

# “The Union of 1861: Establishing an Authentic Canadian Identity for Colonial Presbyterians”

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On Wednesday, 6 June 1861, Montrealers observed an unusual religious procession. Along Côté St, from the church of that name<sup>1</sup>, just above Craig St (now St Antoine) members of the Canada Presbyterian (or “Free”) Church were joined by the Synod of the United Presbyterian Church coming from Lagauchetière St Church<sup>2</sup>, also known as the Scottish Secession congregation or colloquially the “Wee Kirk.” The combined company then made their way to the largest Protestant church in British North America, Great St James St Centre Methodist church. The fifteen-year-old building comfortably seated 2500, but as the two groups arrived they found the church already so crowded that only with great difficulty did the commissioners find seats.

There the union was consummated. The minister of the Lagauchetière St Church, William Taylor, DD, was unanimously elected Moderator and the clerks of the uniting denominations, William Reid and William Fraser, were (again unanimously) chosen as joint-clerks of the new Canada Presbyterian Church. The new Moderator congratulated the nascent denomination on their happy union. Speeches followed: the duty of union, the advantages that will come from union, and a challenge from Robert Burns, then at Knox College, on “The Church of Christ a Living Church.” After the singing of the Doxology and the benediction, the crowd dispersed. It had been a long evening but a deeply satisfying conclusion to sixteen years of negotiation.

Eight months previously a similar reunion occurred in the Atlantic Provinces. On 4 October 1860 in Pictou a peal of bells from Prince St Church announced the time had finally come for church reunion. Two large government tents with a blue covenant flag flying aloft were the venue for the birthing of the “Presbyterian Church of the Lower Provinces of British North America.” Two thousand people attended, the largest gathering under cover so far in the history of Nova Scotia. As in the Canadas, union negotiations had followed a long and torturous path over fifteen years of debate and controversy. Success in the Maritimes was a catalyst for

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<sup>1</sup> Côté St Free Church was organized by a majority of St Gabriel St Presbyterian Church in 1844. A building was erected three years later. In 1877 the congregation relocated to Crescent and Dorchester (now Rene Leveque) as the Crescent St Presbyterian Church. In 1918 it merged with Knox congregation.

<sup>2</sup> The church, established in 1831, built two years later on a property on Lagauchetière St between Chenneville and St George Sts. Relocated in 1866 to the SE corner, St Catherine and Peel, it was renamed Erskine Church. A year later, the first classes of Presbyterian College were held there. It moved to Sherbrooke and Ontario Sts in 1894. The original building, the oldest Protestant church in Montreal, now houses the Chinese RC Church.

another Presbyterian reunion in Upper and Lower Canada.

With the benefit of hindsight Dr John Johnston described one hundred years later the union of 1861 as “an event which, more than any other, made possible the organization of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.”<sup>3</sup> Observers at the time were of the same opinion: “We believe that no event ever occurred in this Province of more delightful character or of happier augury to the cause of Christ than that which was witnessed at Montreal on Thursday the 6<sup>th</sup> ... Of aught more becoming Christian men our annals tell not,” the *Canadian United Presbyterian Magazine* enthused. The *Free Church Ecclesiastical and Missionary Record* was no less sanguine: “The sixth day of June, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-one, will be a memorable day in the annals of the Presbyterian Church, and in the religious history of the country,”<sup>4</sup>

Over the years, memories of these two unions comingled in the public mind subsequent unions and their venues. On 15 June 1875 in Victoria Hall Montreal a final merger of the four Presbyterian denominations in British North America took place. Fifty years later, 10 June 1925, Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists streamed into the Mutual St Arena, Toronto, to celebrate the formation of the United Church of Canada. And between the ecclesiastical unions there was on 1 July 1867 the confederation of the Dominion of Canada. Mergers were very much in the air as the fragmented British colonies in North America established their identity and became self-governing.

It is the thesis of this paper that the Union of 1861, with its tacit acceptance of the principle of voluntarism, marks the first step towards a truly Canadian Presbyterian identity. In establishing that new identity both merging churches put their Scottish roots behind them. In the case of the Free Church the fudging of Chapter XXIII of the Westminster *Confession of Faith* (which stated that the civil magistrate is Christ’s vicegerent) was particularly painful for them and a major concession. It was done with considerable interpretative flexibility, and a degree of pragmatic realism, all in the interest of nationwide evangelization. Sixty-four years later the still recognizable Free Church heritors in the Presbyterian Church in Canada were in the vanguard of agitation for a national Protestant church. You cannot make sense of either 1875 or 1925 without understanding what was involved in the Union of 1861. That is why, in this sesquicentennial year of that event, the union in the Canadas of United Presbyterians and the ‘Free’ church provides vital insight into the unfolding drama of The Presbyterian Church in Canada over the next hundred and fifty years.

