

**Canadian Society of  
Presbyterian  
History**  
*Papers 2020*

**Canadian Society of  
Presbyterian  
History**  
*Papers 2020*

Edited by Jonathan N. Cleland &  
Stuart Macdonald

*Canadian Society of Presbyterian History:  
Papers 2020 (Volume 45)*

Published by the Canadian Society of Presbyterian History (CSPH) in Summer 2021

The papers featured in this publication were presented at the CSPH annual general meeting, held virtually on September 26, 2020. The recorded conference can be found at <https://cspH.ca/2020-conference-video>.

© Copyright is held by the authors.

Permission to reprint should be obtained from the appropriate author through the Canadian Society of Presbyterian History.

## Contents

<i>About the Canadian Society of Presbyterian History</i>	<i>iv</i>
<i>About the Authors of the 2020 Papers</i>	<i>iv</i>
<i>On the Passing of the Editor, Kate Revington</i>	<i>v</i>
Protest or Loyalty? The Background to the Declaration of Faith and Nation (1954) <i>Stuart Macdonald</i>	<i>1</i>
George L. Robinson and the History of Knox College <i>Robert Revington</i>	<i>15</i>
Young People and the Future of the Presbyterian Church: Rebuilding Post-Union <i>Rebecca Jess</i>	<i>27</i>
Major John Norton, Teyoninhokarawen: An Almost Forgotten Hero <i>Angus J. Sutherland</i>	<i>37</i>

## **About the Canadian Society of Presbyterian History**

*Dedicated to the Study of Presbyterian History and Reformed History*

The Canadian Society of Presbyterian History (CSPH) is a religion-centred learned society. It meets annually on the last Saturday of September. Since its founding in 1975, about 200 papers have been presented. A sampling is published on **csph.ca**.

Membership is open to individuals and institutions that share an interest in and a fascination for the study of Presbyterian and Reformed history.

## **About the Authors of the 2020 Papers**

**Stuart Macdonald**, CSPH president, teaches church history at Knox College, University of Toronto. He also directs graduate degree studies and serves as Vice Principal and Academic Dean. Stuart's special church research interests include 17th century Scotland and contemporary Canada, especially the Presbyterian Church. He and Brian Clarke authored *Leaving Christianity* (published in 2017). He is currently researching the history of the Presbyterian Church in Canada between 1945 and 1985.

**Robert Revington** is a doctoral candidate at Knox College in Church History, with two previous MAs from McMaster University. His doctoral research examines how the modern academic study of the Bible has been received in churches. He has received multiple scholarships from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and was the first-ever recipient of the John A. MacKenzie Scholarship from The Ralph M. Barford Foundation.

**Rebecca Jess** is a minister at Armour Heights Presbyterian Church in Toronto. Previous to this, Rebecca was the Co-Executive Director of the Cairn Family of Camps—a set of Presbyterian summer camps in the Muskoka region of Ontario. Christian camping is one of Rebecca's great passions, as well as working with children and youth. It was this interest in youth and camps that led Rebecca to researching and writing the paper in this collection, a paper originally submitted for a course taken as a part of her Master of Divinity program at Knox College.

**Angus J. Sutherland** is a retired minister of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. His family's service in Presbyterian ministry includes his grandfather, two uncles, and daughter. He has served as chair of the Committee on History and of the Advisory Committee for the Presbyterian Church Heritage Centre, the latter of which he continues to serve on. Angus's interest in history began with collecting the coinages of Canada and Scotland, and has continued with his strong interest in communion tokens and church medals. This is his third contribution to the Canadian Society of Presbyterian History papers.

## **On the Passing of the Editor, Kate Revington**

We wish to acknowledge with sadness the passing of our editor, Kate Revington (July 9, 1956–May 29, 2020). Kate was a graduate of the University of Windsor and Western University and worked as a professional editor. She completed the work on the papers for the 2019 conference, which were distributed last year. We are deeply grateful for her work and we continue to offer our condolences and prayers to the Revington family.

