revealed way. As C. W. Gordon explained in 1913, Jesus showed that God was a being “whom we may trust, whom we must obey, whom we ought to love.” God intended for everyone to live “as all one family, bound to one another by ties of kindred race and by that eternal tie of kinship with the great Father in heaven.”⁵ Methodist field secretary Ernest Thomas concurred. “Our fellowship then as Christians is with God as seen in Jesus,” he wrote in 1917. “Fellowship with God is co-operation with the outworking of God’s new creation, and proceeding as He makes the richest life the heritage of all his children.”⁶

³Annual Report, Board of Moral and Social Reform and Evangelism, Acts and Proceedings of the 37th General Assembly, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1911, 274.

⁴T. Albert Moore Annual Report, The Challenge of the New Quadrennium, Methodist Department of Evangelism and Social Service (DESS) Twentieth Annual Report, 1921-1922, 24.

⁵C. W. Gordon, “The Canadian Situation,” Pre-Assembly Congress (Toronto: Board of Foreign Missions, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1913), 93.

⁶Ernest Thomas, “The Difference Christ Makes in Evangelism,” Western Methodist Recorder, November 1917, 6.

Such an understanding formed the basis for the social reform work of both denominations.

Third, both groups were acutely aware that many significant obstacles must be overcome before a society modeled on Jesus' teaching could be formed. Those associated with each board continually pointed to the ongoing presence of sin in society, and struggled to awaken their respective churches to the various forces that prevented people from living as Christ intended. "The drunkenness, the vice, the violence, the industrial injustice, the indecent theatres, the immoral cafes, cabarets and hotels, the moral slaughter of girlhood and youth connected with the evil businesses of the twentieth century, shriek out a challenge to Christ's people," the Methodist board noted in 1913. "We see that the glowing banner of the Redeemer must be flung out in all the great field of our endeavor - out from the sorrowed and sinful, the oppressed and overburdened, the crushed and undone hearts of humanity."⁷ Presbyterian reformers shared similar views about the nature of the obstacles facing them.⁸ "The corrupt condition of our politics, the toleration by the authorities of the indescribable vices in our cities, and a host of other preventable evils" posed serious challenges to Christian men and women, Presbyterian board chair George Pidgeon informed readers of The Presbyterian Record in 1910. Society's evils "could be put down in a day if the people only realized their responsibility for them, and their power to deal with them."⁹

Fourth, each board faced a great deal of indifference and apathy about its work. Many members of both churches had little interest in being reminded about the realities

⁷Present Day Problems in Social Service and Moral Reforms, Methodist DESS Eleventh Annual Report, 1912-1913, 13.

⁸This dimension of social reform thinking has often been overlooked by scholars who have identified a belief in spiritual progress as being dominant among proponents of the Canadian social gospel. For example, see D. Barry Mack, "Modernity Without Tears: The Mythic World of Ralph Connor," in The Burning Bush and a Few Acres of Snow: The Presbyterian Contribution to Canadian Life and Culture, ed. William D. Klempa (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1994), 139-157.

⁹George Pidgeon, "The Church's Interest in Moral Reform I," The Presbyterian Record, February 1910, 55.

of poverty, vice, and immorality that surrounded them. For example, the response to a survey about industrial conditions which had been sent to every Presbyterian congregation in Canada in 1911 revealed that many churches did not respond “with as much care and intelligence as might fairly be expected.” Many churches “seem to be under the impression that there are no industrial problems in their community” and “appear to have given little or no thought to the question whether wealth is being ‘made or used according to the teaching of Jesus.’”¹⁰ C. W. Gordon, for one, wondered whether this situation would ever change. “We fear that very many of our ministers and still more of our people, living themselves in comfort if not in luxury, are not close enough to the struggling masses either to know their burdens and their heart-burnings or deeply to sympathize or self-sacrificingly to endeavour to help them rise to a higher place of life, economic, social, moral and spiritual.”¹¹ Board secretaries thus did their best to challenge church members to take these problems to heart. Nevertheless, the task of gaining widespread support for the work of evangelism and social reform remained daunting.

Finally, there was an inherently practical dimension to Methodist and Presbyterian social reform activities. The men who worked for the two boards were “hard-headed, practical organizational men” who focused their energies on undertaking efficient, effective and specific initiatives to address particular situations.¹² While board secretaries occasionally published articles in the denominational press which outlined the theological basis for such action, their heavy educational, organizational and administrative duties prevented them from developing the systematic treatises which some later critics have sought. Instead, they organized prohibition campaigns,

¹⁰Annual Report of the Board of Moral and Social Reform and Evangelism, Acts and Proceedings of the 37th General Assembly, Presbyterian Church of Canada, 1911, 265.

¹¹Report of the Board of Social Service and Evangelism, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1914, 35.

¹²Christie and Gauvreau, A Full-Orbed Christianity, 35.

coordinated evangelical revivals, spoke in numerous congregations, and traveled extensively. They responded to situations as these emerged, and became involved in a wide range of specific issues.

Thus the social reform activities of the Methodist and Presbyterian churches prior to 1925 stemmed from the shared conviction that the many social and spiritual problems of the time must be candidly acknowledged, intelligently analyzed, and forcefully confronted in order for the Kingdom of God to be realized in either the personal or social dimensions of life. To meet these challenges, an awakened and informed church was required to convert sinners, challenge many contemporary practices, and actively reform society. Leaders of both churches believed that this work required informed and dedicated leadership, and set about determining how the various moral, social and spiritual problems of the age could best be addressed.

The Consolidation of Denominational Reform Work and the Development of New Alliances

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the Methodist and Presbyterian churches consolidated, organized, expanded and promoted the work of moral and social reform at both the denominational and inter-denominational levels. Specific bodies were created for this purpose, and many Protestant reformers channeled their energies into these new departments.

In 1902, the Methodists formed the Department of Temperance, Prohibition, and Moral Reform to “make representations to Governments, Legislatures and Parliament in harmony with the declared principles and policy of the General Conference, on all matters of legislation and administration which affect Temperance, Prohibition and Moral Reform.”¹³ S. D. Chown was named as the full-time General Secretary of the board, and he served in this capacity until 1910. He was succeeded by

¹³Journal of the Methodist General Conference, 1902, 218.

T. Albert Moore, who helped re-organize the board as the Department of Social Service and Evangelism in 1914, and who coordinated the merger between his department and the Army and Navy Board in 1918. As funds allowed, the Methodists hired a number of additional field secretaries to assist Chown and Moore. All ordained Methodist clergy, these included: H. S. Magee (1907-1911), J. W. Aikens (1910-1913), J. H. Hazelwood (1913-1919), Hugh Dobson (1913-1925), W.J. Smith (1913 -1917), Ernest Thomas (1919-1925), John Coburn (1920-1925), G. I. Campbell (1920-1925), E. S. Bishop (1920-1922), and H. A. Goodwin (1921-1923).¹⁴

The work of the various secretaries was supported by an elaborate denominational structure. According to the Methodist Discipline, the General Board was to consist of “the General Superintendents, the General Secretary, the General Treasurer, and of seventy-six other members, half of whom are elected by the General Conference to hold office for four years, and the other half are elected by the Annual Conferences to hold office for one year.”¹⁵ To oversee work at the regional level, each Conference was to appoint a Standing Committee on Temperance and Moral Reform. The general board would meet annually to review the work of the past year, receive staff reports, and develop plans for the following year.

At the request of several synods and presbyteries, the Presbyterians established their Standing Committee on Temperance and other Moral and Social Reforms at the 1907 General Assembly. This body was asked to study “moral and social problems” such as “the relation of the Church to labor, political and commercial corruption, gambling, the social evil, the liquor traffic; to establish a Bureau of Information on moral and social questions; and to indicate lines of action calculated to remove existing

¹⁴Annual Report of the General Secretary, Bringing in Canada's Better Day, Methodist DESS Twenty-Third Annual Report, 1924-1925, 23.

¹⁵Annual Report, Methodist Department of Temperance and Moral Reform, 1910, 2.

abuses and improve conditions in these regards.”¹⁶ In 1908, this committee became the Board of Moral and Social Reform; in 1910, it was renamed the Board of Social Service and Evangelism, and in 1917, it merged with the Board of Home Missions to become the Board of Home Missions and Social Service. John G. Shearer, a Presbyterian minister who had been secretary of the Lord’s Day Alliance of Canada since 1900, served as the first secretary of the board. He was supported by a committee of thirty men, half of them clergy and half laity, which was convened by George Pidgeon of Toronto’s Bloor Street Presbyterian Church.¹⁷ Committees were also created in each synod. Shearer and the board hired other staff and created the largest bureaucracy in the Presbyterian Church’s national offices.¹⁸ F. A. Robinson was recruited in 1910 to coordinate the church’s evangelism activities, D. C. MacGregor was appointed in 1911 to assist with social service initiatives, and several social workers were hired to work in the church’s various settlement houses.¹⁹ After 1915, the board’s scope was greatly reduced. Shearer resigned to become head of the Social Service Council of Canada in 1918, and his successor, Daniel N. McLachlan, was the lone Presbyterian staff person responsible for social service and evangelism work between 1920 and 1925.

Both boards struggled to carry out their work within a defined fiscal framework, and the Methodists proved to be much more successful at this than the Presbyterians. The Methodists funded their new board by requesting that every circuit take an annual collection for the board, and from the outset general secretary S. D. Chown was determined that fiscal prudence would reign. “We have so far rigidly kept

¹⁶Acts and Proceedings of the 33rd General Assembly, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1907, 56.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁸ Brian J. Fraser, The Social Uplifters: Presbyterian Progressives and the Social Gospel in Canada, 1875-1915 (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1988), 166.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 166.

out of debt because, amongst other reasons, we have felt that the worry of this work is so wearing that we could not endure it if we must also carry financial anxiety," he reported in 1908. "It is no sinecure to carry such an amount of responsibility as is involved in this office and to be straightened for funds to do the work successfully."²⁰ This legacy continued until union. While board secretaries frequently reported that staff were overworked and were in need of additional resources, budgets increased slowly and only after the required funds had been secured.

In contrast, the Presbyterians encountered some serious financial problems that soon curtailed their work. As Brian Fraser notes, Presbyterian congregations contributed approximately thirty per cent more revenue to their Board of Evangelism and Social Service between 1910 and 1914 than all the Methodist circuits. However, expenditures quickly outpaced revenues, with the expectation that adequate financial support for this expanded work would follow.²¹ It never arrived.²² In 1914, the Board of Social Service and Evangelism reported a deficit of \$36,454. Coupled with the debt of \$87,631 that the Board of Home Missions had accumulated, the 1915 General Assembly faced a serious financial crisis. It responded by amalgamating the two boards, laying off staff, and dictating that little new work should be initiated. This fiscal crisis was primarily responsible for the shift toward a less pro-active approach that has been seen by some historians.²³ Nevertheless, the Presbyterian board continued to call for a strict observance of the Sabbath, temperance, personal morality, and political purity, and continued to oversee the work of its settlement houses.

²⁰Annual Report, Methodist Department of Temperance and Moral Reform, 1907-1908, 7.

²¹Although the fact that the Presbyterian and Methodist Boards operated on different fiscal years makes exact comparisons difficult, between 1910 and 1913 inclusive the Presbyterians raised \$128,537, in comparison to the Methodist Board raising \$82,711 between 1910 and 1914.

²²Fraser, The Social Uplifters, 166-169, offers a comprehensive account of the financial problems which plagued the Presbyterian board.

²³Ibid.

During this time, Methodist and Presbyterian social reformers also worked together in a variety of inter-denominational reform organizations. One of these was the Moral and Social Reform Council of Canada. Established in 1907 and renamed the Social Service Council of Canada in 1913, this body brought together like-minded reformers from various Canadian churches so that they could cooperate with one another and develop some new ways of working together. In addition, the Lord's Day Alliance of Canada became a focal point for those committed to lobbying government to preserve the Sabbath. However, the church's strongest support was reserved for the various temperance groups which existed throughout Canada. The goal of making Canada an alcohol-free country was central to Presbyterian and Methodist social reformers, and they devoted much time, attention, and money to the task of turning this dream into a reality.

The Churches and Alcohol

The campaign against alcohol was central to the early work of both Methodist and Presbyterian social reformers, and reflected the longstanding belief that the use of alcohol had the potential to destroy human life, shatter the nuclear family, and shred the fabric of Canadian society. While Methodists are often believed to have been more committed to temperance causes than the Presbyterians, both boards constantly urged every person to abstain from consuming all alcoholic beverages. According to their arguments, alcohol resulted in the breakdown of families, homes, and communities. Drinkers were seen as immoral and irresponsible creatures who squandered their resources, denied countless innocent women and children the basic necessities of life, and were largely responsible for the decline in contemporary morality and spirituality. "The bar-room is a social blight," J. G. Shearer reminded the readers of The Presbyterian Record in 1915:

Social happiness is impossible in the homes of its patrons. Nearly 6000 lives are destroyed by drink each year in Canada. That means nearly 6,000 homes

sadly blighted, nearly 6,000 mothers' hearts broken; nearly 6,000 wives' hearts broken; nearly 6,000 families orphaned; the pall of sorrow settling on nearly 6,000 homes, with the hardship and privation and heart agony caused by drunkenness, ending in the tragedy of death.²⁴

Therefore all faithful Christians were urged to vigorously oppose any and all initiatives to permit the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages in Canada.

Consequently, both boards initiated a variety of strategies to discourage people from drinking beer, wine and spirits. For example, S. D. Chown told the Methodist General Conference of 1906 that, in its first four years, the board had launched a campaign that encouraged Sunday school students to sign a temperance pledge, pressured politicians and government officials to more diligently enforce existing liquor laws, and published many pieces of educational literature outlining the evils of alcohol.²⁵ In a similar vein, the Presbyterian board requested that its clergy and laity urge the church's children, young people, and adults "to abstain altogether from the use of alcoholic liquors for beverage purposes" and "use the abstinence pledge cards provided by the Sabbath School Publications Committee, in co-operation with this Board."²⁶

While temperance campaigns remained a central part of the churches' anti-alcohol crusade until well into the twentieth century, many activists also contended that the desired results could never be realized unless the manufacture, sale, and distribution of all alcoholic beverages was prohibited by law. Temperance crusaders had frequently used a clause in the 1878 Canada Temperance Act which authorized counties, cities, towns and townships to prohibit the sale of liquor if a simple majority of votes cast were in favor of the proposal to initiate numerous "local option" campaigns. Church

²⁴ J. G. Shearer, "The Battle With The Bar-Room In Canada," The Presbyterian Record, October 1915, 448.

²⁵ Report of the General Board of Temperance, Prohibition and Moral Reform, Journal of the Methodist General Conference, 1906, 434-437.

²⁶ Acts and Proceedings of the 36th General Assembly, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1910, 61.

leaders were frequently prominent in these campaigns. For example, in 1909 Chown reported that the Methodist department would be active in the upcoming Ontario Local Option campaign, and that field secretaries J. W. Aikens and H. S. Magee were helping to organize the prohibition forces in Manitoba and British Columbia respectively.²⁷

Several years later, Shearer maintained that “the interests of the Kingdom of God in Canada” require that all Christians actively support the campaign to make Ontario dry. “For God and our homes, for our country and the kingdom, let us stand together and fight together, and together we shall win out!”²⁸ Members of both churches worked actively with representatives of other churches and temperance organizations on these campaigns, and took leadership roles in a number of these groups.

Some initial triumphs were noted. By 1918, Methodist T. Albert Moore reported that a number of “significant victories for prohibition throughout the Dominion of Canada and Newfoundland” had been achieved. “The manufacture and importation of intoxicants is prohibited everywhere, and the beverage sale is prohibited over our field with the exception of less than 100 municipalities in the Province of Quebec and the Islands of Bermuda.”²⁹ Presbyterians were equally enthused by these developments, and claimed that phenomenal social change had resulted:

Shattered homes are re-united. Unhappy homes are becoming happy. Bank accounts are increasing in number and size. Old debts are being paid. Cash business is greatly increased. Many goals are empty or nearly so. Many constables are out of work. Numbers of men of all ranks that were opposed are now in favor of prohibition. The bar-room and liquor shops have gone forever.³⁰

²⁷Annual Report, Methodist Department of Temperance and Moral Reform, 1908-1909, 5-6.

²⁸J. G. Shearer, “Ontario Dry Dominion Day, 1916,” The Presbyterian, 13 January 1916, 33.

²⁹Report of the General Secretary, Individual Regeneration and Social Reconstruction, Methodist DESS Sixteenth Annual Report, 1917-1918, 41.

³⁰Report of the Board of Home Missions and Social Service, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1916-1917, 22.

However, storm clouds soon appeared on the horizon. During the war, the federal cabinet had passed an order-in-council prohibiting the importation, manufacture, and sale of intoxicating liquor for beverage use, but this was repealed at war's end. Returning soldiers who had enjoyed the odd drink overseas were unhappy with these restrictions, and popular support for prohibition in post-war Canada began to wane. Church leaders were well aware of these changes, but urged their colleagues to vigorously oppose these tendencies. "The battle is still on," T. Albert Moore warned the Methodist General Conference of 1922:

The enemy, though defeated in many places, is not destroyed: the Liberty and Moderation Leagues are hard at work endeavoring to prove that Prohibition Acts are failures and that Government sale of liquor is the only successful method of dealing with intoxicants. . . Every advance towards Prohibition has been met with an increase of propaganda by the enemy, the devising of new schemes to defeat temperance legislation, and the concocting of false statements to deceive the people as to the actual results of prohibition. We must be constantly alert to meet these vicious plans.³¹

Several church leaders attempted to unify the various temperance organizations into one strong and cohesive body. "There have been too many Prohibition organizations, both Federal and Provincial," Moore contended. "These must be united if we desire to win our cause."³² The Canadian Prohibition Federation was formed in October 1923 to try to meet this goal.

However, the united efforts of various prohibition interests were unable to stem the changing tide of public opinion. During the church year 1923-1924, the majority of voters in Manitoba, Alberta, Saskatchewan and British Columbia authorized their respective provincial governments to begin selling alcoholic beverages. While Ontario voted in favor of continuing prohibition in 1924, Canada's temperance leaders were discouraged by the results, and the churches' temperance forces were on the defensive

³¹The Challenge of the New Quadrennium, Methodist DESS Twentieth Annual Report, 1921-1922, 25.

³²Annual Report of the General Secretary, 1922-1923, A Valorous and Valid Religion, Methodist DESS Twenty-First Annual Report, 1922-1923, 29.

by the time of church union. To further complicate the lives of Presbyterian and Methodist social reformers, a number of other public issues also commanded their attention.

Other Moral and Social Reform Activities

In addition to their temperance and prohibition work, both boards also addressed a wide variety of other public issues. J. G. Shearer's first report to the Presbyterian General Assembly noted that, in addition to promoting temperance, the board had advocated an end to gambling, spoken out against prostitution, promoted purity in politics and integrity in business life, studied some better ways to protect children against neglect, examined the relationship between church and labor, analyzed the impact of immigration on Canadian society, and developed some new strategies for evangelism.³³ The Methodists addressed a similar set of issues and, in later years, both boards also tried to stop the practices of race-track gambling, selling cigarettes to minors, electing dishonest politicians, and exploiting child labour. They also favored the closing of pool rooms and the censoring of "immoral" plays and movies.

Church representatives sometimes addressed these issues in controversial ways. For example, Presbyterian J. G. Shearer became heavily involved in a public uproar over the regulation of prostitution in downtown Winnipeg. The local Moral and Social Reform Council had asked him to help investigate allegations that civic officials had created an area of the city where prostitution could continue unimpeded. Shearer believed these charges to be true, and caused a furor by making these allegations public in November 1910. In his view, police and city officials had permitted the practice of prostitution to proceed in several segregated areas of the city, had made no serious attempt to enforce existing laws relating to this practice, and knew that liquor was being

³³Report of the Committee on Moral and Social Reform, Acts and Proceedings of the 34th General Assembly, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1908, 317-323.

illicitly sold on the various premises. These allegations caused the provincial government to appoint a commission to investigate the charges, and Shearer appeared before the inquiry. As he later reported, he

repeated the statements he had made on the platform and in the press, and solemnly charged the Mayor, the Chief of Police, the Police Magistrate, and the other members of the Board of Police Commissioners with having violated their oath of office and exposed themselves to prosecution for conspiracy to do an illegal thing; declared that the real blackeners of the good name of Winnipeg were its own officers; emphasized the cruel injustice to the foreigners and other comparatively poor people who were compelled to live and bring up their families in the immediate vicinity, and in full view of a colony of criminals carrying on a business as loathsome as it is subversive of good morals.³⁴

The final report of the commission, chaired by Manitoba Chief Justice Robson, upheld the substance of Shearer's charges.³⁵

In addition to appealing to people's consciences, the churches also asserted that legislative means were often required to regulate various immoral social practices. "In the promotion of reforms it often becomes necessary to have public opinion crystallized in law," the Presbyterian board stated in 1908. While legal matters would not be effective without strong levels of public support, "law as a deterrent is necessary in order to the retaining of ground won by the education of public opinion. Legislative effort in Canada calls for an accurate knowledge on the part of those promoting it."³⁶ However, Protestant reformers were clearly reluctant to go too far in venturing into civic affairs. As S. D. Chown stated in 1910, the Methodist department believed

in asking for certain desirable legislative reforms which approve themselves to the Christian conscience as filled with the spirit of the Kingdom of God. But it does not believe in giving form to the legislation asked for, much less in suggesting legislation which would involve compromise of the principles taught by the Master. While it may, and must sometimes accept such legislation, it does not feel free to propose it. It understands quite clearly, and desires to adhere to the understanding, that the function of the Church is to

³⁴Mariana Valverde, The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1914 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991), 63.

³⁵Fraser, The Social Uplifters, 144.

³⁶Acts and Proceedings of the 34th General Assembly, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1908,

produce specific moral conviction in relation to great wrongs which infest our civilization, while the function of the State is action by way of legislation and administration for the removal of these evils.³⁷

With these understandings in mind, Canadian reformers became quite adept at utilizing the help of well-placed allies in securing legislative change. In 1908, the decision of the Presbyterian board to appeal a ruling of the Ontario Court of Appeal which decreed that the business of negotiating bets on racetracks could be lawfully carried out by bookmakers was made after extensive consultations with former Manitoba Chief Justice Sir Thomas Wardlaw Taylor, a longtime leader of Winnipeg's Augustine Presbyterian Church. Taylor advised the board to request Parliament "to amend the code so as to make the business of negotiating bets on racetracks or elsewhere clearly and absolutely unlawful."³⁸ He also advised the church to urge the government to examine British statutes to ensure that all forms of gambling that were prohibited in England were also illegal in Canada.

However, Canadian reformers soon realized that such piecemeal responses would do little to stem the growing tide of immorality in Canada. As Canadian society continued to evolve and change, leaders of both denominations sought to better understand the factors causing these changes. Only then, they believed, could the church constructively respond to the structural transformations occurring within the country.

Social Change and the Development of Social Scientific Analysis

Throughout the early years of social reform work, leaders of both bodies sought to understand and respond to the dramatic changes in Canadian society that were caused by immigration and urbanization. Immigration levels rose from 49,000 in 1901

³⁷Annual Report, Methodist Department of Temperance and Moral Reform, 1909-1910, 3.

³⁸Acts and Proceedings of the 34th General Assembly, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1908, 321.

to 402,000 in 1913, and Canadian cities also grew at an astonishing rate during the first decades of the twentieth century. Toronto's population, for example, grew from 181,215 in 1891 to 521,893 in 1921, and Winnipeg's population exploded from 25,639 in 1891 to 179,087 in 1921.³⁹ Church leaders were acutely aware of the complex nature of these problems, and believed these must be fully understood before any effective work could be done. In order to serve effectively, "the Church must have an intelligent conception of the times" and know the social, political, industrial, as well as the moral and spiritual views of life that are surging about it," D. N. McLachlan wrote in 1920. "Only when the Church is in possession of this knowledge, will she be able to interpret the unrest, the aspirations, as well as the mistakes of life, making them first real to herself and then to the world around her."⁴⁰

To this end, the Presbyterians developed and distributed a detailed "Reading Course in Social Science" to all of its clergy and elders. Developed with the help of leading Canadian social scientists, including Adam Shortt, O. D. Skelton, and William Lyon Mackenzie King, it consisted of a bibliography of recent studies in economics, politics, sociology, and Christian social ethics that would bring church members into contact with the latest research on these subjects. "Once and forever let it be understood that we turn our backs resolutely upon all the quack nostrums and ready-made devices of dreamers and demagogues," the church affirmed. "In all these things there is nothing for us." The course offered listings in political science, sociology, economics, and Christian ethics. Recommended political books included Stephen Leacock's Elements of Political Science and Woodrow Wilson's The State. Sociology texts were Fairbanks's Introduction to Sociology and Simon Patten's The New Basis of Civilization. The selections on economics provided the bulk of the course, and

³⁹Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, Canada, 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), 79 and 98.

⁴⁰ D. N. McLachlan, "Factors in Canada to be Molded into a Christian Unity," Papers of the James Robertson Memorial Lectures, Box 2, File 9, 2.

ranged from Richard Ely's Outlines of Economics and Sidney and Beatrice Webb's Industrial Democracy to O. D. Skelton's Socialism: A Critical Analysis. Books on "Christianity and Modern Social Problems" included Francis Peabody's Jesus Christ and the Social Question, Walter Rauschenbusch's Christianity and the Social Crisis, Jane Addams' Democracy and Social Ethics, and Josiah Strong's The New Era. The board noted that it was not endorsing any specific views put forth in these volumes, but hoped "to stimulate an interest in the study of Social questions, and to indicate the sources whence a knowledge of these questions might be obtained."⁴¹ Although the board realized that not everyone would utilize or welcome this material, it was nevertheless one concerted attempt to awaken church leaders to the nature and complexities of contemporary social problems.

Both boards also urged that sociology be taught in church seminaries and colleges. By 1908, S. D. Chown could report that the "teaching of sociology in the universities and colleges of Canada has been endorsed by many of our Conferences, and we have agreed, at the request of the Boards of Wesley College, Winnipeg, and of Victoria University, Toronto, to deliver a special course of lectures on sociology to the students of each of these colleges some time during the academic year."⁴² That same year, the Presbyterian board was informed "that already the study of sociology and of moral and social reforms is given a place in all our colleges, and that material progress has been made toward securing a more prominent place for these studies in the curricula of various non-Presbyterian colleges and universities."⁴³

The "social surveys" which were made of various urban and rural centres under the joint sponsorship of the Methodist and Presbyterian boards were also notable

⁴¹Acts and Proceedings of the 36th General Assembly, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1910, 294.

⁴²Annual Report, Methodist Department of Temperance and Moral Reform, 1907-1908, 6.

⁴³Report of the Committee on Moral and Social Reform, Acts and Proceedings of the 34th General Assembly, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1908, 319.

attempts to better understand the changing nature of Canadian society. As defined by Bryce Stewart, the investigator of social conditions in Sydney, Nova Scotia, a social survey was "the method by which the community seeks to learn the social facts of its life so that it may intelligently plan the next steps in social advance." Whether one is a rural or urban resident, "we cannot afford not to study the social significance of the rapid growth of industrialism, the vast influx of immigrants, rural depopulation, and the new mobility of labor and of industry that have come upon us."⁴⁴ These various surveys provided a wealth of detail about many aspects of Canadian society. They also helped to inform the church about the nature of the social and economic inequities that were becoming increasingly entrenched throughout the country. Information such as this helped church reformers start articulating a blueprint for a different type of Christian nation - one that, in their opinion, would more closely reflect the ethical principles of Christ.

Economics and Industrial Relations.

As the twentieth century progressed, both Methodists and Presbyterians focused increasing attention on questions about the nature of the relationship between Christianity and the existing economic order. While the Presbyterian board developed a critique of industrial capitalism before its Methodist counterpart, members of both boards had issued several statements about the economy by the time of church union.⁴⁵

The first significant Presbyterian statement on the economy appeared in 1911. As part of a comprehensive seventeen-point statement "of the attitude of Christianity to certain social questions," the board urged the General Assembly to affirm several basic principles concerning the earning and spending of money. "The Church declares that

⁴⁴ Sydney, Nova Scotia: The Report, The Board of Temperance and Moral Reform of the Methodist Church, and The Board of Social Service and Evangelism of the Presbyterian Church, n.d., 3.

⁴⁵ Christie and Gauvreau, A Full-Orbed Christianity, 20.

the getting of wealth should be in obedience to Christian ideals, and that all wealth must be held or administered as a trust of God for the good of humanity," the board stated. "The Church emphasizes the danger, ever imminent to the individual and to society as well, of setting material welfare above the righteous life. The Church protests against undue desire for wealth, untempered pursuit of gain, and the immoderate exaltation of riches."⁴⁶ In addition, the report urged "a more equitable distribution of wealth" and the abolition of poverty:

We realize that some poverty is due to vice, indolence or imprudence, but on the other hand, we hold that much is due to preventable disease, uncompensated accidents, lack of proper education, unemployment, insufficient wages, and other conditions for which society is responsible and which society ought to seek to remove. We believe in the maintenance of a standard of living, that every person shall have sufficient air, light, food, shelter, comfort and recreation to make the conditions of his life wholesome. We believe that whenever possible, he should be able to earn these for himself and those dependent on him, but that, when through old age, accident, sickness, or any other incapacity, the family or individual is unable to become self-supporting, society should make adequate provision for them.⁴⁷

To give tangible expression to these sentiments, the board urged that child labor laws be enacted, and supported the establishment of basic workplace and safety regulations, some type of employment insurance, and policies that guaranteed every worker at least one day a week off from work. This resolution formed the basis of a statement that was endorsed by the Social Service Council of Canada and supported by the Methodist board in 1913.⁴⁸

The Methodists followed with a set of even more radical initiatives in 1918. That year, the Board of Social Service and Evangelism urged the church to condemn "special privilege, autocratic business organization, profiteering, and all unearned

⁴⁶Report of the Board of Moral and Social Reform and Evangelism, Acts and Proceedings of the 37th General Assembly, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1911, 274.

⁴⁷Ibid., 275.

⁴⁸Present Day Problems in Social Service and Moral Reform, Methodist DESS Eleventh Annual Report, 1912-1913, 11-12.

wealth.” It called for the development of democratic forms of industrial organization that would make labour a co-partner in management, profit, and risk, and at the same time urged the nationalization of natural resource industries, means of communication and transportation, and public utilities. It further recommended that legislative controls be placed on industry so labour would receive wages that would support a reasonable standard of living, businesses would receive a fair profit, and the public would receive any additional returns. As Richard Allen notes, the proposal received mixed responses in the various regional conference meetings. The church's western conferences registered unqualified support for the board's call for an early change in the present economic system. However, Montreal and Toronto conferences were openly hostile to the report, and many people defended the commercial and industrial interests of those most threatened by the objectives of the resolution.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, some Methodists continued to challenge the traditional alliance between capital and church. Ernest Thomas, for one, encouraged the church's wealthy businessmen to realize that donating “ten thousand dollars for philanthropic work” while paying only “starvation wages for his workmen” was “not the sign of Christianity for which the heart of the world is hungering today.”⁵⁰

Church attention was also focused on the question of industrial relations, and most notably on the question of the place of organized labour in Canadian society. Presbyterians J. G. Shearer and C. W. Gordon had long sought to bridge the gap between Christianity and the labour movement, and urged the church to adopt policies that recognized the rights of labour. By 1914, the Presbyterian board recommended the establishment of nation-wide labour bureaus “by bringing the vacant job and the workless man together and to save the latter from needless unemployment on the one

⁴⁹Allen, *The Social Passion*, 125.

⁵⁰Quoted in Neil Semple, *The Lord's Dominion: The History of Canadian Methodism* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 352.

hand, and from exploitation, deception and robbery at the hands of profit-making Labor Bureau sharks.” It also reminded the various levels of government of their responsibilities to provide employment through public works campaigns, and suggested they might devise a system of providing low-interest credit to support the establishment of new businesses and farming operations. Presbyterian social reformers also strongly supported the establishment of Ontario’s new Workmen’s Compensation Act.⁵¹

Methodist social reformers also addressed matters of labour relations. In 1913, the board's Sessional Committee on Industrial Problems affirmed the inherent right of workers to receive a “living wage” that would allow a person “by the practice of prudence, care and morality, to house, feed, clothe and educate his family in respectability, to give him some property of his own, to lay up during his working years enough to sustain himself and his wife in old age.” It also urged all provincial governments to establish employment agencies at no cost for those who would use it.⁵² By 1918, the board stated that “labor should have the fullest freedom to organize,” that “the minimum wage should be sufficient to maintain a family in efficiency,” and that “the hours and conditions of labor be so regulated as to ensure health, happiness and productivity.” It also suggested that some type of unemployment insurance be considered to protect workers when they are laid off, and that governments should encourage conciliation between employers and employees.⁵³

However, the church sometimes struggled to follow its own advice. When the Toronto local of the International Typographical Union of America went on strike

⁵¹Report of the Board of Social Service and Evangelism, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1914, 35.

⁵² Present Day Problems in Social Service and Moral Reform, Methodist DESS Eleventh Annual Report, 1912-1913, 46.

⁵³ Individual Regeneration and Social Reconstruction, Methodist DESS Sixteenth Annual Report, 1917-18, 30.

against the Methodist Book and Publishing Company in 1921 to secure a forty-four hour week, the board's annual meeting that year passed a carefully worded resolution that blamed the general situation on the 'misunderstanding' by the union and the unfortunate position of the Book Room on "its affiliation with the United Typothetae of America."⁵⁴

Increasingly, the churches' analysis of current social and economic conditions led them to focus on the "problem" of the Canadian city. "The challenge of the city to the Christianity of the city is a problem of intricate, perplexing and difficult solutions," stated the Methodist board in 1911. "Some stern facts must be faced and in their presence we must surely do something" to reach out to "the multitude in their needs, and bring help and salvation to the poor, the foreigner and the homeborn in the congested districts of our great cities."⁵⁵ Similarly, Shearer reminded the four thousand people who attended the 1913 Presbyterian Pre-Assembly Congress of the existence of "a great concentration of wealth in our cities, alongside of extraordinary poverty" and of the church's responsibility to redeem the cities socially and spiritually. "I am persuaded that we must, as a Church, act in co-operation with all other churches and social betterment agencies, and set ourselves to fight to the death everything that makes for the demoralization of the people."⁵⁶ Both boards gave priority to this work, and established a number of homes to give tangible relief to some of the city's poorest and neediest residents.

⁵⁴Allen, The Social Passion, 193.

⁵⁵Principles, Problems, Programme in Moral and Social Reforms, Methodist Department of Temperance and Moral Reform Sixth Annual Report, 1910-1911, 49-50.

⁵⁶J. G. Shearer, "The Problem of the City," Pre-Assembly Congress, 172.

The Presbyterian board was the first to establish particular institutions to meet the needs of urban residents. Its early work focused on responding to the needs of unwed mothers and women who had become prostitutes, and the 1910 General Assembly agreed to undertake so-called "redemptive work" to this particular constituency. These homes were geared "toward winning back, by means of the gospel, the fallen women who have gone into the life of shame, whether as victims of the White Slave Traffic, or of the seductive wiles of professed lovers, or of their own folly."⁵⁷ The board explained "that these are not institutions and that the Church is not aiming at being the permanent custodian of criminal or feeble-minded women, which is the work of the State." Rather, redemptive houses offered a "ministry of mercy" to those in need. Women were "kept for a short period, brought under medical, moral and spiritual influences and as soon as it seems safe to do so are placed under the care of Christian women and given an opportunity to start over again on a self-respecting and self-supporting basis." The church employed a number of deaconesses to run these houses. Special attention was paid to women recently released from prison, and those who were working in prostitution. "No distinction is made on the score of race, colour, nationality or creed," one worker noted, and "we stand ready to extend the hand of help to any woman in need of any service we can render."⁵⁸ In practical terms, these homes often served as a refuge for unwed mothers, young women who had been banned from home, and prostitutes. Within two years, institutions were established in Toronto, Montreal, Calgary, Sydney Nova Scotia, and Winnipeg.⁵⁹ The female staff

⁵⁷Acts and Proceedings of the 36th General Assembly, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1910, 61.

⁵⁸Acts and Proceedings of the 38th General Assembly, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1912, 314.

⁵⁹For an overview of social settlement houses in Toronto, see Cathy Leigh James, "Gender, Class and Ethnicity in the Organization of Neighborhood and Nation: The Role of Toronto's Settlement Houses in the Formation of the Canadian State, 1902 to 1914" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1997), 125-158.

of these homes regularly visited “jails, prisons, hospitals, police courts, segregated districts, tolerated houses of shame, and the streets at night” to induce young women “to leave life in the underworld and to accept the help we are privileged under Christ to offer for their deliverance and salvation.”⁶⁰ Once under the care of the church, these girls were “given the opportunity to start over again on a self-respecting and self-supporting basis.”⁶¹ They were also encouraged to become active Christians.

The Presbyterian board’s 1914 report provided a concise statistical breakdown of the residents of these homes. Of the 284 women admitted, about eighty-five per cent were Protestant and twelve per cent Roman Catholic. Twenty-nine per cent were designated “Canadian,” forty-two per cent “British,” and twenty-three per cent “Other.” Fifty-six per cent of the cases were maternity cases, twenty-five per cent of the women were prostitutes, and 125 children and babies were given shelter. After a suitable period of time, many of the residents were placed in secure jobs and thus offered a way of supporting themselves.⁶²

While responsibility for most inner-city mission work usually rested with the Home Mission departments of both denominations, the Presbyterian decision to amalgamate the boards of Home Missions with Social Service and Evangelism in 1917 meant that, for a time, a diverse range of other work came under the board’s auspices. Much of this effort was focused on reaching out to the countless thousands of new immigrants who were arriving from central and eastern Europe. American denominations had already established these types of facilities, so the Presbyterians sent C. W. Gordon, J. G. Shearer, and Colonel R. M. Thompson of Winnipeg to spend several weeks in New York in the spring of 1912, to study the conditions in that

⁶⁰Acts and Proceedings of the 38th General Assembly, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1912, 314.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 313.

⁶²Report of the Board of Social Service and Evangelism, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1914, 21-24.

city's tenement slums, and determine the best methods of meeting similar conditions in Canada. The Presbyterians also recruited Sara Libby Carson, the founder of Christodora Settlement in New York and Evangelia Settlement in Toronto, to its staff in 1912. By 1922, they boasted five downtown missions: Chalmers House in Montreal, St. Columbia House in Point St. Charles, St. Christopher's House in Toronto, Robertson House in Winnipeg, and Vancouver Community House.⁶³ These centres sponsored a host of community programs. Neighborhood women could receive training on caring for their infants and take dress-making classes. These facilities also served as food and medical depots in times of emergency, and offered a range of recreational facilities. Religious services and programming were also provided.

The work of these institutions was informed by several commonly-held beliefs. Christianization was thought to be an essential prerequisite to Canadianization. As most of the residents of urban slums were seen to be hostile to the church, special initiatives were required to reach out to them. These took the forms of diverse community centres with resources to address the physical, mental, social, and spiritual needs of the residents. One of the workers in St. Christopher's House in Toronto stated that the facility "is first of all a home, where the workers eat and sleep and meet their friends and neighbors." Church workers "do not swoop down upon the community from another sphere, in order to change its ways: they are already on the ground, twenty-four hours in the day, seven days in the week, working out through the very heart of the neighbourhood."⁶⁴

The Presbyterian board's 1922 report reported that contact had been established with a wide range of inner city residents across Canada. Vancouver's Community House reported direct contact with over 900 families of thirty-four nationalities, and a

⁶³Allan Irving, Harriet Parsons and Donald Bellamy, Neighbors: Three Social Settlements in Downtown Toronto (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1995), offers an overview of the settlement movement in Toronto.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 24-25.

daily attendance of nearly 200. Robertson House in Winnipeg ministered to over 850 families and 1,746 individuals. Toronto's St. Christopher's House was the largest Presbyterian Settlement, reaching 1,229 families with an average daily attendance of 300. Chalmers House in Montreal ministered to over 450 families, sponsored thirty-seven special group activities, and reached out to a wide range of religious and ethnic groups. St. Columba House in Montreal came into contact with representatives of twelve nationalities and had an average of 100 people participate in their daily activities. The United Mission in Sydney reached out to over 1200 individuals from ten nationalities in seventeen different group activities.⁶⁵ Conversion and Canadianization continued to be central elements of their agenda. Good Christians made good citizens and would stand as heirs to the dominant Anglo-Protestant values embodied in the church.

The Methodist board proceeded more cautiously. In 1913, it established a single facility in downtown Toronto known as the Earls Court Children's Home. A twelve-room house on Dufferin Street, it provided a haven for children who had no place to go when a parent became ill and was hospitalized, and offered them long-term care until alternative arrangements could be made. Such a facility, Toronto Methodist minister Peter Bryce noted, was greatly needed:

In the visitation of the district we found many mothers under doctors orders to go to the hospital, and unable to obey because there was no one to care for the children. Neighbors might be willing, but they had not the accommodation necessary. In some instances, where the mother, in order to save her life, had to leave the children without adequate care, the results were deplorable. A home for children in such circumstances was imperative, and no such institution existed in the city.⁶⁶

In addition, child care for single and working-class parents was needed because many mothers were forced to work outside the home to supplement the family income or

⁶⁵Report of the Board of Home Missions and Social Service, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1921-1922, 6-8.

⁶⁶The Church at War for Justice, Righteousness and Peace, Methodist DESS Annual Report, 1915-16, 116.

because the father was dead or ill. Thus the Earls court Home also featured a day nursery where children could be left during working hours.

Also in 1913, the Methodist board agreed to cooperate with the Presbyterians and establish a home for girls in the Maritimes. Unlike existing Presbyterian facilities, it was intended for "delinquent Protestant girls" and would be an equivalent to existing Roman Catholic institutions. Financed chiefly by government grants from the province sending the girls to it, additional funding was to be supplied by the sponsoring churches:

It will be a school. Not a permanent refuge for girls, nor an institution to be supported by their labor. Its object will be the physical and moral rehabilitation of the girls, that they may be restored to society as good citizens. They will be taught the usual school branches, together with such useful arts as home-making, dressmaking, etc. . . . The girls will be kept out of the way of doing harm till they respond to the moral and religious training given. The keynote of the Home will be its invisible discipline. They will be housed in cottages as much like homes as possible.⁶⁷

Ernest Blois, Nova Scotia's Superintendent of Dependent and Neglected Children, strongly supported this proposal and the Maritime Home for girls was established on a 250-acre farm outside Truro, Nova Scotia. Owned jointly by the boards of the Methodist and Presbyterian churches, it was supported also by the Anglicans and Baptists.⁶⁸

Other initiatives were undertaken by the Methodist board. In January 1915, the Alberta Social Service Home was opened in Edmonton as a reform school for young women who were placed there by the Alberta Department of Dependent and Delinquent Children, the Edmonton Police Courts, and local probation officers.⁶⁹ In 1921 the McLean-Malpas Memorial was opened in Thorold, Ontario as an outreach ministry to

⁶⁷Present Day Problems in Social Service and Moral Reform, Methodist Board of Temperance and Moral Reform Eleventh Annual Report, 1912-13, 32.

⁶⁸Report of the Board of Social Service and Evangelism, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1914, 23.

⁶⁹T. Albert Moore, General Secretary's Report, The Church At War For Justice, Righteousness and Peace, Methodist DESS Fourteenth Annual Report, 1915-1916, 115.

recently-arrived British immigrants and featured a community Sunday school, regular meetings for women of the area, and a mid-week worship service.⁷⁰ Finally, in 1924 the Farm Centre for Boys in Perth County, Ontario, was opened to offer temporary homes with good environments for needy inner-city boys referred by the Juvenile Courts and Big Brother movement.⁷¹

During this time, the Methodist board also began sharing responsibility for existing Presbyterian homes. In 1917, the Methodists agreed to share in the management of the Presbyterian Social Service Home in Winnipeg and entered into similar arrangements with the Montreal home during that same year. By 1921, homes in Sydney, Truro, Montreal, and Winnipeg were administered on a co-operative basis.⁷²

While such work was understood to represent an important form of social service, it was also undertaken because of the church's desire to spread the Christian gospel in real and tangible ways. Prior to 1925, both Methodist and Presbyterian boards actively worked to evangelize as many people as possible. They developed a wide range of strategies and initiatives to re-energize its existing membership and draw people into the church, believing that true moral and social reform was predicated on a personal acceptance of Jesus Christ.

Evangelism

Throughout the twentieth century, the Methodist and Presbyterian churches firmly believed that personal conversion was a prerequisite for shaping the type of

⁷⁰Annual Report of the McLean-Malpas Memorial, A Valorous and Valid Religion, Methodist DESS Twenty-First Annual Report, 1922-23, 53.

⁷¹Annual Report, Farm Centre for Boys, Bringing in Canada's Better Day, Methodist DESS Twenty-Third Annual Report, 1924-25, 42.

⁷²Evangelism and Environment, Methodist DESS Nineteenth Annual Report, 1920-1921, 47-55.

moral attitudes upon which society could be built. Leaders of both denominations discerned a deep spiritual malaise that was thought to undermine the type of renewal which they sought, so they worked to develop new means to convert newcomers to Christianity and to strengthen the faith of those already belonging to the church. Over time, however, both churches increasingly stressed the relationship between evangelism and social reform, and saw both activities as representing both sides of the same coin. According to Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, by 1919 “individual regeneration and social salvation had become interchangeable and mutually reinforcing.”⁷³

The Presbyterian General Assembly had established a Committee on Evangelism in 1908 “with authority to appoint advisors and corresponding members to arrange for the appointment of committees on Evangelism in the Synods and Presbyteries, to arrange for evangelistic services and to report to next Assembly.”⁷⁴ During these years, Presbyterians developed a variety of strategies to both recruit newcomers and deepen the spirituality and faith of those already within the fold. One popular method was a “simultaneous” campaign of evangelism that involved the infusion of several evangelists into an area and the holding of special meetings and services at a number of points in a region at the same time.⁷⁵ A “progressive” campaign involved the movement of a gospel team from one area to another. Other campaigns were merely local in scope. Through these efforts, the church hoped to reach out to those outside the fold while strengthening and encouraging those already converted.

⁷³Christie and Gauvreau, A Full-Orbed Christianity, 73.

⁷⁴Acts and Proceedings of the 34th General Assembly, 1908, 62.

⁷⁵Fraser, The Social Uplifters, 106-109, discusses several forms of evangelism utilized by Canadian Presbyterians.

The boards frequently recruited high-profile revivalists to lead special campaigns. In 1908, the Presbyterians engaged American evangelist Wilbur Chapman to conduct evangelistic campaigns in the Ontario centres of Orilla, Paris, Galt, and Brantford, as well as in the Kootenay region of British Columbia.⁷⁶ In 1911, they hired William Patterson to lead a program in Huron Presbytery and, in 1914, they recruited W. R. Andrew, formerly a singer with Wilbur Chapman's team. Dr. G. Campbell Morgan was invited to lead special missions across Canada in 1922, and his work generated real excitement in the church. "This is the biggest thing you could have done for Canada," one correspondent reported. "It demonstrated to the most sceptical the great fact that the Gospel has not lost its glory. Bible study has now a place it never had before."⁷⁷ Seminary students from Knox and Manitoba Colleges were organized into summer "Gospel Teams" which toured various parts of the country leading special campaigns. Leading Presbyterian clergy were also recruited to lead campaigns in neighboring areas. George Pidgeon, C. W. Gordon, G. A. Woodside, and others often led revival campaigns across Canada.

While these activities were taking place, the social dimensions of evangelism were increasingly emphasized by those Presbyterians interested in evangelism. In 1911, this new emphasis was reflected in the board's name change to "Social Service and Evangelism" and church reformers promoted a "new" evangelism. As J. G. Shearer explained to the Presbyterian Pre-Assembly Congress in 1913:

It is not enough to change the environment; it is not enough to transform social life. That is necessary, but it is not sufficient. It is essential that the heart be regenerated, that the people should be saved, that character should be transformed; and that can be done to the full only by bringing the people in contact with the living, life-giving, risen, glorious and glorified Son of Man.⁷⁸

⁷⁶Acts and Proceedings of the 35th General Assembly, 1909, 65.

⁷⁷Report of the Board of Home Missions and Social Service, 1921-1922, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1922, 13.

⁷⁸J. G. Shearer, "Redemption of the City," in Pre-Assembly Congress, 172.

