

## **“Edinburgh 1910 and Church Union 1925: The Ecumenical Missionary Impulse in Canadian Presbyterianism”**

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I begin with a quote from Andrew Walls: “Both ‘ecumenical’ and ‘evangelical’ today have their roots in Edinburgh 1910. If each will go back to the pit whence both were dug, each may understand both themselves and the other better.”<sup>1</sup> Evangelicals see what happened that summer of 1910 as significant to their lineage: over 4000 delegates from 168 countries will converge on Cape Town in a fortnight to mark its centenary. Lausanne III is a reminder of how far they have come over this past century. But it is also a seminal event that led directly to the creation in 1921 of the World Missionary Council which amalgamated with the World Council of Churches in 1961. According to its current website, the 1910 World Missionary Conference “is considered the symbolic starting point of the contemporary ecumenical movement.”<sup>2</sup>

The specific use of the word “ecumenical” in regards to Edinburgh 1910, however, is a misnomer. The conference was originally to be called “The Third Ecumenical Conference” (the first and second being in 1888 and 1900). But in what Brian Stanley calls “appropriate Christian modesty”<sup>3</sup> the planning committee early realized that the word “ecumenical” was inappropriate. As one of its members wrote, “It cannot be used truthfully while great sections of the Church are in no way connected with the Conference.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed Edinburgh 1910 has often been known more for who was excluded than whom were included: women, non-whites and Latin Americans. “Ecumenical” could hardly be used as an adjective to describe the Conference, but it certainly helped develop a momentum towards breaking down denominational barriers.

Fifteen years after Edinburgh 1910 ecumenicity received a boost when three historic Protestant churches merged into the United Church of Canada. This paper seeks to explore the interconnectedness between the two events. It also sheds light on the increasingly divergent interests of evangelicals in the world-wide missionary movement: Edinburgh 1910 for all its trumpeted unity was an exercise in forbearance, when cracks were papered over in the interest of – to cite the watchword of the Student Volunteer Movement – “the evangelization of the world in this generation.” Twenty

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll, N.Y., 2002) 62

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.oikoumene.org/who-are-we/organization-structure/consultative-bodies/world-mission-and-evangelism/history.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910* Grand Rapids (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2009) 36.

<sup>4</sup> Ritson, letter to Smith, 24 July 1908, Cambridge University Library, BSA/F4/3/1, fol. 69, quoted in Stanley 36.

years later the lines had been drawn, and as has been noted<sup>5</sup>, there could never have been an Edinburgh 1930.

Missionary enthusiasm brought Christians together across denominational lines. The rise of the so-called “faith missions” starting with the China Inland Mission in 1865, had blurred historic and creedal distinctive: “winning the world for Christ” was what mattered most, particularly as the *eschaton* was about to break on the world with the Second Coming of Christ. Dwight L Moody’s evangelistic campaigns on both sides of the Atlantic crossed denominational lines. His great missionary conferences at Northfield, Massachusetts, in the 1880s drew together a wide cross-section of evangelical Protestantism.

The Student Volunteer Movement, birthed during those meetings, enlisted a generation of university youth to go overseas as missionaries. And by 1894 their arrival on the field in such great numbers cried out for a wise and strategic use of resources. Thus was born the International Conference of Foreign Missionary Board and Societies in the United States and Canada (“IC”). Comity arrangements, divided up non-Christian countries so that each denomination could have a specific area of its own, thus avoiding overlapping and duplication. One such arrangement was the 1898 allocation of the northeastern “arm” of Korea to Canadian Presbyterians as their specific responsibility.

The word “Ecumenical” surfaced in 1900 with the Ecumenical Missionary Conference, an extravaganza in New York City with former US president Benjamin Harrison as chair. Comity was the buzz word, particularly in higher education, medical missions, and publishing. It was Alexander Sutherland, Missionary Secretary for the Methodist Church in Canada, who on 26 April 1900 in Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church spoke words that seem in retrospect eerily familiar in the subsequent church union debate: “...when the church has practically solved this question of mission comity, it will have taken a very long stride forward in the work of evangelizing the world.” He argued for economy in the use of resources: “He, in whose hands is the gold and silver of the earth, will not intrust (*sic*) us with more until He sees that we are using faithfully what He has already given us. And,” he concluded, “We can scarcely be said to be using it faithfully if we are using it in separate interests that could accomplish vastly more by co-operative effort.”<sup>6</sup>