# Protest or Loyalty? The Background to the Declaration of Faith and Nation (1954)

Stuart Macdonald

A common narrative has developed to explain the origins of the 1954 “Declaration of Faith Concerning Church and Nation.” Canadian Presbyterians were watching what was going on in Europe. They saw the stand that the confessing Christians in Germany took in the Barmen Declaration—they were inspired—and this led to the Paris Deliverance which ultimately created the “Declaration of Faith Concerning Church and Nation.”<sup>1</sup> This allowed the Presbyterian Church in Canada for the first time since its creation in 1875 to have a united stance on church and state relations, resolving the compromise that was built into the formation of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, wherein one was allowed “full liberty of conscience” on this important issue. Canadian Presbyterians could now speak with one voice, and it was a voice that was ultimately one of protest; the church could now take the state to task when it defied what the church believed was essential to the gospel. This remains a common narrative yet it is incomplete, misleading, and flawed. Loyalty to the government at a time of war was as crucial a part of the story of what led to the Declaration of Faith as was the theme of resistance to governmental tyranny.

I stumbled into this subject while doing research for an introduction I was commissioned to write for the later confession *Living Faith*. The task was to set that confession in its historical context and this necessitated an investigation of the doctrinal development in the post-union period of the Presbyterian Church in Canada as well as the consideration of how we have told this story. In this development the “Declaration of Faith Concerning Church and Nation” (1954) was clearly central; yet the common narrative described above and what the documents suggest were substantially different. It thus seems appropriate to reconsider the early years of what became the Articles of Faith Committee, and in particular the background to the “Declaration of Faith Concerning Church and Nation.” A natural starting place is the theology of the denomination in 1925, and the place of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

## Westminster Confession of Faith Pre- and Post-Union

During the debate about the proposed 1925 church union, the Westminster Confession of Faith became one of the points around which many opposed to the 1925 church union project rallied. Throughout his book “*Church Union*” and *the Presbyterian Church in Canada* (1928), written shortly after the crucial division in the denomination in 1925, Ephraim Scott made the case that one of the things which was central to the Presbyterian Church in Canada was the Westminster Confession of Faith and the related Catechisms and other documents which developed in the mid-seventeenth century. Scott spoke of the Presbyterian Church as a voluntary group bound together by their adherence to these common things: “It is a voluntary fellowship. It consists of those who, of their own free will, have accepted the principles of that Church; its doctrine or statement of the teaching of Scripture as to ‘what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of

---

<sup>1</sup> The Paris Deliverance is named after the Presbytery of Paris, not the French city.

man.”<sup>2</sup> In other places he was more explicit that “doctrine” relates to the Westminster Confession of Faith. This was what united Presbyterians in Canada. This is what those leaving for the United Church of Canada had rejected; and by rejecting it, their entire actions, he argued, were illegal under church law. Of those opposed to church union, he writes:

Some studied their Church yet further, and found that Church pledged to the Word of God as the supreme Standard of faith and life, and to the great truths of that Word as set forth in the Subordinate Standards of their Church, the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, and they would not forsake a Church thus pledged to the truths that circle around the Cross, for a Church not pledged to any definite Christian truth.<sup>3</sup>

While powerful rhetorically, this claim was highly questionable: the “Twenty Articles of Doctrine (1925)” in the Basis of Union were clearly theological.<sup>4</sup> The notion of the United Church of Canada as a creedless church, as articulated here and elsewhere by Scott, is simply not accurate.

Nevertheless, this appeal to the credal purity of the Presbyterian Church in Canada in its adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith reinforced the arguments under the Overtoun case in terms of the original doctrine and purpose of the Presbyterian Church. Scott himself made direct reference to this British legal case in *“Church Union” and the Presbyterian Church in Canada* declaring that it “was one of the most important [legal cases] ever decided by a British court” noting that its judgment was directly relevant to the situation in Canada.<sup>5</sup> He cited with approval Lord Chancellor Halsbury’s judgement that