As Phyllis Airhart has convincingly demonstrated, a similar transformation took place within Canadian Methodism.⁷⁹ In 1910, responsibility for evangelism was given to a “General Conference Committee on Evangelism” chaired by S. D. Chown. During the next four years, Chown and secretary T. Albert Moore encouraged the church to develop greater discipline in the practice of intercessory prayer, coordinated the Chapman-Alexander revival in Toronto, organized a series of “spiritual conferences” across the country, supported the work of several “special evangelists,” and distributed a range of devotional literature across the church. While by 1914 the committee believed “that there is now the firmest ground for optimism in respect to evangelism, this most important work of the Church of Jesus Christ,” it also recommended that evangelistic efforts “be associated with some existing connexional department.” The 1914 General Conference gave responsibility for evangelism to the Board of Temperance and Moral Reform, and changed the name of the department to Social Service and Evangelism in that year.⁸⁰

From this time onward, evangelism and social reform were directly linked.⁸¹ “The great central task of the Church of Jesus Christ is an aggressive evangelism, which shall lead the individual to become the servant of God, and influence the community and the nation to accept the principles of the Gospel in her laws, her industries, her commerce, her amusements, and every relation of life,” T. Albert Moore asserted in 1916. Throughout its history, the Christian church “has ever been in constant conflict with the hideous vices and hoary evils of the social order.” Only

⁷⁹Phyllis D. Airhart, Serving the Present Age: Revivalists, Progressivism, and the Methodist Tradition in Canada (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), details the nature of this transformation.

⁸⁰The Working Church and the Waking World: Social Service and Evangelism, Methodist Department of Temperance and Moral Reform Annual Report, 1913-1914, 21.

⁸¹David W. R. Plaxton, “A Whole Gospel For A Whole Nation: The Cultures of Tradition and Change in The United Church of Canada and its Antecedents” (Ph.D. thesis, Queen's University, 1997), emphasizes the connection between evangelism and social reform among both Methodist and Presbyterian social reformers.

through a new relationship with “Jesus the Son of the Father, the beloved elder brother of the human race” could one find a faith “which transforms the individual, influences the actions of men and cleanses the conditions of society.”⁸² Presbyterian C. W. Gordon interpreted Christianity in a similar way. “Man is an individual and also a socius,” he wrote. “He is born an individual but also into a family. He is organised an individual but into a community. . . . His salvation is that of an individual in social relations and there is no other salvation for him.”⁸³ Field secretary Ernest Thomas agreed. In 1918 he lauded American social gospel theologian Walter Rauschenbusch for “having shown what the truly conservative student had asserted all along, that the old gospel contained in it all that was needed to support and inspire a social message.” Rauschenbusch emphasized that true Christianity never saw human beings “as isolated units but ever as members of a society intimately bound into oneness with all its members.” In applying this insight to the social and economic issues of his time, Rauschenbusch challenged the church to hear “the cry of the city, of the slum, and of the ill protected worker” and respond to the physical, material and spiritual needs of all people.⁸⁴

These assumptions informed the work of the new Board of Evangelism and Social Service created by the United Church of Canada. The new board was designed to bring the large administrative bodies of the Methodist and Presbyterian boards under one organizational umbrella, and responsibilities were delineated between various departments. Staff were appointed, and the work of integrating the various activities of the two churches was begun.

⁸²Annual Report of the General Secretary, The Church At War: For Justice, Righteousness and Peace, Methodist DESS Fourteenth Annual Report, 1915-1916, 97.

⁸³Quoted in Christie and Gauvreau, A Full-Orbed Christianity, 71.

⁸⁴Ernest Thomas, “A Modern Apostle,” Western Methodist Recorder, September 1918, 5

Church Union and the Creation of a New Board

The Board of Evangelism and Social Service was mandated “to give leadership in the Church, in cooperation with the ministers and the courts of the Church, in the promotion of Evangelism, the development of the spiritual life and work and the application of the principles of the Gospel of Jesus to the whole of life.”⁸⁵ As determined by the Commission on Permanent Organization of the United Church, it would be composed of a chair elected by the General Council, the board secretary and associate secretaries, two representatives (one clergy and one layperson) from each Conference, six additional members (three clergy and three laypeople) to be elected by the General Council, and two representatives from the Women’s Missionary Society. The board was to meet annually, and an executive made up of the chairman, secretary, and eight other General Council appointees would oversee the ongoing board business throughout the year. A general secretary and five field secretaries would coordinate the day-to-day work of the board.

While historian John Herd Thompson has suggested that early United Church social reform work was dominated by Presbyterians and therefore reflected a cautious approach to social questions that was less adventurous than the Methodist tradition,⁸⁶ an analysis of the denominational background of the board secretaries and members reveals that the majority of the people who undertook this work were Methodist. In fact, while only one official from the Presbyterian church was hired, all five Methodist staff people for evangelism and social service were recruited for the new board. Seven of the twelve clergy representatives to the board were also Methodist.

⁸⁵Constitution, Board of Evangelism and Social Service of The United Church of Canada, “Thy Will Be Done”, Board of Evangelism and Social Service (BESS) Second Annual Meeting Minutes, 1927, 4.

⁸⁶John Herd Thompson with Allen Seager, Canada, 1922-1939: Decades of Discord (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), 62.

The lone Presbyterian who joined the staff of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service was Daniel N. McLachlan, a clergyman who had served as Field Secretary of the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions and Social Service since 1920, with special responsibilities for social service. Born in Woodville, Ontario in 1873, McLachlan emigrated to the Canadian prairies at an early age. After apprenticing as a printer, he graduated from theological study at Manitoba College in 1904, was ordained that same year, and was called to the newly-constituted King Memorial church where he had worked while studying theology. Here he served until 1920, except for a six-month stint in Edmonton. Under his sixteen years of leadership, the congregation thrived and he brought the same spirit of common-sense realism to his administrative duties that had distinguished his ministry in Winnipeg. Described by his colleagues as a "Christian gentleman" who possessed "a brotherly and catholic spirit" and an "unusually winsome" personality, McLachlan was a thoughtful, careful and prudent administrator with "a fineness of spirit and a keenness of sympathy which won the affection of his associates."⁸⁷ Until his retirement in 1936, he supervised the work of the board, coordinated the work of the other secretaries, and served as the liaison between the board and wider church.

Of the five associate secretaries appointed after union, the most notable was Ernest Thomas. Perceptively described by historian Richard Allen as "possessing in all likelihood the best mind that was to do the social gospel service in Canada," Thomas was a brilliant, eclectic, and irascible personality.⁸⁸ Born in England in 1866, he emigrated to the Gaspé area of Quebec as a Methodist missionary in his early twenties. A graduate of McGill University and Queen's Theological College, he was ordained in 1891 and served thirteen pastoral charges in Quebec, Ontario, Saskatchewan, and

⁸⁷Resolution from 1938 Annual Meeting of the Board of Evangelism & Social Service, He is "Mightiest in the Mightiest", BESS Thirteenth Annual Report, 1938, 20.

⁸⁸Allen, The Social Passion, 126.

British Columbia between 1891 and 1918. In 1919, he became the Secretary of the Army and Navy Board of the Methodist Church. Between 1920 and 1925, he worked in Toronto as Field Secretary of the Methodist Department of Evangelism and Social Service, and he undertook similar duties with the United Church before his retirement in 1936. A prolific writer, Thomas produced a steady stream of articles and reports (some under the pen name Edward Trelawney) which appeared in the Christian Guardian, New Outlook, Christian Century, Toronto Star, and numerous other publications. He was also an active member of the League for Social Reconstruction, and was a keen student of international affairs. Thomas's thought was defined by his ongoing commitment to defining the basic principles of Christ's teaching and then applying them to the social and intellectual realities of the modern age. Recognizing that the Biblical world was fundamentally different from the society of his time, Thomas believed it absolutely essential to correlate the basic teachings of Jesus with the latest in modern social scientific research to more clearly discern the best practical options which were available to tangibly express the essence of Christ's message.⁸⁹ He was a deeply spiritual and highly original thinker whose ideas often defied conventional wisdom. However, despite his obvious brilliance, Thomas could be difficult to work with. Upon his death in 1940, his longtime friend Salem Bland noted that he often was regarded as a "celestial gadfly" and "was not free from some minor defects which as commonly were sometimes more easily discernable than his many sterling qualities."⁹⁰

John Coburn also provided continuity between the Methodist and United Church boards. The son of a blind Methodist evangelist, Coburn was born in 1874 in Wisconsin, emigrated to Toronto in 1891, entered Victoria College in 1894, and was

⁸⁹Ian Manson, "Ernest Thomas and the Theology of the Social Gospel," Canadian Methodist Historical Society Papers, 1991, 51-62.

⁹⁰"Ernest Thomas - A Good Soldier of Jesus Christ." Ernest Thomas Biographical File, United Church Archives, Toronto.

ordained in 1897. Between 1897 and 1919, he served eight parishes and a year in Europe as missionary chaplain during World War One. He was appointed to the Methodist board in 1920, and retired from the United Church board in 1945.⁹¹ Called “the happy warrior” by his friends, Coburn was a committed temperance crusader and zealous evangelist who frequently traveled throughout Canada to lead various preaching missions and assist local temperance leaders in organizing support for various plebiscites and referendums. Based in Toronto, Coburn focused most of his attention on southwestern Ontario, but also responded to requests for help from other parts of the country.

Hugh Dobson was the youngest of all the field secretaries to join the United Church. He coordinated the board’s work in western Canada from bases in Regina and Vancouver until his retirement in 1949. Born in Ontario’s Huron County in 1879, Dobson moved to Manitoba in 1901 and began studying at Wesley College in Winnipeg in the same year. He earned his B. A. in 1904, his B. D. in 1908, and worked summers for the Methodist Church in the interlake area north of Winnipeg. Following his ordination in 1908, Dobson served for three years as pastor of the Methodist Church in Grenfell, Saskatchewan. In 1911, he was appointed professor of Biology and Human Relations at the new Regina College, where he taught courses in genetics and sociology. In 1913, he left the college to begin working for the Methodist Department of Temperance and Moral Reform and, over the next thirty-six years, he devoted considerable attention to issues concerning the family, temperance, and social work. His files were full of reports and studies which emphasized the scientific dimensions of particular policy options, and he firmly believed that if people had the facts, then they would change their behavior.⁹²

⁹¹John Coburn Biographical File, United Church Archives, Toronto.

⁹²David R. Elliot, “Hugh Wesley Dobson (1879-1956): Regenerator of Society,” Canadian Methodist Historical Society Papers, 1991, 29.

George I. Campbell was the fourth Methodist field secretary to transfer into the United Church board, and he was responsible for the Maritimes and Newfoundland. Born in Stormont County, Ontario in 1865, he graduated from Wesleyan Theological College in Montreal with an S.T.L. in 1896 and a B.D. in 1898. Received as a probationer in 1892 and ordained in 1896, he served ten pastoral charges before joining the Methodist board in 1920. A military chaplain between 1916 and 1919, Campbell worked for the United Church board until 1928, when financial restraints resulted in his position being deleted.

The fifth secretary, Walter I. Millson, was born in Osborne township of Ontario in 1870. A graduate of Wesleyan Theological College and McGill University in Montreal, he was ordained by London Conference in 1900 and served six pastoral charges before his appointment to the staff of the Methodist board in 1919. After union, Millson focused his energies on Manitoba and Saskatchewan from a base in Saskatoon, and remained with the United Church board until 1933.

The staff of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service was composed exclusively of a group of senior and well-experienced male pastors. In 1925, the secretaries were, on average, fifty-four years of age, had served an average of seven-and-a-half churches, had worked in congregational ministry for an average of about twenty years, and had all been employed by one of the board's denominational predecessors.⁹³ None possessed advanced theology degrees and none was a professional academic. They had received their basic theological training in a variety of places: Dobson and McLachlan both studied in Winnipeg (at Wesley and Manitoba colleges, respectively), Campbell and Millson were students at Wesleyan College in Montreal, Coburn was a graduate of Victoria University in Toronto, and Thomas was an alumnus of Queen's University in Kingston. Campbell and Coburn also served as

⁹³These figures are my own, compiled from material found in the various biographical files held in the United Church archives in Toronto.

military chaplains during World War I. Four of them were born in rural Ontario, one in England, and one in the American midwest. All were married.

An analysis of salaries paid to the board secretaries reveals them to have been well within the middle-class spectrum of Canadian society. At a time when an average Canadian worker was making approximately \$1,400 per year and the minimum annual salary for full-time United Church ministers was \$1,200, McLachlan collected an annual wage of \$4,375, Dobson earned \$4,000 per year, and the other four each received \$3,937.50 per annum.⁹⁴ While the church's national staff was required to pay for its own housing (unlike most parish clergy, who lived in manses supplied by their local congregations), these stipends enabled board secretaries to support their families in relative comfort.

Those who were appointed by the church to help guide and support the secretaries in their work also represented the elite of the denomination. A survey of the twelve clergy board members for 1927 and the congregations which they served reveals that the vast majority of appointees were senior ministers who worked in relatively large and affluent urban congregations. With an average age of fifty-five years and over twenty-seven years of pastoral experience, all of them worked in churches which had raised more money than ninety per cent of the other churches in their Conference. The congregations of seven of the eleven board members (one was retired) were in the largest five per cent of congregations in their conference, nine of eleven were in the biggest ten per cent, and all were in the biggest twenty per cent. All represented urban areas. The salaries of seven of the eleven were in the top five per cent of their conference, nine of the eleven were in the top ten per cent, and all were in the top twenty per cent.

Such factors help to explain a number of dynamics. It is not surprising that this group of people failed to develop close ties with the Canadian labour movement. It also

⁹⁴United Church Year Book, 1927, 66.

helps to explain why the board was sometimes reluctant to undertake activities that would alienate the middle-class church constituency they knew best. In addition, this administrative design was typical of middle-class social organizations of the time and reflected the ethos of a culture which believed that regulation, efficiency, consolidation, and coordination were central objectives to be achieved.⁹⁵ At the very least, it is clear that the men who guided this board were seasoned and experienced pastors who knew the church well and developed social reform activities that were well within its ethos.

Conclusion

By the time of church union, Methodist and Presbyterian social reformers had developed a three-fold commitment to evangelism, service, and social reform. They sought to stem the tide of secularization by analyzing and challenging various religious and social practices, encouraging people to follow Christ, and undertaking a variety of practical initiatives that they believed would help establish a new and more Christian type of society. In subsequent years, the United Church's Board of Evangelism and Social Service would continue this legacy by working toward the establishment of a more faithful, moral, and just society.

⁹⁵These themes are introduced in Craig Dykstra and James Hudnut-Beumler, "The National Organizational Structures of Protestant Denominations: An Invitation to a Conversation," in The Organizational Revolution: Presbyterians and American Denominationalism, ed. Milton J Coalter, John M. Mulder, and Louis B. Weeks, 307-331. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992).

CHAPTER TWO

VISIONS AND REALITIES OF A NEW AGE

In the eyes of many proponents of church union, the amalgamation of Methodists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists into the United Church of Canada in 1925 was an important step in establishing the kingdom of God on earth.¹ Many supporters of church union maintained that denominational rivalries were preventing Canadian Protestants from focusing on the task of shaping Canadian society to be in closer accord with God's will.² Therefore, they believed that this new denomination would be more successful than its predecessors had been in molding, shaping, and transforming Canadian society. In the minds of the architects of church union, the work of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service was central to this task.

Those who were appointed by the United Church to lead the Board of Evangelism and Social Service shared the hope that their new national church would play an important role in ensuring that Canadian society would gradually evolve into the kingdom of God on earth. "God, in various ways, is constantly revealing new forms of truth," John Coburn asserted in 1925. "Some people think that long ago God handed down a complete set of religious ideas for all time and that nothing can be added to or taken from that set of ideas. But we know that God is speaking to and leading His children into ever-widening fields of truth and knowledge."³ Therefore, the church had been offered the opportunity to lead its people into the modern world, respond to the tangible needs of the age, and re-form itself in ways that would best facilitate such

¹Allen, The Social Passion, 250-263, analyzes the relationship between the social gospel and the church union movement.

²N. K. Clifford, The Resistance to Church Union in Canada, 1904-1939 (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1985), surveys the debate about church union.

³John Coburn, "The Faith of a Modern Christian," The New Outlook, 9 September 1925, 28.

work. In order to meet these objectives, both the social and personal dimensions of life would have to be addressed. "The Christian Church must always stand for the welfare and betterment of society," T. Albert Moore noted. "Social service, in its most modest interpretation, is irrevocably related to Christ and His followers, and seeks the Christianization of all areas and relations of human life."⁴ Ernest Thomas agreed. "The old days of self-assertion, seeking a Church which suits our own private whims and crudeness, must go once and for all," he wrote in July 1925. "There must be absolute divorce of the Church from all entanglements with the existing social order or any other economic programme. The Church must turn from stressing details of opinion to the basic facts of Christian life - making the Cross central in every outlook, and leaving every one who looks at it to see it in relation to his own world of thought and interest."⁵

In the new world Christ was initiating, all people were to be regarded as equal. "Men, all men, employers and employee, white, black and yellow are His children, and 'if children, then, heirs, joint heirs with Christ,' to the heritage which the father had to give," Hugh Dobson wrote in 1925.⁶ John Coburn shared this belief, maintaining that the United Church affirmed that Jesus Christ "is by right the Lord of all life, that His principles apply to every human relation and activity, and that when He prayed, 'Thy will be done on earth,' He meant in the factory and the shop, as well as in the temple or the church."⁷ This meant that discrimination on the basis of race or economic class must be actively opposed. "As Anglo-Saxons we should cultivate a spirit of good will,

⁴T. Albert Moore, "The Challenge of Social Service to the Christian Church," Social Welfare, March 1927, 376.

⁵Ernest Thomas, "The First United Church of Christ," The New Outlook, 8 July 1925, 6.

⁶Hugh Dobson, "The Christian Way of Life and the Labor Movement," Social Welfare, August-September 1925, 210.

⁷John Coburn, "The Christian Solution to Social and Industrial Problems," The New Outlook, 8 July 1925, 29.

sympathy, fair play and helpfulness towards people of other nationalities and races," Coburn stated. "Any attitude of contempt, superiority or patronage is out of place. These people are all our brothers and in many cases just as intelligent and as good as we are, only perhaps a little different."⁸

Although such sentiments ran contrary to much contemporary thinking, board secretaries believed that the time was ripe to spread this message. "There never was greater need of leadership along our lines of work than there is at the present time and I doubt if ever in the history of the Church such leadership would bring greater results than it will bring today," Hugh Dobson wrote early in 1926. "I am not overlooking that the path will be beset with difficulties, but there is such a state of plasticity and instability of the public mind on many questions that now is the day to convert that mind to the point of view which is more distinctly Christian and social in its outlook."⁹

However, it soon became obvious that these ideals were not being readily realized in Canadian society. From the outset, United Church social reformers experienced serious difficulty in implementing these early dreams, and quickly perceived that Canadian society was evolving in ways that were very different from what they intended. "The tasks confronting the Church generally and this Board in particular are many and great, causing the stoutest hearts to ask 'who is sufficient for these things?'," D. N. McLachlan conceded in 1927.¹⁰ Field secretary Walter Millson of Saskatchewan agreed that the obstacles facing social reformers were great. "The year has not been without its trials," he noted in 1928. "There have been some difficulties, many heartaches, and some things to depress. One is constantly aware of

⁸John Coburn, "Some Race Problems in Canada To-Day," The New Outlook, 19 August 1925, 30.

⁹Hugh Dobson to D. N. McLachlan, 4 January 1926, Dobson Papers, Box 18b, File Mc2.

¹⁰D. N. McLachlan Annual Report, "Thy Will Be Done", BESS Second Annual Meeting Minutes, 1927, 18.

the fact that there is so much to do.”¹¹ Not only were outside forces often resistant to the board's message, frequent opposition also appeared from within the United Church. George Pidgeon, former convenor of the Presbyterian board, contended that the same interests that had condemned the church's social reform before 1925 were still influential within the new denomination. As he wrote in 1928:

Unquestionably one of the major obstacles to Union was the dislike and dread felt by certain interests for aggressive policy of moral and social reform. Our struggles and sacrifices for these principles did not end with the coming of Union; rather the increase in influence which Union brought made the reaction against the advocacy of our principles the more severe. The fact that our advocacy of these principles involves sacrifice commits us more unreservedly to them.¹²

As evidence mounted that increasing numbers of Canadians were adopting attitudes that ran counter to the policy prescriptions of Canada's Protestant churches, the board believed that urgent action was required. In 1932, Hugh Dobson likened the situation to that of a man who had a small lump on his face that he thought was benign, but that turned out to be cancerous. “Unless we face these issues honestly and squarely when God brings us face to face with them, the warts and pimples on our nose will turn out to be cancerous, and will imperil the very integration of human society.”¹³

In such a climate, board reformers realized they would be required to redouble their efforts to counteract the secularization of Canadian society. McLachlan reminded his colleagues that much of the board's work was routine and unglamorous. “Of necessity, much of the work of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service is unspectacular, because it is spade work: foundation laying, research, interviews with responsible persons regarding undesirable conditions, helping ministers and

¹¹ Walter Millson Annual Report, “He Must Reign”, BESS Third Annual Meeting Minutes, 1928, 25.

¹²Quoted in Paul T. Phillips, A Kingdom on Earth: Anglo-American Social Christianity, 1880-1940 (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 190.

¹³Hugh Dobson to D. N. McLachlan, 15 December 1932, Dobson Papers, Box 63, File 12.

communities in their efforts to re-establish broken homes and individuals.”¹⁴ As part of their ongoing attempts to develop a distinct and visible set of alternatives, the board focused much attention on the questions of temperance, gambling, and the nature of the Christian family. In the midst of a rapidly changing world in which many traditional values were perceived to be under constant attack, the board believed that its vision of a temperate, gambling-free, and family-oriented society was faithful to Christian tradition and attractive to those seeking to lead healthy and wholesome lives.

The Losing Battle Against Alcohol

The question of alcohol dominated the early work of the new Board of Evangelism and Social Service. The board developed a range of strategies to persuade people to refrain from drinking alcoholic beverages and continued the legacy of Methodist and Presbyterian social reformers in actively supporting the legislated prohibition of the manufacture, sale, and consumption of beer, wine and spirits. However, as these laws were being overturned during the 1920s in numerous plebiscites throughout the country, the board struggled to reconcile its vision of an alcohol-free society with the reality that a majority of Canadians no longer supported its dreams of the future.

United Church social reformers initially continued the tradition of offering clear and definitive support to the principle of prohibition. “In accordance with the declared policy and findings of the General Council, we commend . . . the prohibition of the manufacture, importation, and exportation of liquor for beverage purposes as the most satisfactory way of controlling and ultimately abolishing the liquor traffic,” the Sessional Committee on Temperance Activities and Public Morals affirmed at the board’s 1927 annual meeting.¹⁵ In keeping with this commitment, board members and

¹⁴D. N. McLachlan letter to The New Outlook, 29 January 1930, 116.

¹⁵Ibid., 15.

secretaries lent their energies and expertise to a variety of temperance campaigns during the latter half of the 1920s.

The board was especially active in Ontario. The Conservative government of Premier G. Howard Ferguson decided to fight the 1926 election on a platform of abolishing prohibition and placing the sale and distribution of alcoholic beverages under government control. The decision to turn prohibition into a partisan issue was highly controversial and posed a great challenge to the church. According to field secretary John Coburn, it meant the friends of prohibition "are forced to enter the political arena." While recognizing that this move posed serious potential hazards to the church, he believed that all members of the United Church "must do everything in their power to secure the election to the legislature of a majority of members of like mind."¹⁶ Coburn himself worked diligently against the Ferguson government. He reported that, during the election campaign, he "traveled many thousands of miles, addressed public meetings, organized committees, attended prohibition conferences" and "operated in 25 of 111 constituencies for a period of six weeks."¹⁷ However, these efforts were in vain. The Ferguson government swept back into power with seventy-five seats, compared to twenty-one for the Liberals, thirteen for the Progressives and three for the United Farmers of Ontario.¹⁸ Ontario voters had spoken clearly against prohibition.

Despite this setback, board secretaries also worked in various ways to encourage temperance and prohibition work in other parts of the country. In addition to his activities in Ontario, John Coburn participated in referendums held in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. He toured the prairies and addressed several conferences sponsored by the Saskatchewan Prohibition League and the Prohibition Federation of

¹⁶John Coburn, "The Crisis in Ontario," The New Outlook, 10 November 1926, 19.

¹⁷John Coburn Annual Report, "Thy Will Be Done", 1927, 35.

¹⁸Peter Oliver, G. Howard Ferguson: Ontario Tory (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 275, provides a detailed account of the 1926 Ontario election.

Canada. Coburn also organized a series of temperance rallies throughout Ontario, Quebec, and the Maritimes that were led by Henry Carter, the secretary of Temperance and Social Welfare of the Wesleyan Methodist Church. Hugh Dobson surveyed the conditions relating to the sale of alcoholic beverages in the four western provinces, offered temperance instruction to various Sunday school and youth leaders, and spoke at several rallies across the prairies. Walter Millson helped organize the temperance forces in a few Saskatchewan municipalities where they believed prohibition would carry. "I intimated to this Board a year ago that we were on the watch for a liquor district where we could carry the campaign into the enemy's camp, and bring on a vote," he informed the church's 1927 annual meeting. "This has already come to pass in Liquor District 56" and "immediately upon my return from this annual meeting I am going into that district."¹⁹

Board secretaries also produced a range of educational material that outlined various reasons not to drink for distribution in these campaigns. For example, John Coburn's 1926 booklet, Alcohol and Human Well-Being: The Physical, Mental, Moral and Social Effects of the Beverage Use of Intoxicating Liquors, provided congregational ministers with outlines for sixteen short addresses to children and youth. Coburn emphasized that the human body was a "holy temple of God," regarded alcohol as a "narcotic poison," and affirmed that "the taking into our bodies of a poison like alcohol is in opposition to God's laws and will bring its penalty."²⁰ He also noted that alcohol affected the brain and nerves, was a major cause of automobile accidents, and contributed to illness, inefficiency, and ill-health. "It must be clear that the drinking of even a small quantity of the toxic (poison) in beer, wine, whiskey, or other liquors, produces an intoxication which affects the higher brain forces, and affects

¹⁹ Walter Millson Annual Report, "He Must Reign", 1928, 25.

²⁰ John Coburn, Alcohol and Human Well-Being: The Physical, Mental, Moral and Social Effects of the Beverage Use of Intoxicating Liquors (Toronto: Department of Evangelism and Social Service, and Department of Religious Education, The United Church of Canada, 1926), 4.

judgment, decision and moral relations," he wrote. "Take large quantities and one becomes more affected until finally he becomes dead drunk, or actually dead."²¹ In a more restrained vein, Ernest Thomas's booklet, Alcohol and Life, explained "why great numbers of people whose lives are dull and drab, resort to alcohol to forget the realities of life in a brief illusion of romance."²² Thomas drew on much recent scientific research in presenting a detailed outline of how alcohol affects the human body and society. He urged his readers to "accept some restriction of easy indulgence, so that the evils which have been inseparable from any social life that centres in alcoholic beverages may be, if not eliminated, at least greatly mitigated."²³

Despite the best efforts of United Church social reformers, eight of nine Canadian provinces had opted for some form of government sale of liquor by 1930.²⁴ Board secretaries were discouraged by this trend. "The defeat of the Ontario Temperance Act and the establishment of a system of Government Sale of liquor has seriously broken down the morale of the Temperance forces in the Province," John Coburn admitted.²⁵ "There is no greater or more difficult task before the Church to-day than the creation of an enlightened conscience among its people on this great matter."²⁶ United Church reformers admitted that a variety of forces had combined to defeat legislation that prevented the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages. "It was a

²¹Ibid., 7.

²²Ernest Thomas, Alcohol and Life (Toronto: Board of Evangelism and Social Service, United Church of Canada, n.d.), 21.

²³Ibid., 23.

²⁴ D. N. McLachlan Annual Report, "Revive Thy Work", BESS Fifth Annual Meeting Minutes, 1930, 18.

²⁵ John Coburn Annual Report, "He Must Reign", 1928, 28.

²⁶ John Coburn Annual Report, "Complete In Him", BESS Fourth Annual Meeting Minutes, 1928, 25.

master stroke of the evil one to persuade the Premier to make prohibition a party political issue," Coburn wrote of the Ontario situation:

Thousands of people who have been life long prohibitionists and stalwarts in the fight have been influenced by their party and are very cold and even hostile to the cause. In most of our churches there are certain people who resent any reference to the liquor question from the pulpit or in connection with the Church One disquieting result of this is that not a few of our ministers are pretty badly scared.²⁷

He identified three main causes of prohibition's defeat. In addition to having been "made a party political issue," the "changed character of many communities through immigration" meant that the country was now inhabited by people who had very different attitudes about alcohol. The "clever and persistent propaganda of misrepresentation and exaggeration carried on by the enemy" had also "blinded the eyes of the people" and "created an attitude of distrust and dissatisfaction." Finally, the lack "of an enlightened conscience as to civic duty" meant many were unable to see the wisdom of prohibition.²⁸

In the aftermath of the public's widespread repudiation of prohibition, the board realized that much additional attention must be given to the task of educating people about the virtues of temperance. Hugh Dobson lamented that only five congregations out of sixty in one British Columbia presbytery were doing any sustained temperance work.²⁹ He emphasized that more time, energy, and money was necessary to counteract the "weakness of our Church" and "quicken our whole life in the shepherding and protecting of our people from the menace of the custom of drinking alcoholic beverages, and the aggressiveness of the trade in the spread of the liquor traffic."³⁰ In keeping with these sentiments, the board in 1927 urged United Church

²⁷Letter from John Coburn to Hugh Dobson, January 19, 1929, Dobson Papers, Box 18B, File C-2.

²⁸John Coburn Annual Report, "Thy Will Be Done", 1927, 36.

²⁹Hugh Dobson Annual Report, "Thy Will Be Done", 1927, 31-32.

³⁰Hugh Dobson Annual Report, "He Must Reign", 1928, 22.

clergy to adopt a seven-step plan for temperance education. All groups within the church should receive “definite and systemic instruction” on “the nature and effects of alcohol.” Pledge signing, observance of World Temperance Sunday, faithful distribution of educational literature, using available lantern slides, and cooperation with other agencies “working to secure adequate teaching of scientific temperance in day schools” was also recommended.³¹ At the same time, however, the board recognized that new and better educational material was required. Canadian educators have “an ever-present distrust of the propaganda which has been carried on against drinking and the drink traffic,” Thomas informed the board’s 1931 annual meeting. Many regarded the church’s material “as too often unscientific and not truly educational; for the process followed is out of accord with accepted principles and practice of education.” Temperance leaders “must open their minds to self-criticism” and adopt new and better means of getting their message across.³² Hugh Dobson agreed that significant changes were required. “Interest in temperance education in church, school and home increases, but needs to be more systematic, more continuous and more thorough in its method and comprehensiveness.”³³

However, as the board began to focus increasing energy on temperance education, it also questioned whether the goal of legislated prohibition was still worthy of pursuit. “The Church is being reminded that in view of its distinctive mission it ought to think very seriously before invoking the coercive power of the State to further its ends,” D. N. McLachlan declared in 1927. “More and more Ministers and people are feeling that the peculiar task of the Church is not to promote sobriety by political action, but to create an informed public opinion and a sustained political conscience,

³¹Report of the Sessional Committee on Temperance Activities and Public Morals, “Thy Will Be Done”, 1927, 15-16.

³²Ernest Thomas Annual Report, “I Am The Bread of Life”, BESS Sixth Annual Meeting Minutes, 1931, 26.

³³Hugh Dobson Annual Report, *ibid.*, 23.

which will itself find expression through political organs, and finally become enacted in Law."³⁴ Richard Roberts, the influential minister of Toronto's Sherbourne Street United Church, also wholeheartedly agreed that a shift in approach was necessary. The church's business "is not so much to change men's manner as to change their minds," he wrote in 1927. "I confess to a great misgiving about the idea that it is the business of the Church to press legislation to pass laws providing this or enforcing that. These legislative short-cuts to the Kingdom of God seem to me to be altogether illusory."³⁵

Ernest Thomas also questioned the church's relation to the goal of prohibition and believed that a clear distinction between prohibition and temperance was required.³⁶ The call for people to remain temperate "must be rooted in something deeper and more spiritual than the right of the majority to rule," he noted in 1926. "We gain nothing as ministers of Christ by talking of the rights of majorities."³⁷ In the aftermath of the 1926 Ontario election, Thomas urged the church to recognize that "there is now no call on us for political action" because the church "must refrain from insisting that her standards be imposed by the State on that larger body of people which constitutes the State." This shift in approach did not require reformers to "cease to hold forth our ideal of a Christian social order." However, it did mean recognizing that the church no longer had the right to demand "that that ideal be written into the statutes of the land ere the people as a whole have reached the stage of life which will require such laws."³⁸

³⁴D. N. McLachlan Annual Report, "Thy Will Be Done", 1927, 18 and 21.

³⁵Richard Roberts, "The Social Ministry of the Church," Social Welfare, August 1927, 492.

³⁶Allen, The Social Passion, 280-282.

³⁷Ernest Thomas, "Facts and Values in Debate," The New Outlook, 24 November 1926, 4.

³⁸Ernest Thomas, "After The Ontario Election: How The Church May Meet The New Situation," The New Outlook, 22 December 1926, 5.

Throughout the latter part of the 1920s, Thomas adamantly maintained that the church's focus must shift from advocating legislative restrictions to educating its people. In the May 1928 edition of Social Welfare, he noted:

The chief concern of those who promote moral and social reforms must ever be the promotion of right personal attitudes. Right personal attitudes must be the outcome of fair thinking and normal emotions. Propagandist presentation of partial views of a situation may provoke the adoption of a desired course of conduct for the moment; but when concealed factors are discovered there is danger of discredit overtaking both the original propagandist and the conduct he suggested. The methods of political organization may enlist votes in an electoral campaign, but those who represent the churches can never rest satisfied with the enlistment of votes unless these represent enlightened attitudes. Whatever may be the legislative situation in the various provinces of Canada to-day, there are evidences of serious change in the prevailing personal attitudes towards the resort to alcoholic beverages and towards the traffic in such commodities. Perhaps concentration on legislative action, and especially on electoral organization, has aided the diversion of thought from education, and perhaps the highly skilled campaign of suggestion by which the old morale was undermined must be held responsible. But, however the change was wrought, no one can doubt that we must start afresh to create in the life of young Canada an intelligent attitude of resistance to alcoholic customs and to alcoholic institutions.³⁹

Therefore, he told readers of The New Outlook that the church was being called "to create a community in which the legislative regulation will but embody social custom and this carry the support of the community." Its challenge was "to win to our side the hundreds of thousands who gave us their support a few years ago, but who have now changed their minds and stand against us."⁴⁰

Longtime temperance worker C. H. Huestis applauded Thomas's approach. For many years, "to be a prohibitionist was almost synonymous with orthodoxy," he noted in 1930. "Indeed, so far has this policy prevailed that a minister of the Church might with greater safety and comfort proclaim his disbelief in almost any article of the Church's creed than to declare his inability to accept prohibition as the sole method of dealing with the liquor problem." Huestis encouraged the church to remember that its

³⁹Ernest Thomas, "The Scientific Approach to Alcohol: 1. The Need of Re-Education," Social Welfare, May, 1928, 173.

⁴⁰Ernest Thomas, "Ethical Aspects of Temperance Discussion," The New Outlook, 8 January 1930, 31 and 44.

primary task involved “bearing witness to the truth” by “bringing men into relations with God, out of which relations to the good life would emerge.”⁴¹

Such assertions aroused some heated controversy within the United Church. No one was more disturbed by this line of thinking than Hugh Dobson. Although Dobson was supportive of the need to educate Canadians about the perils of alcohol, he was reluctant to let the dream of prohibition die. Shortly after the disappointing results of the 1926 Ontario election, he encouraged D. N. McLachlan not to give up hope that the goal of prohibition would eventually be realized. “I am a firm believer . . . that we will come back, and that much sooner than we contemplate,” he wrote. While stating that a program of “systematic, comprehensive, educational and evangelical” temperance education was obviously needed, “I believe we will come back long before we have succeeded in doing that.”⁴² In the meantime, Dobson believed that the United Church must resolutely oppose the move towards government-controlled liquor boards that most provinces had established by the late 1920s.⁴³

However, the board’s report to the 1928 General Council revealed that prohibition was no longer seen as a primary focus of its work. The report concluded:

the church must give its strength to educational efforts rather than attempts to secure reforms by direct political action. Facts are God’s arguments. Hence the Board regards its duty primarily to be the discovery of facts, the revealing of spiritual values, and the presentation of these to the Church. By this means, there is reasonable hope to believe that an informed public opinion and a sustained political consciousness may be created which will find expression through political channels and finally have its convictions, when necessary, enacted in law.⁴⁴

⁴¹C. H. Huestis letter to The New Outlook, 19 February 1930, 190-191.

⁴²Hugh Dobson to D. N. McLachlan, 29 December 1926, Dobson Papers, Box 18b, File Mc2.

⁴³Carolyn Strange and Tina Loo, Making Good: Law and Moral Regulation in Canada, 1867-1939 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 91.

⁴⁴“Report of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service,” Record of Proceedings, 1928 General Council, 265.

From that time forward, the board's emphasis shifted away from legislative activities and toward developing a more adequate program of temperance education. By the time D. N. McLachlan addressed a convention of the Ontario Prohibition Union in February 1930, no mention of prohibition was made. "Undoubtedly the immediate responsibility for the Church and for all temperance agencies is to concentrate upon a thorough system of education," he stated. "Perhaps the greatest obstacles to reform movements are to be found in uninstructed people, and a semi-educated electorate." The church needed to help the population "think rightly and to act rightly" by bringing "the scientific facts respecting alcohol to the attention of the employer, employee, professional man, and private citizen, and arouse in their minds the determination that the evils resulting from the liquor traffic must be removed from Canadian national life."⁴⁵

Thus, throughout the 1930s, the board paid only sporadic attention to questions of alcohol legislation. In 1930, it "very carefully and persistently brought pressure to bear upon the federal government to secure legislation to prevent the exporting of liquor from Canada to the United States."⁴⁶ In 1934, T. Albert Moore, now United Church moderator, joined D. N. McLachlan in writing to the clergy of Ontario and Saskatchewan regarding the decision of the Ontario government to permit the sale of beer and wine in hotels, restaurants, and clubs, and concerning an impending referendum in Saskatchewan to determine whether or not "beer saloons" should be legalized. They reminded their colleagues that the United Church "has conscientiously and consistently opposed the sale of alcohol for beverage use and has therefore resisted all efforts to extend the privileges of the liquor trade." They also noted that the church has "regarded the confusing of the temperance question with political party issues as

⁴⁵D. N. McLachlan, "The Temperance Situation in Canada: Synopsis of Address at the Recent Convention of the Ontario Prohibition Union, February 25-26, 1930," The New Outlook, 12 March 1930, 247.

⁴⁶D. N. McLachlan Annual Report, "Revive Thy Work", 1930, 19.

unfair, misleading and calculated to becloud the moral considerations so often associated with the consumption of strong drink," and urged their Saskatchewan colleagues "to successfully withstand the attempt of the liquor trade to force beer and wine saloons on the people of that Province."⁴⁷ However, the board apparently took no active role in this campaign.

Given the church's demonstrated inability to effectively mold and shape Canadian public opinion on this issue, the 1934 General Council instructed the board to "explore the possibilities of a fresh approach to the problem and to seek the most effective methods for overcoming the evils associated with drinking usages and the commercial traffic in liquor."⁴⁸ The board's subsequent report was submitted to the 1936 General Council. It noted that alcohol was much more readily available than in prohibition days, that greater social tolerance towards drinking existed, and that, on the part of many Christians, there had been "a weakening of moral conviction and a tendency to compromise with doubtful social usage."⁴⁹ Given these realities, the need for new educational approaches that would inform people about alcohol's many dangers was emphasized. However, certain legislative actions still could be appropriate. "While Educational methods inspired by Christian appeal are, undoubtedly, the most effective in dealing with the individual, the organized liquor trade is not amenable to such influence," the report noted. These forces have "proven to be anti-social, cruel, gravely lacking in respect for law" and no other institution "is a greater menace to social well-being, to political integrity, and to man's freedom to realize the richest life, than the organized liquor trade."⁵⁰ Although the goal of

⁴⁷T. Albert Moore and D. N. McLachlan letter to United Church Ministers in Ontario and Saskatchewan, 28 May 1934, Dobson Papers, Box 29, File H.

⁴⁸D. N. McLachlan to Hugh Dobson, 10 February 1936, Dobson Papers, Box 29, File J.

⁴⁹"The United Church and the Liquor Problem," Record of Proceedings, 1936 General Council, 1936, 356.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 358-359.

legislated prohibition was clearly no longer realistic, the report suggested that the church might lobby for the liquor trade to be brought under full government control. "Inasmuch as the huge profits made in the liquor business constitute the driving power behind the aggressive, unscrupulous and anti-social activities of the trade, it is suggested - not as a complete solution to the problem - but as a step in that direction, that the desirability of such action as will eliminate private control and profit in the trade in alcohol, is worthy of careful consideration."⁵¹

Consequently another committee was created to consider this question. Chaired by John Coburn, this group reported that it "could not agree on the main issue involved." One group "firmly believed that the elimination of private control and private profit from the liquor trade was both practicable and desirable." Another group "just as strongly refused to endorse any proposal involving nationalization or public operation of the trade."⁵² A vocal proponent of this second view was Hugh Dobson, who warned that the church "must be guarded against anything that will establish in the minds of Christian citizens any place of rest in the confronting idea of Public Ownership of the Drink Trade as a solution."⁵³ The board was unable to find a compromise acceptable to both groups.

Thus, by the late 1930s, the board's various attempts to promote temperance had done little to prevent Canadians from buying and consuming increasing quantities of alcoholic beverages. Board secretaries continued to urge pastors to educate and encourage their parishoners in the virtues of temperance, but they gradually realized they were powerless to stem this tide. As they stared defeat in the face, the board began focusing attention on other matters in which it hoped to have more success.

⁵¹Ibid., 359.

⁵²Board of Evangelism and Social Service Report, Year Book, The United Church of Canada, 1936, 69.

⁵³Hugh Dobson to D. N. McLachlan, 12 November 1937, Dobson Papers, Box 29, File K.

Gambling

The Board of Evangelism and Social Service regarded the practice of gambling as a second major impediment to the coming of God's kingdom. "In accordance with the direction of the General Council we call the attention of the whole Church to the serious development during recent years in the spirit and practice of gambling, and urge upon our ministers and members that careful study be made of this practice in the light of the teaching of Jesus," the board stated in 1927.⁵⁴ In particular, the practice of race-track gambling was strongly condemned. "Outstanding among many evils following this toleration are: Fostering the gambling spirit in the minds of the young; Squandering millions of dollars; Admitting undesirable elements from other countries to prey upon the people during race track meets, resulting in the spread of immorality and disease." The board held "the Government and Parliament of Canada responsible for these conditions because of persistent refusal to declare race track gambling an offence against the Criminal Code" and called on "all good citizens to exercise their sovereign powers to secure such legislation because of persistent refusal to declare race track gambling an offence against the Criminal Code."⁵⁵

In addition, the board condemned the growing desire to legalize sweepstakes, and paid particular attention to the situation in British Columbia. In 1932, the Vancouver City Council decided to hold a plebiscite on the question of whether the provincial government should be allowed to run a sweepstake program for the benefit of British Columbia's hospitals. Hugh Dobson and Hugh Rae, convener of Vancouver Presbytery's Committee on Evangelism and Social Service, maintained that such a plebiscite was illegal, but they were unsuccessful in persuading the city council to rescind the motion. Along with a special presbytery committee established to deal with

⁵⁴"Thy Will Be Done", BESS Second Annual Meeting Minutes, 1927, 16.

⁵⁵Ibid.

the question, they then appealed to Conservative Prime Minister R. B. Bennett for assistance. Bennett agreed that the holding of such a plebiscite was illegal but maintained that he was powerless to intervene. Thus he suggested that some “public spirited ratepayers” be encouraged “to obtain an injunction.”⁵⁶ Dobson and Rae recruited a private rate-payer to launch the appeal, secured the services of leading Vancouver lawyer C. W. Craig to argue the case, hoping that the chief justice of British Columbia would rule in their favor. The case was dismissed, the vote proceeded, and the residents of Vancouver legalized sweepstakes by a vote of 25,735 to 9,074.⁵⁷ Dobson feared for the future. As he wrote to McLachlan: “It will be discovered that we are up against a real task; but the sooner the Church realizes that its witness must be borne against opinion that prevails among masses and majority, and that very often in our own churches, it will be better for the maintaining of this generation's witness to the pure and undefiled religion of Christ.”⁵⁸

The board also opposed a proposal to introduce para-mutual betting at Toronto's Exhibition Park. “We are against putting the City into the gambling business,” Dobson told the City of Toronto's Board of Control. “Gambling and drinking would be fostered by the present effort to turn the Park to the purposes proposed,” and this facility “would be spoiled for Playground purposes, during summer months when children most need Playgrounds.”⁵⁹

Dobson's words proved prophetic. In a circular sent to United Church clergy in 1938, D. N. McLachlan encouraged his colleagues to increase their efforts to

⁵⁶Telegram from R. B. Bennett to Hugh Dobson, 2 December 1932, Dobson Papers, Box 63, File 11.

⁵⁷Hugh Dobson to D. N. McLachlan, 15 December 1932, Dobson Papers, Box 63, File 12, outlines the narrative of this case.

⁵⁸Dobson to D. N. McLachlan, 16 December 1932, Dobson Papers, Box 63, File 12.

⁵⁹Hugh Dobson letter to The Board of Control, 10 March 1937, Dobson Papers, Box 63, File 11.

eradicate this practice. "Gambling in all its forms is anti-social and unethical" because it "cultivates and panders to the acquisitive spirit, the root cause of most of the social and economic evils of our time," he wrote. "Gambling in stocks, in land, and in commodities is a menace to the well-being of the people and should be avoided by all followers of Christ." There was a need for "plain and faithful teaching from the pulpit on this subject" to urge people "not only to abstain personally from participation in raffles, lotteries, etc. but also to discourage their use in community life."⁶⁰

Nevertheless, by the late 1930s the board acknowledged that such advice was not widely heeded. W. J. Gallagher reminded the board's 1939 annual meeting "that it is not only the conventional morality of the respectable world but also the Christian morality that is challenged today."⁶¹ Increasingly, the views of the board were running counter to the dominant tendencies of Canadian society. The board hoped that additional attention to the institution of the family could stem this tide.

The Family and the Development of a Christian Canada

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, members of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service perceived that the institution of the family was under serious attack. Questions about the role and function of the Canadian family were perceived as attempts to undermine one of the most basic social institutions. The board devoted much attention to the issue, and endeavored to find ways to support this basic social institution.

Much of the board's early analysis of the family was spearheaded by associate secretary Hugh Dobson. From his office in Vancouver, Dobson developed some detailed analysis of the various pressures facing modern families, produced a range of

⁶⁰D. N. McLachlan mailing to United Church of Canada Ministers, 17 May 1938, Dobson Papers, Box 29, File K.

⁶¹Chairman's Address, "Let the Church Be the Church," BESS Fourteenth Annual Report, 1938, 6.

material to help people see the family from a Christian perspective, and suggested specific ways in which family life could be supported and encouraged. He read widely in contemporary literature, studied the daily newspapers, subscribed to publications such as the Christian Science Monitor and Public Opinion to keep abreast of current political developments, regularly read social scientific journals such as the Journal of Social Hygiene, and collected a mass of government reports and studies on the topic.⁶²

Dobson consistently emphasized that the institution of the family, which ideally was composed of husband, wife, and children, was being challenged by a range of modern secular forces. He perceived a significant shift of traditional family functions from the home to the community, and was deeply worried that modern changes in the workplace, the growing popularity of different forms of entertainment, and other pressures would undermine the sanctity of the nuclear family and lead to its eventual dissolution.⁶³ Thus he believed the family to be under siege. Dobson outlined several modern threats to the family in an address delivered to the annual meeting of the Social Service Council of Canada in April 1930. Here he suggested that the “disruption of family life” revealed through rising rates of divorce, desertion, annulment and separation was caused by several factors. Traditional family patterns were being disrupted by the “wage earning and increased independence among women.” Changes in individual expectations of what life could give resulted in “increased discontent,” the “widening of human horizons,” and a feeling of “keeping up with the Joneses.” In addition, growing acceptance of “the idea of incompatibility” provided an easy excuse for those people who wanted to end their marriage. Recent psychological assumptions concerning the place of children saw the child “as an economic liability” instead of seeing “the child as an economic asset as in the past.” Dobson concluded by

⁶²Hugh Dobson to E. W. Mackay, 27 February 1935, Dobson Papers, Box 19, File McI, contains a list of reading suggestions and some of the periodicals Dobson found most helpful.