Denominational cooperation was in the air. Sutherland had witnessed first-hand two Canadian Methodist mergers – in 1874, the year he was appointed a Methodist missionary executive under pioneer Enoch Wood, and then a decade later when all Canadian Methodists were joined in a single denomination. In 1875 four strands of Canadian Presbyterianism merged, and in 1900 two of its parents, the Free Church of Scotland and the United Presbyterians, came together to form the United Free Church of Scotland. Euphoria from that union energized William Patrick, recently arrived from Scotland as Principal of Manitoba College, to challenge the Winnipeg 1902 Methodist General Conference, where he was a Presbyterian fraternal delegate, to join to form a great national church. Patrick’s words were spontaneous, unscripted, and unauthorized, but helped set union negotiations in motion.

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<sup>5</sup> Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll, N.Y., 2002) 62.

<sup>6</sup> *Ecumenical Missionary Conference New York, 1900* vol. 1 (New York: American Tract Society, 1900) 267.

In 1907 five-hundred delegates (with an even larger number of guests and overseas visitors) met in Shanghai to celebrate the centenary of the arrival in China of Robert Morrison, the first Protestant missionary. Among the official visitors were two Canadian foreign missions board secretaries: Alexander Sutherland and his Presbyterian counterpart, R. P. MacKay. Resolutions passed urged greater cooperation among missionary organizations and “the union of the churches established by different missions of the same ecclesiastical order”<sup>7</sup> anticipating a Chinese church (though there were only six or seven Chinese delegates present).

On 13 February 1908 the peripatetic Alexander Sutherland was in Edinburgh for a planning meeting for what became Edinburgh 1910. He had been one of the members of the of the IC (International Conference of Foreign Missionary Board and Societies in the United States and Canada) who had proposed to their British counterparts an ecumenical missionary conference three years earlier and the plans were now well in progress. His contribution that day, along with five others who had been with him in Shanghai the year before, at proved crucial. On the agenda was a discussion as to whether the conference should be ‘demonstrational’ (i.e., inspirational) or ‘consultative’ (business and issue-oriented). Sutherland and the others who had been present in Shanghai spoke favorably of its consultative nature. The concept was adopted as well as agreeing to appointed delegates, the setting up of commissions, reporting on relevant themes, and resolutions to be adopted. Edinburgh 1910 was taking shape.

Five months later, in Wycliffe Hall, Oxford<sup>8</sup>, another Canadian, L. Norman Tucker, General Secretary of the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada, was present at a further planning session This time Alexander Sutherland was not there as his health had deteriorated (he died in July 1910). The meeting established the eight commissions and started to nominate leadership and members. Among those approached was Sutherland’s colleague, friend, and Presbyterian *alter ego* R. P. MacKay. MacKay was one of two Canadian Presbyterians who played a significant role on the commissions, the other being Rev. (later knighted as Sir) Robert Falconer, President of the University of Toronto. Falconer was appointed to Commission III, “Education in Relation to the Christianisation of National Life.”

R. P. MacKay’s assignment was on Commission I: “Carrying the Gospel to all the non-Christian World.” John R. Mott, Student Volunteer Movement spell-binder and now General Secretary, was nominated to chair the Commission. Mott, headquartered in New York City an American Methodist, assumed a prominent role in the subsequent proceedings. As Mott’s biographer notes “The ink was hardly dry on the minutes of the international planning committee’s Oxford, 1908, sessions when Mott started to work on his assignment.”<sup>9</sup> His first task was to raise money for the large budget that was set.

His two vice-chairmen were the Scot George Robson, editor of the United Free Church’s *Missionary Record*, and the German missiologist Julius Richter. Four members of the commission were from his “household” including two SVM secretaries Ruth Rouse and Samuel Zwemer. The Moravian Bishop LaTrobe from Herrnhut, Saxony, was a reminder of historic missionary links, joining two others from the Continent. From the United Kingdom there was a cross-section of Free Churchmen and

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<sup>7</sup> K. S. Latourette, K. S. *A History of Christian Missions in China* (New York: Macmillan, 1929) 666.

<sup>8</sup> Invited by W. H. Griffith Thomas, the Principal, soon to go to Wycliffe College, University of Toronto.

<sup>9</sup> C. Howard Hopkins, *John R Mott, 1865-1955* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 1979) 349.