The presence in Pictou of The Rev Peter Gordon MacGregor as clerk of the Synod of Nova Scotia served as a reminder of the historic role that the Scottish secession had played in the planting of Presbyterianism in Canada. The Rev James MacGregor, his father, the so-called “apostle of Nova Scotia,” was the one who responded at the 1786 General Associate Synod to a plea for a minister from the 500 settlers in Pictou Co.<sup>5</sup> The Secession churches in Scotland, formed out of the deadness of the Moderate takeover of the state church, were the ones with

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<sup>3</sup> *Presbyterian History*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (May 1961). 1,

<sup>4</sup> *Ecclesiastical and Missionary Record for the Presbyterian Church of Canada* (July 1861), 131

<sup>5</sup> *Vide* Alan Wilson’s “James MacGregor: A Visit and a Re-Visit” *2005 CSPH Papers*, 94-104. Alan Wilson’s biography of MacGregor is under consideration by UTP but ASPP has declined to subsidize it.

missionary vision and evangelical zeal. MacGregor labored on his own for the next nine years until he was joined by two young clergy. Together they formed that year “The Associate Presbytery of Nova Scotia.” In a union of the secession churches in 1817, establishing three presbyteries, the name “Presbyterian Church of Nova Scotia” was chosen. Only in that year did the Church of Scotland organize itself. At the time of the Disruption, most of their clergy returned to Scotland to serve in recently vacated livings.

In Upper and Lower Canada the indifference of the Church of Scotland to Scottish settlers was equally palpable and it was the Associate Synod to which application was made in 1817 to form a Canadian presbytery. Four years later the Church of Scotland General Assembly (still dominated by Moderates who had little interest in outreach or missionary activity) declined to admit Canadian churches into membership, doubting the feasibility of a Canadian connection and citing the fact that the Church of Scotland had not yet been legally recognized in the Canadas. In contrast, at the same time the United Secession Church sent three missionaries to Canada and in 1834 took the name “The Missionary Presbytery in connection with the United Associate Synod of the Secession Church in Scotland.” In 1847 when the mother church, the United Secession Church, joined the Relief Church they also became the United Presbyterian Church. In Canada they chose as their name the “Synod of the United Presbyterian Church in Canada.”

On 18 May 1843 the Disruption of the Church of Scotland took place as almost 500 clergy (and all overseas missionaries) left the church of their birth. The issue was the spiritual independence of the Kirk from state control. But that did not mean that most of the Free Church was opposed to established religion. Thomas Chalmers sought a “godly commonwealth” and maintained (at its first Assembly) that his new denomination represented “unwilling voluntaries.” The National Church ideal became a bone of contention in the Free Church of Scotland throughout the Nineteenth Century, dividing the Highlanders from the Lowlanders, who generally were voluntaries.

The impact of the Disruption was felt immediately across the Atlantic: many Kirk clergy hastily left the colony to take advantage of well endowed livings recently vacated. Those who remained, often the more evangelical, were enlisted by a delegation sent from the new Free Church. Though the issue that had caused the split had no immediate Canadian relevance, congregations divided and a new denomination with links to the Free Church of Scotland was formed in Kingston in July 1844, known as the Synod of the Canada Presbyterian Church.

The question came up immediately: was there room for three separate Presbyterian bodies, Kirk, Secession and now Free? At the first General Assembly of the Canada Presbyterian Church, held in the autumn of 1844, three ministers from the Missionary Synod attended promoting union between the two bodies. The Assembly considered “the course which should be pursued for promoting a union among Orthodox Presbyterians throughout the Province.” “It was agreed that such union when it can be obtained without the compromise of truth is of the very highest importance, as being the most conducive to the interest of the Redeemer’s Kingdom.”<sup>6</sup>

A Committee on Union was formed and Alexander Gale of Hamilton named as

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<sup>6</sup> Kemp. A. F. *Digest of the Minutes of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Canada*. Montreal, 1861. 279.

