

CONSERVATISM IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA IN 1925 AND
BEYOND: AN INTRODUCTORY EXPLORATION

Dr. Ian S. Rennie
Ontario Theological Seminary

Conservatism is a word that many people would readily associate with historic Presbyterianism, and certainly with the Presbyterian Church in Canada in 1925 and beyond. This conservatism would perhaps first be thought of theologically, and John Moir would validate this outlook in his history of Canadian Presbyterianism by affirming that as late as 1908 'the bulk of church members, both lay and ministerial, were still essentially conservative in doctrine.'¹ At the same time, it must be kept in mind that the next decade and a half or so was going to experience such a shift that D. C. Masters could comment that 'the Christian liberals exercised a tremendous influence upon Protestant thinking in Canada ... Their ideas constituted a new orthodoxy of the generation which went to college in the nineteen-twenties.'² Liberalism was so potent that even many of those who remained Presbyterian in 1925 accommodated themselves to it in some degree or other. As a result, the late Principal A. L. Farris in his article, 'The Fathers of 1925', attempted to show that the reasons for people remaining Presbyterian were more complex than simple conservative adherence to Reformed theological orthodoxy.³

In his article, Farris outlined four major strands in the maintenance of Canadian Presbyterianism, or perhaps better six, for he divided the fourth or theological category into three. The thing that Professor Farris did not overtly do was indicate how

conservative all the four or six strands were, although their conservatism in each case had a somewhat different focus. All were concerned to preserve what they considered the best of Canadian Presbyterianism, and they were agreed that this could best be done by preserving the Presbyterian Church in Canada as intact as possible. Beyond that there were the differences. Thus continuing Presbyterianism appeared conservative and even defensive, although there were distinctly varied shades in the conservative hue.

The first strand was called the Anti-Unionists by Farris, and they believed that Presbyterianism was superior to all other forms of Christianity. And thus the Presbyterian Church in Canada was superior to any other denomination in the Dominion, including the new one into which many were proposing that Canadian Presbyterianism should enter. These Anti-Unionists were conservatives of heritage - the tradition should be maintained so that nothing would be lost.

The second strand was the Federalists who wanted cooperation between denominations but not organic union at the present time. They were quite happy to modify Presbyterian teaching, polity, and practice in some ways, but they believed that the Presbyterian Church in Canada, as an organized entity, was far too valuable a force in the land to allow it to be threatened with disruption over the Church Union issue. Participation in a United Church of Canada at a future date - most certainly; but not as long as it would be at the cost of Presbyterian division. This was pragmatic, institutional conservatism. In 1925 the Federalists might look akin to the

Anti-Unionists, but their reasons for maintaining the Presbyterian Church, although conservative, were significantly different.

Next were the Ethical Critics who believed that the Unionists in their crusading spirit were denying religious liberty and the rights of conscience for minorities. This was a moral conservatism which refused to acknowledge that because many believed the proposed United Church to be the will of God, and anticipated almost quasi-messianic expectations to accompany its birth, they had any right to depart from the path of decency and probity and ride roughshod over fellow Presbyterians who did not see the same vision. Here was the ethical conservatism that would never allow the charismatic to challenge the moral. Such a view could well comport with a philosophical idealism which would challenge traditional Calvinistic theology, but retain, at least for a time, traditional Calvinistic ethics.

The fourth strand included those called the Theological Objectors. The first subdivision represented those who resisted Church Union because it appeared to threaten orthodox theology. They were not as totally enamoured of all things Presbyterian as the Anti-Unionists, but when it came to theology, they were staunchly conservative. Institutional forms and structures might change to some extent, but theology was the great given, and Presbyterian theology was second to none. In order to preserve its theology, the Presbyterian Church in Canada must be retained.

32

The second subdivision of the fourth strand, or the fifth point of view, if we wish so to consider it, was expressed by Principal Fraser of Presbyterian College, Montreal. He argued that the proposed Basis of Faith for the United Church was too conservative. At first sight, Fraser might appear to be out of synchronization with the rest of the defenders of the Presbyterian Church in Canada with their obvious though varied conservatisms. But on reflection, Fraser appeared as one who wished to conserve what he considered to be the standard of intellectual rigor and excellence of Presbyterianism. He feared that union with Methodism, with its stress on the experiential and the practical, would only lead to intellectual embarrassment. The Presbyterian Church must be maintained as the best hope of Christian intellectual respectability in Canada.

Finally there was the view of Principal W. W. Bryden of Knox College, that in theology both liberalism and traditional conservatism were inadequate. Although this may sound fairly radical, and may have been intended to sound so, Bryden's views were actually fairly conservative. When he attacked traditional conservatism, he meant the very conservative theologies of the nineteenth century with their roots in the Protestant Orthodoxy of the seventeenth century. This he wished to distinguish - usually far too sharply - from the theology of the great Reformers of the sixteenth century. Here he saw the root and direction for the theology of the present and the future. In spite of certain presuppositions that he may have brought to the study of the

Reformation, any theologian that takes the Reformers with the seriousness that Bryden did is fairly conservative. So Bryden wished to retain the Presbyterian Church in Canada because it had direct links with the Reformers which Congregationalism and Methodism did not have. Church Union with such people would only decrease attention on the early Reformers, thus hindering the desperately needed revitalization of theology in the Presbyterian Church in Canada and in all the Churches.