Establishment Anglicans: Bishop Montgomery, Secretary of the High-Church Anglican Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, who would be the cause of much friction; layman Eugene Stock who had made the Low Church Church Missionary Society much more Anglican and much less indigenous; Arthur Taylor, secretary of the British and Foreign Bible Society; Marshall Broomhall, nephew of Hudson Taylor and writer and editor for the China Inland Mission; and Frank Lenwood<sup>10</sup> of the London Missionary Society (married to my wife's grandfather's first cousin), a liberal Protestant. The Americans on the Commission (among them two women) were less diverse, representing Northern Methodist, American Baptist, and United Presbyterian mission boards.

Relationships were not always easy, given Mott's intensity of vision. He rushed ahead with a questionnaire sent out in the name of the Commission, only consulting Vice-Chairman George Robson later. Matters became tangled when the Anglicans threatened to scuttle the conference, feeling that the statistics in the *Atlas* drafted by the planning committee proved objectionable to many Anglicans. That question as to what constituted "the non-Christian world" proved thorny: were missions to continental Europe (and specifically Roman Catholic or Orthodox countries) legitimate? Latin America and the West Indies fell under similar scrutiny. A compromise was eventually worked out in which the North Americans gave way in a spirit of cooperation. There was residual resentment at this exclusion of Protestant missionary work, particularly for Americans extensive interest in South and Central America. But it was more than geography: theology was also off limits, shelving the hard questions that later came to haunt. The limits of cooperation were tested.

Sometime early in the summer of 1909 (judging from its position in the files) MacKay received a large dossier from Mott outlining the purpose of the forthcoming conference and of Commission I. "The unifying spirit of the conference will promote [a] spirit of universal co-operation," it stated. "The ministry of intercession will do much in this direction. The close mingling of missionary leaders, mutual acquaintances, the establishment of ties of friendship, will promote that desired end. Out of it will come a conviction that we are essentially one and belong to each other. It will make an atmosphere, a temper, a disposition, an attitude of Christian responsibility for all mankind out of Christ and in Christ, so that all men shall have an opportunity to have a place in the Promised Land. It will be a realizing sense of the sinfulness of our divisions and will open our eyes to the necessity of action." It continued, sounding an almost apologetic note for yet another conference: "It is true that there are too many conferences, and that this fact has created prejudice, but the character of the Edinburgh Conference ought to justify itself. It will be a great council of war, carefully and diligently prepared for, and sure to be attended with consequences which will be of very real help to every society represented."<sup>11</sup>

The North American members of the Commission met at least six times at Mott's urgent insistence. R. P. MacKay, in addition to frequent trips to New York, had voluminous correspondence to answer. And early in 1910 the questions that had been lurking in the background surfaced. In a 29 January 1910 letter sent to Commission members Mott raised in veiled language a question that had been hitherto evaded: was

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<sup>10</sup> Frank Lenwood (1874 – 1934), biography by his brother-in-law, Roger Wilson, 1936 (SCM Press).

<sup>11</sup> J.R.Mott, undated document, 79-185C, Box 18, File 14, The United Church of Canada Archives.

the real hindrance to world evangelization the increasing liberalism of some of the home churches? He wrote<sup>12</sup>: “The members of our Commission have had it impressed upon them that a most crucial factor in the problem of accomplishing the world’s evangelization is the state of the Home Church.” Citing James Stewart of Lovedale, pioneer Scottish missionary and educationalist in Nyasaland (now Malawi), he raised questions under two headings, home and overseas. Referring first to the Home Church he asked:

- (a) Do you consider that we now have on the home field a type of Christianity which should be propagated all over the world?
- (b) Does this type possess world propagating and world conquering power?
- (c) What is there in the present state of the Home Church which most seriously retards or hinders the worlds’ evangelization?

Under a second heading, noting the increasing influence that “the Christian and non-Christian races” have on each other, he asked how the state of the Home Church affects the expansion of Christianity in the non-Christian world:

- (a) As to the beliefs, ethical standards, and spirit of the missionaries
- (b) As to the beliefs, ethical standards and evangelistic activity of the native Christian leaders and church members.