⁶³Hugh Dobson, “Preserving the Integrity of the Family,” Dobson Papers, Box 18B, File S.

emphasizing the detrimental effect “of exploiting fiction and magazines on views of life” and the media’s tendency to emphasize “the sensational or extraordinary” which “augment not the normal but the unusual.”⁶⁴

Behind these influences lay changing attitudes toward sex which Dobson believed were deplorable. A “very large factor in the development of this ‘sex looseness’ is the commercialization of art, science, literature, movie film and especially the exploitation of sex interest,” Dobson informed the clergy of British Columbia and Alberta in a 1927 circular. Magazine publishers “can make millions by a certain type of salacious fiction and by appeal to the deep seated sex interest.”⁶⁵ In large part because of these influences, divorce rates were rising, polygamy was becoming more popular, and sexual relations outside of marriage were seen as increasingly acceptable. These forces constituted a direct threat to the institution of Christian marriage, and had resulted in widespread “confusion” as to the ideals and purpose of marriage.

In response to this situation, Dobson urged “every Christian leader and earnest follower” to undertake “a most careful study of every phase of the marriage problem.”⁶⁶ In an address to the 1928 General Council, he encouraged the commissioners to focus on Jesus’ teachings on the subject and relate these values to “the actual experience of life today with its new knowledge and its much more intricate and complex relationships and interdependence.” In his view, the church had a unique opportunity to “again think through the problem of marriage and be led to see the moral and spiritual obligations involved as well as the necessity for economic and legal adaptations in our modern culture.”⁶⁷

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Hugh Dobson, “Re Christian Ideals of Marriage and Family Life,” unpublished circular sent by Dobson, 20 June 1927, Dobson Papers, Box 18B, File C-3.

⁶⁶Hugh Dobson, “Coming Gales and the Marriage Bond,” Social Welfare, February 1929, 111.

⁶⁷Hugh Dobson, “Address For The General Council,” Dobson Papers, Box B-11, File 12, 7.

As part of this process, Dobson was eager to share his own opinions about the many virtues of married life. In a report prepared for the 1928 annual meeting of the Canadian Council on Child Welfare, he affirmed five basic beliefs. He emphasized the “value of permanency in marriage relations” and the “value of monogamy and the menace of plurality of wives or husbands.” He maintained that both church and state must establish “standardized and conservative codes in relation to both marriage and divorce.” He encouraged “a much more outspoken discussion of the values and dangers of the use of contraceptives as a means of birth control,” and emphasized that the benefits of marriage should be emphasized rather than simply condemning divorce.⁶⁸

Thereafter, Dobson devoted a great deal of attention to stressing the positive role which marriage could play in both personal and social life. In a series of lectures given at Vancouver’s Union College in 1930, he identified several positive aspects of family life. Families existed to ensure the procreation of the race, to protect children during infancy, and to support the aged during their last years. It functioned to spread “human association” and instill the basic social and cultural values of a society. Families were the chief forum for religious instruction and worship, and also facilitated the development of “recreation, art, and expressional life.” They also ensured the “transmission of culture from generation to generation,” allowed children to be educated by adults who could become important role models, and provided rare opportunities to build bridges between classes, gender and ages. Family relationships finally served to develop the family affections which became “a basis and bond for marriage.”⁶⁹

⁶⁸Hugh Dobson, “Ethical and Spiritual Development of the Child,” Dobson Papers, Box 18B, File W, 1-2.

⁶⁹Hugh Dobson, “The Educational and Cultural Function of the Family and Marriage Summarized,” 14 January 1930, Dobson Papers, Box 19, File L, 5.

Therefore, Dobson developed some concrete suggestions to help preserve family life. He encouraged families to “take time to think, to eat, to play, to worship” together.⁷⁰ He reminded couples that the principles of “gentleness, forbearance, self-control and forgiveness” were key to happy and long-lasting marriages. He also maintained that the nurturing of common spiritual ties would unite family members. “In no other relationships of life is religion more vital to the need of the hour in the matter of social adjustments.”⁷¹

Dobson’s colleague, Ernest Thomas, focused more specifically on the uniquely Christian dimensions of marriage and family life in a 1927 article in The New Outlook. Thomas viewed marriage as a sacrament which could reveal the essence of God’s love for the world. In Christian marriage one sees “the actual fusion of two independent persons into one joint personal life to express the purpose of God.” While it was not at all appropriate for the church to foist the ideals of Christian marriage onto persons who are not basically Christian, the church’s task is “to produce men and women who will work out the great experiment,” learn that the “resolve to ‘forsake all others’ gives dignity and wealth to life,” and thereby experience God in new ways. This was especially possible when children arrived. “We find God real and revealing in the life of our children, and they open up gates of new life to us,” Thomas concluded. “Such is the adventure of Christian marriage.”⁷²

The concerns which Dobson and Thomas expressed for the state of the Christian family were also shared by the national United Church. The 1930 General Council asked the Board of Evangelism and Social Service to “undertake and promote a study of the meaning and obligations of Christian marriage” and determine “whether or

⁷⁰Hugh Dobson, “What Is Happening In The Home?” Social Welfare, April 1929, 158.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ernest Thomas, “Marriage: Discipline or Adventure,” The New Outlook, 21 December 1927, 7.

not there are any circumstances warranting the dissolution of marriage and if so the most effective way of providing for it."⁷³ The resulting committee was chaired by George Pidgeon and staffed by Ernest Thomas, and its report was ratified at the board's 1932 annual meeting before being forwarded to the General Council.

The report identified Jesus' teachings on the subject, analyzed the current social situation, and offered the church some specific recommendations about how to proceed. It began with Jesus' assertion that marriage was primarily a covenant between God and a couple. In Jesus' mind "husband and wife are united not by a contract, the conditions of which they may determine as they choose, but by being caught up into the creative life of God, and the selfish refusal of such a place violates the law of Christian marriage." God's creative purpose was carried on through the family which is formed by marriage. The spirit of love was normative to Jesus' teaching. Divorce could be eliminated if only people lived by this injunction:

The adoption of His attitude to marriage would cause the problem of divorce almost to vanish; for, under the conviction, shared by both parties, that 'incompatibility' could and must be overcome by sympathy, patience and self-discipline, minor strains would not develop into disruption. The marriage most fruitful in richer life for both persons would be one in which diverse elements and alms are being held in a state of costly but noble tension.⁷⁴

In other words, marriage represented a gift of God which men and women were to honor. Problems could be overcome with God's help and guidance.

The report also emphasized that parenthood was a sacred calling which deserved the utmost attention. Through parenthood "God yields an experience in which the Divine nature may more fully be realized and appreciated."⁷⁵ Therefore, the calling to be parents was of paramount importance. As part of acting responsibly, however, the report also contended that parents had a duty not to bring unwanted

⁷³Annual Meeting Minutes, April 9. "I am the Bread of Life", 1931, 8.

⁷⁴"The Meaning and Responsibilities of Christian Marriage," Record of Proceedings, 1932 General Council, 279.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 279.

children into the world. Nothing was worse than unloved children with mothers and fathers who were unable to take care of them. The church thus sanctioned the use of artificial birth control. Although procreation was still regarded as “the highest privilege accorded to man and woman,” recent successes at eliminating the pestilence and famines which had previously caused so many infant deaths meant that the world did not require as many children. “With this control over the death rate, we believe that the new control over the beginnings of life may, despite the new access which it provides to lawless pleasures, serve the higher life of mankind, and redeem parenthood from the rule of caprice and accident.”⁷⁶

A healthy and productive marriage was also predicated on the wife foregoing the procurement of employment outside the home. While acknowledging the severe financial situation which confronted many families, the report noted that the “postponement of parenthood and the continuance of the wife in remunerative employment while affording a solution for some, seriously affects the whole employment situation, and raises as many questions as it answers.” The church sought to protect women from the pressures of the workplace, and thus viewed “with the most serious misgivings any practices which menace the slowly acquired gain of centuries in enhanced respect for womanhood, especially in the emancipation of womanhood from exploitation either within or outside marriage.”⁷⁷

Thus the report emphasized that any marriage break-up clearly violated the spirit of Jesus’ teachings and should only occur as a last resort. Jesus called individuals to unite with a spirit of love and compromise. The maintenance and development of this spirit was the best safeguard against marriage breakup. “One cannot doubt that in most cases [of marriage difficulty] Jesus would say that the condition would not have arisen had both parties from the first accepted the task of achieving a compatibility through

⁷⁶Ibid., 279.

⁷⁷Ibid., 282.

reciprocal adjustment.” Jesus’ attitude “must be central in our teaching to-day as in all ages, for the general acceptance of divorce as a fitting solution of the difficulty, can only add to the levity with which some persons enter marriage.” Jesus “was so concerned with promoting such reverence for personality that the question would not arise; and we must still affirm this to be the only adequate safeguard of the marriage bond.”⁷⁸

The board’s 1932 annual meeting adopted this report and offered several recommendations. It moved “to request the legislature and government of any province which has not done so to make provision for civil marriage so as to relieve ministers of any obligation to participate in marriage proceedings not in accord with the teaching of the Church and to avoid the necessity of persons not desiring Christian marriage with its obligations participating in such vows and declarations as the Church requires.”⁷⁹ United Church clergy were also instructed to “inquire diligently” into a request made by a divorced person to re-marry, and were encouraged to decline to conduct a wedding when it was clear that the current relationship had caused their previous marriages to break down.⁸⁰

While the 1932 General Council approved the report, its recommendations about birth control generated a good deal of discussion within the church. A memorial from the Maritime Conference was sent to the 1934 General Council requesting additional clarification on the issues of sterilization and birth control, and Council subsequently directed the Board of Evangelism and Social Service to prepare a statement on the topic. A commission, with Harold Young as chair and Ernest Thomas

⁷⁸Ibid., 284.

⁷⁹Annual Meeting Minutes, September 26, “In Quietness and in Confidence Shall Be Your Strength,” BESS Seventh Annual Meeting Minutes, 1932, 10.

⁸⁰Ibid., 10.

as secretary, was established early in 1936 and a report was drafted for presentation at the board's annual meeting three months later.⁸¹

The Report of the Commission on Voluntary Parenthood and Sterilization reiterated the principle that parenthood was a sacred calling, but that life circumstances sometimes prevented parents from having children. Referring to research which pointed to a probable correlation between fear of unwanted pregnancies, sexual dysfunction and marriage breakdown, it recognized that the elimination of these pressures may enrich and strengthen family life. Noting that even the Roman Catholic Church had long affirmed the principle of voluntary parenthood so long as this was achieved by carefully choosing the times for sexual intercourse, the report saw no essential difference between this and other methods of birth control. "Nature nowhere indicates the purpose that every reproductive cell shall find its mate." Therefore, "Christian persons may utilize present-day knowledge and procedure in determining the occasions when marital intercourse shall issue in a new life."⁸²

With this principle firmly established, the report affirmed that every individual had the right to have access to a full range of contraceptive information. Rich and poor alike should have the right to learn about and practice the form of birth control that best met their particular circumstances. Therefore, the General Council was asked "to record its approval of the establishment of Voluntary Parenthood Clinics under public control and supervision according to standards and regulations prescribed by the Provincial Departments of Public Health."⁸³

⁸¹Minutes of the sub-Executive meeting of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service, January 24, 1936, "The Enduring Name," BESS Eleventh Annual Report, 1935, 87. Other members of the commission were Rev. Frank Stapleford, Dr. Marion Hilliard, Dr. George Young, Rev. C. E. Silcox, Judge H. S. Mott, Mrs. Charence Hincks, D. N. McLachlan, and John Coburn from the board staff.

⁸²"Report of the Commission on Voluntary Parenthood and Sterilization," Record of Proceedings, 1936 General Council, 328.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 329.

This report was favorably received by the board and, at its 1937 meeting, it urged that “the declaration of General Council favoring the establishment of publicly-controlled clinics for the provision of reliable advice to married people regarding the frequency of childbirths” be widely publicized. However, it also noted “that the Church in no way favors the childless home or sexual looseness outside of marriage: but welcomes the movement to regulate the frequency of births in any given family.”⁸⁴ In this way, the United Church board sought to promote the notion of the “Christian family” and protect the family from a variety of perceived threats.

Conclusion

From its earliest days, the work of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service ran counter to many popular currents of Canadian society. Despite its best efforts, the majority of Canadians had repudiated prohibition and maintained that gambling should be allowed. Increasing numbers of people also began questioning whether the institution of the family was as sacred as it had frequently been perceived. In light of these attitudes, the board began to see that increased attention must be paid to developing and nurturing a Christian constituency that would affirm those values that were under increasing attack. It therefore devoted additional attention to the question of evangelism, and attempted to develop new means of enlarging and re-energizing the church.

⁸⁴Report of the Sessional Committee on Social Problems, “Play the Man”, BESS Twelfth Annual Report, 1936, 28.

CHAPTER THREE

EVANGELISM AND THE YEARNING FOR RELIGIOUS RENEWAL

In the aftermath of the widespread defeat of prohibition legislation across Canada, the leaders of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service became increasingly aware of the many ways in which Canadian society was evolving in a manner that ran counter to their wishes. The board gradually realized that further attempts to legislate morality would be futile unless a larger and more committed religious constituency was created, so a variety of initiatives to foster a spiritual revival within the United Church were initiated. The advent of the depression brought additional urgency to the task. Many within the church regarded the depression as a clear and tangible manifestation of the spiritual malaise which had left the country bereft of an adequate set of religious values. Leaders of the board maintained that, by enabling faithful men and women to recover a strong and vital Christian spirituality, deeper levels of faith would be stimulated, newcomers would be attracted to the church, and a new constituency would be developed which would support necessary social and economic reform. Therefore, a concerted effort was made to broaden the church's constituency, deepen the levels of religious commitment of its existing members and adherents, and emphasize that social reform activities must spring from the spiritual depths of the Christian faith. Several initiatives were developed during the 1920s and 1930s to meet these objectives.

Initial Approaches to Evangelism

In the years immediately following church union, disturbing signs abounded that the United Church of Canada was lacking in spiritual energy. In 1927, John Coburn noted that "in many rural communities it has been found that fully fifty per

cent of the population rarely, if ever, attend public worship," and one community which was "entirely Protestant Anglo-Saxon and served almost exclusively by the United Church" reported "that seventy-nine per cent of the people were non-church goers."¹ Similar situations were reported in various urban centers. D. N. McLachlan noted that many city churches encountered individuals who did not attend services and who went instead to theaters, or attended "gatherings of strange cults and sects."² Walter Millson lamented that clergy and laity alike were "loath to face squarely their responsibility to the people outside the Church, and to exercise their great privilege of witnessing for Christ."³ Church attendance in Canada's cities was declining, and the board feared that the United Church was becoming spiritually lazy.

Board secretaries believed that these developments needed to be taken seriously. John Coburn reported that many members of his denomination shared "a great anxiety" about the church's spiritual health and that he sensed "a hungering for something that will revitalize our whole Church life and make it more effective in the winning of individuals and the Christianizing of society."⁴ Hugh Dobson asserted that the church must redouble its efforts "to make people aware of the unity between man and God" and "convince them that man is not merely animal but that man is of God's kind and that God is with man." In order to achieve this goal, "we will have to lift the minds of people out of fatalistic philosophies and cynical attitudes" and show them a new and better way.⁵ George Campbell agreed. The United church required a "thoroughly-planned Dominion-wide campaign of Intensive Evangelistic Missions,

¹John Coburn Annual Report, "Thy Will Be Done", BESS Second Annual Meeting Minutes, 1927, 35.

²D. N. McLachlan Annual Report, "Thy Will Be Done", 24.

³Walter Millson Annual Report, "He Must Reign", BESS Third Annual Meeting Minutes, 1928, 24.

⁴John Coburn Annual Report, "He Must Reign", 1928, 27-28.

⁵Dobson to D. N. McLachlan, 13 December 1928, Dobson Papers, Box 18B, File Mc2.

calling the whole membership of the Church to prayer and personal rededication to Christ and His unfinished work both in Canada and beyond," he told the board's 1928 annual meeting. "I am fully convinced that the membership of the Church will respond to a renewed consecration of life and service to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour."⁶

The board responded to this situation with a variety of initiatives. It sponsored a few special evangelistic teams that featured a preacher and singer who traveled across the country holding a series of special services where requested. These meetings were intended "to avoid anything which will be merely spasmodic or transient in emotional outbursts" and were designed to leave a pastoral charge "enriched, sweetened and encouraged."⁷ The board also oversaw a variety of campaigns. In 1927, Tom Sykes of the English Primitive Methodist Church worked for six months leading eight preaching missions in several major Canadian cities.⁸ In 1928, the well-known British evangelist Gypsy Smith conducted a two-week series of meetings jointly sponsored by the board and three Toronto presbyteries in Toronto's Massey Hall.⁹ Popular United Church clergy were also recruited for this task. Also in 1928, Solomon Cleaver led twelve preaching missions in the Ontario communities of St. Catharines, Cornwall, Brampton, Winchester, Appin, Newtonbrook, Peterborough, Havelock, Wesley, Barrie, and Ottawa.¹⁰ In Alberta, evangelist T. A. Woods also led several well-regarded campaigns.¹¹

⁶George Campbell Annual Report, "He Must Reign", 1928, 30.

⁷D. N. McLachlan, "Report of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service," United Church of Canada Year Book, 1927, 96.

⁸Report of the Sessional Committee on Evangelism to the Second Annual Meeting of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service, "Thy Will Be Done", 1927, 14.

⁹John Coburn Annual Report, "He Must Reign", 1928, 28.

¹⁰George Campbell Annual Report, "Complete In Him", BESS Fourth Annual Meeting Minutes, 1929, 27-28.

¹¹The New Outlook, 5 February 1930, 138.

While these endeavors were initially popular, some weaknesses in this approach soon became apparent. In his 1928 annual report, board secretary John Coburn reflected on the legacy of the Gypsy Smith campaign which he had organized. "Large audiences filled Massey Hall each evening," he noted, and the series of services "gave to many Christian people a real spiritual uplift and resulted in the dedication of many to a more effective Christian service." However, it was also clear that "a very large proportion of each audience consisted of church members and that the Mission made but little impact upon the non-church-going element of the city." Despite the best efforts of the organizers to attract a range of non-churchgoers to these meetings, it seemed that comparatively few new people were persuaded to join the church because of these gatherings.¹²

Out of these experiences, the board began emphasizing that evangelism must become a regular part of a congregation's work rather than something that was sporadic and exotic. D. N. McLachlan noted that the evangelists and singers who worked under the board's direction had "done heroic and slavish service," but he calculated that "it would require fifty-three years for them to give two weeks service to each of the preaching places throughout the United Church."¹³ Thus he began to encourage all people in the church to see themselves as evangelistic. He maintained that all church members had the duty to identify, visit and invite their neighbors into the church, and made a special appeal to the church's men to carry out a greater share of this work.

However, the board realized that the entire church would have to focus more time, energy, and money on this goal before tangible benefits would appear. Thus the boards of Evangelism and Social Service and Religious Education forwarded a joint

¹²John Coburn Annual Report, "Complete In Him", 1929, 23.

¹³D. N. McLachlan, "Evangelism: Outlining the New Policy Recommended by the Board," The New Outlook, 23 November 1927, 8.

motion to the 1928 General Council “requesting that the Supreme Court of our Church take steps to organize the Presbyteries and Conferences with a view to seeking a revival of the religion of the Cross and of the Spirit.”¹⁴ The General Council endorsed this resolution and urged all its ministers, elders and members “to give themselves more continuously than ever to personal communion with God, to avail themselves more fully of all the regular ministries of the Church for the quickening of the spiritual life, and to join in groups of intimate fellowship in a search for a deeper and richer experience of the presence of God through study, meditation and prayer.” The church was also called to “a more heroic practice of the Gospel in the relations of everyday life” whereby every member would work “to Christianize the area of life in which his daily work is done, and to win to conscious allegiance to Jesus Christ those who have not yet accepted Him as their Lord and Saviour.”¹⁵

Board secretaries met frequently with presbyteries, church boards, and groups of clergy to promote these goals. In 1929, Hugh Dobson reported that he had convened a number of “regional conferences” consisting of between fifteen and twenty-five clergy and laymen, and that in British Columbia and Alberta he discerned “a growing tendency for ministers to help each other in evangelical missions, to observe the Week of Prayer and the week preceding Easter for special missions, and to more carefully train and prepare those who are about to become church members.”¹⁶ Walter Millson noted that, in addition to attending forty-four meetings of presbyteries and preaching on forty-six Sundays in various Saskatchewan and Manitoba churches, he attended sixty-four spiritual conferences where he met with both clergy and laity to determine the best way in which the church might “give

¹⁴Minutes of the Third Annual Meeting of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service, April 17-19, 1928, “He Must Reign”, 1928, 6.

¹⁵Record of Proceedings, 1928 General Council, 53.

¹⁶Hugh Dobson Annual Report, “Complete in Him”, 1929, 16.

spiritual Leadership to the Life of the congregation and community.”¹⁷ Ernest Thomas indicated that he had traveled extensively through the Maritimes and southern Ontario offering courses on a wide variety of subjects, with the goal of fostering “a new and richer experience of God in the life of ministers.”¹⁸ That same year, John Coburn led several week-long evangelistic campaigns in Ontario and met with numerous congregations and presbyteries to try to “assist ministers and people to recognize and adequately meet the challenging conditions of this day and of their own community.”¹⁹ George Campbell met all the presbyteries in the Bay of Quinte and Montreal-Ottawa Conferences to train clergy in the techniques of visitation evangelism.²⁰

As David Plaxton notes, Hugh Dobson maintained that western Canadians were growing increasingly receptive to this type of work. “Preaching regularly, and addressing congregations as well as small groups, I have found a growing favour toward evangelical Christianity,” he reported in 1930. “The year has been a very strenuous one, but one is encouraged by the recognition of more sober thought and a clearer sense of dependence upon God for forgiveness and help and for the enrichment of life.”²¹ Dobson frequently urged his colleagues to devote more time and energy to this work, and believed that their efforts would reap enormous rewards. By 1932, he believed that such a transformation was under way. “Redemption is becoming a vital experience with many people and as a result Church work has an

¹⁷Walter Millson Annual Report, “Complete in Him”, 1929, 20.

¹⁸Ernest Thomas Annual Report, “Complete in Him”, 1929, 21.

¹⁹John Coburn Annual Report, “Complete in Him”, 1929, 23.

²⁰George Campbell Annual Report, “Complete in Him”, 1929, 27.

²¹Quoted in David Plaxton, “‘We Will Evangelize with a Whole Gospel or None’: Evangelicalism and the United Church of Canada,” in Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience, ed. George Rawlyk (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), 112.

added zest and new meaning," he wrote. "Everywhere there is in actual fact a revival - of a purer and more undefiled religious life in our churches."²²

At the same time, board secretaries produced and distributed two distinct types of devotional literature to be used in such gatherings. One was focused on the life and teachings of Jesus. In response to a 1927 proposal of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America "to celebrate in some fitting way the human, earthly life of Jesus during the three years ending 1930," the board produced a variety of study booklets to enable interested individuals to become more firmly grounded in the central tenets of Christianity.²³ Ernest Thomas wrote much of this material, and believed that a fresh study of Jesus' life and work which drew on the latest insights of Biblical criticism would shake the church from its lethargy and result in a necessary spiritual awakening. As he explained to the readers of the New Outlook:

When we look over the situation we do not wonder that the General Council called the whole Church to a fresh study of Jesus in the full light of present-day knowledge and of the world needs. Such a study will be 'fresh' and refreshing, but it demands a tremendous price. Radical adjustment of mind and heart are the primary conditions. Great concentration of mental energy will be required ere we will shake off the enveloping atmosphere in which we have so long lived and breathe the air of the new world. We are clearly called to repent, not of the sins which others commit, but of the sins of mental sloth and intellectual poverty, of ethical evasion and spiritual cowardice.²⁴

According to D. N. McLachlan, one such study, entitled "The Message of Jesus for the Life of Today," presented "the message of Jesus in a form which helps the older person, trained in the evangelical tradition of the last century, to trace the steps by which the church has come from these days until now." In light of this message, "the major facts of the present world crisis are described and the issues involved are presented for understanding and discussion." McLachlan encouraged church people

²²Ibid.

²³Minutes of the Second Annual Meeting of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service, October 26-28, 1927, "Thy Will Be Done", 1927, 5.

²⁴Ernest Thomas, "A Startling Call to the Church," The New Outlook, 31 October 1928, 6.

to “work through this little book conscientiously” and gain a greater appreciation of “the nature and gravity of our situation.”²⁵

However, some members of the board were skeptical that introducing people to Biblical criticism would foster a spiritual awakening. Walter Millson told Hugh Dobson that “I do not think much of this type of literature,” and noted his concern was shared by others.²⁶ One of his friends was especially disturbed that Thomas's work served to “discredit the ideas of atonement and sacrificial redemption,” and lamented that parish ministers faced the constant task of explaining “the reputed attitude of some of our Church Leaders who are charged with undermining the Faith of our fathers.” Millson's friend feared “our task will not be any easier” if the church continued producing this type of material.²⁷

To meet the needs of those churches seeking alternative approaches to religious renewal than that offered by advocates of higher criticism, the boards of Evangelism and Social Service and Religious Education cooperated in developing and promoting other resources to be used in programs of prayer, study, and meditation. Most notable of these was a series of booklets entitled “Realizing God,” which were written by Ernest Thomas and “designed to promote deeper experience of God through personal study and intimate fellowship in study, meditation and prayer.”²⁸ The first study outlined some of the thinking from recent philosophy, literature, and science which made it hard for modern people to realize the presence

²⁵D. N. McLachlan, “The Message of Jesus for the Life of Today,” The Western Recorder, January 1932, 4.

²⁶Walter Millson to Hugh Dobson, 11 January 1929, Dobson Papers, Box 18b, File M1.

²⁷Unsigned and undated memo attached to letter from Walter Millson to Hugh Dobson, “Backgrounds of the Gospel Story,” 11 January 1929, Dobson Papers, Box 18b, File M1.

²⁸Letter from D. N. McLachlan to R. P. Bowles, 25 January 1929, Victoria University, President's General Correspondence, Box 18, File 199.

of God in life, and which “can and do inhibit the knowledge of God.”²⁹ The second pamphlet attempted to foster other mental attitudes that could enhance a person’s ability to become more sensitive to God’s presence, and directed people towards the writings of Alfred North Whitehead, William Temple, and B. H. Streeter.³⁰ Thomas then focused on the way Jesus revealed God’s essence to the world, how Jesus was “the crowning expression of an energy found working in a whole creation which travails in pain,” and on the importance of recapturing “as a living faith the verdict of an early age that to have seen Jesus, full of grace and truth, is to have seen the Father.”³¹ Attention then turned toward the early church’s experience of God, and to an understanding of salvation as receiving a place in God’s purpose and enterprise which saves people from despair. God is realized “as He achieves self-realization in human life and love, especially in a love that redeems,” Thomas asserted. Jesus was “the self-realization of God in human life” and sought “to share with those who through Him have come to know themselves expressions of the Father.”³² Finally, Thomas focused on the importance of worship as a time of “personal intercourse” between God and humanity in which individuals become “integrated” with the plans and purposes of God.³³ Worship helps to create “a special strength for those who are sure that their life is being integrated anew with the ground plan for the universe” by

²⁹Realizing God: What Hinders? (The Board of Evangelism and Social Service and The Board of Religious Education, The United Church of Canada, n.d.), 10.

³⁰Realizing God: Thoughts That Help (The Board of Evangelism and Social Service and The Board of Religious Education, The United Church of Canada, n.d.), 10.

³¹Realizing God: God Seen in Jesus (The Board of Evangelism and Social Service and The Board of Religious Education, The United Church of Canada, n.d.), 11.

³²Realizing God: Early Christian Experience (The Board of Evangelism and Social Service and The Board of Religious Education, The United Church of Canada, n.d.), 12.

³³Realizing God: Worship (The Board of Evangelism and Social Service and The Board of Religious Education, The United Church of Canada, n.d.), 6.

enabling people to “become sensitive to the Divine presence.”³⁴ McLachlan believed that this resource could be used in sermon preparation, personal devotions, or as the basis for small group study.³⁵

R.B.Y. Scott of Montreal's United Theological College praised this series. In a letter to The New Outlook, he commended Thomas for the way he “presented the essence of current movements of immense significance to the religious mind.” This material encouraged “real mental and spiritual stimulus” among ministerial groups in Vancouver,” and “points the way to an expression of essential Christianity in terms that are not remote and unreal, but immediately valid for the day in which we live.”³⁶

The board also urged United Church ministers to place greater emphasis on days such as Pentecost. To assist in this task, it distributed a copy of Ernest Thomas's booklet on the topic to the clergy “in the hope that the diligent searching and fervent prayer in which it was conceived may bring to the whole Church ‘times of refreshment from the presence of the Lord.’”³⁷ In this study, Thomas endeavored to remind the church that at Pentecost “the mission of the Master was transferred to the society of His disciples, many of whom still walk our streets and worship in our churches.”³⁸ Through a powerful and mysterious religious experience, Jesus' followers experienced “a radical change of spiritual attitude - a metanoia.”³⁹ Their experience of God was so powerful “their whole being was enhanced, and their life raised to higher planes, while within them they discovered capacity never suspected

³⁴Ibid., 11.

³⁵D. N. McLachlan, “‘Pentecost’ - Suggestions for Its Use,” 1 January 1930, Dobson Papers, Box 18b, File Mc2.

³⁶R.B.Y. Scott letter to The New Outlook, 18 June 1930, 594.

³⁷D. N. McLachlan, “‘Pentecost’ - Suggestions for Its Use,” 1 January 1930, Dobson Papers, Box 18b, File Mc2.

³⁸Ernest Thomas, Pentecost: What It Was - And What It Means (Toronto: The Board of Evangelism and Social Service, The United Church of Canada, 1930), 5.

³⁹Ibid., 12-13.

before, and persuasive power undreamed of went forth from them.”⁴⁰ Thomas believed that modern men and women could experience a similar transformation by going behind church doctrine and “finding afresh the Gospel which Jesus actually gave.” By this process, “we may share with Peter the great change which came over him” and experience significant new life.⁴¹ The church’s task was to enable, encourage, and facilitate its members to undergo this experience:

The Spirit who worked at Pentecost still seeks bodies in which to work and speak. We have reviewed the conditions under which the Spirit then became incarnate and they are essentially the same to-day. Intimate fellowships of prayer and thought; solitary grappling with the mystery of the Divine purpose, courageous grappling with painful difficulties; rigorous intellectual honesty which will refuse to seek a sheltering make-belief; fearless resolve to understand social discord, industrial strife, and international anarchy; and a readiness on the part of the Church, its ministers and members, to throw all they are and have into the struggle to which the Spirit calls them - these are the conditions of Pentecost.⁴²

Finally, the board encouraged the church to see all of these initiatives as part of an ongoing attempt to mold and shape Canadian society according to Christ’s teachings and example. D. N. McLachlan reminded the readers of Social Welfare that every attempt “to re-establish an individual by merely external means will fail.” Instead, a new spiritual impulse was required.⁴³ He noted that the church’s primary task was to nurture and develop the spiritual life of all people, and that such work “proceeds on the assumption that the individual is the key to the mass of men and that genuine social progress can be secured only as a result of the regeneration of the individual members of society.” For “only the Gospel of Christ makes regeneration possible,” and it was concerned with the regeneration of the whole person. Only the

⁴⁰Ibid., 18.

⁴¹Ibid., 36.

⁴²Ibid., 51.

⁴³D. N. McLachlan, “The Spiritual Element in Social Work,” Social Welfare, May 1928, 184.

gospel was “capable of saving man in his entirety. It can reshape individual character and outlook, giving men a new conception of social values.”⁴⁴

With this goal in mind, the board actively explored the ways that the church could use the fledgling Canadian broadcasting industry to spread the Christian message to people who would not otherwise hear it. Under the auspices of a radio committee that was established by General Council executive and chaired by D. N. McLachlan, the church maintained that a state-controlled broadcasting system offered the best hope of regulating content and enabling the churches to challenge the “bold and formidable” secularist ideas which were gaining in popularity.⁴⁵ In an age when “God is ignored, elbowed out, treated as if He did not exist,” one sees “the weakening of old and authoritative moral sanctions,” McLachlan noted. He believed that the advent of this new media would force the church to re-think

the meaning of the Gospel in relation to all the movements of thought in the world of today. Unless each generation makes a fresh effort to believe with a reasoned faith, instead of reposing upon views belonging to other days . . . [and] unless it tries hard to relate its re-vitalized faith to the world of thought around it, it will not get its Gospel accepted by a world that so desperately needs it. Is it too much to say that while we have detached particular dogmas, we lack a comprehensive convincing philosophy of life?⁴⁶

McLachlan and his committee urged the Canadian government to emulate the system that the British Broadcasting System used to handle and monitor religious broadcasting in the British Isles. “Under the British system a wise and representative Advisory Committee selects speakers who are likely to have some message of real value to large numbers of people, many of whom for various causes are isolated from congregational worship,” D. N. McLachlan stated in a 1931 letter to several Canadian

⁴⁴D. N. McLachlan, “Evangelism: Outlining the New Policy Recommended by the Board,” The New Outlook, 23 November 1927, 8.

⁴⁵United Church of Canada, Yearbook 1929, 24.

⁴⁶“Religious Broadcasting in Canada: Report Presented to the Executive of the General Council, May 5th, 1930,” United Church, General Council - Executive and Sub-Executive Correspondence Papers, Series Ib, Box 1, File 17, 8.

newspapers. Such a policy would allow a public broadcasting system to “promote eternal values rather than local or sectional strife” through the careful selection of “competent persons inspired by rich sympathy and deep insight.”⁴⁷ Tangible benefits had resulted. “Large numbers of people hearing a noble presentation, have been led for the first time to an interest in religion, and have turned to their local Church for further experience.”⁴⁸

Despite these assertions, the board took no active role in encouraging or enabling United Church clergy to make widespread and effective use of this new medium. While Hugh Dobson and J. R. Mutchmor appears to have made a number of local radio broadcasts during the 1930s and early 1940s, the board's inability to see the possibilities of this new medium contrasted sharply with the approach taken by the evangelical Alberta preacher William Aberhart.⁴⁹ The board instead focused attention on three new initiatives that had caught the imagination of various segments of the United Church. The United Church's Commission on Evangelism, the Oxford Group, and the Joint Committee for the Evangelization of Canadian Life attracted strong leadership, and the board responded to these initiatives in a variety of ways.

The United Church's Commission on Evangelism

In April 1931, the board recommended that the General Council executive take immediate action “to arrange conferences between representatives of the Churches in Canada, with a view to bringing about concerted action looking to the enrichment of the spiritual life of the people, the extension of the application of Christian methods in Industry, and a fuller measure of the spirit of brotherhood

⁴⁷D. N. McLachlan letter to the Ottawa Citizen and the Toronto Mail and Empire, Board of Evangelism and Social Service Papers, Box 7, File 74.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁴⁹Russell Johnston, “The Early Trials of Protestant Radio, 1922-38,” Canadian Historical Review 75 (1994): 376-402, examines various Protestant responses to the advent of radio.

among all classes, races and creeds represented in the population of Canada.”⁵⁰ General Council executive responded by appointing a Commission on Evangelism with George Pidgeon as chairman, and with Ernest Thomas, Hugh Dobson, John Coburn, and D. N. McLachlan among its members. This group worked to articulate an understanding of evangelism that would provide the grounding for concerted church effort and enable the church to effectively meet the threat of secularization. Less than seven months after its formation, the commission published its first statement in the church’s weekly newspaper, The New Outlook. It affirmed the importance of the “courageous application of the principles of the Christian gospel to the political, social and economic conditions of the world” but emphasized “that such an application cannot be made without the powerful and wide-spread emergence of spiritual life. The source is in God; the initiative is with Him; only in Him is there spiritual power adequate to the demand.”⁵¹ The spiritual dimensions of faith were being ignored by many within the church, so clergy and congregations alike were called to re-focus on the nature of the church’s distinctive message to the world.

The commission’s early work was also stimulated by the growing popularity of the Japanese evangelist Toyohiko Kagawa. United Church proponents of this endeavor, such as Richard Roberts and Jesse Arnup, sought to emulate Kagawa’s campaign to win a million souls for Christ in their native country and believed his call for Christianity to return its attention to God and God’s redemptive work in Christ would also be met with great enthusiasm in Canada. A successful national tour for Kagawa was organized in 1931, but the movement soon disappeared.⁵² However, the

⁵⁰Report of the Sessional Committee on Evangelism, “I Am the Bread of Life”, BESS Sixth Annual Meeting Minutes, 1931, 13.

⁵¹“The Christward Movement,” The New Outlook, 18 November 1931, 1101.

⁵²Robert Wright, A World Mission: Canadian Protestantism and the Quest for a New International Order, 1918-1939 (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991), 178-196, offers a detailed discussion of the impact of Kagawa on Canada.

message that the church must develop a more basic and practical understanding of religion was reflected in the commission's work.

Frequent public statements by commission members continually emphasized the need for the United Church to focus attention on the central themes of the Christian faith. Richard Roberts asserted "that the most pressing need of men to-day is to hear the Word of God in Jesus Christ, to be brought face to face with the majesty of the Divine Purpose, the splendor of the gifts of God through Jesus Christ, and the glory of the task to which we are in these days called."⁵³ Pidgeon similarly stressed the necessity of preaching "the central truths of salvation."⁵⁴ He contended that the proclamation of "the fundamental relationships between the soul and God" would "bring untold blessings to the Church" and attract many newcomers to the church. However, he recognized that conversion was not an adequate end in itself. "From the starting point of conversion we must go on to the fulfillment of the will of Christ in our lives" and live as responsible Christians in the world.⁵⁵ Pidgeon declared that "God has already entrusted to the members of our Church all that is necessary for the work of His Kingdom in the fields for which we are responsible: the wealth, the learning, the messengers, the message and the power behind the message." If people were touched by God's spirit "all would become available and the note of victory would re-enter our Church's heart."⁵⁶

⁵³Richard Roberts, "To the Ministers of The United Church," The New Outlook, 20 January 1932, 55.

⁵⁴George Pidgeon, "Canada's Kingdom of God Movement. III. The Conditions of Spiritual Advancement," The New Outlook, 3 June 1931, 514.

⁵⁵George Pidgeon, "The Kingdom of God Movement in Canada," The New Outlook, 18 November 1931, 1097.

⁵⁶George Pidgeon, "Canada's Kingdom of God Movement. II. The Church's Faith," The New Outlook, 27 May 1931, 504.

These sentiments were shared by board secretaries and members. At the board's 1934 annual meeting, chair J. J. Coulter challenged the United Church to place additional attention on these issues:

I do not think our great Church is taking her full and proper place in Evangelistic leadership. History shows that it is not necessary to preach untenable theories and doctrines in order to exercise a mighty evangelistic influence. I shall not be fully satisfied unless our Church is able to challenge hardened sinners to repentance, and win them to a vital new experience. Less privileged people than we are doing this under our eyes. One is fascinated by the prospect of raising our children from the cradle, in the love of Christ. That demands devoted and understanding Christian parents. These are not the majority or average. Hundreds of thousands of children never go to Church or Sunday School. Compelling evangelism appears to be the hope for less-favored folks. The Church expects us to lead in this. Let us add an increased diligence to the primary tasks of the Church.⁵⁷

The importance of re-focusing the church's attention on God was central to the Commission's final report, presented at the 1934 General Council in Kingston, Ontario. It defined evangelism as "a powerful interest in human redemption as this is seen in the crisis of personal experience," and it said evangelism involved "the presentation of the Gospel with the express object of securing the acceptance of the message whether the Gospel be conceived as Good News about God, or as a new law for the hearer."⁵⁸ It emphasized that Jesus and his followers had both proclaimed and lived the gospel, and humanity was invited to follow them in living similar lives of faithful obedience. The Church was to proclaim the gospel in ways which were fresh and relevant to modern people and abandon a rigid and dogmatic type of emotionalism. Preachers were therefore to return to the "permanent elements" of the gospel and affirm "that ruling the universe is One whose attitude to men can be seen in the attitude of Jesus." They were to emphasize that those who accepted God's will as the law of life would receive the strength of the Holy Spirit to become disciples.

⁵⁷Chairman's Address, Minutes of the Ninth Annual Meeting, Board of Evangelism and Social Service, April 5, 1934, God - Eternal and Contemporary, BESS Ninth Annual Meeting Minutes, 1934, 7.

⁵⁸"Evangelism," Record of Proceedings, 1934 General Council, 253.

All followers of Jesus were united in common kinship to God “so that race and language, personal ability and private property ceased to be regarded as existing for private advantage, being rather given by God for the welfare of the new society.” Christians were therefore to boldly affirm that Jesus’ life would be the standard for future social organization.⁵⁹

The report concluded by urging that evangelism be promoted through Christian fellowship, preaching, personal interviews, and personal testimony. Such work, it noted, was essential “so that we can effectively resist the emphasis on possession of riches as attesting human worth, the vainglory and swagger in national achievement now displacing a humility which accepts God’s mission for our nation, and the arrogant retention of privilege and power both by the class and by the race.” These tendencies which are “approved and glorified” by society must “be dethroned by Christian life, lest our society perish within the near future.”⁶⁰

The Commission on Evangelism made the United Church increasingly aware of the need for religious renewal. As church leaders focused their time and energy on this question, they became increasingly aware of other approaches to spiritual transformation.

The Oxford Group

At the same time as the United Church's Commission on Evangelism was at work, Canada was introduced to the Oxford Group. Begun in England and spearheaded by Frank Buchman, its stated goal was to further the dream of world betterment through personal regeneration. A lay movement which featured small “house meetings” where committed lay people shared personal testimonials of their faith with others, the Oxford Group worked to spread the Christian message to those

⁵⁹ Ibid., 256.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 261-262.

who had become disillusioned with organized religion. The group required all participants to publicly confess their sins before a group of peers as a way of surrendering themselves to God's will, and stressed adherence to the absolute values of purity, unselfishness, honesty and love.⁶¹ As the mind of the United Church was sharply divided on the Oxford Group, members of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service struggled to develop a coherent and acceptable response to the movement.

The active support of George Pidgeon made the Oxford Group a force to be reckoned with in the United Church. As the denomination's first moderator, Pidgeon was a widely respected and venerated figure who believed the movement would help to counter the spiritual malaise of the land and provide a needed stimulus for religious revival in the country.⁶² "The depression had turned the hearts of men away from earthly things, and had led them to seek realities which the changes of time could not touch," Pidgeon reported. "But the coming of the Oxford Group gave it a new definiteness and direction and brought a message and a method which kindled the fire."⁶³

Supporters of the Oxford Group believed it offered three particular benefits to Canadian Christianity. First, the group's focus on small gatherings or "house meetings" provided an opportunity for individuals to engage in the type of prayer and discussion necessary for religious renewal. Pidgeon believed that many people were experiencing a serious spiritual crises, and he testified that the Oxford Group helped people strengthen their faith and deepen their levels of insight and commitment.

⁶¹ A discussion of the Oxford Group can be found in Marshall, Secularizing the Faith, 205-227.

⁶² Ian M. Manson, "Religious Revival and Social Transformation: George Pidgeon and the United Church of Canada in the 1930s," Toronto Journal of Theology 12 (Fall 1996): 213-221, focuses on Pidgeon's role in this movement.

⁶³ George Pidgeon, "The Oxford Group in Toronto," typescript article submitted to Religion and Life, 27 February 1933, George Pidgeon Papers, Box 18, File 321, 2.

“Some of the changes among our people have been truly remarkable,” he reported to his friend Hugh Kerr of Pittsburgh’s Shadyside Presbyterian Church. “We have leaders in the church who are active in seeking to win others to the life of Christ and are meeting with success.” In his experience, the Oxford Group was “a vital force for which I am profoundly thankful.”⁶⁴

Secondly, the group's emphasis on personal testimony and public confession of sin was seen as essential to furthering the church's evangelistic work. Pidgeon believed it represented a genuine working of God's Spirit which was analogous to the religious revivals stimulated by Stephen and his followers in the Book of Acts. House meetings were Biblical and, through personal invitations to these meetings and meaningful religious experiences, newcomers could be encouraged to find faith. After participating in one meeting, Pidgeon testified, “I have never seen as many lives changed and Christians lifted into joyous experience of the grace of God as I have here in the last few weeks.” In his view, the movement was “penetrating our church’s entire work” and he was “profoundly convinced that the work is of God.”⁶⁵

Finally, Pidgeon believed that this movement would provide a firmer grounding for the church's moral and social reform work. In a letter to General Council secretary T. Albert Moore, he lamented that many preachers “have lost sight of the fact that Social Reform can rise only out of spiritual quickening - a new relation between the individual and God. Spiritual revival has been the mother of Social Reform in all the generations past and would be the driving force in that movement that we need today.”⁶⁶ In his view, the Oxford Group could help to

⁶⁴George Pidgeon to Hugh T. Kerr, 26 October 1933, George Pidgeon Papers, Box 23, File 406.

⁶⁵George Pidgeon to J. M. Shaw, 11 March 1933, George Pidgeon Papers, Box 23, File 403.

⁶⁶George Pidgeon to T. Albert Moore, 28 November 1935, George Pidgeon Papers, Box 21, File 357.

provide the religious grounding which some supporters of the social gospel were lacking.

However, a number of prominent members of the United Church were critical of Pidgeon's support of the Oxford Group and clearly uncomfortable with particular aspects of the movement. Ernest Thomas urged Principal J. G. Brown of Vancouver to be wary of Pidgeon when he visited that city:

Do not imagine that you are getting the George Pidgeon which we have known. He is changed - terribly changed. He now leads most persistently a faction and leaves us to do the work of the United Church without him. I dread his visit to Vancouver - and I speak for others here . . . he has dropped his old best and closest friends and gives himself to the new faction.⁶⁷

Richard Roberts of Toronto's Sherbourne Street United Church also criticized the group because of its assumption that individuals must undergo a particular process of group experience in order to experience salvation. "In the public exposition of the principles of the group, the chief insistence has been upon what we have to do; while the chief insistence of the New Testament is upon what God has done," Roberts wrote. Because of this belief, the group held that "it is essential that confession should be made, not only to God but to another person." While Roberts admitted that confession was undeniably important, God had "no flat rule in dealing with men in this region or in any other."⁶⁸ He especially objected to the group's contention that engagement in a particular process was requisite to the experience of salvation. But the most outspoken critic of the Oxford Group was the editor of The New Outlook, W. B. Creighton. In a December 21, 1932 editorial, he called one meeting of the group which he attended "the most unblushing piece of exhibitionism we had ever seen." He criticized the movement as "objectionable and dangerous" and referred to

⁶⁷Quoted in Phyllis D. Airhart, "Christian Socialism and the Legacy of Revivalism in the 1930s," in A Long and Faithful March: 'Towards the Christian Revolution' 1930s/1980s, ed. Harold Wells and Roger Hutchinson (Toronto: The United Church Publishing House, 1989), 36.

⁶⁸Richard Roberts, "The Oxford Group and Ourselves," The New Outlook, 28 December 1932, 1211.

his experience at one meeting where ministers shared intimate sexual details with one another as being “one of the hideous memories of a lifetime.”⁶⁹ Creighton recruited a wide assortment of professionals to offer similar critiques of the movement, and the magazine’s campaign against the Oxford Group did much to discredit it within the church.⁷⁰

In the midst of such conflicting views, the board was frequently asked to offer a formal opinion about the Oxford Group. Initially, D. N. McLachlan commended the work of the group to Toronto area clergy. In December 1932 he sent them itineraries, letters of endorsement, and invitations to an opening reception being held at the city’s exclusive King Edward hotel. He noted that the “visit of the Oxford Group to Toronto at this time appears Providential” and encouraged his colleagues to join the organizers “in their great desire and earnest prayer that your church and indeed all our churches in the city may share richly in the blessing that we anticipate and which we trust will be similar to that which has come to other cities through the visit of the Oxford Group.”⁷¹ However, after the Oxford Group’s meetings in Toronto, McLachlan’s enthusiasm for the movement was more muted. In January 1933, he circulated a draft statement of the movement that attempted to present the church with a “simple, frank statement respecting the Oxford Group movement, as it revealed itself during the Toronto Mission.”⁷² It was far from a ringing endorsement.