Convener. Gale was soon to join his uncle Henry Esson on the faculty of the embryonic Knox College. Esson's pamphlet *A Plain and popular exposition of the principles of voluntarism in opposition to the misapprehensions of those who have imputed to them an infidel tendency; being an humble essay, to mediate between the advocates and antagonists of the establishment principle, and to promote generally the catholic unity of evangelical churches* was published in 1849 highlighted divisions within the Free Church over the question. Gale's committee met with the Committee on Union of the United Missionary Synod. Two years later, on hearing their report, and following a fiery speech from Robert Burns, Synod spoke of "the vast importance of the principle that men, in their national as well as their individual capacity, are bound to honour God and to regulate their proceedings by the rule of His Word, and that he is king of Nations as well as the Head of His Church."<sup>7</sup> It was clear that there were divisions within the Free Church over the matter of voluntarism.

By 1849 union negotiations had reached an impasse. Most from the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Canada were unwilling to capitulate to voluntarism as the price of union with the United Presbyterians, much as they would have liked to join ranks. There were many values that both bodies shared: not only was theirs a common cultural and historical heritage, but as well they were bound by a common commitment to the Westminster standards. Chapter XXIII ("On the Civil Magistrate") had been written in the Seventeenth Century in very different political climate. Covenanters had fought and died over Christ's Kingdom and Covenant. But what did this have to do with the British colonies in North America? Quarrels over the rights of patrons in the Church of Scotland to ignore the wishes of congregations, which precipitated the Disruption, might have little Canadian relevance, but it had caused schism and separation here. Even less, surely, the arcane view of civil authority being beholden to religious regulation.

The Canadian conversation anticipated a fierce debate in the Free Church of Scotland as it likewise would enter into negotiations with the United Presbyterians. The principle of voluntarism which had been accepted by Scottish United Presbyterians in 1829 was still unacceptable to many Free Church members. Two years after the Canadian reunion their Scottish counterparts commenced a decade of torturous debate, befuddled by strong personalities<sup>8</sup> and contentious crusaders. In 1873 negotiations were abandoned, succeeding

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<sup>7</sup> Kemp. A. F. *Digest of the Minutes of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Canada*. Montreal, 1861. 281.

<sup>8</sup> From my forthcoming *The Man Who Beat Macaulay: Charles Cowan MP and the Business of the Disruption*: "Cowan had great affection for the Secession churches<sup>8</sup>, the United Presbyterian Church as it was subsequently known. Al can testify, @ he wrote<sup>8</sup> Athat the better-conducted portion of our numerous workpeople at the mills have been generally connected with that body. @ When negotiations commenced with the United Presbyterians in 1862 understandably he was a strong advocate of reunion. The sticking point initially was the voluntary question. As negotiations progressed, and as opposition intensified, the issue became, as well, the doctrinal commitment of the United Presbyterians and their confessional identity, being more loosely tied to the Westminster standards. The anti-unionists found a champion in James Begg, a feisty opponent of innovation, a strong conservative, and a wily ecclesiastical politician. Cowan had tangled with Begg many times on the Sustentation Committee and on the floor of the Assembly. Begg seemed to be ubiquitous at each General Assembly, rising to speak on almost every question it would appear, and operating the levers of power with consummate skill. Cowan=s visceral dislike of the man - he appears to have always voted opposite to Begg as a matter of course - may have had also to do with a latent anticlericalism on the part of some Free Church elders, in his case a leftover from his experience with Rev Coulston, a resentment of ecclesiastical authority, insensitively wielded. The whole Cowan - Begg imbroglio came to a head at the Assembly of 1867 during discussion about a motion to proceed with union negotiations. It started innocuously enough with Robert Buchanan reading a trans-Atlantic telegram, just received, announcing the agreement of the New and Old School factions of the American Presbyterian Church on a basis of union Aalmost certain to be approved of. @ There was wide applause and then the irrepressible Charles Cowan said Al beg to propose that a copy of that communication be sent to our friends, Dr. Gibson and Dr. Begg. @ There was laughter and then an objection from the floor and a rebuke from the chair, Robert Candlish serving that year as moderator<sup>8</sup>. There the matter might well have rested but two days later, a Sabbath intervening, Charles Cowan rose to his feet and grovelled: AIt was a breach of propriety, and it would have been a most undignified course for this House to adopt whatever the impulse of the moment I proposed. @ He

twenty-seven years later with the formation of the United Free Church of Scotland.