On receiving the letter, MacKay immediately deferred to several of his friends. One of them was T. B. Kilpatrick, Professor of Systematic Theology at Knox College, whom he asked for a judgment “as to whether or not we have a type of Christianity in Canada which had conquering and propagating power, and if not what is the hindrance, either as to belief, ethical standards, or the spirit of the missionaries?”<sup>13</sup>

A month later R. P. was ready for a considered response<sup>14</sup> to Mott, calling the question he had raised “fundamental.” Describing himself an optimist, he nonetheless said that “there are times when the foundations must be examined in order to assure ourselves.” He had, he said, been reading P. T. Forsyth’s recent *Missions in State and Church* where there was an observation “Nobody seems to be afraid of God in these days.” He reflected on “the lack of urgency in the church, due to a weakened sense of sin and its consequences, and of the holiness of God.” “When hearing,” he continued, “appeals from yourself and others as to the importance of acting in this generation, because for the nations that know not God there is no other opportunity, I often had a sort of indistinct consciousness of the thought pervading the audience: What does it matter?”

R. P. then attributed this to “modern Biblical interpretation. The documents have been discredited, and with that uncertainty is inevitable. I know how students of the Bible say they are helped, yet one of these men, who was thus speaking of its value, told me recently that the same principles are to be applied to the New Testament and that nobody can predict what changes may come as to our views of Christ. I said ‘What about the sinlessness of Christ?’ ‘That’ he said ‘is only relative’. Thus nothing is sacred.

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<sup>12</sup> J. R. Mott to R. P. MacKay, 29 January 1910. 79-185C, Box 18, File 16, The United Church of Canada Archives,

<sup>13</sup> RPM to T.B.Kilpatrick, 8 February 1910. 79-185C, Box 18, File 16. The United Church of Canada Archives

<sup>14</sup> RPM to J. R. Mott, 9 March 1910. 79-185C, Box 18, File 16. The United Church of Canada Archives

There cannot be the quenchless zeal that speaks in the presence of the judgment seat without conviction as to eternal realities.”

Having thus stated his orthodoxy and his concern about higher criticism he then asks “whether we load our system of truth with non-essentials. We may have to (*sic*) comprehensive a Confession of Faith. The essential elements of Christianity are few.” The comments reflect what he had stated at a Committee on Doctrine five years earlier. Debating what role the Westminster Confession should have in a united church, R. P. had produced Henry Van Dyke’s “Brief Statement of the Reformed Faith” as an adequate basis for a new denomination. Van Dyke, a poet mystic, had reduced theology to five skimpy affirmations, with Father and Brother Love as its core values.<sup>15</sup> R. P., though numbered among evangelicals as Vice-President of Toronto Bible College, and later chairman of its Board, was no theologian. Growing up in Zorra, Oxford County, Ontario, had endowed him with a warm piety and a personal conservatism.

By the end of March MacKay had received a draft of the document included in the Commission I and titled “The State of the Home Church in its Bearing upon the Work of Carrying the Gospel to All the Non-Christian World.” Now his problem was style more than content. He wrote back to Mott<sup>16</sup> a highly critical letter, saying that the whole document, in spite of “a good deal of valuable thought” should be rewritten as it lacked logical cohesion and was unduly pessimistic: “is there not occasion for some grateful recognition of the vision that has come to our men as seen in the Layman’s Movement, the awakening amongst students and young people, and also of the evangelistic activity of recent times.” And he asked: “Do you not think the last impression on the mind of the man who reads the paper should be that the church is doing well, but could be doing better by giving heed to her ways? Do you think it would be wise, especially in the Old Land where Higher Criticism is so rank, to make that factor prominent in the discussion? It would likely provoke controversy and settle nothing, for such problems are not settled in public assemblies.” In conclusion he pleaded for “A strong deliverance, defining a living Church and relating her to the non-Christian world, would not necessary be too specific as to existing conditions, in order to accomplish the end in view. People could themselves make the application to home conditions and not feel resentful.”

MacKay was carefully raising his own unease about the impact of Biblical criticism and theological liberalism then sweeping the historic denominations in Europe and North America. Universalism, to which he alludes with his comment on a contemporary lack of emphasis on judgment, had already started to enervate the missionary impulse and would in a decade emasculate the Student Volunteer Movement<sup>17</sup>. The Modernist controversies of the 1920s were still ahead but the challenge was there: would a creedless ecumenicity strengthen the missionary vision or would the torch be passed to the faith missions, represented in Commission I by Marshall Broomhall of the China Inland Mission, whose members took a surprisingly active role in Edinburgh 1910. Among the respondents to Commission I was D. E.