The statement interpreted the Oxford Group as one response to “an increasing hunger of the spirit of man for the satisfaction which can be found only in a life

⁶⁹“The Oxford Group,” editorial in The New Outlook, 21 December 1932, 1184.

⁷⁰ George Pidgeon, “The Oxford Group in Toronto,” typescript article prepared for Religion in Life, February 1933, George Pidgeon Papers, Box 18, File 321, 3.

⁷¹ D. N. McLachlan to The United Church Ministers in Toronto and Suburbs, 1 December 1932, George Pidgeon Papers, Box 23, File 400.

⁷² D. N. McLachlan statement on the Oxford Group, attached to correspondence to George Pidgeon, 3 January 1933, George Pidgeon Papers, Box 23, File 401, 2.

which shares the thought and purpose of God.”⁷³ The Toronto experience showed that some United Church clergy appeared to have been profoundly moved by the event. “Many Ministers and others in contact with members of the Group, experienced a glow and release which brought radiant joy and for the time, marked ethical change,” McLachlan noted. “Rarely have the Ministers of this community been so completely stirred to deep heart searching. Many feuds were openly settled, and alienations long endured, brought to an end.”⁷⁴

However, McLachlan was troubled by several aspects of the Oxford Group. He noted that all meetings featured “a long succession of testimonies given of lives changed under the influence of the Group” but that sermons, scripture readings and hymns had no place in their gatherings.⁷⁵ While the group emphasized the importance of every person becoming more honest, pure, unselfish, and loving, there was “no hint of any implication of ethical change in one's corporate relations in society.”⁷⁶ Furthermore, the group was “avowedly directed to the well-to-do class,” and McLachlan wondered if “the message given to them is that which Jesus would have them receive.”⁷⁷ He also noted the practice of encouraging people to publicly confess their personal sins had been “forbidden quite early in the history of the Church, as being not for edification.”⁷⁸ Finally, McLachlan was greatly disturbed by the group's belief that every thought and feeling that someone experienced in times of quiet meditation were messages from God. “To lead people to think that every subjective impulse expressed in a 'quiet time' is the voice of God may, and does have

⁷³ Ibid., 1.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 3-4.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 4.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 5.

regrettable results," he warned. While the group helpfully reminded the United Church "that God reaches the spirits of men less easily in moments of clamorous entreaty, than in times when the prepared spirit stands silent and receptive before God," such changes "do not need to await the coming of the Group."⁷⁹

As the belief that the Oxford Group would stimulate the desired religious revival waned, the board explored alternative ways of enlivening the church. In particular, it focused on the possible advantages of cooperating with other denominations in renewing the spiritual lives of Canadian Christians, and made a concerted effort to work with other like-minded Protestants in achieving this goal.

The Joint Committee for the Evangelization of Canadian Life

In 1930, the Board of Evangelism and Social Service directed D. N. McLachlan and George Pidgeon to approach leaders of other Protestant churches about establishing an ecumenical organization to cooperate in facilitating religious renewal within Canada. This overture met with a favorable response, and the Joint Committee for the Evangelization of Canadian Life was officially constituted in 1932. As McLachlan and Pidgeon explained, this organization "means the concentration of the Church of Christ in Canada on one supreme object - touching with the Spirit of Jesus every phase of our life - individual, national and religious."⁸⁰ The committee was eventually endorsed by the United, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches, the Church of England, Disciples of Christ, Salvation Army, Society of Friends, and YMCA.

The supporters of this venture shared several common assumptions. They believed that "genuine repentance" for "past and present sins, failures, mistakes and

⁷⁹ Ibid., 6.

⁸⁰ "The Evangelization of Canadian Life," memorandum prepared by George Pidgeon and D. N. McLachlan, 4 May 1932, Board of Evangelism and Social Service Papers, Box 2, File 4.

inefficiency” was required before any real spiritual transformation could occur, and that regular prayer was necessary. The churches were urged to undertake a fresh study “of the nature and sovereignty of God” the meaning of Christ’s incarnation and atonement, the significance of Christ’s resurrection, and the nature of Jesus’ “reign as King.” All Christians were encouraged “to place first things first in our Church and individual life, to press forward to a deeper sense of our high calling in Christ Jesus . . . and to recognize and develop an ever-deepening sense of the supremacy of the spiritual in our Church, our National and our individual life.” Finally, the church was urged to respond to Christ’s “insistent call to evangelism, to bring home to each individual heart and life the Gospel of the Kingdom” and thus “enthroned Christ as King and to apply His teaching in our own lives, our homes, our churches, our communities, our politics, our business, our industry, our social life.”⁸¹ Through these injunctions, the committee affirmed that attention must be re-focused on these basic elements of Christianity in order to effectively address the spiritual and social malaise of the time. It encouraged all Canadian churches to turn their attention to the essentials of Christianity and use this re-invigorated religion to effectively mold and shape society.

The strategies proposed by the committee to achieve these ends were varied. Worship resources for ministers were issued that contained suggestions for sermon series designed to bring people to conversion and renewed faith. Ministerial retreats where clergy could meet for prayer were sponsored by the committee. Ecumenical services were encouraged. Devotional literature was promoted, and articles appeared in the denominational press which stressed the importance of personal prayer, worship within the home, and regular attendance at Sunday services. The committee also sponsored a series of successful interdenominational services in several major Canadian cities. For example, over 15,000 worshippers filled Toronto’s Maple Leaf

⁸¹Ibid., 2.

Gardens for a "Service of Witness" and another 4,000 were turned away. Leadership was provided by United Church, Presbyterian, Salvation Army, Baptist, Russian Orthodox, and Anglican representatives. United Church moderator Richard Roberts preached, and this service featured a procession of 900 clergy and a choir of 2,000. Similar events were held in St. John, Halifax, Winnipeg, Regina, Prince Albert, London, Hamilton, and Guelph.

However, the Joint Committee's initiatives had only limited impact. The organization was composed entirely of volunteers who were busy with other endeavors. Its leaders had neither the time, energy nor resources to sustain an effective and coordinated national campaign. Since most member churches were still primarily concerned with launching specific denominational initiatives, materials developed by the Joint Committee merely served to supplement existing resources rather than becoming the focus for new initiatives.

By 1935, it was clear that the work of the Joint Committee was fading, and steps were taken to re-organize. The participating churches appointed official representatives with the authority to speak on behalf of their constituencies. They established a central finance committee, and appointed a small group to arrange for a series of meetings throughout Canada and find good provincial leaders to promote the committee's work throughout the country. But such efforts proved futile, since the committee lacked full-time leadership and a clear mandate from participating churches.

A Return To Social Evangelism

In the wake of the Report of the Commission on Evangelism, the appearance of the Oxford Group, and the activities of the Joint Committee for the Evangelization of Canadian Life, members and staff of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service began to assert that the church required a more comprehensive understanding of

evangelism in order to meet the spiritual needs of the country. Reporting from western Canada, Hugh Dobson noted the churches were “still in deep need of revived life” and that a new focus was needed.⁸² By the mid-1930s, the board began to assert that any attempt at spiritual renewal must explicitly relate the gospel to the ethical dimensions of life. D. N. McLachlan believed that some of those who had yearned for a religious revival had frequently forgotten to relate faith to questions of how to live as disciples of Christ in the world. “To have faith in God, as religious man understands faith, does not simply mean to believe that God exists,” he stated in 1934. “It means to act in ways that are consistent with that belief; not simply to trust, but to prove one's trust in obedience.”⁸³ This was true of the evangelical revival in England, and McLachlan believed it could also be true for Canada.

Another proponent of this view was board member John Line of Toronto's Victoria University. A member of the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order, Line had long emphasized the gospel's social dimensions. However, in a paper delivered at the board's 1935 annual meeting, he suggested that any meaningful social transformation must be rooted in a spiritual revolution that leads individuals and communities to new understandings of God. “The social responsibility of Christianity rests on its spiritual truth,” he contended. Sadly, the church had failed to develop a coherent understanding of God, and thus had struggled to forge a common response to Canada's social and economic ills. Such a situation was not new. Many social problems had been caused by false teachings about God and human life, and these erroneous understandings had played a large part “in making our economic system what it is.” They had also permeated the church and corrupted its views of faith. “Another teaching has prompted attitudes and estimates of life-ends that could have had no place amongst us had we possessed the rudiments of what Jesus lived,

⁸²Hugh Dobson Annual Report, God - Eternal and Contemporary, 1934, 30.

⁸³D. N. McLachlan Annual Report, God - Eternal and Contemporary, 1934, 27.

fulfilled and taught," Line stated. Therefore, the church needed to educate its membership so that everyone would "become Christian, in our conception of God." Only then would the task of social reconstruction become the work of the people. It was only "through the spiritual truth of Christianity that we come to her social responsibility," Line contended. "We can't come in any other way." A new religious revival was required to make that happen.⁸⁴

Other board members began to echo similar sentiments. In 1935, Ernest Thomas noted that the term evangelism emphasized "the urgency of activity, directly concerned with the definite enlistment of persons in the mission of Jesus and in the organization of a Christian society, for which active fellowship in the Church is a major preparation." He asserted that "in the thought and preaching of Jesus forgiveness of sins and assurance of eternal life - the main objectives in traditional evangelism - are regarded as by-products of one's dedication to the Kingdom of God found in a concrete society which embodies the will of God."⁸⁵ In 1937, R.B.Y. Scott of Montreal also emphasized these themes in an address to the board's annual meeting on "The Evangel of God." Here Scott expressed his belief that "the old Gospel our fathers knew" proclaimed God's promise "of release to captives and recovery of sight to the blind" and emphasized "the message of the living, transforming power of the Divine life" that called people to a radical new way of living.⁸⁶ Scott also asserted that the gospel's eschatological dimensions constantly reminded people that life without God is empty and meaningless unless people repent, and embrace God anew. He reminded the board that the Biblical word

⁸⁴John Line, "The Significance of the Report of the Commission on the Christianization of the Social Order," "Time Marches On", BESS Tenth Annual Meeting Minutes, 1935, 26.

⁸⁵Ernest Thomas, "Ten Years of Evangelism and Social Service," The New Outlook, 1 May 1935, 445.

⁸⁶R.B.Y. Scott, "The Evangel of God," Play the Man, BESS Twelfth Annual Report, 1937, 38.

“euaggelion” really referred to “a startling, momentous announcement.” With it, Biblical writers proclaim “that human history is at a critical moment because the time is fulfilled, and history stands in sight of the End.” Therefore, it “is the startling news that man's self-will and self-sufficiency, his urge to master and to possess, run counter to a Divine sovereignty.”⁸⁷ In fact, God is offering the world another chance at a newer, richer, and more fulfilling life:

The Evangel is that God is already at work in the turmoil of our time, using refractory human material. It is the news that what man in his sin and self-sufficiency cannot do, God is waiting to do through those who will discern His presence, surrender to His forgiveness and believe in His creative power. This is a historic moment, and we must choose who we shall serve.

Such a faith, Scott maintained, offered a word of hope to a world that was experiencing great despair. “We live by hope; hope in God which follows on repentance and faith,” Scott concluded. “In committing ourselves to the Kingdom that is in and beyond history, we shall find the Kingdom that is within.”⁸⁸

Professor J. M. Shaw of Queen’s University in Kingston also shared this view. A report he presented to the board's 1935 annual meeting affirmed that the Biblical message “of good news about God” was frequently a “prophetic message of a righteous God ceaselessly working in the affairs of men and nations to bring into being a moral order wherein He should reign and His will be done.” Therefore, Shaw urged the board to recognize that accepting the gospel “necessarily involves the reorganization of life, individual and social, in terms not of self-interest, but of love and brotherhood.” Through the promotion of this type of evangelism, Shaw's committee believed that Christians could “realize their social responsibility for the accomplishment of a more Christian order.”⁸⁹

⁸⁷Ibid., 40.

⁸⁸Ibid., 42.

⁸⁹Report of the Sessional Committee on Evangelism, Minutes of the Tenth Annual Meeting of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service, “Time Marches On”, 1935, 14.

J. R. Mutchmor also echoed these sentiments. A United Church minister from Winnipeg who joined the board staff in 1936 and became secretary of the board upon D. N. McLachlan's retirement in 1938, Mutchmor was a graduate of Toronto's Knox College and Union Theological Seminary in New York, and became a leading exponent of this type of social evangelism.⁹⁰ "To find the Gospel's cutting edge and make it a spiritual purge that cleanses daily life of its muck and filth is a primary task" of the church, he wrote in 1938. "Thus must the purging evangelism of the prophets on the one hand denounce social evils and individual sins, and on the other hand lift up the great ideal, 'Let justice run down as waters and righteousness as a mighty stream.'"⁹¹ The church must uphold the "shattering quality of the gospel" and remind the world that God, by direct action, swept aside those "whose ears are too filled with the noise and jargon of this world." Indeed, "Jesus proclaimed such a gospel" and the United Church thus recognized "no state as its overlord" and was "untrammelled by authority."⁹²

Hugh Dobson also challenged the church to emphasize the relationship between personal faith and social life. "Are we heralding the Kingdom of God or the kingdom of man?" he asked readers of The New Outlook in 1938. "Have we, the ministry and lay leaders of the Church, such an insight into the nature of reality that we can make clear the way to triumph over demonic living and such conditions as war, unemployment, poverty, disease, disruption of family life, ignorance, selfishness, despair and indifference?" Dobson affirmed that "these times demand

⁹⁰Ian Manson, "The Oft-Quoted, Frequently Embattled, Reverend Dr. James R. Mutchmor," Touchstone 8 (January 1990), 44-53, provides an overview of Mutchmor's life and career.

⁹¹J. R. Mutchmor, "Evangelism for this Generation," The New Outlook, 9 September 1938, 837.

⁹²Ibid.

decisions for Christ and the thorough training for those admitted to the Church for effective witness for God and His coming Kingdom."⁹⁸

Conclusion

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the Board of Evangelism and Social Service believed that the task of nurturing a more spiritually energetic and enthusiastic church was essential to stemming the tide of secularization in Canadian society. Through its work on the Commission on Evangelism and Joint Committee for the Evangelization of Canadian Life, and in its response to the Oxford Group, the board explored a variety of strategies and ways to re-invigorate the United Church. While these efforts stimulated much thought and action, they did not adequately establish the connection between the personal and social aspects of life that had been the hallmarks of much United Church theology. In the end, an understanding of evangelism that directly linked the personal and social dimensions of life resonated most clearly with the board. It maintained that this approach to faith was capable of transforming Canadian society in new ways.

⁹⁸Hugh Dobson, "The Message and the Messenger," The New Outlook, 9 September 1938, 838.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SEARCH FOR A NEW ECONOMIC ORDER

As the Canadian economy experienced a massive upheaval during the 1930s, the United Church of Canada worked through its Board of Evangelism and Social Service to identify the causes of the depression and indicate some ways in which Canadian society could be transformed. Throughout this period, the board continually turned to the Bible to clarify its understanding of the type of human community that God desired for the world and develop a set of principles that could help solve the many problems facing the country. It believed the implementation of Christian teachings and principles could help create a society in which the realities of poverty and economic injustice would be alleviated, and that a nation founded on Christian rather than secular principles would be based on the principles of equality, cooperation, and communal responsibility.

By the 1930s, the board had refined its way of studying social questions through several earlier studies it had made of Canadian industry. However, its work during the depression differed in some significant ways from this earlier analysis. Church studies of the 1920s assumed the existing economic system to be essentially sound and that current problems could be alleviated if business and labour would cooperate, compromise and treat each other with dignity and respect. However, the depression shattered this consensus. While some church leaders still believed the existing economic order was essentially sound, others maintained the present crisis resulted from structural flaws within industrial capitalism and that systemic reform of the Canadian economy was required. During the 1930s, the United Church's studies of the social and economic order tried to reconcile these different understandings and determine how far the church could legitimately go in supporting specific economic and political initiatives. While many of the board's studies revealed no clear

consensus, by 1937 it presented a specific set of policy initiatives to the Rowell-Sirois Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations. Thus by the late 1930s, the board had advocated a range of ideas that would later become central features of the Canadian welfare state, and which were rooted in some clear beliefs about the type of world God hoped would be created on earth.

Early Studies on Industrial Relations

The decade following the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike saw the emergence of a concerted campaign against organized labour in Canada. Employers launched an intense drive to secure open shops, eliminate unionism, and lower labour costs. This assault on Canadian labour caused union membership to plummet by over one-third between 1919 and 1924, and Canadian unions to develop different strategies for survival. New labour organizations emerged in Canada and worker unrest increased.¹ The church was deeply troubled by these developments.

The first United Church General Council requested that the Board of Evangelism and Social Service study the question of industrial relations and prepare a statement on the "Christianization of Industry." The board responded by presenting the 1926 General Council with a document which assessed the relationship between Christianity and social questions, identified a number of current problems, and concluded with some guidelines for action.² It suggested that much of the existing conflict in industrial relations would end if both business and labour accepted and implemented several general principles. It called on both groups to recognize that God created all people equally, that every person was related to every other person

¹John Herd Thompson with Alan Seager, Canada 1922-1939: Decades of Discord (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), 140-141.

²Ted Reeve, "Institutionalizing the Social Passion: The United Church and the Welfare State" (Th.D. thesis, Toronto School of Theology, 1996), 109-112, discusses this report in more detail.

because of their common kinship with God, and that the “law of co-operation and mutual helpfulness” should therefore permeate all of life. It affirmed that human beings had greater worth than property, and contended that society should be more intent on meeting people’s basic needs than on slavishly adhering to a set of established economic laws. The report also maintained that the church was called “to transform the present organization wherever it fosters or demands for its operation a lower motive than Christianity sanctions.”³

The document then suggested that many existing social problems had resulted from society’s failure to follow these laws. The unequal distribution of wealth, the overt centralization of power “in the hands of a plutocratic minority,” the practice of making material wealth the standard of human values, long-standing class antagonisms, and the prevalence of irresponsible money management practices all violated Christian principles of conduct. However, no particular sector of society was entirely responsible for this situation. “All are to blame. Capital in many quarters has been held chiefly accountable, but it is questionable whether Capital is any more responsible than Management, Labor or Consumer.”⁴

The report concluded by acknowledging that the church was incapable of making specific recommendations about how Christian principles could be effectively applied in particular circumstances. This responsibility fell to those people “whom experience, special knowledge and engagement in such affairs has marked out and fitted for this duty.” While challenges such as unemployment and the tenuous relationship between labour and capital required further study, the report emphasized that current conditions could not be alleviated without widespread repentance and reception of “the new mind which the Kingdom of God demands.”⁵

³“The Christianizing of Industry,” Record of Proceedings, 1926 General Council, 88.

⁴Ibid., 89.

⁵Ibid., 89-90.

Recognizing that this complex situation required further analysis, the board established another committee in 1927 to conduct a more intensive survey of the state of industrial relations across Canada. Under the leadership of C. W. Gordon of Winnipeg, working groups were established in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal, and Sydney. Although this committee never issued an official report, the Winnipeg group, under Gordon's direction, conducted a number of interviews with representatives of both business and labor, and later produced a statement.⁶ This was forwarded to the 1928 General Council which, in turn, distributed it to every presbytery and congregation across Canada.⁷

The Winnipeg group's report began by clarifying the function of the church in relation to national industrial life. "The function of the Church is, first of all, to leaven the world with the spirit of Christ, to train the conscience, enlighten the minds, broaden and deepen the sympathies of those who are directly responsible for the extension and application of the principles of Christ in the affairs of the world," the document stated. This could be accomplished only by seeking "a clear definition of the principles of Jesus" and then applying these principles "not only to the individual in his personal relations, but to human society in its various forms of organized existence, and very especially in its industrial and social relations." The general principle underlying Christ's teaching was the "Golden Rule," and therefore the church's goal was "to secure the full acceptance of the Rule by the various parties in Industry." Business and labour alike needed to learn to cooperate with one another because "the recourse to class war, in any form, as a method of righting wrongs is wholly inconsistent with the principles of brotherhood," and it was the church's duty

⁶C. W. Gordon to Hugh Dobson, 2 February 1928, Dobson Papers, Box 18B, File G.

⁷Record of Proceedings, 1928 General Council, 271.

“to discover a better way of eliminating the wrongs in industrial life, and thus make class war unnecessary.”⁸

The report concluded with seven recommendations about how the church could help realize these objectives. It recommended that initiatives be designed to facilitate more cooperation between employers and employees, so that the rights of both parties could be protected. It called the church to support an eight-hour work-day, lobby for legislation that would ensure that workers received one day off per week, and endorse “the principle of a minimum wage, adequate to the support of the worker in comfort and decency.” Finally, the church was also urged to accept “the principle of Contributory Pensions, while recognizing the immediate need for Old Age Pensions as outlined by present Federal legislation.”⁹

While the 1928 General Council accepted this report only as a study document and did not ratify it, the next General Council adopted a statement which affirmed many of these recommendations. The 1930 General Council acknowledged “the obligation of the community to ensure an opportunity for employment of all its citizens” and that “this responsibility rests primarily on those charged with the organization of industry, both urban and rural.” However, the statement also suggested that “this responsibility must be more universally accepted by employers in the personal and collective capacities” and called upon all church members “who are in control of any group of workers so to order their operations.”¹⁰

These ideals were clearly echoed by board staff. In his report to the board’s 1927 annual meeting, D. N. McLachlan encouraged the church to strengthen its relationship with the labour movement, defend its interests, and help create a climate

⁸“Report of Conference Committee on the Church and Industrial Relations,” Minutes of the Fourth Manitoba Conference, 5-10 June 1928, 59.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁰Record of Proceedings, Fourth General Council, 1930, 55.

of industrial peace in Canada. At the same time as the Canadian state "has been growing more and more democratic, industry has become more and more autocratic," he contended. "Real democracy cannot be organized on the basis of class interest." McLachlan affirmed that the needs of working people must be taken seriously, and believed that the more equal distribution of wealth would be an essential element of this process. Furthermore, this problem was "not simply an economic, but a moral and religious one."¹¹

While these statements addressed the realities of the 1920s, a very different set of circumstances emerged during the 1930s. The economic and social upheaval of that decade posed a serious challenge to the United Church, as it did to all institutions. The church worked hard to analyze the causes of this crisis, and attempted to find some new and workable responses.

The Great Depression and The Commission on Industry

The 1930s were years of tremendous economic upheaval in Canada. Between 1928 and 1933, national unemployment rates rose from two per cent to over twenty-six per cent. Canadian per capita income decreased forty-eight per cent between 1928-29 and 1933.¹² A bushel of Number 1 Northern wheat which sold for \$1.03 in 1928 was worth only forty-seven cents per bushel in 1930, thirty-seven cents per bushel in 1931 and twenty-nine cents per bushel in 1932. Manufacturing production fell by a third between 1929 and 1932, while the combined national business investment of 1932, 1933, and 1934 was less than that of any one of the years between 1927 and 1929.¹³ Such stark statistics, however, cannot begin to tell

¹¹D. N. McLachlan Annual Report, "Thy Will Be Done", BESS Second Annual Meeting Minutes, 1927, 28.

¹²Thompson with Seager, Canada 1922-1939, 350, 351.

¹³Ibid., 195, 196.

the tale of misery and hardship which many Canadians endured. Canadian churches were thrust into the breach of trying to help people cope with these unexpected hardships.

Across the country, several conference meetings held in the spring of 1930 expressed a desire for more and better information about the nature of the burgeoning crisis. The Montreal and Ottawa Conference instructed each pastoral charge to conduct a survey of existing employment conditions to gather more information about the problem, and also called on the federal government to explore new ways of protecting Canadian workers and ensuring that business people received a just return on their investments.¹⁴ Manitoba Conference instructed its Committee on Evangelism and Social Service to make a "special study" of current employment practices in the province.¹⁵ Saskatchewan Conference resolved that unemployment was "a spiritual as well as an economic and social problem," so affirmed that the church had "a pressing responsibility to concern itself with this vital subject" and identify how "idleness and despair seriously undermine character."¹⁶

Board of Evangelism and Social Service staff also recognized the gravity of the situation. "In the prairie provinces and British Columbia there is no indication of abatement of the pressure of unemployment and poverty on a large scale during this summer and next winter," Hugh Dobson reported at the board's 1931 annual meeting. "The indication is that while many people, and some companies, will have incomes or dividends unaffected except by the greater value of the dollar, and while savings banks, insurance companies etc., will possibly show increase of provision against the future, there will be lower standards of living, increased poverty, and more

¹⁴ "Evangelism and Social Service Report," Record of Proceedings of Montreal and Ottawa Conference, 3-7 June 1930, 448-449.

¹⁵ Record of Proceedings of Manitoba Conference, 2-6 June 1930, 36.

¹⁶ Record of Proceedings of Saskatchewan Conference, 29 May-3 June 1930, 40-41.

unemployed during the coming twelve months, from April 1st, 1931.”¹⁷ He maintained that the church was well positioned to respond to this crisis. “Hard times - low prices for products, and unemployment - through their pressure upon life have created a revival of interest in social service, the ethical and social implications of Christianity, the meaning of the Gospel of the coming Kingdom, of the forgiveness of sins, and of saving grace as Jesus proclaimed it,” he said. “There has been a remarkable stimulation to serious thinking on the most vital aspects of life.”¹⁸ However, it soon became apparent that not everyone in the church shared this concern, and that many church members were not interested in taking these issues seriously. D. N. McLachlan lamented that in many circles

one of the chief characteristics in Church life, at the present time, is the replacement of practical ethical emphasis, which distinguished pre-war days, by a strongly mystical emphasis. Books on the ‘Social gospel’ have been largely set aside in favor of manuals of devotion, books on applied psychology and mental hygiene. The effort which formerly went into social service, now goes into the esthetic enrichment of the public service of worship. To this end the remodeling of churches goes steadily on. All this may be necessary before the renewal of social action comes. But, in the meantime, the emphasis throughout the Church is not so much on the ethical implications of the New Testament.¹⁹

The board responded to the deepening crisis by initiating a comprehensive study of the social and economic circumstances which had resulted in so much unemployment. The board’s 1931 annual meeting authorized its sub-executive to “form a Commission of competent persons to continue the preparation of a report on Industrial Relations, and present the same to the next meeting of this Board for its consideration.”²⁰ In June of that year, the sub-executive appointed J. W. Macmillan, John Line, H. M. Cassidy, John Coburn, Ernest Thomas, D. N. McLachlan, W. B.

¹⁷Hugh Dobson Annual Report, “I Am the Bread of Life”, BESS Sixth Annual Meeting Minutes, 1931, 21.

¹⁸Ibid., 20.

¹⁹D. N. McLachlan Annual Report, “Revive Thy Work”, BESS Fifth Annual Meeting Minutes, 1930, 18.

²⁰“I Am The Bread of Life”, 1931, 9.

Smith, Winnifred Thomas, W. G. Good, James Watt, Thomas Bradshaw, Murray Brooks, and A. W. Crawford to the commission.²¹ Macmillan and Line were ordained United Church ministers who taught sociology and religious studies, respectively, at Victoria University, while Cassidy taught in the Social Sciences Department of the University of Toronto. Coburn, Thomas, and McLachlan were staff members of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service. Winnifred Thomas worked with the United Church's Inter-Board Committee of Women Workers, and W. B. Smith was a United Church minister in Islington, Ontario. James Watt was the President of the Toronto Labour Council, while A. W. Crawford worked as Ontario's Deputy Minister of Labour.

As the commission began its work, several of its members presented discussion papers that emphasized a number of general points. For example, John Line urged his colleagues to focus on developing some basic principles from Jesus' teaching that could then be applied to existing social and economic conditions. He noted that the Christian religion "is the outgrowth of the work and import upon the world of Jesus of Nazareth, and it is primarily in His teaching that we discover the ideal conception which it is the task of the Church to make actual throughout human life." Line asserted that Jesus initiated "a transformation that would beget an order of things in which Love and Love alone would rule, and men in their associated life and labour would be brothers, as of one household."²² W. B. Smith also affirmed that Jesus' principles and spirit should "characterize the relationships which men sustain

²¹ Minutes of the Sub-Executive of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service, 19 June 1931, "In Quietness and in Confidence Shall Be Your Strength," BESS Seventh Annual Meeting Minutes, 1932, 49.

²²John Line, "The Church and Industry," Typescript statement dated 5 January 1932, Board of Evangelism and Social Service Papers, Box 2, File 12, 1.

to their fellowmen in the home and family, recreation and business, and in the discharge of their civic, national and international responsibilities.”²³

Secondly, commission members agreed that Christ’s teachings affirmed that all people were equal in God’s sight. Line highlighted the centrality of “Jesus’ doctrine of ultimate human worth” which held that “human beings simply as human are final in this reckoning” and that the interests of all institutions were subservient to basic human need.²⁴ J. W. Macmillan similarly asserted that “the test of any economic order is whether or not it provides for the reasonable physical needs of its human population and leaves them free to achieve for themselves the higher intellectual, moral and spiritual centre they may desire.”²⁵ W. C. Good also agreed that Christianity held that industry “should be for the service of mankind generally rather than for the profit of the few.”²⁶

Third, there was unanimous agreement that the present economic system came nowhere close to meeting these ideals. Ernest Thomas suggested the present social crisis was due in part to three modern phenomena: the rise of nationalism, changes in the conception of property, and changes in the idea and function of the state. By emphasizing individual initiative and competition above all else, these understandings had done much to destroy the modern social fabric.²⁷ Cassidy explained how much of Canada’s existing wealth belonged to owners and investors rather than the labourers

²³W. B. Smith, “The Christianization of Industry: Tentative Statement,” Board of Evangelism and Social Service Papers, Box 2, File 12, 1.

²⁴John Line, “The Christianization of Industry,” Board of Evangelism and Social Service Papers, Box 2, File 12, 1-2.

²⁵Untitled discussion document prepared by J. W. MacMillan, 25 November 1931, Board of Evangelism and Social Service Papers, Box 2, File 12, 1.

²⁶W. C. Good, “Memorandum on Christianity and Industry for Submission to the Committee Appointed by the United Church of Canada, 1931,” 25 November 1931, Board of Evangelism and Social Service Papers, Box 2, File 12, 1.

²⁷Ernest Thomas, “The Commission on Industry,” Board of Evangelism and Social Service Papers, Box 2, File 12, 1.

and farmers who produced most of the nation's resources. He believed that "the business system, supplemented or limited, as the case may be, by such government controls as exist, is at present quite inadequate to organize the productive power of the Dominion in the interests of the great mass of citizens."²⁸ W. B. Smith agreed that modern society had "lamentably failed" to properly distribute existing wealth and that there really "is more than enough being produced to meet the needs of all."²⁹ J. W. Macmillan also affirmed that wealth was not shared on any reasonable basis. In his view, the present system "fosters a spirit of greed which displays itself most clearly in the possessing classes." The economic order was becoming increasingly unstable, and competition was becoming so strong that, in modern times, "nothing but the destruction of the competitor brings peace."³⁰

However, commission member Winnifred Thomas noted that the commission was divided as to whether it was "the right and duty of the Church to give leadership in the definite application of Christian principles to the economic problems of today" or whether it was "the function of the Church merely to enunciate general principles."³¹ Several members of the commission believed that some specific recommendations should be made. Good urged that the example of the co-operative movement be closely studied, especially its method of gradually constructing "within the framework of the old, a new social order based upon the idea of self-help in mutual association."³² Smith suggested the report recommend that unnecessary competition be regulated, adequate remuneration be given to workers, and workers be

²⁸H. M. Cassidy, "Memorandum for use of Commission on Industry," Board of Evangelism and Social Service Papers, Box 2, File 12, 3.

²⁹Smith, "The Christianization of Industry," 2.

³⁰Macmillan, untitled discussion paper, 1.

³¹Winnifred Thomas, "I Should Hope," memorandum for the Commission on Industry, November 25th, 1931, 1.

³²Good, "Memorandum," 3.

encouraged to join unions.³³ Line similarly concluded “that the task of the Church is to use her means of instruction and persuasion, to direct the spiritual forces she has at command, to bring about, within the conditions of earthly existence, the ordering of activity in the economic as every realm, that will establish in Industry and wherever men toil together those relations and modes of mutual action that alone can claim the sanction of Christ.”³⁴

However, others rejected the push to make specific recommendations. J. W. Macmillan was content to state that wealthy and powerful citizens had a responsibility to “find the way by which every honest, industrious and capable worker shall be able to provide for himself and his dependents, in security of employment, in sufficiency of income, and in enjoyment of reasonable leisure and comforts.”³⁵ D. N. McLachlan also counseled against trying to develop a set of specific economic policies. Instead, he maintained that the church could help to create a new social order by organizing local gatherings of workers and businessmen so they could meet and converse. As he told readers of The New Outlook:

It is doubtful if at this moment the Church can render more effective service than to organize groups containing representatives of different classes and interests. Such groups could be set up in Presbyteries and local congregations. From frank brotherly discussions, each group freely expressing its grievances, hopes or fears, an understanding more sympathetic, more intelligent, and consequently more reasonable would emerge. If in those groups the Church can provide the proper atmosphere - a family feeling - where those who have been embittered and those who have been misunderstood would come to believe that there are among those whom they previously feared or despised many who really care for and about them, long standing prejudices would be disarmed, misunderstandings disappear, thus baring a foundation upon which a structure more Christian and therefore more just would rapidly be constructed.³⁶

³³Smith, “Tentative Statement,” 3-4.

³⁴Line, “The Church and Industry,” 3.

³⁵Macmillan, untitled discussion paper, 2.

³⁶D. N. McLachlan, “The Church and the Industrial Crisis,” The New Outlook, 2 September 1931, 826.

McLachlan maintained that this practice would contribute “in no small measure to the larger industrial problem which affects not merely the employees and employed, but also the public whom industry should seek to serve.”³⁷

Because the commission was unable to develop a consensus on this matter, the board presented General Council with a document which offered a “general view of the problem as it confronts the Church at the present time” and that defined some norms that should guide the church’s response. It noted that the type of “evangelical” approach to social questions which had long characterized both Methodist and Presbyterian theology was no longer adequate to meet the contemporary situation. Evangelical Christianity had emphasized “personal salvation through right adjustment of the individual to God” while also stressing the centrality of a corresponding rule of conduct. The authors of this report acknowledged the long-standing influence of this approach, but contended that “this insistence on religion as essentially a ‘right personal adjustment’ was inadequate to properly face contemporary problems.” While evangelical Christianity had “taught men to trust God and for their own part to work hard, to be abstentious, thrifty and honest,” many people who faithfully followed this path now were “evicted from their homes and begging for a job while numerous employers found “their profits falling away and so must turn their men on the street to face destitution.”³⁸ In light of these realities, the report suggested the church must work actively “toward a holy communion achieved in this world according to God’s righteous purpose.” Jesus’ teachings emphasized the “principles of the worth of personality and the practice of love in all life’s interrelations,” and these “have a very plain social impact” because “the Kingdom of God conception can very readily be put into social terms.”³⁹

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

Ernest Thomas indicated that the commission's final report was vague because, in the time the commission was working, its members recognized that a different type of theology would be required to support the type of response that some of them urged.⁴⁰ The commission recognized that the vast majority of United Church people were still rooted in "the traditional evangelical type of Christianity" that had not emphasized "the collective life of our own age" and thus saw "little value in passing resolutions based on a different kind of Christianity." Therefore, its report called for "the wide-spread effort to promote such a conception of the Christian life that right attitude to industry and finance will spring from it quite naturally instead of being grafted on to it as at present."⁴¹

While the board's official report to General Council lacked the sharp analysis and specific suggestions that had marked the commission's deliberations, the United Church accepted the challenge that the 1932 Commission on Industry had presented. As the economic crisis of the 1930s deepened, the church gradually affirmed that a new theological analysis of the whole economic system was required.

The Commission on Christianizing the Social Order

The wide assortment of protest movements spawned by the crisis of the 1930s included the Social Credit party of William Aberhart elected in Alberta; the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation founded in 1931, and the League for Social Reconstruction constituted in January 1932. Within the United Church, the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order was established to mobilize those who believed that Christianity could make a constructive contribution to social

⁴⁰Ernest Thomas, "The General Council Makes Decisions," The New Outlook, 19 October 1932, 979.

⁴¹Ernest Thomas, "The General Council: An Inside View," The New Outlook, 12 October 1932, 946.

reconstruction.⁴² As FCSO members Eugene Forsey, King Gordon, and Eric Havelock were also active in both the League for Social Reconstruction and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, they strongly urged the United Church to officially endorse the view that some basic structural flaws existed within the existing socio-economic situation, and that these flaws must be corrected in advance of any economic recovery.⁴³

Such suggestions caused a great deal of controversy within the church. At the 1933 meeting of Toronto Conference, John Line presented a report that drew considerable press attention. It contended that "the application of the principles of Jesus to economic conditions would mean the end of the Capitalistic system" and that capital, "especially in those large-scale forms that are essential to the life of the whole people, should be owned and operated instead, not for private gain, but in the service of the general good." This could best be effected through "the socialization of Banks, Natural Resources, Transportation and other services, and Industries in so far as their operation under private ownership places undue power, over the subsistence of the people, in the hands of special groups."⁴⁴

Not surprisingly, many within the United Church disagreed with these initiatives. George Pidgeon, for example, vigorously opposed Line's report at the 1933 Toronto Conference. He contended that Conference had not been given adequate time to discuss the report and that, in any event, "declarations of this

⁴²On the FCSO, see the following: Roger C. Hutchinson, "The Fellowship for a Christian Social Order: A Social Ethical Analysis of a Christian Socialist Movement." (Th.D. thesis, Victoria University, 1975); Roger Hutchinson, "The Fellowship for a Christian Social Order: 1935-1945," in A Long and Faithful March: "Towards the Christian Revolution" 1930s/1980s, ed. Roger Hutchinson and Harold Wells (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1989), 17-29; and Roger Hutchinson, "Christianizing the Social Order: A Three Dimensional Task," Toronto Journal of Theology 12 (Fall 1996): 227-236.

⁴³Richard Allen, "Religion and Political Transformation in English Canada: The 1880s to the 1930s," in From Heaven Down to Earth: A Century of Chancellor's Lectures at Queen's Theological College, ed. Marguerite Van Die (Kingston: Queen's Theological College, 1992), 130.

⁴⁴Hutchinson, "The Fellowship for a Christian Social Order," 73-74.

character filled with generalization on debatable issues and with proposals the implications of which few of us understand are unworthy of a Church which accepts full responsibility for its utterances and their consequences.” Finally, Pidgeon added that “the Catholicity of the Church makes her broader than any movement, or movements, which seek to attain their ends by political means and that, therefore, the Church should not be asked to commit herself to even the apparent support of any political party.”⁴⁵

This debate between Line and Pidgeon illustrates something of the polarized climate in which the Commission on Christianizing the Social Order conducted its work. The United Church’s 1932 General Council authorized the Board of Evangelism and Social Service “to organize a Commission in which Christian men, expert in the fields of industry, finance, statecraft and church life” in order:

1. To ascertain what are the Christian standards and principles which affect or should govern the social order;
2. To discover how far current acceptances in these fields are consistent with these principles;
3. To inquire into the ways and means by which these principles may be applied to existing conditions;
4. To define those particular measures which must form the first steps toward a social order in keeping with the mind of Christ.⁴⁶

Following the General Council’s instructions, the board appointed a commission with Sir Robert Falconer, retired President of the University of Toronto, as chairman, and Walter T. Brown, Principal of Victoria University, as secretary.⁴⁷

⁴⁵George Pidgeon Papers, Box 15, File 274.

⁴⁶“Report of the Commission on Christianizing the Social Order,” Record of Proceedings, 1934 General Council, 235.

⁴⁷Reeve, “Institutionalizing the Social Passion,” 117-137, provides a detailed overview of the commission’s work. In addition, Marshall, Secularizing the Faith, 241-245, contains a short discussion of the commission’s findings.

The commission was composed of a central executive based in Toronto and a number of auxiliary groups from the various regions of Canada. The executive was responsible for initiating the work of the commission, assigning research topics, circulating drafts, and producing the final report. In addition to Falconer and Brown, the executive initially consisted of United Church pastors J. J. Coulter, W. H. Avison, Robert Laird, and Harold Toye, E. J. Urwick of the University of Toronto, Richard Davidson, John Line, John Dow, and J. Hugh Michael from Toronto's Emmanuel College, and Ernest Thomas and D. N. McLachlan from the board staff. They were later joined by board secretary John Coburn, United Church minister Richard Roberts, and University of Toronto academics H. M. Cassidy and Irene Biss. Members of the executive represented a wide range of viewpoints and included many of the United Church's best minds.

The commission focused its study on three sets of questions. The first assessed the most appropriate Biblical and theological basis for social reform by analyzing how various Biblical writers addressed the social and economic problems of their day. The second part of the report surveyed the nature of the contemporary social and economic crisis in Canada and identified the major issues facing Canadian society. Finally, the commission articulated the nature of the relationship between a Christian understanding of social reform and the contemporary situation.

Christian Standards and Teaching

The commission's study of the "Christian Standards for Social Organization" began in the spring of 1933 with the presentation of several scholarly papers which traced a variety of Biblical approaches to social questions. W. R. Taylor of the University of Toronto began by introducing the Old Testament theme that human history has a moral significance and is moving toward moral ends. He suggested that the people of Israel rejected the prevailing Greek view that human life "was just a

flux of unrelated happenings” for the viewpoint that “wars were waged, kingdoms rose and fell because Yahweh was ceaselessly at work in the affairs of men, in order to realize in the world a Divine purpose.” The prophets were especially vigilant in emphasizing “the obvious deduction that the state could know neither true religion nor social happiness unless both the practices of religion and the conditions of society reflect the mind of the Divine Personality who directs and gives unity to all life.”⁴⁸ Thus the prophets stressed the moral significance of history and God sought to impose a moral order on society.

John Dow’s analysis of the Gospels emphasized that Jesus refused to become a political activist bent on securing social and political reform. Rather, the point of Jesus’ ministry was to call humanity to enter into a new and full relationship with God. Jesus’ primary concern was to call people to repent and enter into a right relationship with God, Dow contended. Jesus did not focus his energy on helping individuals to secure a fair share of the world’s material possessions. Rather, he taught that humanity’s desire for material possessions could easily become a barrier to God. “Wealth and poverty are to be judged by whether they come between a man and God,” Dow said. “The poor are blessed because they are the better able to look to God only. Wealth is a peril because it draws the affections to mammon and chokes out intercourse with God.” Therefore, Dow believed that Jesus established “not so much a Social Order as a religious order.”⁴⁹

However, Dow acknowledged that the relationship between God and humanity had important social implications. Jesus also emphasized that God was the common parent of all people and that everyone was made in God’s image and was of high value. Thus he condemned whatever proved hurtful or restrictive to full human

⁴⁸W. R. Taylor, “The Social Teaching of the Old Testament,” typescript manuscript dated 17 February 1933, Papers of the Christian Social Order Commission, File 1, 3.

⁴⁹John Dow, “The Gospels,” typescript manuscript dated 17 March 1933, Papers of the Christian Social Order Commission, File 1, 2-3.

life, and affirmed that “persons come before profits” and protecting human interests was more important than ensuring property rights.⁵⁰ Jesus affirmed that if all people lived according to the two principles of love and service, they could learn to care for and serve other people as much as they cared for themselves. “The total effect of these laws of Love and Service is to put upon all men the obligation of sharing,” Dow concluded. “The obligation is not discharged by giving a tenth or a charitable dole but demands consideration for your brother men equal or superior to your own.”⁵¹

Dow’s New Testament colleague at Emmanuel College, J. Hugh Michael, then presented a paper on “The Social Teachings of St. Paul.” Michael offered an exegetical study of several passages from Paul’s letters to make three basic points. Portions of Romans revealed that, while Paul often taught that members of the church should submit to civil authority, his advice on ethical issues was usually offered in response to particular questions and was therefore difficult to universalize. Secondly, Paul was not primarily interested in questions about the use and distribution of earthly goods. While he often discussed the importance of charity, there was no sign “that the Apostle made an attempt to introduce into his missions anything of the nature of the Communism of which we read in the early part of the Acts of the Apostles.”⁵² For Paul, personal property was perfectly acceptable as long as it was consecrated to God and not used to injure someone else. Finally, his acceptance of the common social practice of slavery was indicative of his belief that “it was in the life of the Church that Paul saw the problems of society solved” for it was there that “free man and slave are on the level.”⁵³ Michael concluded that Paul was not interested in

⁵⁰Ibid., 4.

⁵¹Ibid., 5.

⁵²J. Hugh Michael, “The Social Teaching of St. Paul,” typescript manuscript dated 15 May 1933, Papers of the Christian Social Order Commission, File 1, 8.

⁵³Ibid., 3.

trying to reform the social structures of the Greco-Roman world. Rather, Paul sought to mold the church into a distinct community which would adhere to fundamentally different practices.

Sir Robert Falconer then discussed the attitude toward society found in the remaining Epistles. Falconer also emphasized that these writings were unconcerned with addressing the social problems of their external world. With the possible exception of James, who was “the one most interested in a social gospel,” the remaining writings reflected a situation whereby the churches had effectively withdrawn from the society in which they existed.⁵⁴ For example, he noted that 1 Peter counseled the church to accept existing persecutions as the cost of faith. Christians were to follow Christ’s example and “humbly accept the situation in which they find themselves: persecution, poverty, slavery, domestic subordination. This is the Divine will for them.”⁵⁵ 1 John went even further in stressing that, because the outside world was corrupt beyond redemption, Christians must refrain from extensive contact with it. John’s world “was on the way to destruction, past redemption: therefore the brethren must escape from it and concentrate on love in the fellowship of the brethren. Love, obedience, service to one another, based upon a true faith and love are the security against any danger lest the Devil may pluck them out of the hand of the Son.”⁵⁶

Much of this analysis was reflected in the first part of the commission’s final report, which emphasized Christianity’s affirmation that God was constantly at work in human affairs to bring a moral order to society. Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy by preaching that God offered Divine forgiveness to all who repent, and

⁵⁴Sir Robert Falconer, “The Social Teaching of the New Testament - The Catholic Epistles & Hebrews,” typescript manuscript dated 26 May 1933, Papers of the Christian Social Order Commission, File 1, 2.

⁵⁵Ibid., 3.

⁵⁶Ibid., 4.

that all humanity was invited to enter into a full relationship with God in order to enjoy a full relationship with other people. Though he condemned the Pharisees and Saducees for their corrupt ideas about God and religion, Jesus resisted the temptation to become a political leader. Instead he invited the world to embrace “the practice of brotherly love, representing the unfortunate, the poor, the sick, the outcast as His Brethren, service to whom He considered as service done to Himself.” Paul developed this idea through his conception of the church as a society where the life of the new moral order is fostered and practiced. The non-Pauline epistles supported Paul’s understanding that the church was the place to cultivate sound moral life and doctrine while welcoming those drawn from the outside world. Since that time, the church had actively sought to discern the work of God’s spirit and apply that to particular situations of human need. Thus, in recent years, the church had attempted “to purge society of its grosser evils” so “that Christian people who desired to maintain the standards of Jesus might have the opportunity of developing a Christian civilization, and that all might have an environment helpful to Christian living.”⁵⁷

The Existing Social Order

Once the Biblical and theological basis for Christian social reform was clarified, the commission analyzed present social and economic circumstances. Two members of the University of Toronto’s Department of Economics, E. J. Urwick and Irene Biss, played an instrumental role in this task. Urwick was a social scientist and pioneer in the development of professional social work who had worked at Toynbee Hall in London before becoming Director of the London School of Sociology and Social Economics and later Director of the Department of Social Science and Administration at the London School of Economics. After retiring and emigrating to Canada, he was recruited by the University of Toronto to become head of the

⁵⁷“Report of the Commission on Christianizing the Social Order,” 237-238.

Department of Political Economy and Acting Director of the School of Social Work.⁵⁸ Urwick joined Irene Biss, lecturer in Economics at the University of Toronto and member of the League for Social Reconstruction, in presenting a thoughtful analysis of the state of the contemporary economy. Their study formed the basis for the second part of the commission's report.

Urwick and Biss identified four dominant characteristics of the modern industrial system. Industrial capital was now owned by individuals or small groups who were primarily interested in maximizing production and who failed to consider the social cost of particular business decisions. Secondly, the rise of mechanization in shops and factories had proven to be a mixed blessing. While goods could now be produced more quickly and efficiently than before, many traditional jobs had become obsolete and great social upheaval had resulted. Thirdly, industrialization had risen concurrently with an ideological commitment to free enterprise, profit-seeking, and competition. Modern society had "purposely dissociated economic activity from the higher values of life" and had "deliberately separated wealth from welfare, and the pursuit of wealth from all other sane pursuits."⁵⁹ Modern industrial production had thus become exclusively focused on what was salable and profitable, not on what was socially needed or useful. Finally, Urwick and Biss noted that the free market had become "the core and kernel of modern industry." Concentration of wealth in the hands of a few meant that the needs of the many were no longer considered.⁶⁰

These four characteristics of modern society had led to some tragic consequences. First, poverty and insecurity had greatly increased. "The first

⁵⁸John A. Irving, "The Social Philosophy of E.J. Urwick," in *The Values of Life*, ed. E. J. Urwick (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1948), provides a thorough assessment of Urwick's career and ideas.