Meanwhile back in Canada the lines were being drawn as the 1848 Free Church General Assembly convened in Toronto. A statement of opinions<sup>9</sup>, drawn up by the two committees, was submitted. Under eight headings it dealt with all the thorny issues, stating clearly the differences between the two bodies over church-state relations and they were considerable. Christ's headship over the nations, the Free Church maintained and the Secession disagreed, imposed "new duties upon nations and rulers." The government has an obligation, according to the Frees, not only to protect religion but publicly countenance, favour, and promote it. The UP's did not see that a formal recognition of the Headship of Christ was required of rulers, nor to recognize the authority of the Bible. An enforcement of Sabbath observance was, according to the Frees, expected of government whereas the UP's saw only an educational responsibility. State support was expected by the Free Church whereas the UP's saw this as "encroaching on the rights of conscience. "

A motion by Andrew Ferrier of Caledonia to dismiss the Union Committee was defeated by a vote of 26 to 5. The motion that prevailed instead was the reappointment of the committee and an expression of a desire "to follow out such a course as may appear to them most suited to lead to a union on sound and Scriptural principles."<sup>10</sup> Two years later Dr Ferrier, by birth<sup>11</sup> and experience a strong voluntarist, was expelled from the denomination.

By 1849 negotiations seemed stalled. An ominous sign was the filing of the minutes of both committees in what appeared to be a "wrap-up" account of what had transpired.<sup>12</sup> A year later the Free Church Assembly held a time of "earnest and united prayer" about the matter. It was noted that "apart from the question pertaining to the power, obligations and duties of the Civil Magistrate, they are perfectly at one, on all the great doctrines laid out in the Westminster Confession of Faith. And that further, on the special question above referred to and the point involved in, or connected with it, such as the exclusive Headship of Christ over His Church, individual liberty of conscience in religious matters, and the obligations of all men in all realms of life, to be governed by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, there was such a measure of harmony of sentiments manifested as to warrant the hope of its being found practical to frame some declaration on these points, which might be regarded as mutually satisfactory, and calculated to prepare the way for a union of the two bodies."<sup>13</sup>

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continued: A however much I deplore the division upon the union question, I never had the slightest doubt as to the thorough honesty, and as little as to the manliness of the course, which these reverend gentlemen chose to take ... I am quite sure that they have acted from a regard to the best interests of the Church. @

<sup>9</sup> Found in Gregg, Wm. *Short History of the Presbyterian Church in the Dominion of Canada from the Earliest to the Present Time*. Toronto, 1892. 154-156.

<sup>10</sup> Kemp. A. F. *Digest of the Minutes of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Canada*. Montreal, 1861. 282.

<sup>11</sup> His great-grandfather was William Wilson (1690-1741), one of four original Secessionists after Ebenezer Erskine's 1732 sermon brought censure from Synod and an Associate Presbytery was formed at Gairney Bridge. Ferrier edited his short-hand diary in 1830. Wilson's *Essay on Separation* (1739) was the text for the Secessionists.

<sup>12</sup> *Proceedings of the Committees on Union appointed by The Synod of the PCC and The Synod of the Missionary (now the United Presbyterian Church of Canada containing Minutes of all the meetings of the committees, and all the papers submitted by them explanatory of their respective opinions on national establishments of religion and on the endowment of church*. London, CW. Wm Sutherland 1849

<sup>13</sup> Kemp. A. F. *Digest of the Minutes of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Canada*. Montreal, 1861. 282.

Progress languished until the 1854 Assembly when a memorial was received from Knox Church Hamilton, as well as a submission from the United Presbyterians, urging a reopening of negotiations. Assembly “declare(d) their willingness to consider opinions on the lawfulness of State Endowments, without Erastian submission to the State, as a matter of forbearance, but continue the views they have always held, and formerly expressed by their committee on the duty of the Civil Magistrate.”<sup>14</sup> A new committee was appointed, with some heavyweights included<sup>15</sup> and significantly Robert Ure of Streetsville as Convener. Ure came into the ministry through Alexander Gale who had served as his tutor. Continuity was assured.