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<sup>15</sup> See N K Clifford. *The Resistance to Church Union in Canada 1904-1939* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1985) p. 38. “Father and Brother Love” is from Van Dyke’s hymn “Joyful, joyful,” final verse. When J Gresham Machen was Interim Minister at First Presbyterian, Princeton, he walked out in protest (1924).

<sup>16</sup> RPM to J. R. Mott, 1 April 1910, 79-185C, Box 18, File 16, The United Church of Canada Archives,.

<sup>17</sup> Thus the SVM Quadrennial at Des Moines, 1919 - see Nathan Showalter *The End of a Crusade: The Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions and the Great War* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1998)

Hoste, one of the Cambridge Seven, brother-in-law to Broomhall, and since 1902 general director of the Mission. He participated in the discussion of the report on 15 June, urging flexibility in the training of “native workers.”<sup>18</sup>

MacKay ensured that a good number of missionaries of The Presbyterian Church in Canada were consulted for the finding of Commission I. Among them were Milton Jack from Tamsui, Formosa (as Taiwan was then called); Alex Robb, Korea; among the China contingent, Jonathan Goforth and Murdoch MacKenzie, Changtefu, Honan, J. A. M’Donald of Canton, and Donald MacGillivray, CLS, Shanghai; from Madhya Pradesh India, Fraser Campbell (Ratlam), Miss Chone Oliver (Neemuch), and J. T. Taylor (Mhow); from the New Hebrides (Vanuatu) Joseph Annand; and John Morton of Trinidad (dismissed as “other fields”). It was an impressive array showing the extent and the quality of Canadian Presbyterians committed to overseas mission.

Respondents were divided in their enthusiasm for ecumenical engagement. In the New Hebrides there was a united Mission with Canadian and Scottish Presbyterians cooperating<sup>19</sup>. Fraser Campbell’s *Unoccupied Fields in Central India* is cited to support the comment that “the present missionary staff is insufficient for the accomplishment of the work begun”<sup>20</sup>. Jonathan Goforth wrote of revivals sweeping across denominational boundaries, thirty having been conducted by him in six Chinese provinces since February 1908<sup>21</sup>. In its section on Formosa (Taiwan) the report urges that the Canadian and English Presbyterian seminaries, in the north and the south, merge into a single institution in the centre of the island. “In few lands,” it concludes, “are obstacles so few and conditions so favourable for speedy and thorough evangelization.”<sup>22</sup> In Korea the eight Protestant communions represented there, four of them Presbyterian (Northern and Southern American, Canadian and Australian) had worked out an “amicable adjustment of boundaries.”<sup>23</sup>

R. P. MacKay was himself personally responsible for writing two reports: “Indians in Canada” and “Orientals in Canada.” In “Indians in Canada,” cooperation expressed in the churches’ membership in the government’s Advisory Board of Indian Education “has become a very important step in the direction of overcoming waste of effort and of developing a united policy of missionary education.”<sup>24</sup> By today’s standards the report on Canada’s native peoples does not do MacKay much credit, as it would be seen as culturally superior and racist. It refers to the “dependent and uncivilized life of the reserves.” But it does not exonerate the government, and decries the “pauperising influence of the treaties.” In the section “Orientals in Canada” MacKay is on firmer ground. Outreach to Chinese migrants being a special interest. He railed against the 1885 head tax demanded of all arrivals from the Middle Kingdom. “It would be a great advantage if the Churches interested in this work would combine in a thoroughly organized plan, without denominational claims or distinctions.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Report of Commission I* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1910), 427-8.

<sup>19</sup> *Report of Commission I* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1910), 128-9.

<sup>20</sup> *Report of Commission I* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1910), 139, and footnote 1.

<sup>21</sup> *Report of Commission I* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1910), 355.

<sup>22</sup> *Report of Commission I* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1910), 69-70.

<sup>23</sup> *Report of Commission I* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1910), 74.

<sup>24</sup> *Report of Commission I* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1910), 260-262.

<sup>25</sup> *Report of Commission I* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1910), 264.