⁵⁹E. J. Urwick and Irene Biss, "Modern Industry: A Short Analysis of Some Outstanding Dangers in the Present Situation," in *Supplement to Christianizing the Social Order* (Toronto: The Board of Evangelism and Social Service, The United Church of Canada, n.d.), 14.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 15.

requisite of any society is that its members should be able to win for themselves a steady and adequate livelihood," the two economists stated. "A large proportion of the people in Canada, in common with the rest of the world, are simply failing to get a living in their own right."⁶¹

Second, an overt reliance on machines had created a materialistic society. "We pin our faith in an endless multiplication of the power to produce things," their paper noted, and people now believe "that happiness is to be found in consuming more and ever more bathtubs, radios, automobiles and silk stockings." Material wealth had become "the ultimate basis of social prestige in a modern industrial economy. The accumulation of a fortune therefore becomes the dominant object of ambition and desire and the test of success in life."⁶²

Third, social life had become increasingly one-dimensional. The modern world had glorified everything associated with material success and discounted the values to which a dollar sign could not be easily attached. "Goodness, friendship, beauty, health, the pursuit of truth, are left to make what shift they can after the prior claims of money profit have been met," and little else mattered.⁶³

Finally, current economic dislocation had resulted in a great deal of social upheaval. Social unrest in such circumstances "is the result of inadequate incomes, insecurity, unemployment, crop failures, and the loss on produce sales, and poor working conditions which breed degeneration among workers and farmers."⁶⁴

This analysis was evident in the second part of the commission's final report. The commission emphasized that modern society was characterized by "the false view of wealth and of property, the covetous desire for acquisition, the desire for

⁶¹Ibid., 17.

⁶²Ibid., 19.

⁶³Ibid., 20.

⁶⁴Ibid., 21.

power and domination, and the search for privileged position in the quest for gain.” Such a materialistic ethos was revealed “in the ceaseless desire for more production than is needed in order that additional profit may be obtained.” This type of society resulted in “an industrial organization frequently interrupted, and a society torn by bitter resentment at avoidable inequalities.”⁶⁵

The Application Of Christianity to the Contemporary Situation

The final section of the report sought to apply Christian principles to the existing social and economic order. This endeavor revealed the existence of some fundamental differences among commission members. How far should the church go in suggesting that specific reforms and initiatives be undertaken? Was the church to simply remind individuals and society of the importance of certain values, or was it appropriate for it to suggest concrete policy changes? If so, what policies most closely coincided with the tenets of Christianity? Commissioners held a wide variety of opinions on these questions.

The commission’s chair, Sir Robert Falconer, believed Christians had an important duty to speak out against social injustice but the church should never support specific political measures. Falconer suggested the church’s primary function was to act “as teacher of truth and of the Divine will as revealed in the Gospel” and “must never cease to proclaim the furthering of the Kingdom of God as her supreme aim.” He affirmed that God’s Kingdom “is a realm of full and complete salvation for mankind” so “any economic system, or the working of it, which either degrades man or prevents the realization of his highest manhood is antagonistic to the Kingdom of God, and cannot be approved by the Church.” The church, therefore, “has a duty in protesting against the immoralities produced by any system, economic or political”

⁶⁵“Report of the Commission on Christianizing the Social Order,” 244-245.

and was impelled to utter a “prophetic call for the social redemption of man as one phase of the coming Kingdom of God.”⁶⁶

However, Falconer also believed the church should not attempt to develop specific solutions to particular problems. “For this the Church as an organized body of Christian people has no special knowledge,” for church representatives “are chosen, not as being especially competent to deal with specific social or economic problems, which are to be solved not by moral resolutions but by well informed leadership of persons who have expert knowledge.” While members of certain congregations may have the required expertise to address certain questions, the church “is not called upon to condemn outright the present economic system as being in itself inherently and utterly bad.” Although a better system would naturally produce better results, good results could emerge out of an indifferent system. “Therefore the Church will look with sympathy upon all those who in a Christian spirit seek to bring in a better system, without endorsing any specific plan.”⁶⁷

In contrast to Falconer, Richard Roberts of Toronto’s Sherbourne Street United Church believed the church could properly offer more specific analysis. While the church’s primary task was to declare the “absolute priority of the Spiritual life for all Christian persons,” the pursuit of a truly spiritual life involved living in both spiritual and temporal worlds at the same time so that “the things of the world, since they are gifts of God, are conceived not as means of self indulgence (of whatever sort) but as means of Grace.” God had created human beings as inherently valuable, so the temporal realities of human life should be geared to affirming “the supreme worth of Human Personality” by loving and serving others.⁶⁸ To give

⁶⁶“The Church and the Social Order,” undated paper presented by Robert Falconer to the Executive Committee of the Christian Social Order Commission, 23 February 1934, Papers of the Christian Social Order Commission, File 4, 5.

⁶⁷Ibid., 4.

⁶⁸“A Statement by Rev. Richard Roberts, D.D.,” Papers of the Christian Social Order Commission, File 4, 1.

tangible expression to these basic Christian affirmations, "certain palliatives of pressing ills are required: (a) Unemployment Insurance; (b) Old Age Pensions; (c) Means of redress for unjust dismissal or unjust treatment; (d) the avoidance of strikes and lockout; (e) the elimination of sweating."⁶⁹

But the most radical assessment was offered by John Line, whose views had already drawn controversy. Line announced that the time had come for the church to "advocate measures, in the interest of justice and the good of the people, that may mean at some stage i.e., legislative action." Such initiatives "may involve some re-direction of economic machinery, or even revision of ownership, to the end that it shall be subject to the ideal of a maximum ratio of well being and opportunity for all the people." Line failed to see "ethical justification for parts of the economic mechanism that are collective in scale and are vital to the welfare of all the people, being the property of some." Resources such as banks must somehow become "the people's utility."⁷⁰

Line also offered a pointed rebuttal to those who contended the church had no business discussing such questions. "It is often said that the Church in advocating specific measures is proceeding in a way contrary to Jesus," Line acknowledged, but such reasoning "looks to the formal rather than the essential." For the test of whether one was following Jesus' way was not whether one acted exactly as he did, but whether one realized "the same ethical and psychological tensions." Jesus admittedly did not urge specific measures of reform, "but He did champion the cause of the poor in ways that brought Him into clash with power and privilege." Thus, if modern

⁶⁹Ibid., 2.

⁷⁰John Line, "The Church and the Social Order," Papers of the Christian Social Order Commission, File 4, 1-2.

people “advocate definite and concrete economic changes, it may happen; so that the moral equivalent of what Jesus did may be this advocacy.”⁷¹

The commission’s final report reflected the cautiousness of Robert Falconer rather than the radicalism of John Line. It asserted that “the specific task of the Church in the process of reform is to be the light rather than the engineer of the City of God, to point direction and reveal goals rather than to elaborate programmes of successive changes.”⁷² The report identified seven basic ideals which should be pursued:

- (a) That honest, capable and industrious persons shall have the opportunity as well as the responsibility of earning for themselves and their families a satisfactory livelihood, which should include humane living and working conditions, together with freedom and leisure for the awakening and development in them of whatsoever things are true, lovely and of good report.
- (b) That the wage earner, the management and the provider of capital shall find equitable treatment. It is essential that wage earners and employers, while the present conditions of industry obtain, should bargain on equal terms through persons freely chosen by each group.
- (c) That wage earners shall earn their wages by conscientious industry, that the management shall be efficient and exclude waste in production, and that the consumer shall find in the market price the maximum which will provide equitable treatment for all parties.
- (d) That industry shall be so organized that the supply of the material needs of life will neither be interrupted nor exploited for sectional advantage.
- (e) That the structure of the community shall be so ordered that no one shall be deprived of his chance to do the best he may with his gifts of mind and character, because of unjust outward circumstances.
- (f) That the possession of money shall not be regarded as an end worthy in itself, nor its possessor be held in respect by the community by reason of his riches. The person of true wealth will be he who serves the community with what he has.
- (g) That sometimes for co-operation within the nation or among the nations, renunciation of one’s own desires shall be called for, and that exclusive privileges and economic advantage for one’s self must yield to the larger common welfare, so that suspicion and animosities will be displaced by

⁷¹Ibid., 2.

⁷²“Report of the Commission on Christianizing the Social Order,” 247.

community of purpose.⁷³

However, the report included no specific recommendations about how these objectives could be met. By declining to explore the “particular measures” that should be adopted to begin creating a social order that was in keeping with the mind of Christ, the commission failed to fulfill the fourth part of its mandate.

Therefore, several members of the commission attached a “minority report” which suggested that the report should have answered four central questions:

(a) Whether the Christian ethic can be realized until our estimate of wealth as a really important means of living well is altered by a general agreement to treat wealth as merely an instrument for the necessary equipment of life, and not as a means of satisfaction of desires.

(b) Whether it is possible for our devotion to the motive of profit to be freed from dangerous results so long as our economic activities are allowed to provide a field for the practice of almost unlimited pursuit of private gain.

(c) Whether we individuals can be saved from the demoralization of continual self-seeking, acquisitive desire, and neglect of our neighbors so long as our society allows us to take as our goals the accumulation of possessions, or the exercise of money-power, or the excessive and wasteful satisfaction of wants, or pride in unworthy success gained by disregard of the common good.

(d) Whether these dangers, and especially the dangers resulting from the power and privilege which accompany large private possessions, can be avoided, or whether care for the common good can become real, unless private ownership of the important means of production is in some way changed into communal ownership and control.⁷⁴

Reaction to “Christianizing the Social Order”

Reaction to the commission’s report was mixed. Some agreed with the minority report’s authors that it was essential to specify the nature of the system which could effectively alleviate many existing problems. For example, in 1935 Saskatchewan Conference expressed its dissatisfaction that the report had not fulfilled its mandate to “define those particular measures which must form the first steps

⁷³Ibid., 246-247.

⁷⁴Ibid., 248.

toward a social order in keeping with the mind of Christ." The Conference recorded its own belief "that the time has arrived when the people of Canada must make up their minds with regard to the control of currency, credit and industry, whether by a few men administering affairs for their own profit or by society organized to take control into its own hands and move forward to a social order deliberately planned, democratically controlled and administered for ends socially desirable."⁷⁵

Others within the church believed that the report had gone too far in equating Christianity with a particular set of understandings. R.B.Y. Scott acknowledged that many United Church members undoubtedly agreed with a Toronto newspaper's editorial that "the Church's Business is to Save Souls" and it should say nothing on social and economic questions.⁷⁶ The United Church session in St. Mary's, Ontario published a statement that took this position. In its view, the report failed to stress that the church's main message is to "repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins." This group contended that the church's main task "is other than righting economic wrong, and that in the minds of the Apostles this was not the main issue." They also objected to the way in which the current social and economic situation was analyzed. They contended that the report failed to note the important service rendered to society by financiers, that many common people had experienced a rise in the standard of living, and that a solid bedrock of good family values existed. They also suggested that "the very first principle for the Church to consider is that it is imperative that this great mass of our people have widespread among them lives that have achieved union with the Divine: that have experienced Salvation in a Gospel sense. Only if this requirement be met

⁷⁵Record of Proceedings of Saskatchewan Conference, 1935, 49.

⁷⁶R.B.Y. Scott, "What Has Christianity to Say on Social and Economic Questions?," The New Outlook, 11 April 1934, 267.

will there be established a public opinion strong enough to make general a way of life committed to God.”⁷⁷

Even some of those who supported the report’s conclusions questioned its overall impact on the United Church. “I share the desire that the conclusions of the Report on ‘Christianizing the Social Order’ may become the mind of the Church,” R.B.Y. Scott declared, “but the most that can be said on that score is that it was a lead given to the Church.” He noted that “the Report was not even adopted by the Sixth General Council; it was ‘received’ and ‘commended for study as in substance a statement of the Christian attitude and approach to the economic problem.” Therefore, to assume that this report managed to “genuinely express the considered and final judgment of the whole membership” would be to ignore the fact that there were “many currents of thought in the Church” on this matter.⁷⁸

In spite of these concerns, however, members of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service frequently defended the commission’s findings throughout the church. The most spirited explanation was offered by John Line in a presentation to the board’s 1935 annual meeting, in which he directly challenged the argument that the church had inappropriately ventured into secular territory. He emphasized that “the Report begins with the fundamental teaching of Christianity, going back to the Old Testament prophets and Jesus” and “begins where I think a Report of this sort should begin.” Individuals and groups using the report “ought to spend a long time on this first section, and I am certain that you won’t get much out of later sections unless you do that.”⁷⁹ The prevailing economic system was analyzed in light of Christianity’s

⁷⁷The Session of St. Mary’s United Church, St. Mary’s, Ontario, “A Critical Comment of the Pamphlet Issued by the General Council of the United Church and Entitled ‘Christianizing the Social Order’,” [n.d.].

⁷⁸R.B.Y. Scott letter to The New Outlook, 15 March 1941, 17.

⁷⁹John Line, “The Significance of the Report of the Commission on the Christianization of the Social Order,” Time Marches On: 1925-1935, BESS Tenth Annual Meeting Minutes, 1935, 26.

moral core, and the report sought to identify “the Christian motive” which would spur “the reversal of economic direction” upon which “economic rehabilitation depends.” While it was possible for the church to cooperate with other agencies and groups intent on achieving similar objectives, this report was ultimately concerned with “the ethical substratum, with the inculcation, in explicit fashion, of the right ethical ideas, the right will and spirit.”⁸⁰ Indeed, everything in the report emphasized the importance of “the reversal of ethical outlook and motive to which we have referred.” Christianity’s spiritual core must be grasped before economic and social reconstruction could proceed. Thus Line encouraged the church “to enforce the Christian ethical compulsive that has always been the corollary of the Christian conception of God.”⁸¹

Board secretaries also emphasized the Biblical and theological basis of this report. Ernest Thomas informed readers of The New Outlook that the commission had “worked faithfully and long in seeking to determine what is the Christian teaching - not what we want it to be, but what it was at first and in its later development.” It recognized both the positive contributions and the undesirable consequences of the industrial revolution, but acknowledged the need for a new “practice of repentance in which we renounce not merely sins of the flesh but the quest for possessions and power.” Therefore, Thomas saw the commission’s recommendations as being “imperatively and urgently necessary if members of society are to function as Christian persons,” but acknowledged that the commission concluded that the desired results could be achieved in a variety of ways. “Three such routes were seen by the Commission and were represented in its members,” he noted. “Some see the State already committed to changes which, when completed, will end the evils mentioned; others insist that nothing but frank avowal at the outset

⁸⁰Ibid., 28-29.

⁸¹Ibid., 29.

that private ownership of the means of production is wrong, will provide guidance in difficult times; while yet others think of a great extension of cooperation.” The commission refused to choose between these three alternatives, but affirmed “the freedom of ministers and members to hold and promulgate either and all of them, ‘without fear of reproach, censure or disability.’”⁸²

Associate Secretary Hugh Dobson also defended the report. In correspondence with one United Church minister in British Columbia, he emphasized that the statement did not represent “some sudden change and new concept on the part of the United Church” because most of its principles had been raised in former statements. He also noted that the report’s conclusions were similar in tone to recent statements of the Pope and the Lambeth Conference of Bishops, and reflected a growing consensus of opinion within the Christian church. Finally, Dobson explained that this document was “not issued as an edict” and there was “no compulsion of opinion.” Rather, an effort was made “to sound out the Church and obtain from selected and representative groups concurrency of view as to a better way of life,” and the report was submitted “to the ministry and courts of the Church with the hope that it may ultimately reach every communicant, not as an edict but as a challenge.”⁸³

The 1934 “Christianizing the Social Order” report reveals much about the mind of the United Church during the depression. In it, the church correlated the ethical teachings of Jesus, Paul, and the prophets as recorded in the Bible with an analysis of the current social and economic situation, and attempted to arrive at some specific conclusions. The church worked to develop a thorough understanding of contemporary problems by utilizing experts in the fields of economics and political

⁸²Ernest Thomas, “The General Council Speaks on Economics,” The New Outlook, 14 November 1934, 1018.

⁸³Hugh Dobson to Rev. R. R. Morrison, 5 February 1935, Dobson Papers, Box 19, File M.

science to ensure that the church's understanding of the nature of existing problems was based on thorough and recent material. While it endeavored to draw a wide range of individuals into the process of developing its reports, the majority of work was conducted by a small group of clerics and academics who lived and worked in southern Ontario. The final report also acknowledged that a wide divergence of opinion existed within the United Church and, as Roger Hutchinson notes, it offered a climate where it was possible "to develop trustworthy procedures for declaring the mind of the church on controversial issues."⁸⁴ Finally, these studies reflected the church's belief that it had a distinct contribution to make to the task of social reconstruction that could not be initiated by any other group.

However, the board's concern with social and economic questions did not end with the publication of the 1934 report. With the decision of the Rowell-Sirois Commission on Federal-Provincial Relations to hold public hearings, the board seized the opportunity to build on the work of the Christianizing the Social Order Commission and develop some specific recommendations about how the Canadian state could more clearly embody Christ's values and principles.

Economic and Social Research Commission

The 1936 Church General Council instructed the Board of Evangelism and Social Service "to continue the work of economic and social research in the light of the social ideals of the Christian religion."⁸⁵ The board responded by forming an Economic and Social Research Commission with Walter T. Brown of Victoria University as chair and J. R. Mutchmor as secretary. The commission was comprised of a core group of people who "would have a working knowledge of the subject"

⁸⁴Hutchinson, "Christianizing the Social Order: A Three-Dimensional Task," 230.

⁸⁵Record of Proceedings, 1936 General Council, 85.

under study, as well as a number of selected specialists “who could place before our Commission the technical aspects” of the particular situation under review.⁸⁶

Upon its formation, the commission followed Brown’s suggestion that the group initially address the question of social security in Canada and draft a brief for presentation to the Rowell-Sirois Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations.⁸⁷ United Church clergy Gordon Sisco, George Dorey, Russell Harris, W. J. Gallagher, and E. H. Toye, Victoria University professor John Line, Wilfred Lockhart of the Student Christian Movement, H. L. Brittain of the Bureau of Municipal Research in Toronto, H. V. Hearst of the National Trust Company, R. E. Mills of the Toronto Children’s Aid Society, Toronto barrister A. T. Whitehead, and Toronto actuary Hugh Wolfenden comprised the initial commission. In subsequent months, Frontier College principal E. W. Bradwin, Joseph McNully of Pickering College, W.J.W. Reid of the Otis-Fensom Elevator Company, Hamilton businessman John Firth, agriculturalist James Gibson, Olcott Titus of the Canada Wire and Cable Company, and William Lucas, president of the Toronto Typographical Union, were also recruited.⁸⁸ In addition, special working groups were established in Vancouver and Montreal.

The commission approached the question methodically. Mutchmor traveled to Ottawa and met with the president of the Trades and Labor Council, Charlotte Whitten of the Canadian Child Welfare Council, and federal cabinet ministers Thomas Crerar, R. A. Hoey, and Norman Rogers. Documents such as the United Church’s 1934 Christianizing the Social Order Report, the 1937 Oxford Report, and

⁸⁶Economic and Social Research Commission Minutes, 29 October 1937, Economic and Social Research Commission Papers (ESRC Papers) Box 1, File 1.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸“A Brief on Social Security by the Commission on Economic and Social Research of The Board of Evangelism and Social Service of The United Church of Canada Presented to The Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations,” ESRC Papers, Box 1, File 3, 1.

various tracts published by the Canadian Welfare Council and United States Commerce Department were reviewed. In particular, the interim and final reports of the National Employment Commission received close scrutiny.⁸⁹ Various commission members also offered their specialized knowledge of the issues. For example, Joseph McNully discussed the findings of the National Employment Commission's youth employment committee of which he had been a member, E. W. Brandin outlined the work of the federal commission on single unemployed men to which he belonged, and W.J.W. Reid spoke of the close relationship that existed between many Hamilton industries and the city's technical schools.⁹⁰ After several initial meetings, an initial draft was developed and distributed to commission members and to the out-of-town working groups. Revisions were submitted, and the final report was edited by W. C. Lockhart and finalized in April 1938.

The brief began by outlining the basis from which the United Church addressed the question of Canadian social security:

As members of the Christian Church we approach the problem of our politico-economic life from the standpoint of our faith in Jesus Christ as He who reveals the nature of God and his purpose for mankind. The commandment Jesus laid upon us is to love God and our neighbours as ourselves. Thus we believe that the relations of men are part of their relations to God. Inasmuch then as the brotherhood of man is bound up with the fatherhood of God, systems and institutions which affect the lives of men are the concern of the Christian Church. We seek the best possible institutional arrangement and social structure for the ordering of our national life.⁹¹

From this understanding, the brief identified two "spiritual principles" which were "basic to the establishment of justice and the furtherance of the abundant life." Belief in the "inherent worth of human personality" affirmed "that all men are children of

⁸⁹Economic and Social Research Commission Minutes, 4 January 1938, ESRC Papers, Box 1, File 1.

⁹⁰Economic and Social Research Commission Minutes, 18 January 1938, ESRC Papers, Box 1, File 1.

⁹¹Ibid., 1.

God and that, while they differ in their endowments and capacities, any system which outrages the dignity of man or obscures his common humanity by unduly emphasizing the external differences of birth, or wealth, or social position, is thereby anti-Christian.”⁹² In addition, every human being was regarded as “part of a national community to which he or she is responsible, and which, in turn, has a reciprocal responsibility” for the lives and welfare of its people. The commission then articulated four principles that, in its view, should undergird any social security system. All people should be guaranteed the right to earn “a worthy means of livelihood” as well as assume they have a duty and responsibility to work. When a person was unable to work because of ill health or lack of employment, “adequate means should be provided to safeguard the welfare of individuals and families” so they are not denied “the necessities of life or the opportunities for spiritual, physical, and intellectual growth.” In particular, adequate provision should be made “for those persons who are disabled, whether by sickness, infirmity or age and that they or their families should not be left in want.” Finally, the report affirmed that “every child and youth should have opportunities of education suited for the full development of his particular capacities” regardless of “the economic status of the family.”⁹³

The brief then urged the federal government to pay greater attention to the issue of unemployment aid. While the question of whether the federal, provincial or municipal government should have primary responsibility for unemployment aid was still an open one, they contended “that the financial and administrative functions in any sound plan of Unemployment aid must be united in the same governmental authority” because “nothing but chaos will result if one government provides too large a proportion of the funds that another unit of government expends.” In urban centres, relief should be provided through a public welfare division, Federal

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Ibid., 3.

assistance should be offered to poorer municipalities so “no municipal unit would be compelled to assume a relief burden greater than it could bear.”⁹⁴ They also urged “that relief schedules be at least equivalent to a standard of living recognized as adequate by our medical authorities,” that the question of a means test be thoroughly studied, and that payment of pensions and family allowances be coordinated with relief expenditures.⁹⁵

However, the brief also urged that these initiatives be developed and implemented in a prudent and fiscally-responsible way. It affirmed “the relative merits of both private and public welfare work” and asserted “that both are essential for the promotion of sound social security.” It urged that tax levels be kept low enough to encourage people to voluntarily contribute to causes and institutions in which they believe. It urged that the administration of social security be safeguarded from partisan interference, that public finances be managed responsibly, and that social security be developed on a contributory scheme.⁹⁶

The commission’s blueprint for unemployment insurance reflected a similarly balanced tone. “Insurance procedures are only possible when direct contributions are made by potential beneficiaries,” the brief noted. “We believe that each citizen must bear some share of the common load” and “the responsibility of the individual must be retained.” At the same time, “part of the cost of unemployment should be a direct charge upon industry,” and it favored “a plan whereby regular weekly contributions, equal to the pay roll deduction contributions of employees, be made by employers.”⁹⁷ Insurance benefits “ought not to be so high as to lower work inducement, or so low as to be little if any better than prevailing relief schedules.” It also recommended that an

⁹⁴Ibid., 10.

⁹⁵Ibid., 11.

⁹⁶Ibid., 4.

⁹⁷Ibid., 7.

impartial “National Employment Commission” be created to administer any program of unemployment insurance or employment exchanges.

Mutchmor recalled that this brief was not well received. “Figuratively speaking,” the sharp interrogation of the Rowell-Sirois Commission’s senior legal council, Louis St. Laurent, “stood me on my head, put me back on my feet, turned me around and back - in short I was like putty in his hands.” From this experience, Mutchmor learned “to make sure our church submissions in the future were much more thoroughly prepared.”⁹⁸ But, in 1942, he acknowledged that this goal had been difficult to achieve. The board had sometimes failed in its discussion of social policy “because it has been overzealous and ill-informed,” he confessed. “It has lacked a knowledge of history. It has not known enough economics. It has been limited in its political wisdom.”⁹⁹ For these reasons, the board had asked the 1938 General Council for an additional annual allocation of \$1,200 so “some light might fall upon the ignorance of the Board, but those in authority in the finances of our Church have been unable or unwilling to provide even this small sum for much needed and thorough enquiries into some current social problems.”¹⁰⁰

Significant revisions were made to the brief before it was submitted to the 1938 General Council and subsequently published as The Church and the Economic Order. In particular, several specific recommendations were added. The church recommended that “the administration of public aid be the responsibility of municipal government,” and that “the federal government administer and finance our national Old Age Pensions, as soon as constitutional changes permit; and similarly assume responsibility for the proposed unemployment insurance and other contributory social

⁹⁸Mutchmor, Mutchmor, 87.

⁹⁹“The Policy of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service,” “... And a New Earth”, BESS Eighteenth Annual Report, 1942, 63.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

insurance plans, if, as and when same become operative.” In addition, it suggested that “the federal government assume what might be regarded as a fair additional proportion of the capital debt incurred by provincial and municipal governments through expenditures for emergency relief measures since 1930.”¹⁰¹ However, Mutchmor candidly admitted that the commission had not “had sufficient time to explore fully the matters to be considered”¹⁰² He noted the difficulty in weighing the pros and cons concerning increased state intervention in the economy, and conceded that, because of this, the report was perhaps more cautious than some would like. “We would like to advise far more thorough-going and drastic undertakings, but we lack confidence in a theoretically successful operation that might leave us with a dead patient,” his report concluded. “Therefore the commission recommends making haste slowly.”¹⁰³

Conclusion

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the Board of Evangelism and Social Service issued a number of documents that outlined a social and economic blueprint for Canada. The board believed that Canadian society was evolving in destructive ways, and that the national economy required a drastic corrective in order to ensure that the needs of all people were met. Its numerous commissions and committees identified some of the key elements of Biblical teaching about God’s will for the world, and applied these principles to the social and economic realities of the age. In proceeding in this way, the board steadfastly maintained that the church had a distinctive contribution to make to the development of Canadian public policy, and the Christian

¹⁰¹Ibid., 16.

¹⁰²The Church and the Economic Order (Toronto: The Board of Evangelism and Social Service, The United Church of Canada, 1938), 4.

¹⁰³Ibid.

faith offered insights that were particularly relevant to the task of creating a just and compassionate society.

CHAPTER FIVE

CHRISTIAN PHILANTHROPY AND SOCIAL SERVICE

In addition to its efforts to foster moral reform throughout Canada, encourage a spirit of evangelization to permeate the United Church, and relate the teachings of Jesus to a range of social and economic questions, the Board of Evangelism and Social Service also initiated a number of philanthropic endeavors. Based on the belief that Christ called the church to tangibly respond to the needs of hurting and needy people, it devoted significant amounts of time and money to serving a range of troubled and distressed Canadians. Its commitment to this work remained strong in the face of severe economic difficulty, and it focused significant energy and resources on two types of undertakings.

Between 1925 and 1945, the board allocated approximately thirty per cent of its budget to sponsor a number of “redemptive homes” which cared for orphans, inner city children, juvenile delinquents, and pregnant unmarried women. These facilities were kept open throughout a time of fiscal crisis when some maintained the church could no longer afford to do this kind of work. For example, in 1928, \$25,227 of the board’s \$83,362 budget went to support these institutions and, even in the midst of the depression, it allocated \$13,600 of its total 1936 budget of \$39,500 to these facilities.¹ These church-sponsored homes were some of the earliest social service facilities in the country, and the church maintained an ongoing commitment to them at a time when some believed that it should turn this work over to the Canadian state.

In addition, in 1931, the United Church established the National Emergency Relief Commission (NERC) to direct needed food and clothing to those prairie residents most affected by the drought. Coordinated by the board’s John Coburn,

¹Reports of the Sessional Committees on Administration, “He Must Reign”, BESS Third Annual Meeting Minutes, 1928, 10-11; and Play the Man, BESS Twelfth Annual Report, 1936, 16.

hundreds of United Church congregations in British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec and the Maritimes collected supplies for needy prairie residents and did much to alleviate their suffering and hunger. Thus, through its redemptive homes and the NERC, the Board of Evangelism and Social Service became a vehicle through which the United Church provided a range of philanthropic services to many Canadians.

Redemptive Homes

The Board of Evangelism and Social Service took over the management of a number of “redemptive homes” that had been the responsibility of its Presbyterian and Methodist forebears. As in previous times, these institutions existed to provide a safe haven for people in distress, modify the behavior of those residents who had been entrusted to the church’s care, and educate them about how they might follow Jesus’ way during their lives and reap the tangible rewards that could be gained from following a Christian lifestyle.

The board understood this work to be central to its mandate. “These Institutions are really necessary to the complete work of the Board,” a report presented to its 1934 annual meeting emphasized. “The Board has to deal with many cases of broken homes, unmarried mothers, juvenile delinquency, etc. Having these homes under its care, enables the Board and its Staff to study situations at first hand, and also provides a means of solving problems which arise.”² Another report adopted in 1943 understood this work in a similar way. This work served “as an object lesson, a test mill, if the term may be borrowed from the mining world, of the Church’s social theories,” the report stated. “It is one thing to write a report on juvenile delinquency,

²“Statement Respecting the Proposed Amalgamation of the Board of Home Missions and the Board of Evangelism and Social Service,” God - Eternal and Contemporary, BESS Ninth Annual Meeting Minutes, 1934, 18.

it is quite another thing to accept responsibility for a delinquent girl or boy and help such a one find the right road again.”³

Of all the elements of this work, the board believed the task of redemption was by far the most important. The value of these facilities extended “far beyond their significance as redemptive agencies for particular persons,” Hugh Dobson contended. “They ought to keep warm the heart of the Church in its task of ‘saving the lost’ and to constantly remind the Church of sinister aspects of our social life about which both ministry and laity easily become all too complacent.”⁴ The staff of these institutions was expected to share these assumptions with the residents. “The ‘more excellent way’ of consecration of their lives to the service of our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, is the theme of all our teaching,” stated superintendent Mary Matheson of the United Church Home for Girls in Vancouver.⁵ “We strive to direct their minds to Jesus Christ, as the Lord and Master of our lives, the only One who has power, not only to forgive the past, but also to enable us to rise from the dead ashes of our failures and sins, to the joy of giving our very best in His service.”⁶

In addition, the church hoped the staff of these institutions would become a positive role model for the individuals under its care. D. N. McLachlan reminded his colleagues at the board’s 1930 annual meeting that “beneficial results to those entrusted to the Church, come by way of consecrated personalities, and not by formularities or drastic rules in the homes.” He noted that “we are losing faith in the possibility of permanent improvement by stern regulations, or by remedial measures

³“The Policy of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service,” “... And a New Earth”, BESS Eighteenth Annual Report, 1942, 61.

⁴Hugh Dobson Annual Report, Time Marches On, 1925-1935, BESS Tenth Annual Meeting Minutes, 1935, 36.

⁵Annual Report of the United Church Home for Girls, Vancouver, “In Quietness and in Confidence Shall Be Your Strength”, BESS Eleventh Annual Meeting Minutes, 1936, 46.

⁶Annual Report of the United Church Home for Girls, Vancouver, “I am the Bread of Life”, BESS Sixth Annual Meeting Minutes, 1931, 44.

in themselves.” Instead, the church had learned that “vice cannot be adequately treated merely by condemnation and punishment.” Rather, “prevention and redemption from an immoral life become effective in proportion as the Workers are able to present to their students the worthwhileness of the better way of life” as “illustrated in the life of the teacher.”⁷ Therefore, those who staffed these facilities were expected to embody the perceived virtues of the Christian faith. Upon her resignation from the Mountview Social Service Home in Calgary in 1939, superintendent Marion MacGinnis provided Mutchmor and Dobson with a list of qualifications she hoped her successor would possess:

A healthy body, good nervous system, and no foot trouble, sight and hearing perfect, a saving sense of humor, a youthful outlook, the ability to be ‘one of the girls’ and yet not forfeit discipline, - by discipline I mean keeping control at all times, not by strap or stick method, just by personality, which you can readily see requires a strong but pleasing one, (both in the Home and meeting the public), to be musical, capable of supervising all household arts, cooking, cleaning, caring for furnishings, etc. etc. sewing and mending for the girls and the house, caring for the sick, purchasing foodstuffs and furnishings, etc. - and of course most important the ability to lead and guide the lives of these girls to a new outlook leaving behind the sordid and careless, inspiring personal cleanliness, ambition and hope for the future, developing talents that have never been exposed to cultivation, and above all to try and lead them in the Jesus way of living.⁸

Recruiting suitable staff with all these qualifications was not always easy, as the church discovered when attempting to find an acceptable replacement for Mary Matheson, superintendent of the United Church Home for Girls in Vancouver, upon her retirement in 1938. A former parishioner of D. N. McLachlan’s at King Memorial Presbyterian Church in Winnipeg, she had trained as a deaconess, begun working for the church at its Calgary home, and moved to Vancouver to work for the church in 1920. According to McLachlan, it was here

⁷D. N. McLachlan Annual Report, “Revive Thy Work”, BESS Fifth Annual Meeting Minutes, 1930, 16.

⁸Marion MacGinnis to James Mutchmor and Hugh Dobson, 12 January 1939, Dobson Papers, Box 21, File R3.

that the real strength of character, understanding and courage came to their fruition. She was distinguished by her ability to read character and she was seldom wrong in this regard. She was equally successful in reuniting many young women to their home and giving them a new start in life. Miss Matheson recognized that the greatest care was necessary in order to secure physical, mental and spiritual qualities without which no permanent restoration is possible.⁹

Matheson's were large shoes to fill, and Dobson and J. R. Mutchmor attempted to recruit several prospective applicants. However, none proved suitable. One woman was ruled out because the board discovered that she was separated from her husband. Although Mutchmor noted that this is "not a situation that we would ordinarily desire" and urged Dobson to keep this information "carefully guarded," his research assured him "that all or almost all of the fault was on his side and that she had no alternative but to leave him."¹⁰ However, Dobson was appalled that such a woman was being considered to manage this facility. "When I read your letter of December 12 to hand this afternoon, it gave me the shivers," he confessed. The board of the Vancouver home had been under the impression that the applicant was a widow, and had, in fact, explicitly refused to hire another woman because she, too, was separated. "Now if we go ahead without anyone knowing at the moment" that this woman "is not a widow and then others later on learn the facts after the discussion in the committee I could not be responsible for the effect on [the] Vancouver Home for Girls," he warned.¹¹ Mutchmor then approached deaconesses in Winnipeg and Moose Jaw to see if they were interested in moving, asked a nurse at the United Church hospital in Vita, Manitoba, to consider taking the position, requested that a superintendent of a Fresh Air Camp outside of Winnipeg consider taking the job, and also interviewed a former school teacher from Glengarry County, Ontario, about the position. None of these prospective employees had the desired blend of skills and

⁹Hugh Dobson to Mary Matheson, 29 December 1928, Dobson Papers, Box 20, File M-3.

¹⁰J. R. Mutchmor to Hugh Dobson, 12 December 1938, Dobson Papers, Box 20, File M-3.

¹¹Hugh Dobson to J. R. Mutchmor, 14 December 1938, Dobson Papers, Box 20, File M-3.

experience that the board was looking for. Mutchmor therefore recommended that the board of the Vancouver home recruit a local nurse from B.C. to accept the job on a temporary basis. This was done, but her predecessor's shoes proved difficult to fill. "Miss Matheson with her iron hand in a silken glove and her Christian graces was hard to follow," Dobson acknowledged. "Her staff found it hard to work under an inexperienced worker and one less experienced in Christian Redemptive work."¹² From this and other similar experiences, Dobson was deeply concerned that there was not a more ready supply of desirable employees for these facilities. A "better trained supply of Institutional workers with persons prepared to move up to Superintendency is needed," he noted in a 1940 memo. "If the Christian Church has to employ mercenary forces to equip its institutions and do its work we have some problems to face."¹³

The church's commitment to sponsoring explicitly Christian reform facilities ran counter to the growing tendency of the Canadian state to become increasingly involved in such work. As Richard Allen notes, in the years immediately after church union, the field of social work was undergoing a gradual process of specialization, secularization, and organizational consolidation.¹⁴ Until 1926, the majority of social work activity in Canada was coordinated through the church-controlled Social Service Council of Canada. However, in that year, the creation of the Canadian Association of Social Workers initiated a schism between church-based social reformers and a new class of professional social workers.¹⁵ Growing pressure was placed on the church to abandon this type of work.

¹²Hugh Dobson to J. R. Mutchmor, 30 April 1940, Dobson Papers, Box 29, File 0.

¹³Hugh Dobson, "Memo Re Annual Meeting," Dobson Papers, Box 29, File 0.

¹⁴Allen, The Social Passion, 284.

¹⁵Ibid., 287-301.

While Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau maintain that the division between “secular” and “religious” social workers was not as great as historians such as Allen have asserted, the men who led the Board of Evangelism and Social Service contended that many professional social workers did not share the church’s commitment to sharing the faith and modeling a Christian way of life, and therefore could not adequately serve the needs of the church.¹⁶ “Within the last two decades there has arisen a new profession: that of the trained social worker,” T. Albert Moore, long-time secretary of the Methodist Board of Evangelism and Social Service who was appointed as the first general secretary of the United Church General Council, noted in 1925. This occupation “has reached enormous proportions” in the United States, where “the movement for social service has become almost wholly divorced from organized religion.” As non-religious social workers moved into positions of responsibility, Moore saw a “loss of religious incentive in redemption, and the loss of ethical outlook for the Church.” He feared the same pattern would be repeated in Canada, and believed it essential that the church maintain its own institutions and keep control of them. In this changing context, “constant adjustment will be required if the Church is to render its full aid to social redemption and to find its own life enriched by streams of human sympathy.”¹⁷

Hugh Dobson shared Moore’s belief that the United Church should not turn over control of its social service work to secular agencies. He believed that if developments taking place within the organizational realm of social work were to be extended through the country, the churches would face increasing pressure to turn their facilities over to secular workers. Dobson refused to support a proposal to join the Canadian Conference of Social Workers and the Social Service Council of

¹⁶Christie and Gauvreau, A Full-Orbed Christianity, 131-164.

¹⁷T. Albert Moore, “The Mission of the Church in Personal Evangelism and Social Redemption,” The New Outlook, 10 June 1925, 23.

Canada because he believed “that if the Social Service Council surrenders its research work, and its own instrument of communication, SOCIAL WELFARE, to the Council of Social Workers, the churches which are represented in the Social Service Council would soon play nothing but second fiddle to the few social workers which now almost completely dominate the profession of social workers throughout Canada.” In his view, this development would “very seriously weaken the influence and authority of Christian churches on all matters of social adjustment, and finally, on all matters that require insight even into the ‘character’ that is back of social ‘conduct.’”¹⁸

McLachlan agreed that the plan “would be disastrous,” and the church had a distinctive role to play in caring for the needy and dispossessed of the land.¹⁹

Board staff members were equally critical of a 1935 proposal for the Canadian Council on Child and Family Welfare to take over the Social Service Council of Canada. “I think the churches will find very little value in an organization to coordinate churches’ activity on social service lines if the organization comes under control external to the churches,” he informed McLachlan in 1935. “Outside parties will do the controlling and the churches the work, and provide the financial support.”²⁰ J. R. Mutchmor shared this view. Before joining the Board of Evangelism and Social Service, he worked with the Welfare Supervision Board of Manitoba, and came to know well one of the proponents of this agency, Charlotte Whitton. While acknowledging her as “a person of considerable ability and energy” who “in terms of investigative and survey work “has few equals,” Mutchmor also believed that “Miss Whitton does not know the church angle.” Along with other professional social workers, she tended to be “patronizing to the religious and

¹⁸Hugh Dobson to D. N. McLachlan, 8 December 1933, Dobson Papers, File McIII.

¹⁹D. N. McLachlan to Hugh Dobson, 15 December 1933, Dobson Papers, Box 18B, File McIII.

²⁰Hugh Dobson to D. N. McLachlan, 11 February 1935, Dobson Papers, Box 29, File J.

spiritual” and “can never be more than an interested outsider.” He contended that any move to combine the Social Service Council of Canada with the work of the Canadian Council on Child and Family Welfare “would be very unwise.”²¹

These discussions took place at a time when the church’s financial problems made the prospect of giving up this work appear very attractive. Between 1930 and 1935, the board’s budget decreased by about \$50,000.²² In 1935, D. N. McLachlan reported that the board’s 1930 budget of \$90,000 was reduced to \$73,000 in 1931, to \$59,375 in 1932, to \$41,250 for 1933 and 1934, and to \$40,000 for 1935.²³ Even individuals who were strong proponents of these homes sometimes wondered if the church’s financial resources were adequate enough to continue supporting this work. In a letter to McLachlan, Hugh Dobson worried that the financial burdens of these institutions would become

such a charge against our Board in the matter of upkeep that they will crowd out more important preventive work. That is, a given amount of money from our Board can be spent in taking care of a limited number of people in institutions. The same amount of money spent in promoting a complete understanding of such work throughout the country might possibly lead the people of the country to look after such problems without them becoming a charge on the church. The preventive work is always greater than the care of people in institutions, and it is necessary to keep a balance between the two so far as the share of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service in the budget is concerned.²⁴

However, in the face of secular and financial pressures, the board maintained its belief that these institutions were important. “Personally, I hope that our Church will expand her ministry in these directions, rather than disposing of them to secular control,” board chair J. J. Coulter stated in 1934.²⁵ Ernest Thomas agreed. “These

²¹J. R. Mutchmor to Hugh Dobson, 8 July 1933, Dobson Papers, Box 18B, File M2.

²²Reports of the Sessional Committee on Administration, 1928 and 1938 annual meetings, “He Must Reign”, 1928, 11; and He is ‘Mightiest in the Mightiest’, BESS Thirteenth Annual Report, 1937, 22.

²³D. N. McLachlan Annual Report, Time Marches On: 1925-1935, 1935, 30.

²⁴Hugh Dobson to D. N. McLachlan, 1 November 1930, Dobson Papers, Box 18B, File Mc2.

²⁵J. J. Coulter Address, God - Eternal and Contemporary, 1934, 6.

homes have brought to bear influences which no home representing merely the secular state could supply, he said, "and without which renewal of life is less probable."²⁶ Several years later, the board re-affirmed that "only the Church with its gospel of God's forgiveness and redeeming love can take care of those who have lost their way, and through the Grace of Jesus Christ, build them up in goodness and righteous living again."²⁷

However, board staff soon recognized that the lack of money meant that much necessary work was not being done and these institutions were struggling to survive. For example, Jessie Oliver of the Cedarvale School for Girls noted in her report to the board's 1932 annual meeting that financial constraints had resulted in "a curtailing of even essentials" and that building renovations were desperately needed.²⁸ By 1934, Bethany House in Montreal faced the prospect of closing unless additional financial assistance could be found.²⁹ A year later, the board decided to close its Farm Centre for Boys, but local superintendent Hattie Baker was able to raise enough money to keep the facility open.³⁰ Therefore, at the board's 1934 annual meeting, the Sessional Committee on Administration urged that additional dollars be found for these activities. "The grants being made to Redemptive and Child Welfare Institutions should be increased, because they have been so reduced that there is no margin for upkeep," their report noted. "In addition to this, salaries of faithful and successful

²⁶Ernest Thomas, "Ten Years of Evangelism and Social Service," The New Outlook, 1 May 1935, 444.

²⁷"The Policy of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service," "... And a New Earth", 1942, 61.

²⁸Annual Report of the Cedarvale School for Girls, "In Quietness and in Confidence Shall Be Your Strength", 1932, 38.

²⁹Annual Report of Bethany House, Montreal, God - Eternal and Contemporary, 1934, 38.

³⁰Annual Report of the Farm Centre for Boys, The Enduring Name, BESS Eleventh Annual Meeting Minutes, 1936, 73.

workers of many years' standing have been reduced much below the minimum authorized by the Board."³¹ However, the church was not in a position to provide any additional funds.

Therefore, the local boards that supervised the work of each church facility were required to devote much additional attention to fundraising. While these bodies also hired the staff, oversaw the daily work of the institution, and fostered the relationship between the facility and the churches in their communities, their major task became that of raising money from the local community to keep the doors open. Not everyone was happy with this situation. "Institutions in the East have had the tradition of making some appeal locally over many years, which help is augmented through our Board," Hugh Dobson informed D. N. McLachlan in 1935. "But a number of institutions of the West have not been accustomed to making appeals, and our ministers in churches have opposed any appeal that might conflict, as they said, with the M. and M [Missionary and Maintenance Fund]." Dobson also noted that fiscal realities were causing these opinions to shift, and that "we are beginning to get some action, though not at all adequate."³²

The second obstacle concerned the question of the relationship of these facilities to various provincial child welfare agencies. Initially, these facilities were developed to respond to the needs of people who sought help or were directed there by a local church. However, as finances became tighter, the church's institutions began accepting people who were under the government's jurisdiction. Hugh Dobson, for one, questioned this policy. "I think in all institutions and institutional work we should take the very greatest care to establish it on the soundest principles, safeguarding both society and the church against too great a use of the Home by those

³¹Report of the Sessional Committee on Administration, God - Eternal and Contemporary, 1934, 15.

³²Hugh Dobson to D. N. McLachlan, 25 February 1935, Dobson Papers, Box 29, File J.

for whom it might not have been intended," he told McLachlan in 1930. "At least it has struck me that nearly all institutional work tends to be taken advantage of by somebody unless there is a great deal of care taken."³³ Government was seen frequently as the culprit. In the case of pressures facing a social service home in Calgary, McLachlan reminded Dobson that the church should not try to be all things to all people. In light of "the poverty of the Provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta so far as Institutions are concerned," the church "must make up its mind as to whether it is better to limit the work to one particular class and endeavor to get the best results from that work; or to continue taking into the Home, the different types as heretofore." However, "the fact that we are compelled to refuse some classes may have the effect of hastening the action of the Governments in connection with providing necessary institutions."³⁴

Indeed, many church officials wished the government would develop more facilities for some of the people who ended up in the church's facilities. In 1935, a charge was raised before the Calgary City Council that the staff of the Mountview Social Service Home in that city had punished a resident unfairly and inappropriately. Council formed a committee to conduct a full investigation of that institution.³⁵ The incident received much attention from the local press, and local United Church minister Thomas Powell of the home's board offered a spirited defence of the facility. He told readers of the Calgary Herald that, in recent years, this home had begun receiving a number of "detention cases" from provincial child welfare agencies of Alberta and Saskatchewan. While admitting that "our workers are greatly puzzled at times to know what to do with girls who are determined to break every rule of the

³³Hugh Dobson to D. N. McLachlan, 1 November 1930, Dobson Papers, Box 18B, File Mc2.

³⁴D. N. McLachlan to Hugh Dobson, 1 November 1927, Dobson Papers, Box 18b, File Mc2.