the identity of a religious community described as a Church must consist in the unity of its doctrine. Its creeds, confessions, formularies, tests, and so forth are apparently intended to ensure the unity of the faith which its adherents profess, and certainly among all Christian Churches the essential idea of a creed or confession of faith appears to be a public acknowledgement of such and such religious views as the bond of union which binds them together as one Christian community.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout the remainder of the chapter Scott quotes various opinions from the House of Lords, all taking the position that adhering to the original doctrines was central to the identity of a church.<sup>7</sup> In a sense, these arguments which argue for the Presbyterian Church in Canada and its adherence to the Westminster Standards as proof that it is the only legitimate Presbyterian voice were playing to the courts, in particular as a way of securing the property; however, once made, these argument took on a life of their own. Rhetoric sometimes becomes reality. Changing these doctrinal positions or the language in which they were expressed became more problematic after

---

<sup>2</sup> Ephraim Scott, *“Church Union” and the Presbyterian Church in Canada* (Montreal: John Lovell & Son, 1928), 16.

<sup>3</sup> Scott, *“Church Union” and the Presbyterian Church in Canada*, 105.

<sup>4</sup> Don Schweitzer, Robert C. Fennell, and Michael Bourgeois, eds., *The Theology of The United Church of Canada* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2019). The “Twenty Articles of Doctrine” (1925) are found on 345–350.

<sup>5</sup> Scott, *“Church Union” and the Presbyterian Church in Canada*, 81.

<sup>6</sup> Scott, *“Church Union” and the Presbyterian Church in Canada*, 81.

<sup>7</sup> Scott, *“Church Union” and the Presbyterian Church in Canada*, 81–86. At the conclusion, Scott argues that the 1875 union was different in that all four participants of that union “were identical in doctrine and polity.” He also makes it clear that the continuing Presbyterian Church in Canada, like the Free Church in Scotland in 1904, was thus “the rightful custodian of its own property and trusts,” 86.

1925 than would have been the case a decade previously. Scott, three years after union, catalogued “some needs” of the church. One thing Scott argues the church did not need was any change to its doctrine:

Nor does the Presbyterian Church need, as was so often heard in the twenty years’ conflict, a new theology or creed, a new system of doctrine or religious belief and teaching, for that to which she now stands pledged is the unchanging truth of God’s Word as that truth is summed up in her tried and tested Standards, the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, which she accepts and adopts, not because others in the past have accepted them, but because she believes them “to be founded on and agreeable to the Word of God.”<sup>8</sup>

Canadian Presbyterians were regularly reminded of this adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith each time a minister was ordained. The Basis of Union (1875) served as the preamble and in this the Westminster Confession was named as “the subordinate standard of this Church” with the qualification that it was “distinctly understood that nothing contained in the aforesaid Confession or Catechisms, regarding the power and duty of the civil magistrate, shall be held to sanction any principles or views inconsistent with full liberty of conscience in matters of religion.”<sup>9</sup> To this was added one further caveat, agreed to in 1889, which allowed “liberty of opinion in respect to the proposition, ‘A man may not marry any of his wife’s kindred nearer in blood than he may of his own.’”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the denomination may have been more closely tied to the Westminster Confession of Faith in 1925 than it had been in 1905, because of the very experience of union. There was thus no need for a committee of the church to be tasked with the purpose of discussing doctrinal issues.

## Crisis in World War II

The first cracks in this seeming consensus developed due to the experiences of the Second World War, though not in quite the way that is commonly remembered. The General Assembly in 1942 was crucial to the development of the “Declaration of Faith Concerning Church and Nation.” It was at this Assembly that two overtures related to church and state were received, as well as a memorial or petition from the Presbytery of Paris.<sup>11</sup> In response, a special committee, chaired by Dr. Stuart C. Parker, was created.<sup>12</sup> Overture 18 from the Synod of Hamilton and London (which included the Presbytery of Paris) addressed the issue of “The Civil Magistrate.” The overture which had been presented to the Synod by J.C. Jamieson and G.L. Douglas, contended that the existing situation—that is, a lack of clarity around church and state in how one accepted the Westminster Confession of Faith—was a challenge for many to “affirm their loyalty to the State; and the State on its part is left without assured knowledge of its powers and duties, under the Lord Jesus Christ, towards the Church.”<sup>13</sup> The redress that the overture recommended was that the

---

<sup>8</sup> Scott, “Church Union” and the Presbyterian Church in Canada, 132.