Thus those who chose to remain Presbyterian in 1925 and beyond stood together. The things they supremely valued about Presbyterianism may have been somewhat different, but they were all conservatives in insisting that they be retained, and that they could best be retained in a continuing Presbyterian Church in Canada. Since all continuing Presbyterians were conservative, the title of this paper might then suggest that we are going to discuss all Presbyterians. Although it might be profitable to examine Canadian Presbyterianism in 1925 and beyond in terms of the interrelation of various types of conservatism, such an attempt is far beyond the scope of a paper such as this. Thus the concern here is only with those who would be considered theological conservatives in a fairly traditional sense. As a result, those who do not fit readily into this category will be omitted at this time, which includes the Federalists, the Ethical Critics, and those who shared the views of Principals Fraser and Bryden. Thus the field of inquiry is narrowed to the Anti-Unionists and the first category of the Theological Objectors, who wished to

maintain orthodox theology in the traditional sense. But in order to begin to understand these two groupings, we will be helped by coming at the subject more historically, by which is meant that we must look at the historic forms of conservative Presbyterianism which have significantly impinged on the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

The two schools of Presbyterian conservatism that have most directly influenced the Presbyterian Church in Canada may be called the Auld Kirk and the Free Kirk. The difference between these schools of Presbyterianism, for our purpose, is that the former was an establishment conservatism, while the latter was an evangelical conservatism. Auld Kirk conservatism expressed the Scottish and Scots-Irish version of European Christendom.⁴ Virtually all inhabitants of a nation were members of both State and Church, with each supporting and strengthening the other. Church and State were two sides of the same coin, and the Christian civilization which resulted was the supreme work and glory of God on earth. And for Auld Kirkers of Scottish and Scots-Irish origin, the Presbyterian culture of Scotland and Ulster was beyond compare. For such people it was the whole heritage that was important. At the same time, continuity of structure and form was a matter of supreme importance for it was in this way that the excellencies of the tradition were transmitted. With the structures preserved, the Auld Kirk Christendom viewpoint could then allow a measure of flexibility as far as the internal components were concerned.

Doctrine had to be expressed in terms of the Westminster Confession, but the emphasis in terms of the content could vary considerably from one epoch to another and there could even be significant theological differences among Auld Kirk people at a given time. If we think of the Auld Kirk ethos as having emerged significantly during the reign of Moderatism in the Scottish and Irish Churches in the eighteenth century, then it is quite obvious that the soteriological aspects of theology did not receive major stress. As Presbyterians, however, it was absolutely necessary to stress the sovereignty of God in Westminster Confession language, but among the Auld Kirk Moderates there were those who emphasized sovereignty working through divine election while there were others who expressed it largely in terms of divine providence. During the nineteenth century the Auld Kirk became somewhat more uniformly conservative in theological content, although the soteriological in many cases still did not occupy the proportion which it did in the Confession of Faith. And the irruption of divine grace in conscious conversion was still to many Auld Kirk folk at best an ill-mannered thing and at worst a virtual act of treason for implicitly questioning whether all baptised Scots and Ulstermen were necessarily in a state of grace. In the twentieth century, as anti-supernaturalism once again brought tremendous pressure to bear on Anglo-Saxon and Presbyterian theology, it would be quite natural to expect that the Auld Kirk tradition would accommodate itself in various ways, while all the while waving the flags of the

Presbyterian heritage and the Westminster Confession of Faith.

In Canada the Auld Kirk people were a large segment of what Farris has described as the Anti-Unionists; in fact, as Moir has suggested, they were a very influential element in continuing Presbyterianism in Canada.⁵ Yet because of the tendency to stress form in relation to content, and thus make theological accommodation possible, they are not what many people mean today when they refer to theological conservatism in the Presbyterian Church in Canada. So a large section of the Anti-Unionists are removed from our purview as well.

This now brings us to the evangelical conservatives or conservative evangelicals of the Free Kirk type who stood within the heritage of the Reformation as resuscitated and interpreted by the evangelical movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁶ The positive relation of state and church as embodied in Christendom was accepted, but within that, great stress was laid upon doctrine and the conscious experience of grace. The national and the ethnic were valued, but supremely because in them Scriptural truth of the Westminster Confession variety had been taught, which in turn brought about repentance, faith, justification, union with Christ, and new obedience. The truth of the Bible in the power of the Holy Spirit brought forth life. This was Free Kirk evangelical conservatism, and there was a fair measure of it in the Presbyterian Church in Canada in 1925 and afterwards.