³⁵"An Inquiry into Mountview Home," Calgary Herald, 26 November 1935, Dobson Papers, Box 29, File J.

home and escape from the home at the first opportunity," he wondered what the home's critics would suggest they do.³⁶ He noted that, had someone visited the home on one recent night, "they would have seen one girl brought there by two policemen, in a horrible condition, and they would have seen what the workers are up against at times." Furthermore, he defended the record of the home:

If you study the record of the home . . . for 20 years you will find dozens of girls redeemed, and homes found for many little babies. Surely this is worth while, and the board is of the opinion that lives cannot be redeemed without the power of religion. During these years the church has put over \$50,000 into this home. Thousands of dollars have gone to the city of Calgary for rent for the building we use, which is owned by the city. We wonder if any of our severe critics have invested many dollars in this kind of social work.³⁷

Powell concluded by urging the city or province to establish their own facility if they were unhappy with the services that Mountview provided. His board would "welcome that" and would happily "go back to receiving girls who come to us seeking help." However, if that did not happen, "then we invite all to visit the home and see just what is being done, and help in solving a problem that everyone regards as very difficult."³⁸ Dobson informed McLachlan about these developments, but advised him to allow the local board to handle the situation.³⁹

As a way of dealing with these problems, the board made a concerted effort to work in partnership with other denominations and agencies in running these facilities. As its 1927 annual meeting was informed, "a goodly percentage" of residents in these institutions "belonged to denominations other than The United Church." While the board was "gratified that The United Church through its Redemptive Homes has been able to minister to the needs of applicants from various Churches," it asserted "that

³⁶Thomas Powell letter to the Calgary Herald, 4 January 1936, Dobson Papers, Box B-10, File T.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Hugh Dobson to D. N. McLachlan, 29 November 1935, Dobson Papers, Box 29, File J.

opportunity should be given to ministers, congregations, and office-bearers of other denominations to meet the expense of each inmate from their organization.”⁴⁰

Initiatives were taken to make this happen. By 1935, McLachlan reported that responsibility for a Winnipeg facility was shared with the Anglicans, and the church homes in Moncton and Truro were under the direction of a board representing the Anglican, Baptist, and United Churches.⁴¹

Within this framework, and under these constraints, the Board of Evangelism and Social Service supervised three types of institutions between 1925 and 1945. Maternity homes in Montreal, Winnipeg, and Vancouver served as sanctuaries for pregnant single women to have their babies. Reform schools in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Ontario, and Alberta received a variety of troubled young people and attempted to provide them with needed instruction and guidance. Community outreach facilities in Thorold and Toronto, Ontario, offered special services to particular segments of the community that lacked the necessary resources to live in dignity. While a dearth of research materials means that it is possible to provide only a cursory survey of this work, this hitherto ignored aspect of United Church reform activity represents one significant way the United Church responded to the community's needs.

Maternity Homes

The United Church's maternity homes provided sanctuary to pregnant single women before and after they gave birth, offered basic medical care to those in need, and provided moral guidance to the residents to help ensure that unwanted pregnancies would not occur again. Under the direction of a female superintendent,

⁴⁰Report of the Sessional Committee on Administration, "He Must Reign", 1928, 9.

⁴¹D. N. McLachlan to Hugh Dobson, 8 October 1935, Dobson Papers, Box 29, File J.

the staff of each facility sought to model what a Christian household was to look like so residents could have an appropriate frame of reference to guide their transition back into regular society.

Although life in these facilities remains shrouded in mystery, the annual reports of each home published by the Board of Evangelism and Social Service provide some information about the women who resided in these facilities. For example, it seems that about twenty-one girls a year entered Bethany House in Montreal, with an average age of nineteen, and that between fourteen and twenty babies were born there annually. Upon discharge, about half of the girls moved to employment situations of some kind, while most others returned to live with their parents. The majority of infants were placed in foster homes, while other babies remained with their mothers or were cared for by relatives. Prior to coming to Bethany House, the majority of girls had worked in domestic services, business offices, or factories. A number of others had lived at home.

The women who stayed in the Winnipeg and Vancouver facilities appear to fit a similar profile. In Winnipeg, between six and sixteen young women resided in the United Social Service Home at any given time, and seven to twelve babies were born each year. Coming from a background of domestic work, office employment, or school, the young women represented a range of ethnic and class backgrounds. After leaving the facility, the majority of them went to live with parents or other family members, and most took their babies to live with them. Because of provincial regulations which dictated that infants were not eligible for adoption or foster care until the age of six months, young women who were unable to care for their babies themselves often remained at the home with their children until this time had passed. The Vancouver home was the largest maternity institution run by the United Church, caring for an average of sixty girls and fifty babies per year. As in Montreal and Winnipeg, the girls represented all nationalities, denominations, and classes. Some of

the discharged girls went home to families, while positions were found for others. Some of the babies remained with their mothers, some were sent to foster homes, while others were placed in registered nursing homes where they were supported by their mothers.

In each facility, a concerted effort was made to provide appropriate medical care for the residents. Arrangements were made with the medical staff of local hospitals and clinics to look after the medical needs of mothers and infants. Vancouver superintendent Mary Matheson acknowledged that the “various clinics connected with the Vancouver General Hospital” had provided “wonderful cooperation and care” and, despite heavy demands, “they have never failed us.”⁴² Much attention was given to general health and nutrition, and superintendents frequently reported that the health of the girls under their care greatly improved during their stay.

Attention was also paid to helping the girls make the transition back into the workforce. “It requires much thought and wisdom to place the girls out and arrange for their future so that they will have the best possible chance of making good,” Montreal’s Eleanor Johnson reported. “In this and in other ways, we are glad to cooperate with the social agencies of the city, and find that such cooperation means better results in every way.”⁴³ However, as the depression persisted, this part of the work became increasingly difficult. “It is almost impossible to find situations for the girls, and when they are found, wages are so low that supporting a child upon them is out of the question,” Vancouver’s Mary Matheson noted in her 1932 report. “Unemployment always has a tendency to contribute largely to moral breakdown, and

⁴²Annual Report of the United Church Home for Girls, Vancouver, “In Quietness and in Confidence Shall Be Your Strength”, 1932, 47.

⁴³Annual Report of Bethany House, Montreal, “He Must Reign”, 1928, 38.

there is no question about the additional burden it is now laying upon all social agencies."⁴⁴ This frequently resulted in longer stays in the home.

The staff of each institution made a concerted effort to create a home-like atmosphere for the residents. In many cases, "as the time draws near for them to face the world again, they cling to the shelter of the Home," Alice Richardson of Winnipeg noted. "Some say that it is the only Home they have ever known."⁴⁵ Montreal's Eleanor Johnson echoed these sentiments. "Many girls are without any home at the back of them and Bethany House has proven a home of refuge that only 'home' can be in times of difficulty and readjustment."⁴⁶ Special attention was paid to giving the girls some basic skills and to celebrating Christmas.

In addition, much emphasis was paid to the spiritual well-being of the residents. Daily devotionals and Bible readings were a regular part of each institution's daily life, and attendance at Sunday worship was encouraged where possible. The approach of the staff at the Vancouver home was typical:

The quiet hour which we began in October, 1932, has continued daily without interruption. During this hour we have studied the miracles and parables of our Lord, and Fosdick's 'Meaning of Prayer.' Our Mission Circle meetings, the first Sunday of each month, have brought out unexpected ability and earnestness in the girls who are officers of the Circle. The addresses given by the speakers who have come to us, lantern pictures shown us, and the reading and study we have done, has given a new thought to the purpose and task of the Church, and has aroused in many a real desire to consecrate their lives in service to Christ.⁴⁷

Staff also attempted to reform the residents' moral attitudes and approach to life.

Vancouver's Mary Matheson asserted that many of the girls in her care ended up

⁴⁴Annual Report of the United Church Home for Girls, "The Work is Great and Large", BESS Eighth Annual Meeting Minutes, 1933, 43.

⁴⁵Annual Report of the United Church Home for Girls, Winnipeg, "I am the Bread of Life", 1931, 41.

⁴⁶Annual Report of Bethany House, Montreal, "He Must Reign", 1928, 37.

⁴⁷Annual Report of the United Church Home for Girls, Vancouver, "God - Eternal and Contemporary", 1934, 49.

there because of a lack of religion, morals, and family stability. The reasons for “this appalling waste of girl life” are “not far to see,” she noted:

We find that four girls frankly denied any connection or interest in any Church. Many of the others might quite truthfully have confessed to an utter lack of religious influence and teaching and training in their homes. Just there the great difficulty lies. Liquor still continues to take its heavy toll. Several of the girls this year have said, ‘This is what a drinking party did for me.’ And so from day to day the battle goes on and the re-establishment of our girls when they go out from the Home is made increasingly difficult, because of the absence of strong moral and religious influences in their homes, and the facing of many and strong temptations.⁴⁸

Thus the staff of these institutions attempted to mold, guide, and encourage the residents to follow a different path. While “we cannot undo the years that have passed, we cannot wipe out all the wrong, or make up for all that has been lost, or left out of the early years, but we can bring them in touch with the Source of life - the giver of the New Life,” Montreal’s Eleanor Johnson noted. “In our morning talks and other chats we have from time to time, we feel that these girls are reaching out to something better than they have known before, a new meaning of life which they have missed and which they desire intensely.”⁴⁹ Some successes were reported. Annie Lang of Bethany House emphasized that a “strong effort is made to teach the girls thoughtfulness for others, and it was quite pleasing to see the interest that was taken in preparing a box of toys and other articles, made from odds and ends in the Home, and sent to one of the city hospitals at Christmas time, also in the making of blocks for a quilt for one of the city missions.”⁵⁰

However, not everyone was responsive to this type of program. Vancouver’s Mary Matheson reported that, while many girls left the home to establish successful careers or families, others returned “to a life of sin” for a variety of reasons. “In some

⁴⁸Annual Report of the United Church Home for Girls, Vancouver, “Revive Thy Work”, 1930, 47-48.

⁴⁹Annual Report of Bethany House, Montreal, “He Must Reign”, 1928, 39.

⁵⁰Annual Report of Bethany House, Montreal, “I Am the Bread of Life”, 1931, 32.

cases low mentality, in others inherent moral weakness, for all of them who walk with unworthy feet, the desperate line of drink and all the mad gaiety of the dance hall and the street," she contended. "Remembering that for many of them, there are no home influences that are sweet, and pure, and Christian, to protect, and hold, and steady them, we can easily understand how the results we deplore are brought about."⁵¹

Reform Schools For Boys and Girls

The United Church also sponsored a series of reform schools for boys and girls deemed delinquent. These facilities sought to reform the residents' attitudes, provide them with some basic education, and introduce them to new lifestyles and values.

In Truro, Nova Scotia, the Maritime Home for Girls kept an average of eighty-one girls on site and supervised a similar number of graduates who had moved out to various work situations in the surrounding communities. The girls placed in the facility had been designated as "wayward and delinquent," so the institution attempted "to train [them] educationally so that they may become good housekeepers and good homemakers for the future."⁵² This was done in several ways. Half-days were spent in a day-school, where both elementary and high school courses were offered. Each girl was given an individual flower garden to tend and some rudimentary knowledge of horticulture. Much attention was given to crafts, including wood-working, weaving, rug hooking, and quilting, and the resulting work was often sold at local exhibits and fairs. In 1935, formal classes in cooking, laundry, sewing and home nursing were offered under the auspices of the provincial Department of

⁵¹Annual Report of the Vancouver Home for Girls, "Complete in Him", BESS Fourth Annual Meeting Minutes, 1929, 43-44.

⁵²Annual Report of the Maritime Home for Girls, "Thy Will Be Done", BESS Second Annual Meeting Minutes, 1926, 39.

Education and under the supervision of the Halifax Technical School. The girls who successfully completed the course were awarded a provincial certificate.⁵³

In her annual report for 1928, superintendent Josephine Strothard noted several successes. Two girls remained for extra time at the home in order to obtain their teaching certificates at Normal School. Another graduate had recently completed her three-year nurse's training at an American hospital, while two others had begun studying for their nursing certificate. "Of our graduate girls, sixteen are now being granted the privilege of attending school, either studying in the lower grades or attempting academic work," she concluded. "The remaining sixty are, in the majority of cases, employed as domestics, largely in country homes."⁵⁴

The United Church also sponsored another reform school for young women in the Maritimes. The Interprovincial Home for Young Women opened in Cedarvale, New Brunswick in February 1926, and was organized along similar lines to the Truro facility. Built as a cottage containing twenty-four bedrooms, a hospital ward and treatment facilities, plus the usual amenities, the Cedarvale home also offered school classes, lessons in crafts, sewing, homemaking, and gardening. As the majority of girls arrived with venereal disease, appropriate medical treatment was secured. The residents attended worship, Sunday School, and regular meetings of a local Canadian Girls in Training (C.G.I.T.) group. Superintendent Jennie Robinson summarized the girls' goals: "During the year we have tried to undo the training and experience of years to teach the girls committed to our care a higher and better life."⁵⁵ The task was often daunting. A later superintendent, Barbara Walker, reviewed the history of the home and reported that, of the 100 girls who had resided there, "fifty-two of these

⁵³Annual Report of the Maritime Home for Girls, Play the Man, 1936, 64.

⁵⁴Annual Report of the Maritime Home for Girls, Truro, Nova Scotia, "He Must Reign", 1928, 32-34.

⁵⁵Annual Report of the Interprovincial Home for Young Women, "Thy Will Be Done", 1927, 40.

may be rated as almost normal mentally, thirty-seven were able to read and write but not capable of learning much that would be beyond the grasp of a twelve-year-old girl; six were incapable of writing and reading; six were utterly beyond caring for themselves." In addition, "at least fifty of the inmates have had illegitimate children, thirteen have had two or more, three in the Home at the present time have each had at least three children."⁵⁶

In addition, the board was responsible for the work of a reform facility for boys in rural Ontario. The Farm Centre for Boys was established in Fullarton to train urban youth in the ways of rural life and equip them to work as apprentices on local farms. Located fourteen miles east of Stratford on a hundred-acre site, the facility provided the residents with some basic agricultural training and then arranged for them to live and work with a local farm family. In this way, the board hoped that a wholesome rural environment would help turn the boys around. As D. N. McLachlan remarked, "generally speaking there are few bad boys" but there are "bad parents and unspeakable home surroundings in which boys are brought up." However, "when removed from such parents and surroundings, the rapid progress in right directions made by boys sent to the Farm Centre, shows that under proper conditions and wise training boys seldom go wrong."⁵⁷ The Farm Centre's superintendent, Hattie L. Baker, shared this philosophy:

Ninety per cent of our boys are here because of home conditions. They are not bad boys. They are just surrounded in the city with bad environment. But when the Church takes them out of the environment and places them in God's environment, with the fields, the trees, the sunshine, pure air, good wholesome food, all these things have a wonderful influence on the child's life. The majority of boys who are left out for a year have earned enough to furnish themselves with good clothes and a bank account to their credit.

⁵⁶Annual Report of the Interprovincial Home for Young Women, Moncton, "The Work is Great and Large", 1933, 26.

⁵⁷D. N. McLachlan Annual Report, "Revive Thy Work", 1930, 17.

The residents ranged in age from eight to eighteen years, with the majority around fifteen. They were trained in all branches of farm work, and also had full-time public school hours under the direction of a teacher hired at the centre.

A reformatory for girls was also established by the board near Georgetown, Ontario in 1930 “for the purpose of caring for normal, healthy, incorrigible girls.” According to superintendent Jessie Oliver, “the Board entertains the hope that girls beyond the control of parents or guardians, who are on the verge of delinquency, will probably react favorably if removed from bad surroundings and degrading influences, and placed in good surroundings and wholesome influences.”⁵⁸ After a time of education, the Cedarville School sought to place the girls in suitable homes. The work was challenging. “This type of Christian service is not easy,” superintendent Jessie Oliver confessed. “From unwholesome home environments, the children have received distorted views of life; many of them cling to the old superstitious beliefs of the illiterate. It is daily striving and seeking to teach the best obedience, truth, honor, self-respect, self-control, and all the virtues that make for the upbuilding of character.”⁵⁹ However, Oliver believed this work to be extremely worthwhile. “The underprivileged and incorrigible girl does not mean that the girl or rather the child is bad,” she noted in her report to the board’s 1933 annual meeting. “It does mean that there are broken homes from which many of our girls have come, also lack of early training, wholesome surroundings, and proper food.” Therefore, “our girls do require special attention, physically, mentally, socially and spiritually, and the worthwhileness of our task lies in the fact that had these girls remained in their

⁵⁸Annual Report of the Cedarvale School for Girls, Georgetown, “Complete in Him”, 1929, 39.

⁵⁹Annual Report of the Cedarvale School for Girls, Georgetown, “The Work is Great and Large”, 1933, 36.

former surroundings, they never would have been given the chance to become normal, wholesome, sappy [sic] Christian girls.”⁶⁰

Another girls’ reformatory was operated in Calgary. The Mountview Home received girls from the Alberta Department of Social Services, and sought to reform their attitudes and morals by providing a regulated environment for them. Grade one to nine classes were held every afternoon, and the provincial curriculum followed. Each girl was given a small plot of ground on which she could grow vegetables and flowers, and the girls were taught to sew. Weekly Sunday school classes were held, and prayers offered each morning. The girls also received training in household duties such as cooking, sewing, and household economics, and they were required to assist in tending the cooperative garden which raised produce for the home. In addition, the girls were given regular recreation and exercise.

Not everyone welcomed the opportunity to live in such a facility. A report sent to Hugh Dobson by superintendent Marion Rollins in 1940 profiles several of the residents of the Mountview Home and provides a rare glimpse into the way the women of this home were viewed. She indicated that, between May 1939 and May 1940, ten girls escaped from the facility. Rollins sought to educate Dobson about the problems and challenges her staff faced by describing some of the girls who had been placed in the facility.⁶¹

The first was “Sarah,” a sixteen-year-old prostitute of Polish descent who was the only child of Roman Catholic parents in Calgary. She was taking treatments for venereal disease while awaiting trial, and was kept in detention in the home. One night in July 1939, she loosened the bars on the windows of her room, tore the screen,

⁶⁰Ibid., 36.

⁶¹Marion Rollins to Hugh Dobson, 15 May 1940, Dobson Papers, Box 21, File R3. The following descriptions are taken from this letter.

tore her bedsheets into strips, and descended to the ground. No word had been heard of her since.

A second resident was "Mabel," a seventeen-year old girl described as having a "sulky, stubborn, defiant disposition," who was also taking treatments for venereal disease. She escaped from the home through a basement window one Sunday after church. She was later convicted of stealing a car after escaping from the home, and sentenced to jail in Lethbridge.

"Olga," a fifteen-year-old characterized as "very deceitful and untruthful" was admitted by the Calgary Children's Aid Department for petty thefts. One Sunday morning, "when the others were at church and only 1 staff member and a few girls were at home, she stole another girls [sic] clothing, went out a window on the first floor and ran home." The city police found her within a few hours, and upon her return she was kept in detention for over a week. "She is now preparing to write the grade IX Departmental exam in June."

"Marjorie" was a sixteen-year-old ward of the provincial government who had run away with the circus while in Edmonton. Apprehended in Regina, she was sent to Calgary for rehabilitation and treatment of venereal disease. Rollins noted some recent improvements in her behavior. "She has asked to be allowed to unite with the Church" and "at present is studying 'What it means to be a Christian' and trying to live as if she were a Church member."

"Ethel" was a fifteen-year-old ward of the provincial government whose parents had separated. She had been "running wild for over a year," drank heavily, had a bad case of gonorrhoea, and also regularly wet the bed. While at the Mountview Home, she stole money and possessions from another resident, and took these with her when she escaped. Upon her return, "her attitude has not been at all desirable - being impudent and defiant - she claims she only came back to show that she was not afraid to return and to meet her roommate whose clothing and gifts she had taken."

The sixth girl was "Clara," a fourteen-year-old resident admitted by the Calgary Children's Aid Department, whose parents were separated and whose school attendance had been irregular. "When she came she said she was in Grade II or III and could scarcely read. At that time she was given an I.Q. of 69. She is now doing grade 5 work." After she escaped from the home, she was discovered "living with a man about 44 years of age." It was later shown "that when she left here she went to her father, who 'arranged' with this other man to 'keep' her. Both her father and the other man were sentenced to terms in Lethbridge jail." Since the trial she "appears fairly happy and is making progress, although still slipping sometimes," Rollins reported. "Late in April she made a break on the way home from Church and ran to her Mother's place. She returned in less than two hours."

The seventh girl was "Polly," a sixteen-year-old admitted by the Children's Aid Department for immorality. She, too, had a bad case of gonorrhoea and an I.Q. of about sixty-three, and was described as being "difficult to work with as she did not remember things." In April 1940, she went outside to the clothesline and ran away. At the time of the report, she had not been located.

The eighth resident was "Sandra," a seventeen-year-old from Edmonton who was a ward of the Provincial Department of Child Welfare and "unmanageable at home." Upon moving to Calgary, she became a prostitute and contracted gonorrhoea before being arrested and sent to a home run by the Roman Catholic Church in Edmonton. Here she conspired with others who "caused a riot in the Home (barricading themselves in a room, etc)." She was then sent to the Mountview Home in Calgary, where she continued her efforts to escape. Upon being apprehended, Rollins reported she admitted "that it was entirely her own fault that she ran away, that she was well-treated, etc, but 'couldn't stand not being free.'"

"Lorraine" was an eighteen-year-old ward of the Provincial Child Welfare Department who "started going wild while living with her mother in Edmonton, ran

away with a friend, and contracted Gonorrhoea." While she had been "very careless and unclean in habits and thoughts" when she arrived, she gradually changed, "learned to tell the truth and to face things." She was preparing to write the Departmental Grade 9 examinations in June.

The final resident was "Janice," a seventeen-year-old ward of the provincial government. She escaped from the home, was returned, and then was placed in the home's detention room. According to Rollins:

This room had the usual provisions for such a room - lock and barred window - with bars up to within about 6 inches from the top. The room is on the top floor of the building. The bars and furnishings were as they have been for years. She was given some sewing to do, also a magazine. She was very resentful at being brought back. On April 19th I was on my way to Dr. Frances' office with another girl and when two blocks away from the Home looked back and saw that something was happening at [her] window. I got a car and returned in great haste to the Home, going to the side of the Home where [she] was hanging by her hands from the window bars. I climbed up on some steps until I could reach her feet. I tried to raise her so she could pull herself up to the window ledge but she could not do this and in a very short time her hands slipped from the window bars and she fell. She remained conscious but did not move. An ambulance was sent for - and she was taken to the General Hospital where Doctor Frances attended her. X-Rays were taken of her body and limbs, and she was thoroughly examined. She was discharged from the Hospital on April 25 and returned here where she remained in bed for several days.

While in hospital, "Janice" apparently told stories of the 'terrible punishments' the Mountview staff had made her endure, and "referred particularly to the 'many rules' and the fact that she was not able to do as she pleased!"

Life in these institutions could clearly be challenging, and the staff often found the task of reforming the residents daunting. However, operating a third type of facility presented the board with a set of different challenges.

Other Philanthropic Facilities

In addition to its homes for pregnant girls and its reform schools, the Board of Evangelism and Social Service also supervised the work of several other institutions designed to meet a variety of community needs.

The McLean-Malpas Memorial in Thorold, Ontario served as an outreach ministry to women and children who had recently emigrated from the British Isles. By offering a range of activities which included a Sunday school, Sunday evening worship, Tuesday evening worship, weekly women's meeting, junior boys and girls clubs, and a C.G.I.T. program, this institution sought to "reach out a friendly hand to strangers, and to bring into the hearts and homes and lives of weary and often heart-broken mothers and little children the Christ touch."⁶² In 1929, the building was enlarged and work extended.

In Toronto, the Earls court Children's Home continued to provide a safe haven for needy children placed there on a residential basis by the Toronto Children's Aid Society, or left by a parent while he or she was at work. In addition to providing care and supervision for between forty and fifty children ages two to fourteen, the facility's staff also helped facilitate the adoption of a range of homeless children. "Placing of children in this manner takes time and thought, but the effort expended has been well worth while, proving successful in every case, both to child and parent," superintendent Hattie Inkpen reported. "We wish we had more children for adoption under our care, as we have a long list of would-be foster parents."⁶³ The home's work was greatly aided by a generous private gift of a large house close to the shores of Lake Simcoe, which was used as a summer residence.⁶⁴ By 1935, the number of children under care had been reduced to thirty-five, much to the staff's relief. "In our early days we were overcrowded and overworked. With the smaller family we are happier; we have time for play, more leisure to be interested in the things which are important to the child, and help him learn to adjust himself to

⁶²Annual Report of the McLean-Malpas Memorial, "Thy Will Be Done", 1927, 46.

⁶³Annual Report of the Earls court Children's Home, Toronto, "He Must Reign", 1928, 39.

⁶⁴Annual Report of the Earls court Children's Home, Toronto, "Thy Will Be Done", 1927, 44.

others.”⁶⁵ Every summer, a large number of children who were not regular residents went out to a summer home at Lake Simcoe for a holiday.

Finally, the board oversaw the work of the Ina Grafton Gage Home in Toronto. Opened by United Church moderator E. H. Oliver on April 30, 1931, the home was established with funds provided by the late Sir William Gage and his wife.⁶⁶ According to the first superintendent, Julia Millson, “the purpose of the Home, under the direction of the Church, is the provision of a comfortable home for elderly ladies, where comfort may be assured and a cheerful Christian atmosphere maintained, at rates within the means of those who for various reasons require such shelter and care in the evening of their lives.”⁶⁷ The home was initially able to house fourteen women, but was somewhat hampered by the reluctance of prospective residents to share a room. “Many ladies who have applied for admission and admired the Home very greatly, have declined to come in on account of failure to be assured single rooms.”⁶⁸

In these ways, the United Church, through its Board of Evangelism and Social Service, provided a range of services in a number of Canadian communities. In the face of significant financial difficulties, the church carried forward the task of trying to reform and reshape the residents’ lives to be in closer accord with Christ’s teachings and example. These institutions met a need that was only gradually being filled by the Canadian state, and thus touched many lives. But the United Church used its Board of Evangelism and Social Service to reach out in other ways as well.

⁶⁵Annual Report of the Earls Court Children’s Home, Toronto, Play the Man, 1936, 66-67.

⁶⁶Board of Evangelism and Social Service Executive Meeting Minutes, 6 November 1930, “I am the Bread of Life”, 1931, 47-49.

⁶⁷Annual Report of the Ina Grafton Gage Home, Toronto, “In Quietness and in Confidence Shall Be Your Strength”, 1932, 37.

⁶⁸Annual Report of the Ina Grafton Gage Home, Toronto, “The Work is Great and Large”, 1933, 35.

Through its National Emergency Relief Commission, the church offered a very different form of important philanthropic service to the country.

The National Emergency Relief Commission

In August 1931, the United Church of Canada established the National Emergency Relief Committee (NERC) in order to “consider methods of relief for the stricken areas of the West.”⁶⁹ Under the leadership of D. N. McLachlan and R. B. Cochrane, secretary of the Board of Home Mission, the committee initially decided to “secure used, but usable, clothing for the people in the dried-out area of Western Canada.”⁷⁰ At the committee’s request, the board relieved associate secretary John Coburn of all his other duties for six months in order to devote himself full-time to the task of organizing the church’s western relief work. Coburn coordinated the sending of clothing, food, and other amenities from communities with plenty to communities in need.

Soon after beginning this work, Coburn began urging that fruits and vegetables also be collected and sent to the prairies. While both Canadian railways had “kindly offered to transport bales of goods free of charge, to Western Canada,” they initially refused to make the same provision for food.⁷¹ The Saskatchewan Relief Commission was asked to pay the freight on the carloads of fruit and vegetables that were being sent to that province, and after some hesitation, agreed.⁷² However, after a deputation consisting of T. Albert Moore, R. B. Cochrane, and John Coburn requested that Prime Minister R. B. Bennett intervene, the railways soon

⁶⁹National Emergency Relief Committee (NERC) Minutes, 4 August 1931, Emergency Relief Committee Papers, Box 1, File 1.

⁷⁰John Coburn, “Saying it with Cauliflowers,” *The New Outlook*, 21 October 1931, 1004.

⁷¹NERC Minutes, 31 August 1931, Emergency Relief Committee Papers, Box 1, File 1.

⁷²NERC Minutes, 30 September 1931, Emergency Relief Committee Papers, Box 1, File 1.

reconsidered their position and agreed to carry carloads of food to Western Canada free of charge.⁷³

Coburn then began informing all of the United Church congregations in Ontario, Quebec, the Maritimes and British Columbia about this campaign, and urged them to make every effort to participate. "Let it be remembered by all that the present situation is more serious than has ever occurred in Canada, placing upon the Church and all its members great responsibility, but at the same time opening a door of glorious opportunity for service," he noted.⁷⁴ He suggested that every pastor speak about this project from the pulpit and appeal to all who could help. He urged that local Women's Missionary Societies and Women's Associations be asked to coordinate the collection of supplies and make a personal appeal to all of the church's members and adherents for clothing and other goods. He also advised congregations and pastoral charges to work together where practical. "When any considerable quantity has been assembled, a statement showing number and classification of articles, and making an estimate of the total value, should be sent to the National Relief Committee, who will at once advise as to shipment." Once this happened, all congregations "will be advised as to the ultimate destination of their contributions."⁷⁵ Coburn described the activities of one rural Ontario area for readers of The New Outlook:

At Burlington it was planned to fill one car, but so generous was the response that two were filled to the roof. At Waterdown near by, the canning factory, which had closed for the season, opened its doors, and donated its use for one day. The employees gave their labor free, and the farmers provided the material, as a result of which co-operative effort over a ton of jam was produced. . . . Then a retired minister of The United Church gave a truck load of fine peaches. It was risky to place these in a car in their raw state, so the

⁷³Report of the National Emergency Relief Committee to the Executive of the General Council, August 1931 to March 1932, Emergency Relief Committee Papers, Box 1, File 1, 3.

⁷⁴John Coburn to The Ministers of The United Church, 27 August 1931, Emergency Relief Committee Papers, Box 1, File 3.

⁷⁵Ibid.

ladies of the Burlington United Church gathered in the church kitchen, and as a result of their united assault on that truck load six hundred quart jars of canned peaches were sent on their way westward. I have received a report that the contents of one of these Burlington cars was distributed to needy people over a radius of twenty miles from Benough, and that it was greatly appreciated.⁷⁶

Once the food and clothing were collected, Coburn was responsible for seeing that the goods were gathered and transported by train to the prairies. When the shipments arrived in the west, they were distributed "under the direction of the Home Missionary Superintendents of the needy areas, in co-operation with Government Relief Agencies."⁷⁷ In Saskatchewan, Home Mission superintendent George Dorey belonged to the Provincial Relief Commission that coordinated this work and assumed responsibility for ensuring that donated materials were directed to areas of greatest need. A correspondent to The New Outlook, H. D. Ranns, testified that the collected food was greatly appreciated. Upon visiting Pangman, Saskatchewan on Thanksgiving in 1931, he reported:

The little church was a sight to see! They had not known where to find a suitable building to house the stuff as it came from the car and the church was suggested and agreed to. If it is sacrilege to store foodstuffs in a church, then sacrilege was done; but who would dare to say that the church was not glorified that Thanksgiving Day? At any rate, there the stuff was: boxes and crates of apples, pears, canned goods, pumpkins and squash, two big cheese . . . and honey and maple syrup. 'Bless 'em down East. They're good stuff,' said one woman standing by, as she uncovered the cases of maple syrup. . . . The Church with its mission of relief is taking the better part.⁷⁸

After the first five months of work, Coburn reported "that approximately 200 tons of clothing, worth not less than \$250,000; 159 cars containing about five and one half million pounds of fruit and vegetables, and worth about \$100,000, were despatched to the drought stricken areas of the West." As each car contained enough

⁷⁶John Coburn, "Saying it with Cauliflowers," The New Outlook, 21 October 1931, 1004.

⁷⁷Report of the National Emergency Relief Committee to the Executive of the General Council, 2.

⁷⁸H. D. Ranns, "Carloads of Plenty Arriving in a Barren, Needy Land," The New Outlook, 21 October 1931, 997.

food to serve an average of 250 families, he estimated that 40,000 families benefitted.⁷⁹ These gifts did untold good. “The benefits of the distribution of such a vast quantity of fresh fruit and vegetables, cannot be over-estimated,” Cochrane, McLachlan, and Coburn told the General Council executive in 1932. “Medical authorities call attention to the injury to health through restricted concentrated diet. Deficiency diseases, especially among children, are usually prevalent following famine or semi-famine conditions.” Thus “there is no doubt that the health of many in the stricken areas, was preserved by the vitamin-bearing food contained in those cars.”⁸⁰ Coburn noted that “Christmas gifts were also provided for 5,000 children in the West, who otherwise would have had none.”

The work of the National Emergency Relief Committee continued throughout the 1930s and focused on providing good clothing. “The National Relief Committee decided to concentrate this winter on an effort to supply good second-hand clothing for adults and children in any area from which an appeal comes,” The New Outlook readers were told in October 1932. Because it was “altogether probable that the surplus of clothing in many homes has been exhausted because of the unusual effort last year,” any person “who can send us money to assist in buying materials and yarn will be helping greatly.”⁸¹ Nevertheless, clothing kept being collected. In 1932-33, forty-two bales of clothing were sent to British Columbia, 270 to Alberta, 459 to Saskatchewan, eleven to Manitoba and eighty-one to northern Ontario, for a total of

⁷⁹John Coburn Annual Report, “In Quietness and in Confidence Shall Be Your Strength”, 1932, 25.

⁸⁰Report of the National Emergency Relief Committee to the Executive of the General Council, 6.

⁸¹“Statement to the Church re Relief,” The New Outlook, 19 October 1932, 963.

863 bales.⁸² By 1935-1936, people in Alberta and Saskatchewan had received most of the 1,580 clothing bales that were collected and shipped.⁸³

In 1936, members of the National Emergency Relief Committee also became part of an inter-denominational committee established to find more effective ways of securing additional carloads of fruit and vegetables for the needy sections of western Canada.⁸⁴ The Joint Committee of the Churches for Western Relief consisted of Anglican, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, and United Church representatives, and helped to consolidate work in the various churches. This Committee also began urging government to assume more responsibility for this situation. "This Committee requests the Very Rev. Peter Bryce, D.D., Moderator of The United Church of Canada, to interview, at the earliest date possible, the Dominion Government, bringing to their attention the strong belief of the Committee, viz., that food rations and distribution of clothing be increased to the needy people in the dried out areas of western Canada," an August 20, 1937 motion declared.⁸⁵ In this way, the churches hoped the crisis that had existed for so long throughout the Canadian Prairies could be quickly alleviated.

Although it is difficult to determine the overall impact of the church's relief work, it seems to have been substantial. John Webster Grant concludes that the United Church's mandate to serve Canadians was never expressed "more impressively than during the depression years when the prairies were devastated by successive years of drought and crop failure." While the church may have been "a

⁸²Annual Meeting Minutes, 29 March 1933, "The Work is Great and Large", 1933, 7.

⁸³NERC Minutes, 10 September 1936, Emergency Relief Committee Papers, Box 1, File 1.

⁸⁴NERC Minutes, 14 September 1936, Emergency Relief Committee Papers, Box 1, File 1.

⁸⁵Joint Committee of the Churches for Western Relief Minutes, 20 August 1937, Emergency Relief Committee Papers, Box 1, File 1.

little slow” in providing food and clothing to the areas most seriously affected, “it was ahead of most other churches and well ahead of the federal government.”⁸⁶

Conclusion

Through the work of its various redemptive institutions, and the activities of the National Emergency Relief Committee, the Board of Evangelism and Social Service offered some important philanthropic services to Canadians during the 1930s. By responding to people’s needs in these ways, its evangelism and social reform work was given a constructive balance. In addition, these initiatives provided the church with a way of offering a clear Christian response to the problems of the time. During this period, the board constantly rejected the option of cooperating with various secular agencies doing similar work, believed it could deliver services much more efficiently than governments, and asserted that it had a distinct role to play in tending and transforming lives. However, the outbreak of World War II would provide the church with a variety of other opportunities to respond to a host of spiritual and material needs, and would stretch its resources to the limit.

⁸⁶John Webster Grant, “What’s Past Is Prologue,” in Voices and Visions: 65 Years of The United Church of Canada, ed. Peter Gordon White (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1990), 134.

CHAPTER SIX

THEOLOGICAL REFORMULATION AND THE REALITIES OF WARTIME

During the late 1930s and early 1940s, the Board of Evangelism and Social Service believed the church must do a better job of relating the gospel to the tragic realities of the age in order to counteract the forces of secularization they feared would grow stronger during wartime. Thus it requested General Council to establish a commission to develop a contemporary statement of faith. The board was responsible for this commission, and several of its members were instrumental in developing a document that placed a new emphasis on the reality of human sin, stressed that only God's grace could save humanity from its dilemmas, and called upon human beings to repent and accept God's mercy and forgiveness.

These understandings significantly informed the board's response to World War II. As Thomas Sinclair Faulkner suggests, the prevailing theme in Protestant thought in Canada during the first months of the conflict was a "call to repentance."¹ Individuals and institutions alike saw the war as God's judgment upon the nations, and, in the face of global tragedy, responded by acknowledging their need for God's forgiveness. The board encouraged people to confess their sins, accept God's grace, and care for one another in a time of trial. It coordinated the recruitment of chaplains to the armed forces, and organized a variety of initiatives to help alleviate the hardships of Canadian soldiers who were fighting overseas.

At the same time, however, the board's growing awareness of the various ways that nations around the world had trampled the rights of minorities left it committed to actively defending the rights of conscientious objectors, and led it to criticize the

¹Charles Thomas Sinclair Faulkner, "For Christian Civilization: The Churches and Canada's War Effort, 1939-1942" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Chicago, 1975), 68-76.

internment of Japanese-Canadians in British Columbia. By these actions, the Board of Evangelism and Social Service endeavored to raise a distinct Christian voice and bear witness to the gospel in an age of tragedy, confusion, and distress.

Theological Reformulation and the Commission on the Christian Faith

The latter part of the 1930s was a time of theological ferment throughout Europe and North America. The spectres of depression and war had raised some fundamental challenges to contemporary understandings of faith, and theologians such as Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Reinhold and Richard Niebuhr, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer began to develop Christian theologies that addressed these realities. At this time, the United Church also began to explore a range of new theological ideas.

In Canada, the work of theological reformulation was given particular impetus by the social and economic crisis of the depression. This period “constituted a Gethsemane experience for many people, not only in Canada, but throughout the world,” D. N. McLachlan reported at the board’s 1932 annual meeting:

No reflective person has escaped days of deep anxiety. Many have confronted uncertainty, loss, privation and suffering, and from their hearts has gone forth the bitter cry: ‘Let this cup pass from me.’ It has been a time that tested men’s souls. Some faltered before the test. Others endured as seeing Him who is invisible, and have come through with faith purified and spiritual realities made clear.²

The depression had definitively altered the country's social and religious landscape. The world lay “in broken fragments about us,” McLachlan later reflected. “No human hand has yet been discovered strong enough to put the fragments together again - an Almighty power is required.” Consequently, he believed that “in the midst of misery, want and uncertainty, there is a cry for God.” Therefore, the church had been given the

²D. N. McLachlan Annual Report, “In Quietness and in Confidence Shall Be Your Strength”, BESS Seventh Annual Meeting Minutes, 1932, 17.

“great opportunity, under the guidance of the Spirit” to “affect such changes in thought, attitude and life, as will make God real to the seeking soul.”³

McLachlan’s colleagues shared his belief that the current social and economic situation was giving rise to new and difficult theological questions. People were experiencing “a fading sense of self-sufficiency, a more sure way of dependence upon God, a coming to Him, a greater concern about His way, a deeper insight into His nature,” Hugh Dobson noted. “They cultivate an increasing practice of bearing one another’s burdens and a hope and joy based on surer foundations, until these things are becoming characteristic of religious experience in the fellowship of many of the congregation with which I have the privilege of coming into contact.”⁴

In such a climate, the board offered tangible support to those who articulated a new theology for the times, as evident in the case of J. King Gordon. A professor of social ethics at United Theological College in Montreal, Gordon was removed from his position by the university’s board because of his controversial views and known affiliation with the C.C.F.⁵ After his dismissal ignited a blaze of controversy throughout the church, the board’s 1935 annual meeting adopted a report that affirmed the value of Gordon’s work. It noted that “General Council at its last meeting unanimously affirmed that it was necessary for the Church by some definite act to make clear that freedom of prophesying in The United Church was not imperiled.” It then affirmed this task was especially important in light of the current social and economic crisis:

³D. N. McLachlan Annual Report, “The Work is Great and Large”, BESS Eighth Annual Meeting Minutes, 1933, 18.

⁴Hugh Dobson Annual Report, “In Quietness and in Confidence Shall Be Your Strength”, 1932, 21.

⁵For a more detailed discussion of this event, see Brian J. Fraser, “From Anathema to Alternative: The Gordons and Socialism,” in A Long and Faithful March: Towards the Christian Revolution, 1930s/1980s, ed. Harold Wells and Roger Hutchinson (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1939), 41-49.

The Board finds that within and without the Church, there are large numbers of people who believe that since the suggestion of the General Council was declined, the Church's apparent inaction is inconsistent with her professions. The situation, as it now stands, seriously interferes with the work of this Board in carrying out the work committed to it by the General Council, especially the presentation and advocacy of the principles set forth in the Council's declaration on the Christianizing of the Social Order.

Therefore, the board asked that General Council executive "seek in some adequate way to give effect to the General Council's declaration as to the necessity of definite action on this matter."⁶ In part because of the board's intervention, Gordon was offered the job of teaching social ethics in interested churches and seminaries across Canada.

D. N. McLachlan supported this initiative and encouraged the church to view Gordon as an asset rather than a liability. "It is quite apparent now that though in the past the Church urged its members to take a more intelligent and active interest in public affairs very little permanent good has resulted," McLachlan told T. Albert Moore in July 1935. While the church should never "become a political order" or "announce a definite political programme," it could "declare with greater urgency the need of Christian men and women who possess other necessary qualifications to make whatever sacrifices may be required in entering public life, in order that Christian ideals may be reflected in legislation." McLachlan believed King Gordon could do much to stimulate the type of thinking that would turn these dreams into reality, and thus strongly supported the appointment.⁷

The board also invited several leading United Church theologians to share some of their recent thinking about theology with its members at various annual meetings during the 1930s. For example, R.B.Y. Scott told the board in 1937 that current "problems of war and poverty, of unemployment and the public good in general,

⁶Annual Meeting Minutes, 4 April 1935, Time Marches On: 1925-1935, BESS Tenth Annual Meeting Minutes, 1935, 9.

⁷D. N. McLachlan to T. Albert Moore, 15 July 1935, General Council Executive and Sub-Executive Correspondence, Box 3, File 44.

require a radical revision of our conventional ideas.”⁸ He affirmed that, throughout human history, the gospel frequently appeared “at the point of strain, in the claimant need of the time, and created there something eternally new.” As he put it:

Through Moses it made a new nation out of a crowd of terror-stricken, runaway slaves. Through Nathan and others like him it established a new standard of monarchy in the ancient world. Through Elijah it distinguished two levels of religion and two directions of social development, and made possible a new kind of society. Through Amos it established social justice at the heart of religion and at the foundation of the community. Through Hosea human love, reflecting the Divine love, took on new significance as the bond of family life and political structure. Through Isaiah were revealed spiritual conditions of survival for a little people jostled between the empires. By Jeremiah came an understanding of the individual in his solitariness, and of a new level of integration for a people’s life.⁹

Scott maintained that this legacy continued through modern times. “So in the writers of Job and the Servant Song and many Psalms and Daniel and Paul and Mark and John and Augustine and Francis and Wyclif and Luther and Calvin and Wesley and Shaftsbury and Kagawa - in all of them something new emerges at a particular point of strain.”¹⁰ In the current age of crisis, the church had the opportunity to once again give expression to new movements of thought and foster creative manifestations of faith.

The following year, J. M. Shaw of Queen’s Theological College in Kingston gave a report to the board’s annual meeting on the World Conference on Life and Work at Oxford and on the Faith and Order Conference in Edinburgh, which he had recently attended. These conferences drew together many of the world’s leading theologians and ecumenical church leaders, and provided occasions to discuss a wide assortment of ideas.¹¹ In his view, the Oxford Conference emphasized “that we live in a time when

⁸R.B.Y. Scott, “The Evangel of God,” Play the Man, BESS Twelfth Annual Report, 1936, 41.

⁹Ibid., 40.

¹⁰Ibid., 40.

¹¹W. A. Visser ‘t Hooft, The Genesis and Formation of the World Council of Churches (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), 43-47, provides an overview of the Oxford and Edinburgh conferences.

the very desperateness of the world's need with its confusion and disruption calls the Church to a new united thinking." He also discerned at Oxford a consensus "that in the present world situation, the Church is called to witness to Jesus Christ, and to the power of His Spirit, especially in a twofold relationship, in relation first to community life in the sphere of economic and social relationships, and second, to the State, and especially to the so-called 'totalitarian' claim made in so many countries that the State is the supreme sovereign authority in thought and life."¹² Given the ever-changing nature of world affairs, he warned that the church would be required to constantly re-assess how this might best be done.

Shaw then noted that the Edinburgh Conference had been engaged in a similar process of re-thinking the essence of the Christian faith. As he summarized it:

So as the main issue of the Oxford Conference was the appeal for a new ecumenicity in our thinking, so the main issue of the Edinburgh conference was the appeal to all Christian communions to maintain in their thinking and acting the proper perspective between things essential and things non-essential, between things primary and things secondary or subordinate, and in Paul's words, to 'follow after the things that are vital' for the sake of the Church's more effective witnessing to Christ and to the healing and unifying power of His Spirit in the face of the tragic dissensions and divisions of the present.¹³

Therefore, the church was called again to return to scripture and tradition in order to identify those essential elements of the faith that spoke meaningfully to the realities of the age, and to highlight them in new and relevant ways.¹⁴

Ernest Thomas also believed the work of theological reformulation must be a major priority of the church. In a retirement address delivered at the board's 1936 annual meeting, he encouraged his colleagues to focus on the task "of establishing or recovering in the life of our people and ministers, a confident and thought-out faith in an objectively real God." He continued:

¹²J. M. Shaw, "The Oxford and Edinburgh Conferences," "He is 'Mightiest in the Mightiest!'", BESS Thirteenth Annual Report, 1937, 52-53.

¹³Ibid., 57.

¹⁴Ibid.

The reinterpretation of the world in terms of God and the reinterpretation of God in terms of the modern world, to say nothing of the reinterpretation of God in terms learnt from Jesus our Lord, is a task of tremendous importance. Uncertainty at this point is the secret of ineffectiveness so often experienced by churchmen in seeking to give a spiritual message to the world of today.¹⁵

In addition, Thomas urged the board to articulate a theology that took seriously the ominous developments in Europe. "Every clear-eyed student recognizes the challenge to the spiritual independence of the church in the new forms of collectivist control" that, he noted, were appearing in the Soviet Union, Germany, and Italy. "Though neither of these rival systems is likely to be set up on this continent, the revolt of the human spirit which has produced them, is already manifest all about us; and Christian leaders must be ready with something other than a tradition."¹⁶

This task was undertaken by a group of Evangelism and Social Service board members who served on the United Church's Commission on the Christian Faith. Established by General Council in 1936 at the board's suggestion, this group was to prepare a statement "which shall embody in concise and intelligible form what we in the United Church conceive to be the substance of the Christian Faith."¹⁷ J. M. Shaw was appointed chairman and Ernest Thomas of Toronto was named secretary, while professors John Line, John MacLeod, and Walter Brown, along with United Church clergy Richard Roberts, George Pidgeon, Harold Young, and Gerald Cragg also agreed to assist with this project. Between 1936 and 1938, this committee struggled to determine the best way to proceed, and was further debilitated by the fact that, as J. R. Mutchmor recalled, "certain differences of personality between Shaw and Thomas made it increasingly impossible for them to work together."¹⁸ For these reasons,

¹⁵Ernest Thomas Annual Report, The Enduring Name, BESS Eleventh Annual Meeting Minutes, 1936, 34-35.

¹⁶Ibid., 35.

¹⁷Record of Proceedings, 1940 General Council, 167.

¹⁸Mutchmor, Mutchmor (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1965), 89.

Richard Davidson, principal of Toronto's Emmanuel College, was asked to chair the commission in 1938, with Mutchmor becoming secretary. This re-organized commission was composed of a central committee in Toronto and regional committees in the Maritimes, Quebec, and western Canada. Other central committee members included theological professors J. M. Shaw, John Dow, John Line, and R.B.Y. Scott as well as United Church clergy W. C. Lockhart, H. B. Hendershot, W. H. Young, Ernest Thomas, and George Pidgeon. The members of the Toronto group generated a number of discussion papers that were circulated to the regional committees for comment and critique.