<sup>9</sup> Presbyterian Church in Canada, *Book of Forms*, 1954, 102.

<sup>10</sup> *Book of Forms*, 1954, 103. The reference is to the Westminster Confession of Faith, XXIV, 4.

<sup>11</sup> This document is variously referred to as a memorial, petition or deliverance.

<sup>12</sup> *Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada*, 1942. On the committee’s creation and membership, 26. The reference to the Memorial can be found on 22. On the overtures that were sent to the committee and creation of the committee, 19.

<sup>13</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1942, Overture 18, 112–113.

General Assembly “take steps to provide for 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 considerable debate (“long reasoning”) within the Synod, the overture had been forwarded to the General Assembly *simpliciter* (with one dissent to this motion).<sup>14</sup> Overture 24 from the Presbytery of Toronto was much longer, different in substance, and arrived with the unanimous support of the presbytery. In essence the complaint of this overture was that the state was calling its own worship services during the war and detailing the challenges that resulted. As the overture presented it, ministers were finding themselves in a bind: services of worship were being called by civil leaders and voluntary civic committees, with no previous consent from or consultation with the denomination, and with the expectation that ministers would participate. There was also a concern that officials in the denomination were involved in these committees, but without the authorization of the denomination. If these challenges were not enough, the content of the services was deemed to be problematic for Presbyterians as

the forms of religious worship prepared for these services, and the prayers suggested for use in them, which are prepared with a view to including Protestant and Catholic, Jew and Gentile, in one “religious” act, and which, therefore do not confess Jesus Christ, but are notable for the omission of all references to His Name.<sup>15</sup>

The drafters of the overture raised questions concerning church and state that arose out of the situation which had developed during the war, inquiring if the state could call the church to such services, what role these national committees had, the responsibility of the church to the state, and the approval of services which were “notable in their failure to confess Jesus Christ.”<sup>16</sup>

Because both of these overtures raised timely issues of church and state, they were put together and the special committee was sent away to come up with a suggestion as to what the church should do in response to the issues raised.<sup>17</sup> Given that it seemed to raise similar concerns, the petition from the Presbytery of Paris “re Declaration on the Doctrine of Liberty of Conscience and on the Lordship of Christ over the State” was also later referred to this committee.<sup>18</sup> Though the text of this memorial was not printed in the *Acts and Proceedings*, it later appeared as the centrepiece of the pamphlet “King of Kings” published by Gordon A Peddie. The petition speaks of the “confusion” around church and state issues in the Presbyterian Church in Canada because of the way liberty of conscience was accorded to this one section at the time of the 1875 union (although it suggests, logically, that it applies to all sections of the Westminster Confession of Faith), and asks that this “intolerable situation” be rectified by the General Assembly immediately by offering “a clear and authoritative declaration on the doctrine of liberty of conscience and on the power and duty of the civil magistrate under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.”<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1918, Overture 18, 112–113.

<sup>15</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1942, Overture 24, 117.

<sup>16</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1942, Overture 24, 117.

<sup>17</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1942, 19.

<sup>18</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1942, 22.

<sup>19</sup> Gordon A. Peddie, “*The King of Kings*”: *The Basis of Union of the Presbyterian Church in Canada and its relationship to the present need of the Church for a Confession of Faith in Jesus Christ as Lord of Church and State together with The Petition of a Memorial of the Presbytery of Paris to the General Assembly, 1942* (Toronto: Age Publications, n.d.). There is no pagination, but this document is on the first page.