At the same time, we are up against a certain difficulty at this

point, for there are those in Canada who seem to find it difficult to acknowledge the presence of conservative evangelicalism in mainstream Canadian Protestantism. The same people may recognize the Evangelical party in the Church of England, and similar groupings in American Protestantism, but when it comes to Canada, the situation seems to be viewed somewhat differently. The reason may be sought in the writings of S. D. Clark, with his tendency to equate evangelicalism in Canada with sectarianism, the reputation for monochrome liberalism of the United Church, the weakness of Canadian Evangelical Anglicanism, and the exit from the Baptist Convention of T. T. Shields and his associates. But conservatism in the Presbyterian Church in Canada will not be understood unless the ongoing presence of evangelical conservatives is recognized. Once again, however, the historical approach must be taken, for only in this way will the nature of what is usually considered conservatism in the Presbyterian Church be understood.

There have been two main types of conservative evangelical Presbyterianism in this century, and they both go back to developments in the evangelical world of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These were the Confessional and Fundamentalist movements. During the first two generations of the evangelical movement, known increasingly by historians as the First and Second Evangelical Awakenings, and running from the mid-eighteenth century to about 1830, evangelicalism was the most dynamic and widespread movement in most of Anglo-American Protestantism, Presbyterianism

included. But by about 1830 some evangelicals were becoming concerned that evangelicalism in its expansive, optimistic mood might be losing some of its Reformation theological moorings. With their critical faculties at work, they were more ready to discern that the great days of the Evangelical Awakenings were passing and that the future would not likely be a period of ever-increasing evangelical triumph. In this context the threat of Continental Protestant Liberalism was very foreboding, and thus these critical and fearful evangelicals began to raise their ramparts of defense. Profoundly influenced by the Romantic Movement, with its distaste for the nineteenth century and its veneration for a golden age of the past, they sought the answers to the present in the golden age of their past. This meant the Protestantism of the seventeenth century, often called the Age of Confessions, and from which the term Confessionalism emerged. In few places was Confessionalism the numerically dominant form of Protestantism, but as it separated itself from its existant ecclesiastical affiliation in search of its ideal, as it almost invariably did, it was everywhere a powerfully conservative force. This was true of the section of German Lutheranism which in North America is known as the Missouri Synod, and those from the Dutch Reformed heritage who formed the core of the Christian Reformed Churches. In Presbyterianism the Old School movement in the United States, centering in Princeton Seminary, reflected the Confessional impulse, as did the Free Kirk in Scotland although these Presbyterian Confessionalists also

retained much of the dynamism that was characteristic of nineteenth century Anglo-Saxon Protestantism.

Among the Confessionalists there was a serious attempt to reprimatinate the heritage of the seventeenth century according to the respective denominational traditions. The theology of the Confessions was retained intact, while the Bible was presented as infallibly true because it was the product of a verbal inspiration which had its special locus in the very words of Scripture.⁹ Pan-evangelical cooperation was eschewed and denominational distinctives in seventeenth century form were underscored. Social reform was feared as the entering wedge of liberalism, and the overspill of Methodist methodology and life-style was not appreciated. If only the church were faithful to the seventeenth-century pattern then all would be well. A more tradition-conscious, theological, denominational, sombre, defensive, and combative form of evangelicalism had emerged. The Free Kirk in mid-nineteenth century Canada represented this point of view, although the pressures of other forms of Anglo-Saxon Christianity and the North American ethos were constantly at work upon it, in a way that was not true of its Continental counterparts. Nonetheless, there were still representatives of Confessionalism among Canadian Presbyterians in 1925 and after, and they are to be found in the Anti-Unionist category of Farris. This is probably the correct place to put them, for they did hold inviolate the whole Presbyterian tradition in the form which they understood and to which they were committed. So there were Auld Kirk and Confessional evangelical Anti-Unionists, the Confessionalists

being the much the smaller of the two components.

Confessionalism was well represented by Ephraim Scott, long-time editor of the Record. Although in his editorial position, Scott exercised a measure of restraint in the expression of his own views, they nonetheless came through clearly enough. This was true of a series of articles in the Record in 1924, which included, 'What Presbyterians Stand For' in February, and 'The Confession of Faith' in June. Quotations from such well-known American conservative Presbyterians as Clarence Macartney of Philadelphia, Maitland Alexander of Pittsburgh, and O. T. Allis of Princeton also attested to his commitments.¹⁰ So did a lengthy article against Harry Emerson Fosdick, portraying him as something of a reincarnation of William Ellery Channing, the New England Unitarian of the previous century.¹¹ But in his 1928 volume 'Church Union' and the Presbyterian Church in Canada, there was the full expression of Scott's Confessionalism. He conceived the Church Union battle as another phase of the controversy engendered by liberalism, and as a Confessionalist, the answer to a watered-down Christianity was the complete Presbyterian heritage as he envisioned it.¹²