Board members Ernest Thomas and John Line each produced several important statements for use by the commission, and shared the belief that the Biblical writers had some vitally important things to say about how human society should be organized and how God was still working to create a new social and economic order. However, by 1939 Line's writings had begun to emphasize other theological themes. While Thomas focused on God's work in the world through Jesus' life and teaching was being continued by the church and spirit-filled people who were working to bring God's Kingdom closer to fruition, Line devoted less attention to Jesus' life and work and focused more extensively on the meaning of the cross and Christ's resurrection. These divergent approaches can be seen in two papers circulated for discussion in 1939 - one written by Thomas, and a second drafted by Line and his Emmanuel College colleague John Dow.¹⁹

Thomas's paper emphasized that God was constantly present in history to invite people to enter into a new and deeper relationship with the Divine. Not only did God

¹⁹Minutes of the Commission on the Christian Faith, 26 May 1939, Commission on the Christian Faith Papers, Box 1, File 1, indicates that, although these documents were printed without the authors names attached, Line and Dow's paper was distributed as "Statement A" while Thomas's document was distributed as "Statement B." This notation is supported by obvious similarities between these documents and earlier, signed versions submitted by the authors.

create the world, God was seen to be “ceaselessly working through all the orders of life and in the affairs of men to bring into existence a human society in which His Holy wisdom will be expressed and His loving will be realized.”²⁰ While God had been active since creation, God came into the world in a distinct and life-giving way through the incarnation of Jesus. Jesus was “the one historical person in whom as in no other, the Eternal God (and not merely a messenger from God) was present with men under the condition of their human life and experience,” Thomas affirmed. Jesus’ life “was so completely expressive of the loving character and righteous purpose of God that to have seen Him was to have seen the Father” and to have experienced “the all-forgiving love of God.”²¹ Christ’s work in the world was still carried on through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was “the Divine source of all that heightening of human character and ability which men from time to time have experienced in the service of God’s people, and which is seen in the radiant joy and serenity with which Christians are enabled to overcome temptation, suffering and defeat,” Thomas wrote.²² In this way, God remained present in human life and history to transform, redeem, and renew both persons and society.

Thomas then asserted that the church was created to proclaim these basic truths through the sacraments, scriptural study, worship, and other ministry. Through this work, the “Eternal takes the initiative” and enables persons “to find joy in obedience to the will that awakened them.”²³ Although Thomas acknowledged the existence of sin in the world in that “man as a whole and men in particular have chosen ways which are not God’s ways and have cherished thoughts which are not God’s thoughts,” God was constantly present to help all people overcome their weaknesses and enter into a lasting

²⁰“Statement B,” Commission on the Christian Faith Papers, Box 2, File 12, 1.

²¹Ibid., 1.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., 4.

relationship with God. "Thus we are assured that in the conflict with temptation man is never alone nor God without witness; that where sin abounded, grace did much more abound; and that God's perfect work in man is to be seen, not in a life free from record of sinful mistake or wayward choice, but in one which having overcome the world is crowned with righteousness."²⁴

Such a renewed and transformed life would ultimately lead to the kingdom of God, which was both "an Eternal Reality which may be beyond the limits of what is possible within the process of history, and as now present in the increasing fulfillment of God's righteous purpose in the lives of persons and communities." In Thomas's view, it was "the unchanging purpose of God to establish an actual society of righteousness on this earth, and that those who profess and call themselves Christians should pray and work for its coming."²⁵ Ultimately, people would be judged on the degree to which they participated in this work. "Every person and community must, in the consummation of its life, be judged according to what in Jesus is revealed as the law of God for man; and that for any individual to have missed the opportunity of sharing likeness to God is the supreme disaster from which to be saved is man's highest good," he concluded. "We believe that God being good and having no satisfaction in the death of a sinner offers to all who will accept it that which in his sight is the supreme blessedness in communion with Himself; while over the life which awaits those who have rejected that communion hangs a dark veil of impenetrable mystery."²⁶

Line and Dow's paper differed from Thomas's in several significant respects. While they shared Thomas's belief that God was present in history through Christ and the Spirit, they devoted far more attention to Christ's death and resurrection than their

²⁴Ibid., 3-4.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., 5.

colleague. They emphasized that God's reconciling grace was ultimately offered to the world in Christ's "offering of Himself in the death of the Cross; and that through His Sacrifice and Victory in Death, men can know the all-sufficiency of God's redemptive love and power for the complete overcoming of the sin which has separated them from God."²⁷ Because humanity had corrupted God's creation and fallen away from God's way, this gift was greatly needed. While individuals had been "endowed with freedom and power and moral discernment and choice" as well as "with the capacity for serving God and enjoying fellowship with Him," history showed they had often chosen "the way of disobedience" and thereby turned away from God in sin.²⁸ Nevertheless, God sought to deliver women and men from this fate through the gift of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Christian life was characterized by a "repentance and turning to God of those thus awakened, in the full forgiveness and power to begin life anew with which God everywhere meets real repentance, and in that renewal by the Holy Spirit which ends the dominance in men of the will toward evil and forms in its place the will toward ever more complete trust in God and ever deepening devotion to His will and service." Furthermore, "this new life the Spirit of God is ever present, to enable perseverance toward the complete overcoming of all that is willful and contrary to God, and to bring to pass ever increasing Christlikeness in heart and life."²⁹

Line and Dow understood the church and its ministry to be the means by which God's offer of salvation was shared with the world. The church was created to proclaim "the Lordship of Christ alone and declares herself as His community separate from the world and dedicates herself to His worship and service."³⁰ Through faith in the resurrected Christ, God offered the promise of everlasting life to all people. "We

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸"Statement A," 2.

²⁹Ibid., 3.

³⁰Ibid.

believe in the Kingdom of God as that triumph of the will and love of God which will be the consummation of the Church's travail in the present world, and the eternal portion of all who in this earthly life keep the faith to the end," they wrote. God's promise that the faithful would have a place in the kingdom assured believers "their true being and life cannot be ended by the incident of bodily death." Even though Christians were called to "affirm the authority of the Kingdom here and now, and labour to establish its rule in every department of personal and social living," they must be "mindful that the final realization of the Kingdom is not the issue of events in time, but is to be awaited as the perfect blessedness of the world to come."³¹

While the themes that Line and Dow developed were certainly not new to the United Church, they had not always been stressed by those who emphasized that Jesus came to fulfill the prophets' call for justice and righteousness on earth. In 1935, board chair J. J. Coulter admitted that "our Church is considerably divided in sentiment, as to whether it should emphasize the example and words of Jesus - with the Gospels as Text Book; or that it should emphasize the Person, Death and Resurrection of Jesus, which features so largely in the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles particularly of St. Paul."³² Until wartime, it seems clear that members of the board did not emphasize these latter themes as frequently as the former. To the despair of some, that trend began to change. At a commission meeting early in 1939, Ernest Thomas questioned whether "it would be wise to make Barthianism determinative."³³ A. S. Tuttle of St. Stephen's College in Edmonton wrote to question whether the commission's work was moving "away from a man-centred, moralistic to a God-centred, theological emphasis"³⁴ However, once war was declared, the group began to de-emphasize the

³¹Ibid., 5.

³²J. J. Coulter Address, Time Marches On: 1925-1935, 1935, 6.

³³Minutes of the Commission on the Christian Faith, 17 April 1939, Commission on the Christian Faith Papers, Box 1, File 1.

³⁴A. S. Tuttle to J. R. Mutchmor, Commission on the Christian Faith Papers, Box 1, File 2.

ethical dimensions of faith and place even greater focus on the symbol of the cross and the meaning of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection.³⁵

A draft statement submitted by John Line in May 1940 reflected this new focus. It downplayed the incarnation, emphasized the atonement, and understood the basic Christian message to be that Christ died to save individuals from sin. While affirming Jesus' teachings "are our guide to what God would have all men be and do," the paper stressed that "in His Death on the Cross He declared the Love of God in its height and depth and power, and that in His Sacrifice, God, at infinite cost, took upon Himself man's sin, that He might reconcile man to Himself."³⁶ It declared "that man's disobedience has estranged him from God and from his brother man and brought God's judgment upon him, whence his world is one of confusion and distress, and in himself, he is helpless and without hope."³⁷ It stressed that God acted through Christ to open a "way of deliverance" from sin through "Jesus Christ His Son, in whose Cross and Sacrifice God's abhorrence of sin and the length to which His Love will go to reclaim men from it, are shown forth in such manner as should convince men of the heinousness of sin and move them to repentance."³⁸ Therefore, the paper described the Christian life as being "grounded in repentance, in which men turn from sin to the forgiving God, and in faith, in which they entrust themselves to Christ and rest upon Him alone for salvation."³⁹ The statement, therefore, understood the coming kingdom in otherworldly terms. While "we look for increase of the Kingdom of God in the present world, as individuals and communities come more and more under the sway of

³⁵Minutes of the Commission on the Christian Faith, 22 January 1940, Commission on the Christian Faith Papers, Box 1, File 1.

³⁶John Line Statement, 7 May 1940, Commission on the Christian Faith Papers, Box 2, File 24, 2.

³⁷Ibid., 3.

³⁸Ibid., 4.

³⁹Ibid., 7.

its purposes and motives and thereby an order of society comes into being in harmony with its spirit and ends," he emphasized "that the final realization of the Kingdom is not the issue of events in time; but a Consummation that is to be, whose manner is not seen as yet."⁴⁰

Board member J. M. Shaw also echoed similar themes. In a January 1940 statement he affirmed that human beings had been created in God's image, "but that through neglect of God's love and disregard of His mind and will man sinned against God, frustrating his Fatherly purposes by using his God-given powers for selfish ends, thus introducing disharmony and dispeace into his relations alike with God and with his fellowmen." Thus God "provided for man's deliverance from sin" and sent Jesus to die on the cross "to convince man at once of the heinousness of his sin and of the wonder of God's forgiving restoring love, thus moving him to repentance and to a life of new obedience through surrender to the power of Christ's risen redeeming (or saving) working."⁴¹

This emphasis on sin, grace, and repentance was reflected in the final version of the Statement of Faith approved by the 1940 General Council. Scant attention was given to the doctrine of the incarnation and the ideal of God's kingdom, and the document failed to elaborate on the specific nature of Christ's teachings. It simply recognized that Jesus had "lived a perfect human life, wholly devoted to the will of God and the service of man" and "that by the teaching and example of Jesus the Holy Spirit shows men the way and the end of the Christian life." Instead, it emphasized that God acted "to save man, taking, at measureless cost, man's sin upon Himself" through the crucifixion, and "that the Cross is for all time the effectual means of reconciling the

⁴⁰Ibid., 9.

⁴¹J. M. Shaw Statement of Faith, 6 January 1940, Commission on the Christian Faith Papers, Box 2, File 18.

world unto God.”⁴² Human beings had become estranged from God and brought God’s “judgment and wrath” upon themselves. God “opened up a way of deliverance from the guilt and power of sin” by sacrificing Jesus in order to bear “the burden of sin.” Therefore, Christians were called to work through the church and give thanks for “the unmerited love and the mercy of our God in giving his only-begotten Son that we might not perish, but have everlasting life.” In faith, people were invited to “entrust themselves to Christ and rest upon Him alone for salvation.”⁴³

United Church reaction to this new document appears to have been quite positive. George Pidgeon informed a correspondent that he favored this new statement because the church needed “to restate her faith in the language of each generation and I do feel that this particular effort is meeting a real need in our Church.”⁴⁴ At the board’s 1941 annual meeting, it “was reported that the Statement of Faith, approved by the Ninth General Council, has been widely used throughout the church.” Board member W. C. Lockhart indicated he had used the statement “as the basis of a series of sermons and reported that other ministers have been doing the same,” while his colleague James Semple also used the statement and “found it most interesting and helpful.”⁴⁵

J. R. Mutchmor believed the new focus of the Statement of Faith to be very timely. “Faith for today and tomorrow, of necessity arises out of widespread and tragic suffering,” he reported. God assumed humanity’s suffering, and “it is this sorrow of God, revealed in its fullness on the Cross that enables man to have faith even in the

⁴²Statement of Faith: A Statement Prepared by a Commission of the Seventh General Council and Appointed by the Board of Evangelism and Social Service (Toronto: Board of Evangelism and Social Service, The United Church of Canada, 1940), 2 and 7.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁴George Pidgeon to J. B. Lobb, 27 March 1941, George Pidgeon Papers, Box 21, File 367.

⁴⁵Annual Meeting Minutes, 26 March 1941, The Eternal . . . The Contemporary, BESS Sixteenth Annual Report, 1940, 10.

hour of deepest tragedy.”⁴⁶ He encouraged the church to focus anew on Paul’s words, “we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God” and develop the disciplines of penitence and prayer.⁴⁷ Mutchmor affirmed that “faith in God alone is sufficient” to meet the needs of the day, and it was the church’s responsibility to emphasize this central Christian doctrine.⁴⁸

Mutchmor and others continued to echo these themes in subsequent months. “The Board will do well to make central in its pronouncements the primary need of an ever deeper and stronger faith in Almighty God,” Mutchmor told the board’s 1941 annual meeting:

Our voice must be raised against the all too prevalent trend to invent God in our own image. So eager are we for a new and better order that we are in danger of proclaiming a religion that is nothing more than a cure for depression. Grievous and sore as present burdens are and clamant [sic] as the need of a new deal and a greater measure of planned economy is recognized to be, we must not forget that man’s chief end is to know God, to accept His way of salvation for us and for all men, and to proclaim His love and righteous purpose.⁴⁹

Board chair W. J. Gallagher agreed. “We are not so confident now of man’s ability to live the good life or to build the good world unaided when we see the iniquities and cruelties he can perpetrate upon his fellows,” he noted. Current events clearly showed that humanity “has vitiated the Divine image by sin, and there is in him a radical twist toward evil against which he must always fight and which he can overcome only by the grace of God.” The church’s task was to address this situation. “Surely now, if ever, we must tell the world of God in Christ,” Gallagher affirmed. At this point in time “we need to escape from this evil world,” enter “into the presence of God for the restoring of our souls,” and see world events “in the light of His will and purpose.”⁵⁰

⁴⁶J. R. Mutchmor, “Faith and Morals Today and Tomorrow,” J. R. Mutchmor Papers, Box 14, File 184, 2.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁹J. R. Mutchmor, “Preface to the Agenda for the Annual Meeting of the Board,” *ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁰W. J. Gallagher Address, *ibid.*, 36.

This understanding of Christianity was clearly reflected in the board's approach to the outbreak of World War II. It approached the war with a "sobered" attitude that regarded the war as punishment for a host of human sins.⁵¹ The church had the "God-given task of calling men to prayer and penitence," J. R. Mutchmor wrote in 1940.⁵² "Those who in penitence call upon him [God] for help come most surely and quickly to his throne of grace and must truly enter into the knowledge of that Faith which is the sole source of hope for men and nations in these terrible days."⁵³ While the board believed the church must engage the realities of the time, there was little patriotic enthusiasm for this task.

Wartime Policies and Procedures

Several months after the outbreak of war, Hugh Dobson indicated that the country's mood was very different from that of World War I. "Nowhere do I find the attitude to war quite the same as it was twenty-five years ago," he informed the board's 1940 annual meeting. "The sense of the folly of war is heavy on the world and among many there is contrition and repentance over the fact that we have not more eagerly taught the peoples a better way than war to adjust international life, redress past wrongs, and determine necessary programmes and alignments to meet the new situations of our modern world."⁵⁴ Others in the church appear to have shared

⁵¹Mutchmor, Mutchmor, p. 166.

⁵²J. R. Mutchmor to the editor of the Saint John Telegraph-Journal, 22 May 1940, Dobson Papers, Box 29, File O.

⁵³J. R. Mutchmor to the editor of the Montreal Gazette, 23 May 1940, Dobson Papers, Box 29, File O.

⁵⁴Hugh Dobson Annual Report, "There am I in the Midst", Fifteenth Annual Report, Board of Evangelism and Social Service, 1939, 28.

Dobson's outlook. As John Webster Grant notes, Canadian churches had a "sober determination to finish a messy but necessary job."⁵⁵

However, the United Church was not united in its approach to the war, and the publication of a letter entitled "A Witness Against War" by a group of sixty-eight United Church pacifists in the October 15 edition of The New Outlook soon revealed the nature of these differences.⁵⁶ This document was drafted primarily by FCSO member and United Church minister Edis Fairbairn of Bracebridge, Ontario, and contended that pacifism represented the only true Christian approach to conflict.⁵⁷ "It is generally agreed and confessed that Christendom has through the centuries sadly and seriously fallen short in faithfulness to Christ," the letter said. "We are convinced that at no point has Christendom departed so radically from the mind of Christ and its own original faith as in its acceptance of war."⁵⁸

Such pacifist sentiments were not new to the United Church. As early as 1925 Ernest Thomas suggested in The New Outlook that war was antithetical to Christ's teachings and the United Church should condemn war.⁵⁹ In a 1934 booklet, The Quest for Peace, he continued this theme. He defined peace as the "co-operative effort to bring about needed changes" in the world and not merely the "absence of fighting," and

⁵⁵John Webster Grant, The Church in the Canadian Era (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1972), 151.

⁵⁶For a discussion of this document, see Roger Hutchinson, "Witnessing Against War: Peacemaking in the Changing Canadian Context," in Challenging the Conventional: Essays in Honor of Ed Newbury, ed. Wes Cragg, Laurent Larouche, and G.J. Lewis (Burlington: Trinity Press, 1989), 168-182.

⁵⁷For a discussion of Fairbairn, see Phyllis Airhart, "Christian Socialism and the Legacy of Revivalism in the 1930s," in A Long and Faithful March: 'Towards the Christian Revolution' 1930s/1980s, ed. Harold Wells and Roger Hutchinson (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1989), 30-40.

⁵⁸Quoted in Thomas P. Socknat, Witness Against War: Pacifism in Canada, 1900-1945 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 201.

⁵⁹Ernest Thomas, "Should the United Church Condemn War?," The New Outlook, 12 August 1925, 5.

contended that Christ came to earth as a peacemaker.⁶⁰ Because wars were intrinsically linked to the rise of nationalism and not defended in the gospels, he bemoaned those occasions when one saw “the subjection of loyalty to the Body of Christ to the promotion of merely nationalist interests.” He maintained that “the special task of the Christian Church in that struggle is to sustain a passion for a world-fellowship, embracing all races and peoples as equally dear to our Lord.”⁶¹ Pacifists could certainly work toward these ends and make valuable contributions to this work. “One can respect any person who seriously decided that, come what may, he will have no part in any activity which supports a war if it should come,” Thomas wrote. All “genuine” conscientious objectors “win the deepest respect.”⁶²

However, the need “to avert disaster to another nation’s citizens” transcended a person’s wish “to keep comfortable himself.” No person “has a right to foster in himself ignorance of and indifference to the sore spots in the world’s life, and then demand exemption from the price of war.”⁶³ He feared many pacifists held their beliefs because of a desire to ignore the world’s realities, and he strongly condemned those who held such opinions. Instead, he emphasized that pacifism was no escape from the horrors of armed conflict. Suffering was inevitable in times of conflict, and pacifists would be required to endure their share of pain and sorrow along with everyone else.

By the time hostilities actually broke out, most of those associated with the board shared Thomas’s basic belief that the pacifist option failed to recognize the serious nature of world events. For example, in a letter published in The New Outlook

⁶⁰Ernest Thomas, The Quest for Peace (Toronto: Board of Evangelism and Social Service, United Church of Canada, [1934]), 3.

⁶¹Ibid., 7.

⁶²Ibid., 21.

⁶³Ibid., 20.

in rebuttal to a letter by his FCSO colleague Edis Fairbairn, R.B.Y. Scott shared his understanding of the relationship between faith and the war. Scott noted there were “multitudes in The United Church and many in its ‘effective leadership’ who reject war as genuinely as he does, who will never identify the victory of our arms with the victory of God, but who do not find that this leads them to doctrinaire pacifism.” He and others believed the war “has come upon us as God’s judgment upon the sins of the nations, sins of commission and of omission, our own sins and those of our present enemies.” Therefore, he contended it was impossible for any one to “escape responsibility or participation by the simple expedient of washing our hands.” Even though people “have not chosen war and do not willingly participate in it,” they “cannot now avoid it.” Scott assured his colleague “that we are deeply conscious of the horror and evil - yes, of the sinfulness - of the war, but at this moment can see no other way, is part of the judgment.”⁶⁴

Others involved with the board arrived at a similar conclusion. While admitting that Jesus preached an “ethic of pacifism,” board chairman W. J. Gallagher openly wondered whether this approach was realistic under the circumstances. In his opening remarks at the board’s 1940 annual meeting, he reminded his associates that “we must not give up the ideal of a world free from war, or lose the age-old vision of the day when men shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning-hooks, when nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” However, he continued, “many things come into our world not as the will of God but because of the sin of man.” When circumstances “often deny us the ideal and force upon us the second best,” it was the Christian’s duty “to face those circumstances manfully and after a Christian manner, and to ask what is the will of God for us in these circumstances.”⁶⁵

⁶⁴R.B.Y. Scott letter to The New Outlook, 15 March 1941, 17.

⁶⁵W. J. Gallagher Chairman’s Address, “There am I in the Midst”, 1939, 32-33.

At its first annual meeting after the outbreak of hostilities, the board adopted a document on "The Church's Task in Time of War" that reflected these views. Drafted by R.B.Y. Scott, this declaration was consistent with a statement concerning the war made in September 1939 by United Church moderator J. W. Woodside, which Scott also helped develop.⁶⁶ It affirmed five basic principles. First, the church was to "remain true to her Lord" and work hard in "resisting any temptation to make the God and Father of Jesus Christ the tribal deity of the nation." It was "to create a mind for a just and righteous peace." The church was also to "honor the men who feel it is their Christian duty to express their loyalty by joining the active forces of His Majesty, and also those who, for conscience' sake, cannot take up arms" by affirming that "both are the beloved children of the Church." In addition, the church was to respond to the "human needs" of wartime by supplying chaplains, providing material aid and comforts to enlisted persons, and coordinating various national welfare bodies. Finally, the church was called to look beyond the war by being "constantly at work, regaining the moral damage of these days and so increasing her good works and attaining wise judgment that when the conflict ends, the leadership and help of the Body of Christ may be available for needy men in a broken world."⁶⁷

Mutchmor later reported this statement "was ahead of the general thought of our Church and enjoyed some sharp criticisms particularly from the press of Saint John, Montreal and Toronto."⁶⁸ Indeed, an editorial in the Saint John Telegraph-Journal took the church to task for saying "that all nations, her own included, are responsible for the sins which have produced the war." This newspaper contended that it "will be a matter of regret to many loyal citizens and churchmen that any church should not be more

⁶⁶ Socknat, Witness Against War, 337, note 27.

⁶⁷ "The Church's Task in Time of War," "There am I in the Midst", 1939, 20-22.

⁶⁸ J. R. Mutchmor, "Preface to the Agenda for the Annual Meeting of the Board," The Eternal . . . The Contemporary, 1940, 4.

guarded than is indicated by this assertion." The board's statement simply represented "the propaganda conducted by extreme pacifists and by those who are actually disloyal to the Empire," and showed a marked inability to "discern a difference of character of Britain and her allies and those against whom they wage warfare."⁶⁹ Mutchmor replied by noting that the board's statement echoed similar comments recently made by the Archbishop of York and the Archbishop of Canterbury, and contained little that was new or unusual. He also pointed to the many ways the United Church had begun to support those Canadians who were serving in the armed forces, and suggested that the church's true commitments could be discerned in these actions.

Chaplaincy and the War Services Committee

Shortly after the outbreak of conflict, the United Church established a War Services Committee to coordinate its wartime work, and directed J. R. Mutchmor to chair a sub-committee on chaplaincy that would "review all applications, determine principles of selection, and bring recommendations to the Committee."⁷⁰ Many clergy volunteered for this service - Mutchmor reported that, as of January 31, 1942, approximately one hundred United Church ministers had been appointed as full-time chaplains in the Canadian army, navy, and air force - while many other clergy also served on a part-time basis.⁷¹

Throughout the war, Mutchmor devoted much time to the task of maintaining the church's ties with its chaplains. He carried on a heavy correspondence with them, frequently sent devotional materials, and advocated for them in a variety of ways. He was also convinced there was an important evangelical dimension to chaplaincy work.

⁶⁹Editorial, Saint John Telegraph Journal, 18 May 1940, Dobson Papers, Box 29, File 0.

⁷⁰Minutes of the War Services Committee, 20 September 1939, War Services Committee Papers, Box 1, File 1.

⁷¹Report of the War Services Committee, "Hope in God", BESS Seventeenth Annual Report, 79.

“Religious services for members of H. M. Forces is a paramount evangelistic undertaking,” he told the board’s 1943 annual meeting. “The Board believes that the utmost must be done to support ministers in the chaplaincy and auxiliary services, so that they in their spiritual tasks may lift up Christ and win men and women to believe in Him.”⁷² Much of the devotional material the board published during this time was designed for this very purpose.⁷³

Mutchmor was also influential in organizing the church’s women to sew and knit the material goods which Canadian soldiers required. At the first meeting of the War Services Committee he “stressed the need of early action on account of the fact that many Canadian recruits will come from the homes of the unemployed.” He suggested “war service clubs” be formed in larger United churches, while in rural communities with several denominations, “it would be a good policy to unite in an inclusive local unit.”⁷⁴ The Canadian Red Cross provided church women with yarn, cloth, and thread on the understanding that they would hand back these materials as socks, sweaters, and other garments made to Red Cross specifications. They were to equal, in weight and yardage, the wool and cloth provided. Each unit was also asked to deliver its completed articles to the nearest Red Cross branch for distribution.⁷⁵ Church women responded immediately to the invitation to help. At the end of 1939, Mutchmor reported that 928 units had been registered with the committee, “which includes probably 2,784 Church organizations.” Among other things, the units had already produced 19,620 pair of socks, 3,126 sweaters, 2,724 mattress and bed pads, 2,889

⁷²The Policy of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service, “... And a New Earth”, BESS Eighteenth Annual Report, 61.

⁷³See the board’s 1939 publication Prayers for War-Time for an example of this type of literature, War Services Committee Papers, Box 1, File 8.

⁷⁴Minutes of War Service Committee meeting, 20 September 1939, War Services Committee Papers, Box 1, File 1.

⁷⁵J. R. Mutchmor memorandum to War Service Units, War Services Committee Papers, Box 1, File 8.

pair of pillow slips, 8,523 bandages, 1,563 pneumonia jackets, and 1,566 hospital gowns. In addition, "a number of units are busy making clothing for refugee and evacuated children," while other units "have taken a great interest in their 'soldier orphans', and have befriended these boys in their communities who are away from their homes, or may have no family ties."⁷⁶

Mutchmor continued to oversee this work throughout the war. Over 1,000 war services units were eventually registered, and by war's end a massive supply of goods had been produced. As of December 31, 1944, United Church women supplied 846,927 pairs of socks, 296,398 sweaters, and 226,533 pairs of mitts and gloves. There were 1,068,560 "miscellaneous sewn articles" and 633,522 "miscellaneous knitted articles." In total, United Church women made and donated well over five million articles.⁷⁷

While the task of coordinating this work occupied a good deal of Mutchmor's time, the board was also concerned with various other aspects of wartime life. The plight of the church's conscientious objectors, who declined to take up arms because of their religious beliefs, was of particular interest. The board worked actively to ensure their rights to express and act upon their religious beliefs were protected.

The United Church and Conscientious Objectors

By 1939, the United Church had clearly acknowledged the rights of conscientious objectors to refrain from wartime service. In 1938, "the United Church declared that rights of conscience should be safeguarded in a conflict, while adding to its usual condemnation of war an acknowledgment that Christians disagreed on the

⁷⁶Report of the War Services Committee, United Church of Canada, War Services Committee Papers, Box 1, File 8, 1-2.

⁷⁷"War Services Committee," "More Than Conquerors!", BESS Twentieth Annual Report, 114.

legitimacy of participating in war in some circumstances."⁷⁸ However, many other Canadians did not share this opinion. Great pressure could be placed on conscientious objectors to support the war, and those who applied for exemption from wartime service often faced many obstacles. Board staff frequently affirmed and defended the right of individuals to be conscientious objectors.

This support took several forms. Mutchmor's annual report of 1940 outlined the "considerable effort" the board made to secure an amendment to Canada's War Service Regulations to bring Canadian law in line with British and American policies.⁷⁹ In addition, board staff frequently intervened to support a pacifist's claim for conscientious objector status. John Coburn took a major role in this work. A leader of the Toronto Civil Liberties Association, he believed individuals deserved the freedom to which both church and state entitled them. Although he was not a pacifist, he was deeply troubled by the fact many of the tribunals which determined whether an appeal would be heard "have the idea that they are there to decide on whether the pacifist decision is sound and logical or not" and did not realize "it is their duty to discover and decide whether or not the young man is a genuine bonafide pacifist."⁸⁰ Throughout the war, Coburn consistently defended the right of conscientious objectors to act in ways consistent with their theological beliefs.⁸¹

Coburn's involvement with the case of William D. Fear is instructive. In May 1943, Coburn received a letter from Gerald Cragg of United Theological College in Montreal describing how Fear had appeared before the board in Montreal to claim conscientious objector status, only to be denied. After a lengthy interview, Cragg was

⁷⁸Grant, The Church in the Canadian Era, 150.

⁷⁹J. R. Mutchmor Annual Report, The Eternal . . . The Contemporary, 1940, 30.

⁸⁰John Coburn to Kenneth Wilson, 13 October 1943, Board of Evangelism and Social Service Papers, Box 8, File 89.

⁸¹John Coburn Annual Report, Right Relations Among Men, BESS Nineteenth Annual Report, 1943, 27.

convinced Fear was a sincere pacifist and his church owed him some help. The “Church to which he belongs has insisted on the right of the individual to follow his conscience in regard to what he shall do about war, and many of its past pronouncements as well as much of the tenor of the young people’s work when he was growing to manhood would not make it unreasonable for him to reach the position which he holds.”⁸²

Further inquiry revealed Cragg’s assessment of Fear was shared by others. George Pidgeon of Bloor Street United reported that Fear had been a member of that congregation for eight years before moving to Quebec and he was “respected by all who know him for his ability and consistent Christian character.” While Fear’s pacifism set him apart from most other members of that congregation, Pidgeon affirmed that “we know him to be absolutely honest in this matter, and we claim for one of our former members who differs from us the same freedom of conscience which we are fighting to secure for oppressed people overseas.”⁸³ Leslie Pidgeon of Montreal concurred with his brother’s judgment. Although he had done his best to convert Fear to another way of thinking, he admitted, “he is perfectly sincere and perfectly conscientious,” so whatever leniency “is granted to conscientious pacifists certainly is due to him.”⁸⁴

With these judgments in hand, Coburn and General Council secretary Gordon Sisco appealed in writing to the chair of Montreal’s military service tribunal and stated that, in the United Church’s view, “this young man qualifies fully under the regulations as a Conscientious Objector.” They reminded the tribunal that the three denominations

⁸²Gerald Cragg to John Coburn, 15 May 1943, Board of Evangelism and Social Service Papers, Box 8, File 88.

⁸³George Pidgeon statement re William Fear, Board of Evangelism and Social Service Papers, Box 8, File 88.

⁸⁴E. Leslie Pidgeon to John Coburn, 21 May 1943, Board of Evangelism and Social Service Papers, Box 8, File 88.

which created the United Church “have always insisted very strongly upon the principle of the liberty of the individual and the right of conscience.” In this spirit, they noted that the 1938 General Council had specifically recognized the “conscientious right and action” of those who “sincerely hold that obedience to that Divine command leads them to abstain from participation in any war,” and affirmed that pacifism was part of the United Church’s tradition. While recognizing that proper vigilance was required to prevent “any man from using a ‘trumped-up’ case of conscientious objection simply to evade his responsibility as a citizen,” they assured the tribunal “this is not such a case.” They also reminded the group that the “vast majority of our members and adherents have accepted without protest their full responsibility in the Armed Forces and elsewhere,” that “the young man will render no effective service to his country at all if shut up in prison,” and that “from end to end of this country there will be a great deal of indignation aroused among the ministers and members of the United Church of Canada and of other Christian Communion if any young man is sent to prison because of Conscience convictions.”⁸⁵

These arguments also appeared in a letter which Coburn and Sisco sent to federal Labour minister Humphrey Mitchell, “asking you as Minister of the Crown to intervene and prevent a violation of Canadian justice.” They affirmed that the “highest court in the United Church has declared that any of its members may hold the pacifist position without being exposed to the charge of inconsistency” and contended that Fear’s conscientious convictions forbid him to engage in military service.⁸⁶ While they were unsuccessful in their attempts to persuade the authorities to discharge Fear from his duties, Coburn reported that Fear at least was being employed “in the work of

⁸⁵John Coburn and Gordon Sisco to Honorable Justice A. Trahan, 18 May 1943, Board of Evangelism and Social Service Papers, Box 8, File 88.

⁸⁶John Coburn and Gordon Sisco to Honorable Humphrey Mitchell, Board of Evangelism and Social Service Papers, Box 8, File 88.

medical research” and this work would hopefully “be fairly congenial to him under the circumstances.”⁸⁷

While defending the rights of United Church conscientious objectors, Coburn also worked to ensure that those already engaged in alternative service work were being used most advantageously to Canadian society. He encouraged the government to allow those theological students who had been granted conscientious objector status to serve in parishes currently without a minister.⁸⁸ He also believed “that men of ability whose services are needed by the community should not be herded together in labour camps and given work for which they are entirely unsuited” and lamented the fact that, at the same time as a trained dentist had been put to work planting trees, there was “an area 350 miles long on the main line of the C.P.R. in which there is no dentist.” Apparently he had some success. One conscientious objector, Donald M. Ewing, wrote to Coburn to express thanks for his “behind the scenes” work in securing his release from an alternative service camp in British Columbia so he could teach in a special high school established for those Japanese-Canadians who had been interred.⁸⁹

The United Church and Japanese Internment

The issue of how Japanese-Canadians were treated after the bombing of Pearl Harbor was a topic of much discussion in United Church circles. While Hugh Dobson and others in British Columbia were greatly disturbed by the situation, their ability to speak out was hampered by the fact the Board of Home Missions had primary

⁸⁷John Coburn to George Fidgeon, 21 January 1944, Board of Evangelism and Social Service Papers, Box 8, File 90.

⁸⁸John Coburn to H. M. Horricks, 28 December 1942, Board of Evangelism and Social Service Papers, Box 8, File 86.

⁸⁹Donald Ewing to John Coburn, 26 September 1943, Board of Evangelism and Social Service Papers, Box 8, File 89.

responsibility for the issue and was reluctant to criticize government policy.⁹⁰

Nevertheless, a number of individuals associated with the board in British Columbia were well aware of the situation and forcefully condemned the growing racism they saw.

In January 1942, Hugh Rae, the convenor of the Evangelism and Social Service committee of British Columbia Conference, encouraged Mutchmor to urge the federal government to proceed cautiously in interring the Japanese. "Our church feels that we have nothing to fear from the Japanese Christian section of these people," Rae reported. "It bodes no good to ourselves to adopt Hitleristic oppression." The Japanese of British Columbia "have proved themselves the most law-abiding of our national groups" and were clearly willing to fight for Canada. For these reasons, he urged that "everything should be done to prevent isolating them, embittering them, dislocating their home life, or reflecting any further upon the integrity of their Canadian patriotism and good faith."⁹¹

Hugh Dobson also sounded a similar note at the board's annual meeting in March 1942. He commented on the "serious problems" that had emerged in British Columbia with respect to Japanese-Canadian citizens, and saw it as a continuation of "a very serious anti-Oriental push" which went "as far back as I can remember." In this climate, "the War threat, the actual outbreak of the war, and foolish letters and utterances especially of many who have been leaders in racial prejudice, has led to a very serious condition, when regardless of Canadian citizenship and with no suggestion of anything but loyal behavior a whole class has been ordered from their homes, and business and industry." Dobson warned that "anti-Orientalism may become just as pernicious a thing in Canada as Anti-Semitism in Europe," and "Canada

⁹⁰J. R. Mutchmor to Aubrey Tuttle, 16 March 1942, Board of Evangelism and Social Service Papers, Box 8, File 84.

⁹¹Hugh Rae to J. R. Mutchmor, 6 January 1942, Board of Evangelism and Social Service Papers, Box 8, File 84.

is not the kind of country where we can afford to allow race hatred to be fanned to flames."⁹²

To support these claims, Dobson sent his eastern colleagues copies of a series of resolutions Vancouver Presbytery had adopted. In March 1942, the presbytery urged the federal government to allow Japanese-Canadians to join the armed forces. It noted that, "from our long association with and work among these people, it is our conviction that many are sincerely interested in the victory of our democratic forces." Any attempt to inject "a racial cleavage into our Canadian life is a violation of Christian Principle, and we sincerely protest against a policy that would inevitably prejudice our national unity and burden us with an unfortunate heritage of feeling for generations to come."⁹³

However, the national board did little to affirm these sentiments. Its annual meeting of 1942 issued a vaguely worded statement that included no critique of present governmental policies, and no call to treat Japanese-Canadians more justly. "We would convey to our loyal fellow-Christians and fellow-Canadians among the Japanese from the Pacific Coast, our sympathy at their plight in the necessity of their being uprooted, and we exhort our Church to use its every power to express comradeship to these folks in so difficult a period," the board declared. However, it refused to say anything more. Mutchmor related Canada's treatment of Japanese-Canadians to the recent Japanese attack of Pearl Harbor. While affirming the importance of "urging United Church members to do their utmost to prevent hysteria," Mutchmor contended "that the Japanese know little or nothing of playing the game according to the rule." Their "treacherous attack on Pearl Harbor at a time when their representatives were in conference with the President and Foreign Affairs Secretary of [the] United States, will

⁹²Hugh Dobson Annual Report, Hope in God, 1941, 35.

⁹³Copy of resolutions from the Minutes of Vancouver Presbytery, Hugh Dobson Papers, Box 24, File 15.

be a black mark upon Japanese record and a stigma on all Japanese, whether born in Japan or out side [sic] of it, for many years to come."⁹⁴

With the wisdom of hindsight, the weaknesses of this policy became apparent to at least one board member. In 1947, John Coburn reflected back on his fifty years of ministry, and lamented that the church had failed to more actively condemn this practice and uphold the rights of those Japanese-Canadians who had been persecuted. He saw this episode as one of the "most striking and at the same time most disgraceful demonstration" of racial discrimination in Canadian history:

Many of these people, born in Canada, as loyal to Canadian institutions as any, simply because they were born of Japanese parents, have been herded into concentration camps, their property confiscated and sold at ridiculously low prices. They have been deprived of the right to vote, the right to hold property, and the opportunity of carrying on their business when and where they chose.

He maintained there was "no use for continuing this policy of discrimination" and that "until this wrong has been righted, decent, intelligent Canadians will find it difficult to hold up their heads and take pride in Canadian citizenship."⁹⁵

Conclusion

By the early 1940s, the Board of Evangelism and Social Service had developed a variety of responses to the realities of war. Through its contributions to the creation of the 1940 Statement of Faith, it focused on the tragic dimensions of life in a new way. It carried these understandings forward into its wartime work by supporting those chaplains directly ministering to people's needs, and organizing the collection of wartime supplies. At the same time, the board actively worked to uphold the rights of conscientious objectors, and offered some opposition against the practice of interning Japanese-Canadians.

⁹⁴J. R. Mutchmor to Hugh Rae, 14 January 1942, Board of Evangelism and Social Service Papers, Box 8, File 84.

⁹⁵John Coburn, I Kept My Powder Dry, (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1950), 184.

However, as war progressed and the eventual victory of allied forces seemed to be increasingly probable, the board devoted increasing attention to the business of post-war reconstruction. Members of the board worked actively to develop a blueprint for the type of post-war society they believed desirable.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CHRISTIAN FAITH AND THE TASK OF SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION

In addition to responding to the spiritual, social and material needs of soldiers and families during wartime, the Board of Evangelism and Social Service devoted much attention to the task of postwar reconstruction in Canada. As World War II progressed, the board discerned that the forces of secularization were drawing people further away from the church, Christian beliefs, and religious practices. In an effort to reverse this trend, the board developed some clear ideas about how postwar society could be made to reflect the church's values. Through the work of its Economic and Social Research Commission, as well as through its contributions to the church's commissions on "Church, Nation and World Order" and "Christian Marriage and the Christian Home," the board offered a blueprint for society that related the Christian gospel to the social, economic, and spiritual needs of the age. At the same time, it launched an evangelistic campaign to revitalize the church, stem the growing tide of secularization, and provide Canadians with the spiritual and social beliefs they needed to enjoy full and meaningful lives.

The Challenge of Social Reconstruction

As board secretaries assessed the state of Canadian society after the outbreak of World War II, they often despaired. "As the years pass I grow more concerned about the Unity of Canada and often I fear lest we in Canada without sensing it are building up another Europe," Hugh Dobson lamented at the board's 1941 annual meeting:

We build walls between provinces, by attempting to pit Province against Province in economic affairs. In dealing with relief we insist on Youth going back to their own municipalities, while at the same time we goad them by

saying 'why don't you get out and rustle like we did.' We are against Anti-semitism in Europe but in grave danger of Anti-Orientalism in British Columbia. Our Canadian attitude toward refugees has not had much in it of which to boast.¹

J. R. Mutchmor agreed that Canadian society was full of problems, and maintained that the church must accept at least some responsibility for this situation. In addition to showing a serious "lethargy and weakness during the unemployment crisis," the church had "not been deeply concerned about the plight of the farmers who make up one-third of our population," and had also "failed youth during the difficult 30's." Mutchmor challenged the church to learn from its mistakes, "take a stronger stand," and "accept a larger share of responsibility in finding a solution to unemployment after the war."²

The board recognized that the serious nature of the world crisis left the churches no choice but to respond. "The burden of the war has become more direct and poignant with the growing recognition of the desperate nature of the struggle," its Sessional Committee on Social Problems reported in 1941:

We recognize the precarious hold we have upon accustomed and cherished liberties, under the stress of war and the challenge of a 'new order' of economic, social and cultural life to be imposed by military power answerable only to itself. We are aware also of the weaknesses of an imperfect and complacent democracy which has failed to develop the powers and possibilities of a society of free men. We begin to realize that our way of life must be able, while preserving freedom, to adapt itself to new economic conditions, and to surpass the Nazi 'New Order' in social achievement if it is to meet the challenge with success.³

While the Canadian people responded to the challenges of wartime in many constructive ways, much remained to be done. "The nation is engaged in a gigantic and terrible enterprise with too little thought for the goal to which it is directed,

¹Hugh Dobson Annual Report, The Eternal . . . The Contemporary, BESS Sixteenth Annual Report, 1940, 30.

²J. R. Mutchmor Annual Report, Hope in God, BESS Seventeenth Annual Report, 1941, 33.

³"Canadian National Life and the War," Report of the Sessional Committee on Social Problems, *ibid.*, 52.

beyond the necessity of national survival,” the report concluded. “The question has to be faced; what will the nation be like when it survives, and for what will it have endured the struggle?”⁴

Throughout the 1940s, the board approached this work with a candid recognition that there were no easy answers to this question. In 1941, board chair W. J. Gallagher reminded his colleagues that the task of social reconstruction was fraught with dangers and difficulties. He noted that humanity’s hope of an ideal society was very much like a legend from Scotland’s Orkney Islands that told of an island that would disappear whenever someone tried to visit. Although the isle could be seen clearly from the shore, it vanished once a person started to approach it across the channel. However, once the traveler returned to land, it could be seen again.⁵ Gallagher believed this story reminded the church that “humanity’s hope of an ideal society” and “of the Kingdom of God” could be illusory. Since Old Testament times, humanity had “dreamed of a world of righteousness and love and joy and peace” and had “seen it shining in the distance.” But like the disappearing isle, this destination could be difficult to find. Throughout history, a variety of worldly forces had distracted the church from its goal, and Christians had frequently lost sight of their objective. The pressures of wartime made the challenge of focusing on this vision even greater. However, Gallagher maintained, it was vitally important for the church to remain focused on this vision and to hold it up for all to see:

The immediate pressure of the moment may distort our vision and blind us to ultimate goals and values. We may be led into actions inconsistent with our purpose and may lose sight of our objective altogether. We Christians must not forget, even in the midst of the struggle, that we contend for the Kingdom of God, and that part of our Christian duty is to keep clear the vision of that Kingdom, and to maintain the Christian sense of values and the Christian way of living among our own people. It will be a sad anomaly if, while professing to defend a Christian way of life abroad, we live un-Christianly at home. That, indeed, would invite failure, for a house divided against itself cannot

⁴Ibid.

⁵W. J. Gallagher Address, *ibid.*, 34.

stand. Our war effort itself may be vitiated and our purpose defeated if we make the war the occasion or the excuse for things that are wrong.⁶

Gallagher encouraged his colleagues to share this message in Sunday worship, as well as in the practical work of upholding “Christian moral standards” throughout the country; protecting “the essential freedoms which characterize democracy,” and endeavoring “to anticipate post-war problems” and find just solutions to them.⁷

The board was also reminded that the work of social reconstruction was consistent with the insights of modern theology. In 1942, John Line presented a paper to the board’s annual meeting entitled “The Things We Believe and Teach,” in which he contended that the work of Christian social reform would be revitalized if the churches emphasized and proclaimed that God is a transcendent being who can never be confined by human understanding. “Christianity is eschatological,” he affirmed. In each of its great periods “it has been of its very nature to have an outlook beyond this world.” From the very beginning, the church had been “within time and history” but had also looked “beyond history for history’s own meaning; beyond time for the issue of temporal events.”⁸

Line acknowledged the possibility that a new focus on eschatology would dampen the church’s zeal for social reconstruction. In his view, “this fear ought to be groundless.” Instead, he contended that a Christianity “alive to its divine meaning would find in it ultimate standards, under which to bring all our human ways to a higher judgment; it would reject every form of injustice far more decisively than if human tests only were applied.”⁹ In other words, a belief in God’s purpose for humanity “should not lessen but fortify a thousandfold our obligation to labour in

⁶Ibid., 36.

⁷Ibid., 37-38.

⁸John Line, “The Things We Believe and Teach,” *ibid.*, 44.

⁹Ibid.

every way for his essential good.”¹⁰ For “the present revival of theology, if such it be, will be a thing of pathos” unless it resulted in a clearer sense of Christian vocation.

Line then maintained that the distinctive character of Christian mission could be seen through the incarnation of this transcendent God into the world. “It is in Christ God is self-revealed, and the Revelation is not in voice or word only, but in act,” he affirmed. Although God was not limited to the world, God “visited it, and wrought for our redemption great deeds within it.” In Jesus Christ, God took up the task of shaping and transforming the world. Therefore, “the Incarnation determines the Christian attitude to the world, as it determines Christian action,” he said. “In the Incarnation, God came to the world and made His bid for the allegiance of the world; He did this through his Love and the gift of salvation wrought by Love.” In this way, “God whose being is not man’s, set up His Dominion in man’s world, that man might share the life of God. This Dominion or Kingdom of God, Jesus proclaimed; and it defines, we say, present Christian action.”¹¹

Line thus believed that a Christianity rooted in “the judgments of God” could be proclaimed “with far more disturbing and provocative impact on every form of entrenched spiritual and social wrong.” While some clergy asserted that church people were “more in need of comfort and help,” he maintained “that comfort and disturbance are not homiletical incompatibles.” Indeed, “nothing is more comforting and cheering to Christ-minded hearers than a sure prophetic word, no matter what demands it lays upon them.”¹² Therefore, Line challenged the board

to declare the basic convictions and themes of faith. Ours is a time to be all alive to this. For the world today presents to Christian discernment the aspect of being under judgment; whence the call to the Christian preacher to witness

¹⁰Ibid., 44-45.

¹¹Ibid., 47.

¹²Ibid., 45.

to the divine judgments, as did prophets of old. They saw God's hand in Assyria and Persia; so the preacher should trace out and help the people to see what God is doing in the strange happenings of our time, and what He would have them do. The Church must in this way learn and make known the divine will, to preserve its own being. For only as the prophet and interpreter of God to the conscience of men can the Church escape taking its tone and standards from the world in which it is set, and lapsing into a sub-Christian sociological existence in which its identity as Church is lost. A Christianity that does not overcome the world is very promptly overcome by it.¹³

Thus Line believed the forces of secularization could be effectively challenged by emphasizing "the experience of God in receiving His Word and Work in our behalf; and the consecration of ourselves and our world to the righteous ways of God."¹⁴

United Church moderator Aubrey Tuttle agreed that the church had a distinctive contribution to make to Canadian life. He informed the board's 1940 annual meeting that, in his view, the church "should not attempt to draw up blueprints for the new world, but with its clearer spiritual insight and keener moral judgment, it ought to be able to point out the abuses in the present order and to lay down the spiritual basis and the moral principles according to which the new one must be built."¹⁵ Hugh Dobson also believed the church had a distinctive contribution to make to the country. "I see much more clearly now even than then, that no other salvation is being offered for the peoples of the world either by culture or by economics or by politics except that which springs from the Christian Way and the Christian Hope and the reconciling constraining power of the love of Christ," he said. "If this is true surely we should rally the devotion of our Church to a depth and quality we have never known before."¹⁶

The board worked to achieve these goals in a variety of ways. Throughout World War II, it actively upheld the right of organized labour to bargain collectively.