Despite these diverse and challenging issues, the special committee came back with the suggestion that no action be taken. The committee began with a detailed response to all of the points raised in Overture 24, before turning to consider Overture 18 and the “Memorial” from the Presbytery of Paris. The committee recognized that each overture asked for a “Confession of Faith” dealing with issues related to the mutual duties and responsibilities of church and state, but argued against this as “no issue as to the relations of Church and State exists in this land”; further, the relations that do exist were “founded upon mutual respect and goodwill” so there was no need for a declaration other than the one found in the XXIII chapter of the Westminster Confession of Faith; and finally, that any statement would cause needless controversy, within the church and possibly between the civic authorities and the church.<sup>20</sup> The committee’s separate responses were each contested at the General Assembly, with a series of motions to table, amendments, and amendments to amendments. In the end, it was agreed, though not without some dissent, that “a competent committee” be established “to take this matter into consideration and bring in a finding at next Assembly.”<sup>21</sup> The importance of the 1942 Assembly is clear. It was a result of this Assembly that a special committee was struck to look at an issue of doctrine, in this case the continually thorny issue for Canadian Presbyterians of the relationship between church and state. It is also worth noting that, while it played a role, the Paris Deliverance was only one of the concerns related to church and state that appeared before this General Assembly. The importance of the two overtures at this Assembly, and the diverse and divergent concerns that surrounded them, needs to be remembered.

In their report to the next year’s General Assembly (1943) the special committee (Special Committee Re Overtures Nos. 18, 24 and Petition of Presbytery of Paris) continued the model that had already been established of dividing these concerns and dealing first with Overture 24, and then dealing with Overture 18 and the concerns of Paris presbytery. The concerns of Overture 24 were readily dealt with. The moderator, Dr. Norman MacLeod, was present and reported on a meeting which he and the leaders from three other Protestant denominations had with the Prime Minister in Ottawa. Dr. MacLeod reported

that they were very cordially received by the Prime Minister, and assurance was given by him that, while in the past there had been sent out forms [of worship] for special services which were admittedly unsatisfactory, the name of Jesus Christ having been nowhere mentioned in at least one of them, the same thing would not happen again, and that Church leaders would be consulted when such forms were being prepared in the future. The Prime Minister said he fully recognized the place of the Church in the national life.<sup>22</sup>

The report continues that “considerable discussion” on church and state relations took place, including the position that the church might find itself in “if at any time a government unfriendly to the Church might arise in Canada,” given that the church considered Christians to have “dual citizenship” as citizens of the state as well as members of the church; however, no resolution was

---

<sup>20</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1942, 42–44.

<sup>21</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1942. The debate was very confusing, and indeed is not always clear, 44–45. The one dissent recorded was on the basis that the commissioner regarded “the matter as divisive,” 46. It is also interesting to note that in the Report of the Board of Evangelism and Church Life and Work there is a recommendation which passed which notes that there “seems to exist, in the mind of some, doubt in regard to what the Gospel is” and that there be “a renewed study of the subordinate standards of our Church,” which then are specified as the Westminster Confession and the Catechisms, 47.

<sup>22</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1943, 130.

recorded. Instead, the committee turned after lunch to consider the other overture and the petition, and how this related to the Westminster Confession of Faith. The discussion was recorded as being wide ranging, dealing not only with the presenting issue, but broader issues of the Westminster Confession, its place in the church, the relationship between scripture and confessions, and other larger theological questions. In the end, the committee agreed on three things: 1) it was not the time to look at church and state issues, as any “pronouncements” would lead to “misunderstanding and confusion”; 2) these issues needed to be looked at in terms of all of the theological issues which required study; and, therefore, 3) the special committee recommended the establishment of “a larger committee, comprised of the ablest men in the Church” who would be given the task of “re-examining our whole confessional position as a church, with a view eventually to stating what we believe, as a Reformed Church, in language and concepts relevant to our own day and situation.”<sup>23</sup> Prior to making this suggestion, the committee noted that other churches, including the Church of Scotland, were working on these “larger issues.”<sup>24</sup> With seemingly little debate, the recommendations of the special committee were adopted, and continuing Presbyterians—for the first time since 1925—found themselves with a committee mandated to consider theology and doctrine.