At the same time, as part of the Anglo-Saxon evangelical world, Scott's Confessionalism was inevitably, if at times uncomfortably, in touch with the wider forms of evangelicalism, Presbyterian and otherwise. As a result, there were constant references in the Record under Scott's editorship to evangelistic services and accounts of conversion ranging from C. H. Spurgeon to John McNeill,

the Scottish evangelist who had been minister of Cooke's Church, Toronto, for a couple of years around the beginning of World War I.¹³ Visits to Canada of prominent evangelical conservative preachers of various communions were continually alluded to; such as G. Campbell Morgan, S. D. Gordon, and F. B. Meyer.¹⁴ And in the battle against liberalism, and by implication Church Union, Scott regularly drew on material from this wider circle. C. H. Spurgeon provided an excerpt entitled 'No Compromise', the Bible Union of China - perhaps with an assist from W. H. Griffith Thomas who had until recently been at Wycliffe College, Toronto - supplied 'Modernism and Its Fruits',¹⁶ while A. Z. Conrad of Park Street Congregational Church, Boston, gave 'Modernism's Mistakes'.¹⁷ The significant fact, however, was that in spite of Scott's prominence, the Canadian Presbyterian Confessionalists were few in number, aged, and on their way to oblivion.

The supreme difficulty with Confessionalism in Canada was that its fundamentally backward-looking vision had little appeal to the coming generation, with its leaders enshrining an ambience of the past. Professor N. Keith Clifford of U.B.C., in research which will be included in his much anticipated history of the United Church of Canada, has discovered that many Presbyterian ministers who opposed Church Union from early in the twentieth century had taken at least some of their theological training at Princeton Theological Seminary. On the other hand, those who supported the United Church concept and had studied abroad had usually gone to Edinburgh or one of the German Universities where, to say the least, a somewhat different

theological approach was taken, at least after the 1870's. And those who had attended what came to be known as the Old Princeton, or wished they had and were one with it in spirit, were usually of the older generation. So that in 1925 Confessionalism appeared to have little future as a force for conservatism in the Presbyterian Church in Canada. In spite, however, of its weakened condition, Confessionalism was regarded as an essential component of continuing Presbyterianism in 1925, and efforts were made to draw on the resources of this tradition.

On the one hand, the search for additional ministers which Church Union necessitated among the Presbyterians caused approaches to be made to the Confessional Highlanders of the Continuing Free Church of Scotland. This body was known accurately and affectionately as the Wee Frees since 1901, when a tiny minority refused to follow the rapidly moderating majority of Free Kirkers into the union with the United Presbyterians which formed the United Frees. When the commissioners of the Presbyterian Church in Canada arrived in Scotland in 1925 seeking ministerial recruits, they officially visited the Free Church College as well as the other Presbyterian Theological institutions of Edinburgh, and preached in leading Free Church pulpits.¹⁸ This continuing openness to the Confessional tradition has meant that there have always been a few ministers in the Presbyterian Church in Canada who have received their upbringing and training in the Free Church in Scotland, some of whom have occupied positions of some influence in Canada. Young immigrants of Free Church stock who were already working in Canada were also

attracted by this approach, the most outstanding perhaps being George Murray of the Highland mining community in Trail, B.C. Upon graduation from Presbyterian College, Montreal, he served with great acceptability in both Cape Breton and Scotstown, Quebec, where fluency in Gaelic was highly prized along with other ministerial gifts. But Murray soon faced the almost overpowering attractiveness of segments of American Presbyterianism for Confessionalists in Canada. As a result, he ministered in the old United Presbyterian Church in Newton, Massachusetts, for almost thirty years.

In addition, approaches were also made to representatives of the Princeton Confessional tradition in the United States in the hope of securing ministers. Although by 1925, the officials at Princeton Seminary, represented by President Stevenson, were already seeking to break with Confessionalism,¹⁹ it is interesting that it was to Professor J. Gresham Machen, the spokesman for the Confessionalists, that Canadian Presbyterians turned, requesting him to supply fifty graduates.²⁰ And Machen was also being sounded out as a candidate for the principalship of Knox College by at least one Presbyterian minister.²¹ Machen never reached his quota, but a steady if small stream of American Confessionalists continued to arrive in Canada, and when Machen left Princeton in 1929 and founded Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia, the supply continued from the new source. One representative of this group was Quincy McDowell, who began his ministry on P.E.I., but spent the thirties in Sydney Mines, where he left an impact that remains until today

and which was well explained by one of the historians of Cape Breton Presbyterianism: 'Dr. McDowell contributed much to the work of the Presbytery ... His message as a preacher was strongly evangelical. He was a diligent pastor. Above all, he was interested in the spiritual welfare of the youth.'²² However, after spending the forties and early fifties at Maissoneuve Church, Montreal, McDowell returned to the U.S., undoubtedly seeking a more congenial Confessional climate. Although it is true that not all Machen's recruits were Princeton men, it would seem that most shared a conservative theology, as expressed by John H. MacGillivray who came to Springville, Nova Scotia via San Anselino, the Presbyterian seminary in California. 'I am growing more convinced that the disruption will prove a blessing, for modernistic teachers and preachers can now go to their own place; and the old Gospel of Grace have free course in the Presbyterian Church in Canada.'²³