The only other contribution in the commission reports attributed directly to a Canadian Presbyterian was that of Sir Robert Falconer, President of the University of Toronto, and a member of Commission III “Education in Relation to the Christianisation of National Life.” Falconer did not involve fellow Canadian Presbyterians as correspondents as MacKay had: only Miss J. M. Kinney of Formosa is listed. No report having been received “from workers among the Indians in North America”<sup>26</sup> Falconer was asked to prepare a paper on “Indians in Canada” and Anna, daughter of Senator Harry Dawes (he of the 1887 Dawes Act giving Indians property allotments), a well-known activist for native rights in the United States, was asked for one on American Indians. Whether they worked cooperatively or not, in late September 1909 Falconer wrote mission executives in the United States soliciting “the latest information and statistics regarding the work of your Church among the Indians of the United States and Alaska.”<sup>27</sup> The result of his inquiries appears to be written hurriedly by a busy man. Under three rubrics – industrial schools, boarding schools, and day schools – the report’s defense of residential schools by a leading Canadian educator makes strange reading today.

Bishop Gore convened British members of Commission III in Birmingham 1 – 6 November 1909. The North American members met 8 to 11 February at the Manhattan home of Commission member and socialite Grace Dodge and made heavy weather of the British draft, particularly the use of the word “heathen.” Exception was taken to the sections on India, China and Korea. But it was the report on “The Relationship of Christian Truth to Indigenous Thought and Feeling.” as originally drafted by Bishop Gore, to which strong exception was taken. The whole Commission never met together. A single North American member, George Burton<sup>28</sup> of the University of Chicago, was present in London 22 April 1910<sup>29</sup> when the final draft was approved. With courteous restraint so typical culturally, the British members had yielded to the American complaints and the final draft showed much of their handiwork. But Falconer’s specific contribution remains unknown. The twelfth question, on whether “further co-operation or federation [is] desirable in the educational work of different Missionary Societies,” certainly reflects his commitment to ecumenical action. As chair of the Presbyterian Union Committee, Falconer was an articulate and outspoken proponent of organic denominational union<sup>30</sup>.

On 23 April 1910 Allan and Mary Armstrong set sail from Portland, Maine, accompanied by J. M. Duncan and his wife, Canadian Presbyterian missionaries in India. Allan Egbert Armstrong, Assistant Foreign Missions secretary, was being sent

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<sup>26</sup> *Report of Commission III* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1910), 397.

<sup>27</sup> Falconer papers, University of Toronto archives, Fisher Library, A1967-0007/009/100 and A1967-0007/010/039. Letters to A B Leonard Methodist Board of Foreign Missions (who referred him to their Home Mission secretary, Robert Forbes, and R. B. Morehouse, General Secretary, American Baptist Home Mission Society).

<sup>28</sup> Burton, a Baptist minister, had made a tour of Asian educational institutions in 1909.

<sup>29</sup> His trip paid for by Grace Dodge.

<sup>30</sup> See James Greenlee *Sir Robert Falconer* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 93–99; 233–235. Also: Michael Gauvreau “Presbyterianism, Liberal Education and the Research Ideal: Sir Robert Falconer and the University of Toronto, 1907-1932” in Klempa, Wm Ed., *Burning Bush and A Few Acres of Snow* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1994), 39 – 60.



instead of Dr MacKay and was making a side trip to Europe before Edinburgh 1910 began. R. P. had lived with the Armstrongs since returning from lengthy globetrotting after his only child was married in 1906 to China missionary appointee Andrew Thompson<sup>31</sup>. He and Allan Armstrong had a very close relationship and it may be that MacKay wanted him to have the trip (only one of them could go) or perhaps made the 1910 General Assembly a priority. He had been nominated that year as Moderator but turned it down, accepting the office the following year. Falconer likewise did not attend Edinburgh 1910.

There were eleven Canadian Presbyterians in all, among the 1200 delegates. In addition to Armstrong and Duncan two others from the India field (R A King and Fraser Campbell); medical doctor William McClure from China; Robert Welsh Professor of Apologetics and Church History at Presbyterian College, Montreal<sup>32</sup>, McPherson Scott, sponsor of Toronto's Jewish Mission<sup>33</sup>, Donald MacOdrum then in Moncton<sup>34</sup>, and Mrs. J. D. Robertson, representing the WMS. Rev W. A. J. Martin of Zion, Brantford, convener of the Foreign Missions Committee<sup>35</sup>; and Rev J A MacGlashan, minister of Bridgeport, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia<sup>36</sup>, representing the Maritimes missionary commitment.