¹³Ibid., 48.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵"The Moderator's Message," The Eternal . . . The Contemporary, 1940, 3.

¹⁶Hugh Dobson Annual Report, *ibid.*, 34.

As Canada's labour unions confronted significant pressures to sacrifice many of their rights in support of the war effort, the board's policies attracted much public attention and were very controversial.

Collective Bargaining and the Kirkland Lake Gold Miners' Strike

By the late 1930s, the United Church was firmly committed to the principle of collective bargaining. The 1934 Christianizing the Social Order report recognized the right of workers to choose their own representatives. The 1936 General Council stated "that wage earners and employers, while present conditions of industry obtain, shall bargain on equal terms through persons freely chosen by each group."¹⁷ In 1938, General Council voted to "reaffirm our Church's stand in favour of collective bargaining" and agreed "to support in every fair and constructive manner the fundamental right of labour to collective bargaining through its freely-chosen representatives without any fear of discrimination or of discharge from their duties."¹⁸ This Council also urged all church conferences to organize standing committees on industrial relations, and commended the provincial governments of Nova Scotia, Manitoba, Alberta, and British Columbia for having passed legislation that guaranteed the right of labour to organize.¹⁹

With these principles in mind, the board's Economic and Social Research Commission more clearly defined the church's approach to industrial relations questions in its 1940 report on "Collective Bargaining and Industrial Organization." In this paper, it outlined the historical basis of labour's right to organize, identified some major principles of collective bargaining, surveyed the history and development

¹⁷Record of Proceedings, 1936 General Council, 83.

¹⁸Record of Proceedings, 1938 General Council, 108.

¹⁹Laurel Sefton MacDowell, "United Church Support for Collective Bargaining in the 1940s," Toronto Journal of Theology 12 (Fall 1996): 251-263, provides an excellent overview of the United Church's approach to the issue of collective bargaining during this time.

of Canadian labour unions, and focused on the particular dynamics of labour organization in wartime.

This report offered several recommendations which were approved by the 1940 General Council. It urged that “all collective bargaining procedures be of a constructive and fair nature.” Every United Church member was asked to help to create an “informed and favourable public opinion” toward collective bargaining, although “no direct or immediate responsibility for promoting labour organization as such devolves upon the ministers or congregations of our communion.” The church was also encouraged to “support all reasonable and constructive efforts to secure Federal and Provincial legislation for the improvement of collective bargaining procedures,” and call upon business to maintain fair employment standards during wartime because employers who were “anxious to achieve maximum production, may work skilled staff long hours rather than train new workers out of the large number of employables still out of work.” Finally, the report urged “that the one day rest in seven be preserved and that excessive overtime should not be allowed.”²⁰

J. R. Mutchmor was a strong proponent of this policy. His experience in northern lumber and mining camps, as well as in Winnipeg’s north end, gave him a special appreciation of the important ways that organized labour could protect workers rights. As he later reflected:

It did not require many such insights to make me a strong believer in and supporter of organized labour. My railroad experience added to my concern for Canada’s unorganized labour force. Information I obtained about a deplorably low-paid box factory staff made me more indignant. I did not learn about ‘man’s inhumanity to man’ out of poetry books; my lessons came directly from the hurly-burly of life.²¹

Throughout his career, Mutchmor was especially supportive of the Canadian labour movement, and believed the particular needs of wartime made the goal of upholding

²⁰“Industrial Organization and Collective Bargaining,” Record of Proceedings, 1940 General Council, 140-141.

²¹Mutchmor, Mutchmor, 79.

the principle of collective bargaining even more important to achieve. In November 1941, he informed readers of The United Church Observer that one of the reasons industrial productivity had remained so low during the early years of the war was that many common labourers only “receive forty or forty-five cents per hour” at the same time as “many war industries are making large profits.” Such rates of pay “do not enable the poor man to feed and clothe himself, his wife, and his children today, with food costs increased by 21.3%, and clothing 15.7% more than before the war.” He believed the Canadian labour movement was “making many sacrifices for the war effort, “ and affirmed “the time is long since past, for Government leaders to hurl charges of sabotage and disloyalty at working men.”²² In his opinion, the fair treatment of labour could help to ensure that the country would produce the quantity and quality of materials necessary for the Allies to achieve victory.

The board soon had the opportunity to put these principles into practice. In 1941, a labour dispute erupted in Kirkland Lake, Ontario, over the question of whether the workers employed by the town’s mining companies should have the right to unionize. After several attempts at conciliation and mediation failed, a strike was called for November 18, 1941. Through Mutchmor’s active role in this dispute, the church’s labour relations policy became extremely well known across Canada.

As the work of Laurel Sefton MacDowell demonstrates, Mutchmor and his board colleagues “were primarily concerned with the basic issue of collective bargaining and they continued to view the strike in a national political context.”²³ They believed that a satisfied and contented national labour force was crucial to successful prosecution of the war effort, and that work stoppages such as the one in

²²J. R. Mutchmor, “What is the Church Doing For the Working Man?,” The United Church Observer, 15 November 1941, 25.

²³Laurel Sefton MacDowell, Remember Kirkland Lake: The Gold Miners' Strike of 1941-42 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 151. MacDowell offers a detailed discussion of the role of the United Church in this dispute.

Kirkland Lake jeopardized this plan. Quoting various General Council resolutions on collective bargaining, Mutchmor emphasized that "this Department in particular, and our Church in general, means business in so far as Collective Bargaining is concerned" because of its belief that "it is a fundamental right in time of peace, and in time of war." As a national staff person of the United Church, he maintained that he was fully justified in relating the church's policies about collective bargaining to this particular situation.

Mutchmor's fear about the national ramifications of an unsuccessful settlement led him to pressure the United Church minister in Kirkland Lake, Ernest Long, to ensure that the interests of labour were protected. If the unions "lose because of Federal Government inaction, labour, both in the C.I.O. and the A.F. of L. Groups, as well as unorganized workers, will know that they cannot put any confidence in Mr. Mackenzie King and his cabinet," Mutchmor warned. In this case, the "great army of men in overalls will be quite convinced that the right of collective bargaining has ceased to exist in Canada."²⁴ For these reasons, Mutchmor suggested the national interests involved in this strike transcended any local particularities.

"It should be recognized that Kirkland Lake is part of a whole national problem," he declared:

The tools for Churchill are not being produced. Labour is restive and discontented. Labour is not willing to consent to Ottawa's 'wait and see' policy. It is along this line that I am directing most of my effort because as a citizen and a member of the Christian Church I feel strongly that much greater support must be given to our men in uniform.²⁵

Mutchmor believed the national implications of the Kirkland Lake strike were more important than the desire to keep peace in the local community, and he urged Long to publicly take the side of organized labour in the dispute.

²⁴J. R. Mutchmor to Ernest Long, 9 December 1941, Mutchmor Papers, File 5.

²⁵J. R. Mutchmor to Ernest Long and John Boyd, 19 December 1941, Mutchmor Papers, File 5.

However, Long viewed things very differently. His congregation included a mine manager and several active trade unionists, so he worked diligently throughout the strike to articulate a compromise position that stated "we uphold the right of collective bargaining, but not necessarily Local 240 save as the general principle is involved."²⁶ Long's congregation discussed the situation, and agreed all people had the right to their own opinions, clergy had the freedom to address the matter from the pulpit if they wished, and churches had the right to lead on social matters.²⁷ This conciliatory approach helped maintain peace in Long's congregation, and he resented any outside interference which undermined the delicate balance that had been established. He condemned public pronouncements that both the Toronto-West Presbytery and FCSO had made about the strike because they failed to understand the complexities of the situation. Long urged Mutchmor and other outsiders to stay away from Kirkland Lake unless they could spend one or two weeks in the situation. "In no less time would it be possible for anyone to form judgments of value."²⁸

Nevertheless, Mutchmor continued to urge that labour's interests be defended. In a strongly-worded letter to federal labour minister Norman McLarty, he demanded that the government become involved to help secure a fair settlement, and contended that the government's policy of not intervening in any shut-down of the mines was simply "buck-passing" which "will make the labour problem a political football to be kicked around between Ottawa versus Queen's Park." In his view, situations such as the one in Kirkland Lake were "much too grave to allow any degree of political expediency to determine policy in the industrial labour field."²⁹

²⁶Ernest Long to J. R. Mutchmor, 10 November 1941, Mutchmor Papers, Box 1, File 5.

²⁷Sefton MacDowell, "United Church Support for Collective Bargaining in the 1940s," 258.

²⁸Ernest Long to J. R. Mutchmor, 16 December 1941, Mutchmor Papers, Box 1, File 5.

²⁹J. R. Mutchmor to the Honourable Norman McLarty, 7 November 1941, Mutchmor Papers, File 5.

Despite the controversial nature of this position, the board in 1942 re-affirmed its support of collective bargaining in a resolution urging the Canadian government “to recognize labour’s right to collective bargaining by means of an Act applicable to all industry, commerce and employment.” Such an act was to be independently administered to ensure that “employees can choose their bargaining agency free from employer’s control or interference.”³⁰ The board also urged the federal government “to give organized labour full and direct representation on all wartime control boards” and “encourage the formation of joint management-labour war production committees in all war industries.”³¹

Toward the end of the war, Mutchmor believed the church’s faith in organized labour had been well founded. “The church joins with all makers of a sane and informed public opinion in paying high tribute to Labour’s war effort,” he told C.B.C. radio listeners in a 1944 Labour Day weekend broadcast. “Men and women who work in shop and factory, in mine and ship yard, on boats, trains and trolley [sic] cars, in office and warehouses, in the forest and on the sea, have pledged their all.” While a few labour disputes occurred during the war, Mutchmor contended that the labour movement had acted responsibly. “So I say again to all church folk, think well of labour,” he concluded. “Do not let some narrow prejudice blind you to its proven worth.” Instead, “let church people in particular make it plain by word and deed that they support Labour in all its fair and forward looking endeavours.”³²

While Mutchmor became a vocal defender of the rights of organized labour, the United Church began studying the plight of another group of frequently forgotten Canadians - the rural farmer. Upon concluding its study of collective bargaining, the

³⁰Report No. 2 of the Sessional Committee on Social Problems, Hope in God, BESS Seventeenth Annual Report, 1942, 31.

³¹Ibid., 32.

³²J. R. Mutchmor, “Church and Labour in War-Time,” typescript of a broadcast delivered on Sunday, 3 September 1944, Mutchmor Papers, Box 14, File 193.

board's Economic and Social Research Commission turned to the question of Canadian agriculture and how the church might support those Canadians living on family farms.

The Farmer in National Life

Throughout its history, many of the social issues that the board addressed had a distinct urban focus. The Board of Evangelism and Social Service "has not been deeply concerned about the plight of the farmers who make up one-third of our population," Mutchmor admitted in his 1942 report.³³ In an attempt to rectify this situation, the board directed its Economic and Social Research Commission to undertake a major study of the situation facing primary producers in Canada. A number of experts were recruited to offer assistance. Economics professor Alexander Brady of the University of Toronto acted as research director for the commission and outlined the nature of economic planning in Australia and New Zealand. Agricultural leaders H. H. Hannan, V. S. Milburn, and E. H. Clarke lent their expertise, retired farmer Mel Staples presented a paper outlining some of the problems currently faced by Ontario farmers, and commission member George Dorey "presented two papers from his recent study and long experience of prairie farming conditions." In addition, a professor from the Ontario Agricultural College in Guelph presented the commission with a paper on the plight of the primary producer in Canada.³⁴

The report outlined the various ways farmers contributed to Canadian society and the Canadian economy. Over thirty per cent of the Canadian population lived on a family farm, and these people did much to protect the land, preserve a distinct way of life, and contribute to the national economy. However, statistics revealed that agriculture's share of the national income had dropped from over thirty per cent in

³³J. R. Mutchmor Annual Report, Hope in God, 33.

³⁴"Report of the Commission on Economic and Social Research," *ibid.*, 77.

1911 to less than fifteen per cent by 1939, and that rural poverty was at least as large a problem as urban poverty.³⁵ In addition, poor living conditions, an uncertain economic future because of the vagaries of weather, and the allure of regular paychecks were leading many rural people to leave their farms and migrate to the cities. Those who remained were faced with the daunting task of modernizing their operations in response to the advent of a wide range of new agricultural practices. The “essential problem of today” was to find ways “to adapt the new machines and techniques to the family-sized farm,” the report stated.³⁶

The report affirmed that “co-operation among neighbors will help in this solution” and suggested the United Church could play an important role in educating farmers about some different ways of living and working together. “Only aggressive education can make rural co-operation a reality,” it noted, and “there must be created among farmers a sense of inter-dependence relative to other members of the community.” While recognizing that it was “easy for the farmer to develop a feeling of isolation from the townsman,” the report maintained that “isolationist sentiment in any modern social group is a menace to the solution of problems in a democratic way.”³⁷

The report then proceeded to make a number of specific recommendations about how these goals could best be accomplished. Many of them suggested an increased role for government. “It is indeed a responsibility of the state on occasion to take whatever action is necessary . . . to ensure the social health of important groups within it,” the report said. It urged local municipalities to establish and attract more libraries, medical services, and other amenities that would increase the quality of life in rural areas. It also urged provincial governments to continue the task of

³⁵“The Farmer in the National Life,” Record of Proceedings, 1942 General Council, 137.

³⁶Ibid., 146.

³⁷Ibid.

rural electrification and help subsistence farmers find other seasonal work. Both federal and provincial governments should do a better job of marketing agricultural produce across Canada and find ways to extend the same kind of tariff protection to Canadian agriculture as they did to other industries.³⁸ In addition, more farm credit should be made available. Finally, the report urged all levels of government to actively initiate programs to prevent soil drifting, increase the number of wood lots and wind breaks, and ensure “that all future drainage programmes be most thoroughly studied to the end that land wastage and soil erosion be not increased.”³⁹

The report then indicated some specific ways the United Church could reach out to its farm constituency. It urged ministers and congregations alike “to assist in the promotion of collective enterprises,” such as the creation of local credit unions.⁴⁰ It also recommended that “through sermon, study group, panel discussion, participation in radio programmes and other ways,” help be offered “to any worthy effort in the form of co-operative movement, agricultural society or other organization through the growth of which the well-being of farm families and the economic health of agriculture may be advanced.”⁴¹

In advocating an increased role for the Canadian state and emphasizing the social and communal dimensions of life, the board articulated ideas that would begin to appear with increased frequency in future policies and pronouncements. Indeed, the work of a major commission that the United Church established to develop a blueprint for postwar society would develop these same themes at much greater length and extend these principles to other dimensions of Canadian life.

³⁸Ibid., 148.

³⁹Ibid., 151.

⁴⁰Ibid., 148.

⁴¹Ibid., 151.

Church, Nation, and World Order

From the earliest days of the war, the question of the nature of postwar Canadian society occupied a central place in the board's activities. "Today is the time to deal with post-war issues," J. R. Mutchmor told the 1940 General Council meeting in Winnipeg. "Those who cry 'Delay' advise us ill." He maintained that concerns such as the cost of living, the price of daily bread, and solving the unemployment problem were some of the "fundamental questions" of the age, and the United Church had a responsibility to address them. While some concern for the Missionary and Maintenance Fund had been expressed because not all would agree with the church's findings and withhold their money in protest, Mutchmor reminded his audience "there's something even more important" than this fund, namely the ongoing responsibility of discerning and following the way of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. "Now is the time to think and plan to work and fight and do," he declared. "The new world is coming on and under God it will be a better one." Therefore, "having studied these matters and knowing what God requires, we must not be fainthearted."²

Mutchmor delivered a similar message to readers of The United Church Observer. In a September 1940 article he explored the question of what a "blueprint of the Kingdom in the 1940s" would look like. He believed the church must begin by claiming anew "the rights of the ordinary man" because it was imperative that "the ways of righteousness be established in our land and the supremacy of spiritual things be recognized." He also asserted "that our continued existence as a free people requires that at the end of the war steps be taken to secure a more equitable distribution of wealth both within the nations and among the peoples of the world."³

²J. R. Mutchmor, "Faith and Morals Today and Tomorrow," typescript of a speech delivered at the 1940 General Council, Mutchmor Papers, Box 14, File 184.

³J. R. Mutchmor, "The Board of Evangelism and Social Service at General Council," The United Church Observer, 1 September 1940, 25.

In order to think through how these goals might be achieved, the board appointed "a Commission on the Church and World Order" at its 1941 annual meeting. It was asked to "take into careful consideration the deeper moral and spiritual issues of the war, and the peace following, and the call involved in the present world situation to a more Christian order in national and international life."⁴⁴ Toronto lawyer G. W. Mason agreed to chair the commission, Mutchmor served as secretary, and R.B.Y. Scott drafted its initial terms of reference.⁴⁵ Commission members also included clerics Gordon Sisco, Richard Davidson, John Coburn, W. J. Gallagher, J.R.P. Sclater, W. H. Young, and professor Gerald Riddell.⁴⁶ This commission began its work in 1940 and presented an interim report to the 1942 General Council.

However, General Council was concerned that this body was not reflective of the entire church, so it decided to appoint a formal commission that would be more representative of the church's constituency and speak for the entire United Church.⁴⁷ This new commission consisted of forty-five members, fifteen of whom were appointed by the General Council's sub-executive, and thirty others named by the sub-executive upon consultation with the president of each conference.⁴⁸ In the final analysis, however, many of those involved with the initial commission continued to occupy influential positions. While General Council secretary Gordon Sisco replaced

⁴⁴Sixteenth Annual Meeting Minutes, The Eternal . . . The Contemporary, BESS Sixteenth Annual Report, 1940, 24.

⁴⁵R.B.Y. Scott, "Suggested Terms of Reference," Papers of the Commission on Church, Nation and World Order (hereafter CNWO Papers), Box 1, File 1.

⁴⁶Minutes of the Church, Nation and World Order Commission, 15 December 1941, CNWO Papers, Box 1, File 1.

⁴⁷Minutes of 24 March 1943 Annual Meeting, "...And a New Earth", BESS Eighteenth Annual Report, 1943, 7.

⁴⁸Minutes of the Church, Nation and World Order Commission, 5 November 1942, CNWO Papers, Box 1, File 1.

Mutchmor as secretary, G. W. Mason remained as chair, R.B.Y. Scott was named research director, and Mutchmor continued to take an active role in the group's work.

The "core of the commission" was comprised of the executive and commission members who lived in southern Ontario.⁴⁹ A variety of local groups were established in selected urban centres across the rest of Canada to ensure that regional interests were reflected in the commission's work.⁵⁰ Each of the regional groups was assigned a particular subject to study and asked to submit its findings to the central group. However, with the notable exception of groups in Ottawa and Regina, few of the regional groups produced any original material.⁵¹ The major role played by those who lived outside southern Ontario was to offer written comments on various drafts of the report, and respond to specific queries.

This report was drafted at a time when, because of the war, the Canadian state was becoming increasingly active in social and economic affairs. As Dennis Guest indicates, a number of crown corporations were established to produce wartime materials, and the public was becoming more accepting of state intervention in the economy.⁵² Meanwhile, the federal government had established an advisory committee to develop proposals on how to transform a wartime economy into a peacetime one, and had named Leonard Marsh as research director. The publication of Marsh's 1943 report on "Social Security for Canada" drew public attention to a range of policy options that saw an increasing role for the Canadian state.⁵³

⁴⁹Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Church, Nation and World Order Commission, 18 January 1943, CNWO Papers, Box 1, File 1, 1.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 2.

⁵¹Reeve, "Institutionalizing the Social Passion," 181-210, provides an overview of the work of the Commission on Church, Nation and World Order and discusses the Ottawa working group's contribution to the final report.

⁵²Dennis Guest, "World War II and the Welfare State in Canada," in The Benevolent State, ed. Allan Moscovitch and Jim Albert (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1987), 205-210.

⁵³Doug Owram, The Government Generation: Canadian Intellectuals and the State, 1900-1945 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 285-317, offers a comprehensive discussion of

The commission also utilized a wide variety of resources produced by religious organizations in Europe and America. Its "Source Book" presented various statements on postwar reconstruction made by prominent church and political leaders as well as several international commissions. The document included declarations by the Pope, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Archbishop of York, and the Moderator of the Free Church Council. Statements from the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America on a "Just and Durable Peace," and President Franklin Roosevelt were also published. Canadian references included a press release on Leonard Marsh's report on social security, as well as summaries of the political platforms of the Liberal, Progressive Conservative and C.C.F. parties in Canada.⁵⁴ In addition, the commission drew on the reports of the 1937 Oxford Conference on "Church, Community and State" and the work of the Dulles Commission in the United States.⁵⁵

The commission's early discussions focused on a draft memorandum that was prepared by W. C. Lockhart of Toronto's Kingsway-Lambton United Church which proposed that the commission focus on three primary areas. It suggested the group first clarify the religious basis of the church's interest in this question, articulate the "moral principles" that could be derived from the Christian faith, and then discuss the way these principles could be applied to the national and international situation of the time.⁵⁶ The commission agreed to follow this agenda, and Lockhart offered some further thoughts in a series of discussion papers.

Lockhart outlined several theological affirmations that undergirded the church's work in this area. God was a righteous and compassionate Being who gave

the range of social policy ideas being considered by the federal government, including the Marsh report.

⁵⁴Reeve, "Institutionalizing the Social Passion," 194-195.

⁵⁵Ibid., 203.

⁵⁶W. C. Lockhart, "Commission on Church, Nation and World Order Basic Memorandum: Outline and Scope of the Commission's Work," CNWO Papers, Box 1, File 10.

the world an enduring and life-giving set of religious laws. All people were children of God created in God's image to live in community and solidarity with one another. However, humanity had become mired in sin, and salvation without God was impossible. Jesus Christ was sent to save humanity and "recreate" the world so "it will conform to the mind and purpose of God in all human relationships." The church was called to manifest God's reconciling and beneficent power in its beliefs and actions.⁵⁷

He then delineated the principles upon which society could be faithfully ordered. Because every person is a child of God, society must maintain an "ordered unity" so all people would live in peace and harmony with their neighbors. Everyone's rights and freedoms must also be respected. Each person had a responsibility to care for one another as for themselves and to build a society in which worldly resources will be regarded as God's provision for all God's children.

Lockhart then applied these principles to the church, economy, politics, and society. The church was challenged to set its "own house in order" by embodying these principles in its personnel policies, spending, and advocacy work. It could do so by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ which "above all must create new life and a new spirit" among all persons. A "just" economic order would affirm labour's right to organize and bargain collectively, provide work for the unemployed, ensure natural resources were shared equitably, and guarantee that every person would receive the opportunity to obtain a decent house, basic education, and meaningful employment. A true democracy would affirm that the "basic rights and freedoms" of all people would be preserved "in order that man may live as a child of God." A desirable society was one which upheld the sanctity of marriage and family, preserved basic moral standards, offered everyone quality health care, and protected

⁵⁷Ibid., 1.

the rights of its minority citizens.⁵⁸ In this way, he believed, the Christian vision of postwar society could be fully embodied.

Lockhart's document was circulated and given careful consideration by the central group and selected others. Several common critiques surfaced. There was uncertainty about whether this statement should outline "what a just order would be," the "ultimate ideal toward which Christian society must move," or be "a statement of the measures that will be practicable in the immediate post-war world."⁵⁹ Mutchmor and Sisco also shared the insights they gained from their work with the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America's commission on a "Just and Durable Peace."⁶⁰

R.B.Y. Scott then incorporated these responses into several subsequent drafts of the report. After identifying some "basic Christian beliefs concerning man and society" and offering a "Christian charter for man and society," the document focused on how these principles might be applicable to the realms of Canadian economics, politics, and social affairs. Scott's drafts were widely distributed throughout the church and elicited further comment, much of it positive.

However, not everyone who was consulted approved of the way the document was unfolding. Canadian historian A.R.M. Lower of Winnipeg's United College was troubled by the "considerable hiatus" between the "proper and orthodox statement of the Christian position" in the first part of the memorandum and the subsequent "social manifesto that does not intimately relate to the statement of doctrine preceding it." In

⁵⁸Ibid., 6.

⁵⁹Minutes of the Commission on Church, Nation and World Order, 1 April 1943, CNWO Papers, Box 1, File 1, 1-2.

⁶⁰Mutchmor, *Mutchmor*, 165. The United Church of Canada was an affiliate member of the Federal Council, and utilized various pieces of information produced by this American body. For a discussion of the relationship between the Federal Council and United Church see Robert Handy, "Reflections on the Federal Council of Churches, the United Church of Canada and the Social Gospel in the 1930s," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 12 (Fall 1996): 179-188.

his view, the paper's general tone was "idealistic and Utopian," and he maintained that it could, "with appropriate changes, well be the programme of an advanced left-wing political party." While there was "nothing inherently objectionable in this," to depict the ultimate goal of the church "in the colours of worldly well-being" ignored the fact "that no easy solutions may be expected" and "that a facile materialism is no answer to life's problems." He therefore wondered "whether we are even putting ourselves on the side of the best solution if we think in nothing but terms of material advancement."⁶¹

Similar concerns were expressed by commission chair G. W. Mason. He lamented that many of those who had been appointed to the commission had been inactive, and feared the report would not adequately reflect the thinking of the entire church. He worried that the report "would be regarded as visionary and unsound by large numbers of our people whose opinions are as much entitled to respect as ours, and by certain large classes of our population and that instead of accomplishing a service for our people we may be doing much harm to the Church."⁶²

Further revisions were made, and the full commission convened in May 1944 at Toronto's Metropolitan Church to finalize the report. This document attempted "to set forth the basic principles of a Christian charter for society."⁶³ Consisting of a statement that affirmed the spiritual and social dimensions of life, followed by a comprehensive listing of reforms needed in national and international politics, the economy, and various aspects of social life, the report stands as a detailed summary of United Church social thought for the period.

⁶¹A.R.M. Lower memo, "On the Basic Memorandum: Commission on the Church, Nation and World Order," CNWO Papers, Box 1, File 10.

⁶²Gershom Mason to Gordon Sisco, 28 June 1943, CNWO Papers, Box 1, File 8.

⁶³A Report of the Commission on Church, Nation and World Order (Toronto: Board of Evangelism and Social Service, 1944), 6.

As Ted Reeve notes, the commission's final report outlines a comprehensive plan for a full welfare state.⁶⁴ It emphasized that the objectives of “full employment, adequate production of goods serving basic needs, wise and just distribution, and basic security for all” should guide Canadian public policy.⁶⁵ Human well being was deemed more important than the quest for large profits, and the state could play a very important role in protecting the public interest. To this end, the report encouraged the federal government to develop policies concerning health, education, employment, housing, labour relations, social insurance, social security, and taxation to ensure that everyone's basic human needs would be met. By taking control of selected economic sectors through the establishment of crown corporations, the state could help protect the weak and vulnerable from the vagaries of free market economics and ensure that basic levels of food, clothing, and shelter would be the right of all Canadians. The report also urged the government to develop a publicly funded universal medicare system, an unemployment insurance program, and a full employment strategy.⁶⁶

Marriage and the Family

The outbreak of the Second World War renewed the board's interest in issues related to marriage and the family. The social disruption of wartime threatened family stability, and the church responded by reminding people of the family's importance. As the war drew to a close, the church paid particular attention to issues around resettlement and reintegration. They anticipated that families would be united after long absences, army veterans would return as very different people from when

⁶⁴Reeve, “Institutionalizing the Social Passion,” 206.

⁶⁵A Report of the Commission on the Church, Nation and World Order, 19.

⁶⁶Ibid., 20-24.

they left, and their families would also have changed. The board was well aware of the importance of easing the transition back to a more normal way of life.

From 1939 on, the board recognized that wartime pressures would likely result in increased difficulties for family life. Hugh Dobson devoted particular attention to this issue. He believed the problem was compounded by the fact that many marriages had already been strained by the trials of the depression. In radio addresses, as well as in an article for Canadian Welfare, he noted the “rapidly increasing divorce rates, legal separations, desertions, family tensions between husband and wife and between age and youth” were signs that family life had become increasingly disrupted during the depression.⁶⁷ The fact that the national divorce rate in Canada rose from 873 in 1930 to 2,022 in 1939 testified to the fact that the Canadian family was under siege.⁶⁸ “Economic insecurity, unemployment, loss and uncertain family income, our nomadic life, the shifting of family life from rural to urban conditions, and unplanned cities with the laissez faire attitudes that prevail” were identified as important reasons for family breakdown. However, Dobson believed that more serious temptations lay in the threat posed by new standards of conduct and morality:

The fundamental causes [of this situation] lie deeper - jealousy stimulated by highly suggestive literature with a higher market than literary value; misunderstanding and bitterness developing within the family because the young woman worker in shop or office - well dressed and younger than the wife - shares more intimately the burdens of the business more than the wife who bears heavy home burdens without an income sufficient to allow her to dress and live up to the same standards in the competitive life of our times.

The spread of popular knowledge in biology and physiology - which in most cases is only half knowledge - kindles curiosity, and excites to adventurous living which entangles many a life. The only remedy is more knowledge, more conscious and better controls.⁶⁹

⁶⁷Hugh Dobson, “The Christian Family,” 13 August 1940, Dobson Papers, Box B-9, File H.

⁶⁸Hugh Dobson, “Whither - The Canadian Family?,” Canadian Welfare, November 1940, 3.

⁶⁹Ibid., 7.

Such problems had been devastating enough in peacetime, but were capable of destroying the very morale of Canadian soldiers and families during the war. In 1940, Dobson declared that “the deteriorated quality of family life is the most serious casualty we can suffer in war time, for on that depends the loyalty, the fortitude, the stamina, the unity of our national life when we come to the final strain.” Given the crisis of the age, “the soldier and his wife and children both needed the utmost care.” The “quality of family life is the greatest source of the stamina that makes for endurance, and so high quality family life is an absolute necessity in time of war.”⁷⁰

The board’s 1941 Sessional Committee on Evangelism urged the church to find ways to make family life “thoroughly Christian by establishing clear Christian standards of conduct and cultivating definitive Christian values” in domestic life. Here again, Dobson suggested several concrete initiatives to address the situation. Better public education about matters of marriage and sexuality was thought to be essential, and it was also imperative to change both individual and social attitudes about the family. This could be done through offering additional training courses on the family in Canadian universities. Homemakers could learn how to establish a “more regular tempo and tone in our ordinary living” through proper meal preparation and entertaining.⁷¹

Dobson also deemed necessary the political will to establish a more equitable distribution of income. He asserted that the “national income must be more equitably distributed for the security of the family” because the final test of economic viability “is not the barometer of ‘dividends and bank clearings’ but of ‘family incomes.’” However, families also had a responsibility to use their available resources in the wisest way:

⁷⁰Dobson, “The Christian Home,” 6.

⁷¹Hugh Dobson, “Strengthening Our Family Life II,” Canadian Welfare, December 1940, Dobson Papers, Box B-11, File III, 8.

Too often, family need is due to wasteful, uncontrolled expenditure without any sense of value in what is bought and the price paid for it. Ignorance and inadequacy in use of income can be as vitiating for the family as insufficient income. Both demand that we face squarely the examination of our sense of relative values, and the amount and use of family income.⁷²

The Canadian state also had a responsibility to see that additional health and family services would be available. Some "form of social insurance, to assure reasonable medical and health provisions for all the population" was necessary "if we are to develop the stamina in life which enables a family to stand up against the strain of modern society." Additional resources to counsel families in distress were also needed. Such families "must have community services on which to draw - skilled family welfare agencies, clinics under dependable auspices and guidance in need."⁷³

While these social mechanisms were undoubtedly important for Dobson, in his mind they never replaced the Christian church as the best means for ensuring that the ideal of the family would survive intact. The task of education should not "be left to Welfare Groups, Social Hygiene Societies and the newspaper and the novel," he stated.⁷⁴ Over the years, the church had promoted a set of moral standards deemed essential to happy family life, and he feared that other sources would not place adequate emphasis on these values. "Jesus and the Christian Church have laid great stress upon the family as the basic association of humanity on which all other human associations and institutions depend for their very existence, their character and their survival," Dobson wrote.⁷⁵ He asserted that the continuation of the church's historic focus on the family would help preserve the best of modern civilization in the present time of trial and difficulty, and remind the country that the goal of preserving the

⁷²Ibid., 9.

⁷³Ibid., 10.

⁷⁴Hugh Dobson, The Christian Family is Essential to Democracy, to Canadian National Life, and to the Coming Kingdom of God (Toronto: Board of Evangelism and Social Service, 1940), 15.

⁷⁵Ibid., 5.

family was vitally important. "If family life breaks down, national life will crack," he warned. "To establish and buttress democracy there must be a family type, a family culture, in which the family worships Christ and in which the personality of each member of the family will be held equally sacred." The task of building "such a Christian family life is all important in Canada and for any democracy."⁷⁶

Dobson's concerns were shared by many others in the United Church. The 1944 General Council instructed the Board of Evangelism and Social Service and the Board of Christian Education to establish a Commission on Christian Marriage and the Christian Family in an attempt to address the massive social adjustments anticipated once the war ended. Mr. Justice J. C. McRuer of the Ontario Court of Appeal agreed to chair the commission.⁷⁷ While the bulk of the report was drafted in Toronto, Dobson organized a group in Vancouver to study the question of divorce, and other board members took an active role in developing this report.⁷⁸

The commission's final report articulated the principles of family life thought essential for the postwar reconstruction of Canadian society, and reaffirmed many of Dobson's favorite themes. "Our finding is that the life of the family is being threatened at its source by secularism and materialism, and that the Church has a great responsibility in combating the disintegration of the home," commission members concluded.⁷⁹ "The Christian teaching concerning the nature, maintenance and function of the family is that (1) the family is the natural and basic unit of

⁷⁶Ibid., 15.

⁷⁷Annual Meeting Minutes, 16 March 1945, "Doers of the word", BESS Twentieth Annual Report, 1944, 17.

⁷⁸Daphne J. Anderson and Terence R. Anderson, "United Church of Canada: Kingdom Symbol or Lifestyle Choice," in Faith Traditions and the Family, ed. Phyllis D. Airhart and Margaret Lamberts Bendroth (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 126-142, makes brief reference to this report. However, the article deals primarily with United Church discussions on the family that took place after 1945.

⁷⁹"Report of the Commission on Christian Marriage and Christian Home," Record of Proceedings, 1946 General Council, 106.

society; (2) society rests upon the stability of homes; and (3) marriage, parenthood and family associations have God-given significance and the birth of children has a Divine end and blessing.”⁸⁰ The church could help to “strengthen and develop the home” by offering opportunities for the entire family to participate in church programs, and by “encouraging families to conduct life in the home in a definitely Christian way” through Scripture reading, prayer, and other “daily observance of those graces and courtesies of family life which make for gracious and wholesome Christian living.” The church could also emphasize the family connections in its classes for marriage and baptism, and provide “a definite and continuous programme of parent training through parent meetings and training classes, young married couples groups.”⁸¹

The board therefore saw a properly constituted Christian home as being a central ingredient to a well-functioning postwar Canadian society. Dobson and the board maintained that healthy families preserved social stability in times of turmoil, and were therefore essential to the continued vitality of both Canada and Christianity. Christians were called to strengthen the family by living lives according to the principles of Jesus’ teaching, and observing some basic tenets of moral and social conduct. The board tried to educate people about the family’s importance by reminding them of their obligations to uphold and strengthen the family. By following this agenda, Dobson and the board believed Canada could indeed be Christianized, and that the forces of evil in the world could be overcome by strong and virtuous Christian living.

⁸⁰Ibid., 142.

⁸¹Ibid., 143.

Evangelism and a New “Crusade for Christ”

While the board devoted considerable time and energy to questions of labour relations, rural life, social reconstruction, and the family during the war years, evangelism was never forgotten. During the war years, the board developed a new set of strategies to undertake what it considered to be this all-important task.

As the war progressed, the need for this kind of work was becoming increasingly clear to the board. “The strain, worry and ever increasing demands for work and service in a day like this rob religious life of its resilient and dynamic quality,” Mutchmor lamented at the 1943 annual meeting. “To endeavor to keep religion in a preeminent position, to show people that it must have priority, to make it plain that cultural and spiritual values must not be forgotten is thus a heavy task at present but one from which we dare not turn aside.”⁸² Some believed the United Church had neglected this work. In 1943, the Sessional Committee on Evangelism drew attention to the “wide gap between the spiritual potentiality of the United Church and the effective Christian power which it at present exercises.” It reported that between 1931 and 1941, the population of Canada increased ten per cent while the United Church’s membership had increased by a bit more than six per cent.⁸³ The church was losing ground.

The following year, J. R. Mutchmor identified some of the contributing factors to this situation. He noted that growing numbers of people who belonged to organized labour and university communities were now indifferent to the church. The growing urbanization of Canadian society posed another challenge, as many people who moved to the cities did not join a new church. These trends were serious, and the church needed to ask why increasing numbers of Canadians were no longer

⁸²J. R. Mutchmor Annual Report, “... And a New Earth”, BESS Eighteenth Annual Report, 1942, 54.

⁸³Report of the Sessional Committee on Evangelism, *ibid.*, 1942, 22.

attracted to the church. He wondered whether part of the problem lay with the style of worship that could be found in many congregations. Many United Church clergy favored a move toward a more formalized, ritualized and structured liturgy, in the hope that worshippers would experience a greater sense of God's awe and majesty. Although Mutchmor admitted that much could be said "in favor of more dignified services" of worship "now quite generally provided throughout our communion," to "have such an improvement at the cost of spontaneity, a sense of warmth and fellowship means doubtful gain for our church." Instead, the United Church "should become more alert to the fact that many of our congregations are self-contained units in which the stranger finds no welcome, the homeless no spiritual abode, and the poor man a cold and indifferent greeting."⁸⁴ In fact, he reported, "in 1941, 548,068 people told the census enumerator they belonged to the United Church, but they are not members of the Church nor is there any record of them being under pastoral care."⁸⁵ Mutchmor was greatly disturbed by these facts and urged the church to respond.

He did not have long to wait. In 1944, the United Church's recently elected moderator, Jesse Arnup, initiated a "Crusade for Christ and His Kingdom" in an attempt to foster a religious revival that would respond to the postwar situation. This campaign aimed to rededicate the church to Christ, "win to Christ and His Church those not yet reached by the Gospel message," recruit returning service men and women and wartime workers to the church's work, and encourage larger numbers of young people to enter the ministry and serve the church in other ways. In Arnup's view, a renewed and strengthened church would "help rehabilitate our country and its

⁸⁴J. R. Mutchmor, "Evangelism," "Right Relations Among Men", BESS Nineteenth Annual Report, 1943, 31.

⁸⁵Ibid.

people,” assist “in building an enduring world order on spiritual foundations,” and work together with other reformed churches in Canada.⁸⁶

The board at its 1945 annual meeting warmly received this undertaking. “I just want to say that our men seem to leap at the chance to get to grips with the spiritual indifference and materialism which beset our times,” the board’s new chair, Arthur Organ, reported. The crusade was designed to “establish a right idea of, and relation to God” in order to mold and shape “the moral atmosphere of tomorrow.”⁸⁷ J. R. Mutchmor also believed this work timely, and reflected an outlook that differed sharply from the apathy of the year before. “The predominant note of United Church life and work, as I sensed it in the last twelve months was responsiveness,” he reported in 1945. “In our Communion there is marked eagerness to know the deeper things of the spirit, a yearning for a stronger faith.”⁸⁸ He also reported that “more and more persons believe that Christ is indeed the Lord of all Life.” Such a situation clarified the board’s task. “This Board realizes as never before that Evangelism is its chief duty,” he stated, and “rejoices that this judgment is not just a conclusion of one part of one Communion, but rather the common mind of the United Church, and shared by many Communions.”⁸⁹

Conclusion

Throughout the war years, the Board of Evangelism and Social Service worked diligently to respond to the social, economic and moral crises of the time and articulate a clear Christian vision for postwar Canadian society. The board hoped to

⁸⁶“Crusade for Christ and His Kingdom,” “Doers of the Word”, BESS Twentieth Annual Report, 1944, 62-63.

⁸⁷Arthur Organ Address, *ibid.*, 42-43.

⁸⁸J. R. Mutchmor Annual Report, *ibid.*, 32.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 33.

see the Canadian state play an increasingly important role in people's lives. Its reports upheld labour's right to organize and bargain collectively throughout the country. It urged government to meet the special needs of Canadian farmers, and provide a social safety net to guarantee basic levels of food, shelter, and clothing for all. In this way, the board hoped Canadians would be encouraged to renounce secular values, embrace the Christian faith, and live in ways consistent with the teachings and example of Christ.

But the board was convinced that none of this could happen unless Canadians became more firmly rooted and grounded in the Christian faith. It believed that only the Christian faith could provide the type of spiritual foundation to create a climate that would foster, develop, and support such initiatives. Thus, in the face of new challenges, the board entered the postwar era firmly committed to the task of nurturing a spiritual revival that would make all of this possible.

CONCLUSION

In 1945, Board of Evangelism and Social Service associate secretary John Coburn announced his retirement. At the board's annual meeting that year, he reflected back on his twenty-five years of service with the Methodist and United Church boards. It had been, he recalled, a time of diverse activity. He had actively encouraged the work of evangelism by leading numerous preaching missions, evangelistic campaigns, and spiritual conferences. He had worked in countless temperance campaigns and urged numerous government officials to develop new temperance laws and properly reinforce existing regulations. He had studied a diverse range of social issues, lectured widely, helped oversee the work of the church's redemptive homes, and defended the civil liberties of many Canadians. He had assisted in the work of assorted national church committees and responded to a wide variety of other problems and issues. It had been a full and interesting career.

Among the highlights of his work, Coburn pointed to the way he had helped his church respond to the needs of prairie residents whose lives had been battered by drought and depression. "It was the United Church that led the way," he reminded his colleagues. "Before any agency had been able to do anything for the West, the United Church had carloads of fruit and vegetables and tons of clothing rolling into the distressed areas." In fact, the church responded so effectively "the Premier of Saskatchewan publicly stated that the United Church had saved his province from panic."¹

Another highlight was the "substantial progress in social conditions" that had taken place. "As a result of agitation by the churches through their social service departments and of other organizations, mother's allowances, old age pensions,

¹John Coburn Annual Report, "Doers of the Word", BESS Twentieth Annual Report, 1944, 36.

minimum wage laws for women, laws for the protection of the child of unmarried parents and Collective Bargaining Acts have been put into operation in most of the provinces, and now we are to have family allowances for the whole Dominion," he reported. "Medical and dental inspection in schools and various health measures have also been established in many towns and cities."² In part because of the board's efforts, many Canadians enjoyed a level of security unknown by previous generations.

However, Coburn also recognized that many of the objectives he and the board had fought so hard to realize were never achieved. Alcohol consumption continued to rise in Canada, with the consequent destruction of countless lives. Membership within the United Church continued to wane, and concerns about the church's spiritual health still abounded. Social resistance to the type of economic programme advocated by the board during the 1930s and 1940s remained strong, and much work was required to ensure that every working person "shall have a steady job with such remuneration as will enable him and his dependents to enjoy a clean and comfortable home, adequate clothing and food, and at least some of the pleasures of life with reasonable leisure and periods of rest."³ Family break-ups occurred in ever-increasing numbers, and the world seemed unable to escape from the "moral slump" that began in the years immediately following World War I.⁴

Coburn recognized that continuing this work in the years ahead would be fraught with difficulty. "The forces of evil and selfish interest will strongly resent the mobilization of religious and moral forces in the interest of better conditions," he warned. Board representatives would continue to be criticized severely and sometimes unfairly by the interests that the church opposed. Nevertheless, he urged the board to continue its efforts to draw people to God and reform Canadian society. The church

²Ibid., 37.

³Ibid., 38.

⁴Ibid., 36.

must “insist that religious and moral considerations shall have their due place in all policies of reconstruction, national and world life,” he concluded. The power of God would one day triumph, and in the end, “He shall reign, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, forever and ever.”⁵

This thesis has described and analyzed the work of John Coburn and his colleagues, and demonstrated that this group of social gospellers consistently opposed the secularization of Canadian society in many ways. In tracing the activities of this United Church board between 1925 and 1945, it has shown how the board’s opposition to secularization built on the concerns of many Presbyterian and Methodist social reformers before union, and carried this legacy forward into the United Church. During these years, the board believed that Canadian society had gradually but unrelentingly moved away from, and became increasingly apathetic to, the church’s faith and teachings. Society had repudiated prohibition laws and temperance attitudes, ignored the church’s call to take seriously the spiritual dimensions of life, supported a social and economic system that had failed to take seriously the needs of the country’s poorest and most vulnerable citizens, accepted the growing disintegration of home and family life as a matter of course, and adopted a new and laxer set of moral standards. The board was greatly disturbed by these developments and devoted considerable resources to meeting the challenge they posed.

Through a wide variety of initiatives, the board endeavored to stem the tide of secularization and persuade Canadians to adopt beliefs and policies it believed were consistent with the Christian faith. Board secretaries worked tirelessly to encourage people to support prohibition legislation, abstain from drinking alcohol, and refrain from gambling. In its attempts to re-energize the church, convert newcomers to the faith, and instill in people a love of God and knowledge of Jesus Christ, the board sought to encourage Canadians to embrace a way of life that could provide them with a

⁵Ibid., 40.

new sense of meaning and purpose grounded in a strong commitment to social justice and social responsibility. By thinking about a new social and economic order founded on the Christ's teachings rather than on either capitalist or Marxist principles, it endeavored to develop ideas and policies that challenged those that dominated the country. In its efforts to reach out to orphans, single mothers, and troubled youth, the board endeavored to show compassion to those in need and re-form them in Christ-like ways. By articulating a new theology that offered a distinctively Christian response to wartime problems, the church tried to equip its ministers for the task of caring for soldiers, protecting the rights of Canada's minorities, and providing people with the spiritual resources they needed to come to terms with death and tragedy. By devoting itself to the task of developing a blueprint for postwar social reconstruction and launching an evangelistic campaign to draw Canadians to Christ, the board worked to ensure that postwar society would avoid the perils and pitfalls experienced by previous generations.

Such work had its share of shortcomings. The board was guided by a small group of elite clerics and academics from southern Ontario, and never fully involved those from other parts of the country. It was entirely dominated by men, and made no attempt to draw on the insights, experience, and wisdom of United Church women. It gave rural issues only cursory attention, and never developed strong links with the agricultural community. The board was unable to exploit the new medium of radio in a manner similar to that of "Bible Bill" Aberhart of Alberta, and never developed a viable approach to evangelism. In addition, its failure to respond to federal government policies that prevented Jewish refugees from finding refuge in Canada is, to say the least, striking.⁶

⁶Alan Davies and Marilyn F. Nefsky, How Silent Were the Churches? Canadian Protestantism and the Jewish Plight during the Nazi Era (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1997), 30-46, offers a valuable discussion of the way the United Church viewed Judaism during the 1930s and 1940s, and responded to the plight of Jewish refugees during World War II.

Nevertheless, this thesis presents a very different picture of the social gospel than that portrayed by Ramsay Cook, David Marshall, and Travis Kroeker. By focusing on a group of social gossellers which many Canadian historians have ignored, it emphasizes that a desire to bring people to God and help them know God's love through Jesus Christ was at the heart of much social gospel activity in Canada. It demonstrates that this group of social gossellers actively fought to create a world based on Biblical teachings, refusing to capitulate to the secular forces around them. It shows their Christian reform activity was firmly grounded in a theology that took the Bible seriously and attempted to relate the Christian faith to the contextual realities of the time. It also demonstrates how the board offered tangible assistance to some needy Canadians and thus expressed the faith through service to others. While it is possible to argue that this group of reformers could have found more effective ways to achieve its goals, the evidence does not support the claim levelled by historical and theological critics alike that all social gossellers became the agents of secularization. Indeed, it was the board's very criticism of many dominant social norms that made it unpopular in many parts of the United Church.

Thus, this thesis invites a fresh examination of other Canadian Christians who worked to foster spiritual and social renewal. It raises questions about what historians mean when they talk about the nature and function of religious tradition in the United Church, and challenges historians and theologians alike to examine more closely the nature of twentieth century liberal Protestantism in North America. It also reminds the United Church that this part of its religious heritage sees the work of "fighting the good fight" in the midst of spiritual apathy and social injustice to be a central calling for all faithful Christians.

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