Machen not only sent Americans to Canada, but he also attracted some young Canadians to study in the U. S., whence they returned with firm Confessional commitments. The most conspicuous group was from Montreal and included Stanford Reid who returned to found the Town of Mount Royal Church in Montreal, before proceeding to McGill and the University of Guelph; Lyall Detlor, who pastored at Parry Sound and Trail before going to the U.S., and Ronald Rowat who interspersed his Canadian ministry with an American interlude, concluding as Superintendant of Missions of the Synod of Montreal and Ottawa in the fifties and sixties. And somewhere in this category should be included George W. MacKay from far-off Formosa,

not so young as the others, but bearing the imprint of his father, the famous missionary, and also of his earnest father-in-law, John Ross of Brucefield, who in his sturdy Confessionalism stood almost alone on the Free Kirk side in rejecting the Canadian Presbyterian Union of 1875. During the forties and fifties a trickle of young Canadian Presbyterians continued to attend Westminster Seminary, which sought to perpetuate Machen's memory and outlook, while they increased significantly in the sixties and seventies, although a number subsequently left the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

One other distinct source of Confessional recruitment after 1925 was the McDonaldites of Prince Edward Island.²⁴ Followers of a Church of Scotland minister who had a remarkable ministry on the Island for four decades before Confederation, this movement is still one of the few indigenous Canadian Christian developments. Numbering at least 5,000 adherents in the later nineteenth century, the McDonaldites did not enter the Presbyterian union of 1875, but continued on their own way. This way almost led to oblivion, until they linked up with the Free Church of Scotland earlier in this century. The Presbyterian Church in Canada has received several congregations of McDonaldites on P.E.I. since 1925, and in many Presbyterian congregations on the Island, there are leading members with McDonaldite roots. At least one former McDonaldite clergyman has also served in the ministry of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. Remembering that the Presbyterian Church in Canada forms a larger percentage of the population of P.E.I. than anywhere else in Canada, and that this position is at least in some measure due to

McDonaldite transfers, these people, with their Confessional faith, cannot be dismissed as altogether inconsequential for Canadian Presbyterianism.

And so Confessionalists have continued in the Presbyterian Church in Canada until today. Usually having had significant experience in other parts of the world, and feeling the power of centrifugal attraction, they nonetheless have maintained their noble and romantic view of the Presbyterian heritage - more frequently described as the Reformed heritage - into our day. Among them will be found some of the most loyal and most frustrated members of the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Now it is necessary to turn to that other body of theologically conservative Presbyterians, whom Farris has described as those who simply wanted undiluted, orthodox theology in its Presbyterian form. Although he did not tell us exactly who these people were, references to John Gibson Inkster and Jonathan Goforth in this category lead one to assume that in large measure he had in mind those who were called Fundamentalists. Anglo-Saxon evangelicalism was profoundly influenced by the Awakening of 1857-60 and its aftermath. Sometimes called the Shop-Keepers' Revival, or the Prayer-Meeting Revival, its first characteristic was lay-led, interdenominational prayer meetings. These initial manifestations were followed by a great movement of the laicization and democratization of Anglo-Saxon Christianity. With D. L. Moody, the lay evangelist, as its most prominent individual figure, the movement

expressed itself in manifold outreach activities at home and overseas with social concern seen as an inevitable accompaniment. Participation or even exposure to such a vital form of evangelicalism frequently had an impact on Confessionalism, weaning it away from some of its distinctives, and bringing much of it back into closer contact with mainstream evangelicalism. But by 1880 evangelicalism was beginning to feel the pressure of liberalism. Not only was it an external threat this time, but many of the ablest of the younger generation, who had been raised in the evangelical milieu, were finding aspects of liberalism alluring. As a result, those who wished to retain evangelicalism had to mount their defenses. Strict Confessionalism did not appear to be the answer, so a new response to liberalism emerged which reflected the era from which it came to birth and which came to be known as Fundamentalism.

Fundamentalism existed in most Presbyterian denominations, including the Presbyterian Church in Canada. It valued the basic orthodoxy of the Westminster Confession of Faith and tended to think of the Bible in terms of verbal inspiration. The Fundamentalists were not stridently denominational - in fact, they often felt very much at home in the interdenominational world of evangelistic campaigns and Faith Missions - an ecumenicalism which they saw as a major opponent of liberalism. There was, however, one area of newness in the arsenal of the Fundamentalists, and that was premillennialism. Almost to a man, whether Presbyterian or not, they believed that a good deal of the lack of resistance to liberalism in evangelicalism

stemmed from such an optimistic, postmillenarian eschatology, with its attendant triumphalistic philosophy of history, that people could not even see danger when it stared them in the face, and thus they were overcome before they knew what had hit them. Premillennialism, on the other hand, developed a very literalistic hermeneutic which flowed naturally if not necessarily out of verbal inspiration. It posited a somber philosophy of history flowing on to the consummation, in which Christians ought to be prepared for the worst before Christ would return personally and manifest His victory in subduing all His enemies and theirs, and which explained the difficult days that evangelicalism was encountering.²⁵ By the 1880s the Age of Romanticism was largely gone, so the past was not seen as holding the pattern for the present. The hope lay in the future, which was more in keeping with mainstream evangelicalism, but in a future once removed, for it was only after the Second Advent that the victory of Christ would in any major way be manifested. There was very little 'now' in connection with the Kingdom of Christ; it was almost entirely 'not yet'. At the same time, the prospect of the near return of Jesus Christ bred apocalyptic hope which anticipated a pouring out of the Holy Spirit before the Second Coming.