The Committee exercised due diligence and presented to the 1857 Assembly, a statement of common belief under three rubrics: (1) the Headship of Christ, (2) Liberty of Conscience, and (3) the Duties of the Civil Magistrate. The crusty John Bayne of Galt expressed “great satisfaction” with this apparent capitulation of the United Presbyterians and reaffirmed the “great principle” of the “duty of the Civil Magistrate, in his official capacity as well as his private capacity, to acknowledge the authority of Christ as the Supreme Governor among the nations, and that in aiming to promote social well-being, he ought to ensure that the laws of the land are avowedly in accordance with the principles inscribed in the Word of God are the same with those of this church.”<sup>16</sup>

The debate was significant for several reasons. Presbyterians had gone through a bruising debate about their legitimacy in the Canadas, centering on issues such as the registration of marriages, the issuance of baptismal certificates, and above all the clergy reserves and who had claim to these endowments. Faced with a strong Roman Catholic hegemony in Lower Canada, protected by the Quebec Act of 1763, should there not be an equivalent status for Protestants in Upper Canada? The Disruption highlighted the resentment of Scots over the failure of Westminster to understand them and their unique culture generally, but also specifically their religious commitments. There was also the matter of education on all three levels but particularly the tertiary. Calvinists had been in the forefront of political engagement from the days of John Knox and Duplessis-Mornay. “For Christ’s crown and covenant” had been their war cry since the Seventeenth Century.<sup>17</sup>

Placed in a wider context, church/state relations continue to bedevil civic dialogue, particularly in the United States – Canada and Britain have, in the interests of multiculturalism, given up the possibility of any religious voice in the political arena. The polarities that exist in the United States, and reaction to what Father Neuhaus described as the “naked public square,” still skew the topic south of the border, as witness most recently the controversy over the place of clergy at the tenth anniversary 9/11 official observances in Washington and New York. Though the whole debate between the Free Church and the United Presbyterians may seem arcane, issues raised in interpreting and applying Chapter XXIII of the Westminster

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<sup>14</sup> Kemp. A. F. *Digest of the Minutes of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Canada*. Montreal, 1861. 284-285.

<sup>15</sup> Bayne, Willis, Gregg, Burns, Young, Stark, Fraser among the 14 clergy with 8 ruling elders.

<sup>16</sup> Kemp. A. F. *Digest of the Minutes of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Canada*. Montreal, 1861. 291.

<sup>17</sup> For the contribution of Canadian Presbyterians to politics see Peter Bush’s “Canadian Presbyterians Engage the Political Principalities and Powers” Winter 2006 *Channels*, Vol. 22, No. 1

Confession still remain.

By 1859 a Basis of Union between the two denominations was finally submitted to the two Assemblies. Five of the six sections were quite unexceptional for both sides, but the fourth represented a carefully crafted statement:

“IV. Of the Headship of Christ over the Nations and the Duty of the Civil Magistrate – That the Lord Jesus Christ, our Mediator, is invested with universal sovereignty, and is therefore King of Nations, and that all men, in every capacity and relation, are bound to obey His will as revealed in His Word; and particularly that the civil magistrate (including under that term all who are in any way concerned in the legislative or administrative action of the State) is bound to regulate his official procedure, as well as his personal conduct, by the revealed will of Christ.”<sup>18</sup>

There was however an exemption clause in the Preamble to this watered-down statement that the United Presbyterians insisted on: “unanimity of sentiment is not required in regard to the practical application of the principle embodied in the said fourth article, and that whatever differences of sentiment may arise on these subjects all action in reference thereto shall be regulated by, and be subject to, the recognized principle of Presbyterian order.”<sup>19</sup>

The insertion of this clause, brought in at the last minute at the insistence of the United Presbyterians, caused a crisis of conscience for at least one member of the Free Church’s union committee. The redoubtable John Ross of Brucefield conceded the point with the other members of the committee “though he was conscious of a vague feeling of unrest in connection with it. It was not,” his widow would recall forty years later, “until he had retired for the night, and was lying quietly awake thinking over the matter, that the full significance of the change flashed upon him.” In the middle of the night he sprang to his feet and felt that he should right the wrong. “He saw that the slight change seriously affected the integrity of the Union Basis, which it had been the special care of the Free Church Committee to conserve in full strength throughout the negotiations.”<sup>20</sup>