While in Edinburgh delegates received hospitality from local residents. My wife's grandfather's uncle, John James Cowan, was assigned two names: R. F. Coyle, 1903 Moderator of the Presbyterian USA General Assembly and Vincent Massey a 23 year-old Canadian Methodist layman. Massey (which he misspelled in his memoirs as Massie), then at Balliol in Oxford, sent a telegram announcing his arrival the next morning. Cowan recalled that "At breakfast time I went to the door to welcome our guest and found he was a beardless youth. It turned out he was representing his father, who was a man of wealth, acquired by making agricultural machinery."<sup>37</sup> The other guest never turned up, having stayed with his son who was a student in Edinburgh, so Cowan joked with Massey about having shuffled off this mortal Coyle. Twenty years later Massey, then Canada's first minister in Washington, reminded a granddaughter of the pun.

Held in the Assembly Hall of the United Free Church of Scotland on the Mound in Edinburgh, the meetings went on for nine days, from Tuesday, 14 June, to the following Thursday. That opening afternoon, with Lord Balfour of Burleigh in the chair, standing orders and rules of debate were approved, as was the appointment of a secretary (William Oldham, a strong supporter of union while in the Philippines as a Methodist missionary) and the ubiquitous John R. Mott as Chair. One of the two recording secretaries was Newton Rowell, a Toronto lawyer. The delegates were sent out as Mott declaimed on Jesus' words in John 17:21, "That they all may be one." It was a familiar theme throughout the week and would resonate fifteen years later in Canada.

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<sup>31</sup> His wife had died at 27 after three years of marriage. He never remarried.

<sup>32</sup> Professor Welsh came from the Presbyterian Church in England in 1905 to be British & Foreign Bible Society Secretary; was appointed professor in 1907, In 1925 joined United Theological College, Montreal.

<sup>33</sup> John McPherson Scott (1859-1920), minister of St John's, Toronto (1889-1920).

<sup>34</sup> Donald MacOdrum (1863-1938) died two weeks after serving as PCC GA Moderator.

<sup>35</sup> Wm Albert Johnson Martin (1862-1911) had just received a DD from Knox College

<sup>36</sup> MacGlashan, a native of French River, Pictou Co., served Chalmers, Bridgeport, 1893-1917.

<sup>37</sup> Cowan, John James. *From 1846 to 1932*. Edinburgh: Printed privately, 1932), 83-4

Cheng Jingyi, one of the few non-Westerners present and a product of the London Missionary Society in China, a fluent English-speaker who had spent two years recently at the Bible Training Institute in Glasgow, spoke twice, first on Thursday and then the following Tuesday. The latter was regarded as the most outstanding speech of the entire conference<sup>38</sup>. Responding to Commission VIII “Cooperation and the Promotion of Unity,” he threw down the gauntlet to the assembled delegates: “Speaking plainly we hope to see, in the near future, a united Christian Church without any denominational distinctions.” It took seventeen years for his vision for China to take place. On New Year’s Day 1927 the first General Assembly of the Church of Christ in China joining most Protestant mission churches, met in Shanghai. Canadian Methodists, by now part of the United Church of Canada, enthusiastically joined<sup>39</sup> as did erstwhile Canadian Presbyterians from Honan. Evangelical bodies such as the China Inland Mission and the Christian and Missionary Alliance had earlier withdrawn from negotiations. The south Shandong presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church in China refused to be a part of the new denomination. The lines were being drawn.

Canadian participation in Edinburgh continued on Thursday 17 June: Presbyterian R. A. King, Principal of Indore College, spoke that morning and the Hon W A Charlton a wealthy Toronto businessman and politician occupied the chair that evening. Monday of the next week J. M. Duncan, again of the Canadian Presbyterian Mission in India, responded to the report of Commission VII “Missions and Governments” while the final afternoon A. E. Armstrong addressed the issue of “how to increase the missionary gifts of individual Christians who are able to do much more finally than they are not doing.”<sup>40</sup>

At the conclusion of the Congress John R. Mott led the delegates in a service of consecration with a cry that echoes over the past century: “The end of the congress is the beginning of the conquest.” That triumphalism was not sustained: in four years the Christian world would be convulsed in the bloodiest conflagration ever seen. Many children of delegates – from both sides - would die in the slaughter that ensued. The impact of the Congress towards comity, unity, and union, continued unabated, nowhere more than in Canada. It was the great talisman that was to bring in the kingdom of God.