Perhaps as good a place as any to start in considering this group of evangelical conservatives, who in the Presbyterian Church in Canada may best be described as proto-Fundamentalists, since they did not usually proceed to some of the more extreme positions with

which the substantive term is frequently associated, is Knox Church, Toronto. After all, Henry Martyn Parsons, surely one of the first premillenarians in Canadian Presbyterian history, came as minister to Knox in 1880, and among many emphases, may particularly be remembered for the way in which he drew the congregation into his concern for worldwide missions.²⁶ Then he was followed at the turn of this century by A. B. Winchester, a Chinese missionary working under the Presbyterian Church in Canada in Victoria, B.C., whose ministry was long remembered for its spiritual power. Although it may not be valid to draw too strict a division between Confessional and proto-Fundamentalist evangelical Presbyterians, it is instructive that while the former would be pinning their hopes on the Old Princeton, and later Westminster, Winchester was busily engaged in the years just prior to 1925 in participating in the establishment of a theological seminary in which premillennialism would be an article of faith, in Dallas, Texas.²⁷

To realize that this proto-Fundamentalist viewpoint was considered an authentic strand of Canadian Presbyterianism in 1925, it is only necessary to remind ourselves that on the fateful evening of June 9, the 'Rump' Assembly met at midnight in Knox, where for two hours the minister, the Orcadian Scot, John Gibson Inkster, commonly referred to as 'Jock', had been in his element leading a prayer meeting.²⁸ Knox's commitment to conservative theology in its Calvinistic expression was also evidenced when Inkster, seconded by the great missionary, Jonathan Goforth, who also had strong

Knox Church ties, moved that 'this assembly desires publicly to reaffirm its faith in our ancient and historic standards - The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Longer and Shorter Catechism.'²⁹ At the same time, to make its position unequivocal, Knox Session under Inkster had a Platform of Principles printed at the beginning of the Annual Report, sharpening up their commitment to certain beliefs which were the objects of contemporary theological debate.³⁰

Closely associated with Knox Church was Toronto Bible College, a type of educational institution which Fundamentalists saw as invaluable for the maintenance and propagation of orthodox Christianity and which had a special place in training candidates for the last, great, missionary thrust. John McNicol was principal of TBC from 1906 - 1946, and he continued to have a major influence for the remaining decade of his life, at least in part because of the serious ill health of his successor and fellow-Presbyterian, J. B. Rhodes. McNicol, a native of Ottawa, and graduate of the University of Toronto and Knox College, closely identified himself and his school with Knox Church, although he was always unquestionably his own man.³¹ He was assistant to A. B. Winchester until Winchester became Minister Extra Muros in 1920, and thereafter was a lifelong elder of Knox, virtually bringing TBC into its parish when it was moved to Spadina Avenue in 1928. McNicol was a Council Member of the China Inland Mission and the Sudan Interior Mission, two large Faith Missions, as well. Where he particularly showed his own mind

was in the way in which he rejected some of the more extreme forms of premillenarianism, expressed in his booklet, Fundamental But Not Dispensational, and perhaps most of all in his particular stress on the Holy Spirit. In this area McNicol insisted that all corporate decisions of student committees and the Board be arrived at by a consensus given by the Holy Spirit and that student conduct be governed not so much by comprehensive rules but sensitivity to the Spirit. In this way, McNicol was probably saying what Pentecostalism was emphasizing in another manner at the same time; namely, that error can best be defeated and truth maintained when there is a charismatic dimension to the witness. While the one stressed the power of the Spirit, the other emphasized the organic community produced and maintained by the same Spirit - both containing a reality which was seen as self-authenticating.

During the Inter-War period, with McNicol in full charge, Toronto Bible College rose to a full-time enrollment of 380. Over 200 students during McNicol's principalship proceeded to ordination, fulfilling the requirements for their respective communions, many of these being Presbyterians. So it is impossible to travel very far in Ontario Presbyterianism without meeting lay persons and ministers and their wives who did not have some training at TBC or OBC as it now is.³² And the same people very often express appreciation for Knox Church and identify themselves with its approach.