Others were amenable, and after the motion was passed that the Basis of Union be approved and sent down to Presbyteries and Sessions for their comments, dissents soon followed. John Bayne of Knox’s Galt, long an opponent of union, thundered his anathemas in seven-point missive signed by nine, among them Michael Willis whom he had recruited when in Scotland in 1846 to be Professor of Theology at Knox College. Bayne noted that the Basis lacked a “declaration on the subject of the leading applications of the doctrine of Christ’s Headship over the nations, such as its application to the question of Sabbath laws, or of the use of the Bible in Common Schools, or of the suppression of open blasphemy, and no definition of the extent or limits of the Province within which the Civil Magistrate is to confess and serve Christ as King.”<sup>21</sup> To which the Committee charged with issuing a response stated emphatically that Article 4

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<sup>18</sup> Gregg, Wm. *History of the Presbyterian Church in the Dominion of Canada*. Toronto: Presbyterian Printing and Publishing Co., 1885. 595.

<sup>19</sup> Gregg, Wm. *History of the Presbyterian Church in the Dominion of Canada*. Toronto: Presbyterian Printing and Publishing Co., 1885. 593.

<sup>20</sup> Ross, Anna. *The Man with the Book or Memoirs of “John Ross of Brucefield”* Toronto: R G McLean, 1897. 79

<sup>21</sup> Kemp. A. F. *Digest of the Minutes of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Canada*. Montreal, 1861. 311.

“does contain a statement of the province within which the civil magistrate is to confess and serve Christ as King, sufficiently precise and comprehensive.”<sup>22</sup>

Bayne’s sudden death on 3 November 1859 at fifty - he was described as a heavy smoker with “ever-growing sedentary habits”<sup>23</sup> - silenced one of the most articulate and forceful opponents of reunion and made it finally possible for the two denominations to come together.

In June of 1860 both Synods met in Hamilton. The United Presbyterians, who met first, had added an additional caveat to the Basis - - “it being understood that, in the application of the doctrine of this article, mutual forbearance shall be exercised.” The Free Church had asked that it be withdrawn and after considerable debate a final motion was approved by the United Presbyterian Synod: “that the respectful request of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Canada, to remove the note formerly appended to the fourth Article, be complied with; and that the following words be added to the fourth Article, namely: ‘It being understood that in the application of the doctrine of this Article, mutual forbearance shall be exercised.’”<sup>24</sup>

When this decision was announced three days later to the Free Church Synod nearby there were anxious questions as to whether the final compromise could be accepted. After rancorous debate there was still hesitation:

“the Synod sees difficulties in the way of accepting in a basis of union, a clause which might seem to recognize unlimited forbearance as to the applications of the said doctrine, and does not therefore agree to the addition made. The Synod, however, still heartily desirous of union, and believing that union can be effected on sound and honorable principles, remit to a committee to meet with the committee appointed by the United Presbyterian Synod, for the purpose of seeing, whether the object, believed by this Synod to be intended by the proposed addition, may not be better accomplished in some other way, the Committee being authorized to request the Moderator to call a special meeting of the Synod, if it shall be considered necessary.”<sup>25</sup>

So it came about that the two churches met concurrently in Toronto in October 1860, the United Presbyterians in Bay St Presbyterian Church and the Canada Presbyterians in Knox’s Church, and together, perhaps out of sheer exhaustion, agreed to consummate a union with the name agreed on as the Canada Presbyterian Church. The union duly took place in Montreal on 5 June 1861.

The issue of church/state relations remained unresolved by Canadian Presbyterians. In the Basis of Union of 1875 a caveat was provided for subscription to the Westminster Confession: “it being distinctly understood that nothing contained in the aforesaid Confessions or Catechisms, regarding the power and duty of the Civil Magistrate, shall be held to sanction any principles or view inconsistent with liberty of conscience in matters of religion.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Kemp, A. F. *Digest of the Minutes of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Canada*. Montreal, 1861. 314.

<sup>23</sup> Moir, John. “John Bayne” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (vol VIII, 1851-1861) 256. Cf also Sutherland, Angus “John Bayne: Champion of the Free Church of the Canadas” *CSPH 2005 Papers*. 61-67.

<sup>24</sup> Minutes of the Synod of the United Presbyterian Church in Canada. 24<sup>th</sup> Session.388.

<sup>25</sup> *The Minutes of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Canada 1857-1860*. 19-20

<sup>26</sup> Gregg, Wm. *Short History of the Presbyterian Church in the Dominion of Canada from the Earliest to the Present Time*. Toronto, 1892. 191.