And what had been accomplished? Reports from journals and magazines around the world varied in their answers. The secular press, particularly *The Scotsman*, provided extensive coverage. The *Daily Mail* summarized the event: “Above and beyond everything else one thing has been demonstrated – namely, that if the Christian faith is to go forward in the conquest of the world, the Christian Churches must learn to combine their forces and to sink their accidental difference in the attack upon the common foe.”<sup>41</sup> In the August 1910 Canadian Methodist *Missionary Outlook*, in spite of much space given Alexander Sutherland’s death, the Conference filled a full page. Its report saw four impacts: a sense of the vastness of the missionary task, the need for the

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<sup>38</sup> Cf the *Boston Missionary Herald*: “without question the best speech” made at Edinburgh. Quoted by Stanley, *World Missionary Conference*, 108.

<sup>39</sup> Latourette, *History of Christian Missions in China*, (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1929), 801.

<sup>40</sup> *The History and Records of the Conference* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1910), 106.

<sup>41</sup> “World Missionary Conference” *Scotsman* 25 June 1910, 7.

Christian Church to bestir themselves, the challenge to enter unoccupied fields, and the impression that “if the world situation was to be met there must be united planning and concerted action. They fell back frankly in front of this task if it must be faced with a divided Christendom, but they approached with calmness and confidence if the true disciples of Jesus Christ stood together as members of a common family.”<sup>42</sup>

The *Presbyterian Record* of the Presbyterian Church in Canada edited by anti-Unionist Ephraim Scott limited itself to a three-line news item. The editor was far more concerned about the Union debate in the General Assembly that had met in Halifax that June. Assembly, after bitter debate, had approved a Union proposal for transmission to presbyteries under the Barrier Act. Scott reported that more commissioners registered dissent than any previous act in the history of the church. He warned: “If the people do nothing, it will come. If the Church goes into Union, it should do so actively and intelligently, and not drift, or be drifted, into it.”<sup>43</sup>

Of the eleven delegates to Edinburgh from the Presbyterian Church in Canada 1910 nine were Unionists. Only MacOdrum and Scott (who died in 1920) were opposed. R. P. MacKay’s was the first signature on the Basis of Union on 10 June 1925. But there was pain that, as he wrote his niece at the time, “The most beautiful and the most painful thing we see today is the number of ministers who for principle’s sake have stepped out and accepted the consequences.”<sup>44</sup> The consequences were indeed significant, affecting the entire mission work of the Presbyterian Church in Canada: Honan, Macao, Korea, India, and Trinidad all went into the new United Church. Formosa stayed with the continuing church, and non-concurrents joined existing work in Manchuria, among tribal people in central India, Koreans in Japan, and in British Guiana<sup>45</sup>. The fifteen years between Edinburgh 1910 and the formation of the United Church of Canada had been, for Presbyterians at least, one of the most fractious in their history and its aftermath, which showed no letup for years, was arguably a key factor in the subsequent secularization of Canada.

None of that was immediately apparent. Sailing on the steamship *Tunisia* to Quebec City, and looking forward to spending the rest of the summer of 1910 at his cottage at Lac des Iles, Mott wrote MacKay explaining that, in his absence Commission I had met during the conference and had changed the wording in a few places in the report, a copy of which he sent on to him. He concluded with a ringing word of affirmation about the events of the previous month: “It went beyond our highest expectation. Notwithstanding limitations, shortening, and mistakes, we have much for which to be thankful to God.”<sup>46</sup>

The Promised Land, the conquest, never came. Edinburgh 1910, for all its excitement and emotion, the excellence of its arrangements, the wide representation and knowledge of its participants and correspondents, the eloquence of its speakers,

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<sup>42</sup> *Missionary Outlook* (August 1910), 176.

<sup>43</sup> *Presbyterian Record* (July 1910), 295.

<sup>44</sup> Thompson, Andrew. *Life and Letters of Rev. R. P. MacKay, D.D.* (Toronto, Ryerson Press, 1932), 126.

<sup>45</sup> *Vide* Zander Dunn’s “The Great Divorce and what happened to the Children” in *CSPH Papers 1977*, 58-96. Dunn’s excellent research is somewhat marred by the way in which he dismisses the anti-Unionist missionaries as “old men, conservative in their theology and in their life-styles.” (80)

<sup>46</sup> Mott to MacKay *et al.* 7 July 1910 79-185C, Box 19, File 2. The United Church of Canada Archives.

never did achieve its ultimate goal, the evangelization of the world in its generation. The profound theological issues that had been raised, and then sidelined in the interests of accommodation and breadth, were never addressed. And the Presbyterian Church in Canada paid a high price for that evasion.