Another constituent in this proto-Fundamentalist conservatism was a contingent of Irish Presbyterians. Although a significant section of Irish Presbyterianism, particularly west of the Ban river, never seems to have been too enthusiastically evangelical, in the eastern part of the province of Ulster, conservative evangelicalism was preponderant from the 1840's to the earlier twentieth century. Gradually shifting from a form of Confessionalism to a more mainstream evangelical position in the later nineteenth century, the inroads of liberalism were evident even in eastern Ulster early in the twentieth century. Fundamentalism was present among some of the ministers of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, but the movement came into its own during the upheavals in Ireland associated with partition. A significant Christian Awakening developed among lay people in the early twenties led by P.W. Nicholson.³³ Many of these young converts migrated to Canada to escape the 'troubles' of their day, and in Toronto Cooke's Church became the spiritual home of many. In Vancouver, Dr. Esler, who had once been at Cooke's, drew many of these fellow-countrymen of his around him in Robertson Church. And in his report to the Record after Union, as he reported on virtually the only congregation to remain Presbyterian in Vancouver, he appropriately expressed his own and the congregation's sentiments: 'Our people feel that they must set themselves to Gospel Evangelism as never before.'³⁴ So it is not inappropriate that his daughter Pauline should have been deaconess at Knox, Toronto, for many years. On the east coast the same emphasis was represented in Nova Scotia by another Irishman, Joseph Cathcart, of whom it was said that 'he was a devout man.

As a pastor, he was faithful, and as a preacher, he was highly evangelical.³⁵ And in maintaining the succession, his daughters are married to Neil J. McLean, for many years minister of Sydney Mines, and to Wallace Whyte of West Hill, Toronto.

This same type of evangelical conservatism appeared at places on the Prairies as well, and with strong Bible School links. The district of Coleville in western Saskatchewan, which produced the Farris family and others of note in Canadian Presbyterianism, was largely maintained after Union by a lay preacher named Joseph Brent, who was a graduate of Moody Bible Institute. He was so highly regarded that in his old age he was ordained and appointed principal of the largely abortive Presbyterian Leadership Training School in Medicine Hat. Parkview Church, Saskatoon, was closely associated with the Saskatoon Bible Institute, with Mr. Nixon, the principal, being an active member of the congregation. And in the dust-bowl of southwestern Saskatchewan, in the hamlet of Pambrun, an Irish Presbyterian farmer named Dickson gave a building and land for what became known as the Millar Memorial Bible Institute.³⁶ One of the local families active in the Presbyterian congregation and the Bible Institute were the Theobalds, and when Clare McGill, the future missionary to Taiwan, arrived one year as a summer missionary, he met his future wife, Grace Theobald. And when the Dicksons began to move from Pambrun, as almost everyone would do, it was quite natural that they would be found worshipping in Bridlewood Church, Toronto, and Fairview Church, Vancouver.

A study such as this would have no claim to anything like completeness without some reference to the above-mentioned Fairview. A number of Presbyterians had been converted and revitalized in their faith by the evangelistic campaign conducted by French Oliver of Moody Bible Institute in Vancouver in 1917. Among the minorities that coalesced to form Fairview in 1925 were a number who had been caught up in the Oliver movement, and when they began to search for a minister they thought of a man they had come to know well. Walter Ellis was an Englishman who had graduated from Wycliffe, Toronto. He proceeded to graduate studies at the University of Toronto in Semitics where J. F. McCurdy invited him to become an associate at the School of Archaeology in Cairo.³⁷ An invitation, however, to teach at Latimer House, Vancouver, an Anglican theological college, claimed his interest. He taught for five years but was out of a job when Latimer House and St. Jude's College united to form the Anglican Theological College. This event transpired not long before the Oliver campaign, and when one of the outgrowths was the Vancouver Bible School, Ellis was asked to become principal. His Thursday night lectures on the International Sunday School Lesson were particularly famous, with Christian workers from across Vancouver in attendance, including many of the founders of Fairview. So they asked him to become a Presbyterian and become their minister, to which he consented, on condition that he could remain principal of VBS as well, thus holding both positions until his death in 1944. And the Church and the Bible School had an even closer relation than Knox, Toronto, and TBC.

Walter Ellis and John McNicol maintained very close ties. The Vancouver School followed the TBC curriculum and organizational structure, and Ellis was invited on one occasion to join the TBC faculty. Although a premillenarian, Ellis like McNicol opposed its dispensational form. He also found great satisfaction in close links with the China Inland Mission. Although many of the VBS graduates became missionaries, and particularly with the C.I.M., Ted McPhee was one who became a Presbyterian minister. And Mr. Ellis' son Ted, although not a VBS graduate, became an ordained Presbyterian minister and a missionary in Taiwan.

Just as evangelical Confessionalism had constant difficulty in maintaining itself in the Presbyterian Church in Canada, so did the proto-Fundamentalists, although they had no major links with other countries which would allow them to retreat at will. But when it dawned on them that whatever the maintenance of the Presbyterian Church in Canada had meant, it did not mean victory for proto-Fundamentalism, then they were a chastened and sorry lot indeed. In fact, after World War II, there were signs that this strand of Canadian Presbyterianism might be coming to the end of its days. Although the more intensely Fundamentalist Bible institutes were experiencing unprecedented growth in the post-War era, the quiet conservatism of McNicol, Ellis and Nixon seemed doomed. The Saskatoon Bible Institute went out of existence in the early fifties, Vancouver Bible School ceased to operate in 1956 - only to be resuscitated a couple of years later by the Swedish Baptists - and Toronto Bible College began a lengthy slide in enrollment. Some congregations began to have obvious

difficulty, notably Cooke's in Toronto and Robertson in Vancouver, which may at least in part indicate how difficult it was for staunchly conservative Irish Presbyterianism to turn cultural corners in a new land. The shift of many young potential leaders from this attachment to Bryden's almost charismatic neo-orthodoxy was also a severe blow. But the end was not yet, for in the 1950s and early 1960s, a new group of young conservatives began to emerge, most graduating from Knox. Canadian born, raised and educated, not unduly concerned about millenarianism, some of them have turned out to be among the most effective pastors in the Presbyterian Church in Canada. So the conservative tradition has continued.