Sixty-seven years later this omission was drawn to the attention of The Presbyterian Church in Canada by a memorial from the Presbytery of Paris and by Overture 18 of the Synod of Hamilton and London. The Presbyterian Church in Canada had been left “without a clear and defined doctrine of Church and State” and Assembly was asked to produce a confession of faith “with respect to the powers and duties of the Civil Magistrate and the relation which exists, under the Lord Jesus Christ, between the Church and the State.” After a long and torturous process taking thirteen years, the *Declaration of Faith Concerning State and Nation* was adopted as one of the subordinate standards of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. William Klempa stated during the fiftieth anniversary of its adoption: “The *Declaration* was a remarkable achievement for a small national church with limited theological resources.”<sup>27</sup> This was the ultimate legacy of the process that led up to the Union of 1861.

Meanwhile United Presbyterians in Scotland had looked from afar with anxiety as to what they regarded as possibly a union based on compromise. “A Word from Scotland” published under the pen name “Mersianus”<sup>28</sup> in the *Canadian United Presbyterian Magazine* wrote that forbearance was a two-way street and “we consider their views as erroneous as they can regard us.” And in speaking to others “The uniform conviction is that the United Presbyterian Church in Canada cannot agree to the Fourth Article unexplained, without a surrender of a principle of perhaps all but universal belief within her pale.” And added: “they owe much to Christian brotherhood and love, but they may also be reminded that they owe much to Scripture truth.”<sup>29</sup>

Given that strength of feeling in Scotland, after the decision made in October 1860 the United Presbyterians asked William Fraser as Clerk and Alexander Drummond of Shakespeare as Moderator to draft a letter of explanation to the Scottish church. Expressing “the hope that we have entered upon a course which will meet with your ready and cordial approbation,” it went on to suggest that “the example set in the colonies may exert its influence on the Presbyterian church in the fatherland; that we may yet see its large divisions there, drawn towards each other as with one heart and one soul, gather into the same fold, and that the only strife which shall thenceforth exist shall be that so strongly urged by the Apostle, ‘Striving together for the faith of the Gospel.’”<sup>30</sup> It would be another forty years before that would happen.

The last act of the United Presbyterian Church, on the Tuesday evening before the merger ceremony, 4 June 1861, in Lagauchetière St Church was an act of worship led by Alex Drummond as Moderator. He concluded his message with a moving summation of sixteen years of struggle to birth a new denomination:

“We look back over the year of negotiations with the Sister Church and think of the difficulties that have been surmounted – the obstacles that have been removed – the

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<sup>27</sup> Klempa, William. “*Church and Nation Declaration Revisited*” *CSPH 2005 Papers*. 28. See also DiGangi, M. “*Declaration of Faith Concerning Church and Nation*” *Channels*, Winter 2006, Vol. 22, No. 1

<sup>28</sup> A pseudonym, identified only as “a most respectable Minister of the U. P. Church of more than twenty years standing.” *The Canadian United Presbyterian Magazine* Vol VII No 3. (March 1860). 72.

<sup>29</sup> *The Canadian United Presbyterian Magazine* Vol VII No 3. (March 1860). 70

<sup>30</sup> *Minutes of the Synod of the United Presbyterian Church in Canada*. 439.

heart-burnings and jealousies and strifes, that have been exchanged for mutual love and confidence. Surely God has fulfilled his promise, and his presence has been with us. We look into the relationship so close and gratifying and helpful, that has subsisted between us and the mother church, for over a quarter of a century, which will, to a certain extent be broken up, and we might regret the action that leads to this result, did we not feel assured that the Church in Scotland will heartily rejoice over the union and regard it, as another reward of her missionary enterprise. And we look forward to the work still to be done in this country and note the hindrances in the way, arising from the carelessness and worldly-mindedness and skepticism of the age; and we cannot but rejoice at the prospect of having our hands greatly strengthened and our hearts encouraged and a new impetus given to ministerial and missionary zeal. O, for his presence to direct and animate us. Lord, send now prosperity.”<sup>31</sup>

The next day, one hundred and fifty years ago, a church was born amid compromise that was genuinely Canadian, reflective of a new identity, and prepared to advance with courage and determination, in a new country, helping to set a new direction in a colony that was, like the church formed that day, coming into new maturity and independence.

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<sup>31</sup> *God's Presence with His People: A Sermon Preached By Rev A A Drummond, Shakespeare, CW.* Prescott: Evangelize Office, 1861. 4.