In recent years, the two strands of conservative evangelicalism in the Presbyterian Church in Canada have been joined by a very small Charismatic presence. Although conservatism may appear relatively homogeneous, there are strains and stresses between the various conservative strands. One instance of this occurred in Fairview Church, Vancouver, in the 1970s, when a Confessional minister, through emphasizing his distinctives, quickly reduced the congregation to a fraction of its former self. Although the congregation is now decimated, it is much happier with a minister from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, much closer to its own brand of conservatism. At the same time, there are signs of a growing together among conservatives. Decline in millenarian interest on the part of some, a moderate and intelligent charismatic emphasis on the part of others, and a greater amount of ministerial

training in Canada, with the inevitable accompaniment of commitment to Canada and the Presbyterian Church in Canada, all point in this direction. Events at Cote des Neiges Church, Montreal, have pointed in this direction, until this quiet, conservative congregation in recent months has been thrust unexpectedly and uncharacteristically into the headlines of Canadian Presbyterianism. After the ministry of a Westminster Seminary man, and another from the Free Church of Scotland, a minister who had grown up in Fairview Church, Vancouver, was there for fifteen years. Now a young minister with his roots in the congregation of St. Andrew's Sherbrooke, has been called. As a graduate of Presbyterian College, Montreal, he might be thought of as one who would lead the congregation further and healthily in the direction of an indigenous Canadian conservative Presbyterianism. But this depends on the Presbytery of Montreal and the Judicial Commission of the General Assembly.

1. J. S. Moir, Enduring Witness: A History of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, p. 202.
2. D. C. Masters, Protestant Church Colleges in Canada, pp. 178, 179.
3. A. L. Farris, 'The Fathers of 1925', in Enkindled by the Word: Essays on Presbyterianism in Canada, 59-82.
4. J. H. S. Burleigh, A Church History of Scotland, pp. 286-308, 370-393.
5. Moir, op. cit., p. 210.
6. Burleigh, op. cit., pp. 307-333
7. S. D. Clark, Church and Sect in Canada.
8. J. C. Brauer ed., 'Confessionalism', The Westminster Dictionary of Church History, p. 225; A. L. Drummond, The Church in Victorian Scotland 1848-1874, pp. 1-34.
9. R. Preus, The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism, pp. 281-291.
10. Presbyterian Record, 1924, p. 245; 1925, p. 136; 1926, pp. 86, 92.
11. Ibid., 1925, pp. 28f.
12. E. Scott, 'Church Union' and the Presbyterian Church in Canada, pp. 107, 111, 112.
13. Record, 1923, pp. 91f, 344; 1924, p. 91.
14. Ibid., 1923, p. 7; 1925, p. 11; 1926, p. 16.
15. Ibid., 1925, p. 135.
16. Ibid. 1923, p. 327; S. G. Cole, The History of Fundamentalism, p. 54.
17. Ibid., 1923, pp. 154, 155.
18. Ibid., 1926, pp. 104, 105.
19. L. A. Loetscher, The Broadening Church: A Study of Theological Issues in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Since 1869, pp. 138f.
20. Moir, op. cit., p. 226.
21. N. B. Stonehouse, J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir, p. 424.

22. A. D. MacKinnon, The History of the Presbyterian Church in Cape Breton, p. 62.
23. Record, 1926, p. 274.
24. D. E. Weale, 'God's Exiles: A Theology for Immigrants', Papers of the Canadian Society of Church History, 1977, 27-40.
25. E. R. Sandeen, The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism 1800-1930; G. M. Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture, The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism: 1870-1925.
26. W. Fitch, Knox Church, Toronto: Avant-Garde, Evangelical, Advancing, pp. 33-43.
27. Ibid., pp. 44-56.
28. Record, 1925, p. 224.
29. Farris, op. cit.
30. Fitch, op. cit., p. 61
31. W. Charlton, 'Dr. John McNicol and Toronto Bible College', The Canadian Society of Presbyterian History Papers, 1977, 38-57.
32. At present fifty-one Presbyterian ministers have received some training at OBC.
33. S. W. Murray, W. P. Nicholson: Flame for God in Ulster.
34. Record, 1926, p. 233
35. MacKinnon, op. cit., p. 84.
36. S. J. Peeler, Links Make a Chain: 1932 - 1957, pp. 1-4.
37. B. Burkinshaw, 'Evangelicalism in the Mainline, Protestant Denominations of Vancouver, 1917-1970', Unpublished Paper, Graduate History Seminar, UBC, 1982.