## Steps Toward a Contemporary Confession

The “Special Committee on Overtures Nos. 18 and 24 and Petition from the Presbytery of Paris (1942)” organized themselves and set about the task they had been assigned. In the course of their work new tasks were assigned to them; in doing their work the theological divisions which existed in the denomination came to the fore. The first year (1944) was spent on organization. The committee suggested a “much smaller committee” representative of “the various views in regard the Church’s Confession assumed to exist” was needed. One task the committee somewhat tentatively suggested be undertaken was the preparation of a brief statement of faith, based on both scripture and the Westminster Confession.<sup>25</sup> The report of the committee concluded with the naming of the committee and with the proposal that the committee’s work be shared with the entire church.<sup>26</sup> At the next year’s General Assembly (1945) the energy of the committee was clear as a six page statement was presented with the following headings: The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God; The Doctrine of the Grace of God; The Christian Doctrine of Man; The Doctrine of the Person of Christ; The Doctrine of the Church; and, The Social Order. The committee’s report also included a discussion of the origins of their work and suggestions as to how they would proceed, the relationship of their work to the Westminster Confession, and areas they did not cover in their statement. The Assembly agreed to send the study it had prepared which it called the “Statement of Faith” down to the presbyteries for study and comment.<sup>27</sup> Comment was received, not all of which was welcomed by the committee. One concern the committee highlighted was feedback from those who had misunderstood the “*purpose and nature* of the Committee’s work.”<sup>28</sup> The

---

<sup>23</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1943, 131.

<sup>24</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1943, 52.

<sup>25</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1944, 57.

<sup>26</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1944, 58.

<sup>27</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1945. “A Statement of Faith” is actually the name given to the report itself, 301. For the complete report, 301–309. In the Assembly minutes, this is documented as the report of the “Special Committee on A Statement of Faith,” 61.

<sup>28</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1946, 334. Italics in the original. The committee’s report is on 334–336.

theological diversity of the denomination was also made clear. The committee noted two omissions—Baptism and the Holy Spirit—and also responded to the comment on the section on election, noting that it “required clarification” and suggested that they would work to rectify these and other issues. As well as recommending they continue this work, the committee also recommended a new name for itself: The Committee on Articles of Faith.<sup>29</sup>

The divisions the committee noted were only too real, not only within the denomination but within the committee itself. Attempts at clarification, particularly in regards to the doctrine of election, led to a much longer section on this topic being presented to Assembly in 1948, and an important dissent from within the committee which was appended to the report. Dr. William Stanford Reid protested that the committee’s work went beyond its mandate because the statement was “definitely not the doctrine held by the Westminster Confession of Faith” and further dissented that the proposed section was “anti-Reformed, and rejects the historic position of Presbyterianism.”<sup>30</sup> Not surprisingly, debate ensued when the report was presented to the General Assembly. Reid attempted to amend the standard motion to send the report down for study and comment by the presbyteries. He proposed instead that the report be sent back to the committee “with a strong reminder that the Westminster Confession of Faith is still the statement of this Church’s faith” and further that the committee’s report not be printed in the proceedings of the Assembly.<sup>31</sup> This amendment failed. Instead, the committee was reminded of its mandate, but the report was printed and distributed.<sup>32</sup> The divisions within the committee continued, even after the resignation of William Stanford Reid and F. Scott McKenzie preceding the 1949 Assembly. In its report to that Assembly, the committee proposed one section on Baptism, but two alternate interpretations of the Doctrine of the Church, reflecting divisions within the committee on this important matter.<sup>33</sup> Whether a contemporary statement of faith might have been produced despite these divisions had things continued remains unclear. An overture to the 1949 Assembly permanently changed the committee’s work and deliberations.

The overture from the presbytery of Montreal, Overture 18 “Re Church and State,” that appeared before the 1949 General Assembly created a major course correction to the committee’s work: instead of looking at the broad confessional position of the church, the overture asked the Assembly to narrow the committee’s focus to this one area. The overture, as all overtures do, began by offering a rationale for the need for a statement defining the relationship between church and state. It spoke of the world situation which caused “grave concern” to Christians in terms of church and state relations. The overture also affirmed that the lack of clarity around this issue within the Presbyterian Church in Canada was a problem rather than a strength. It noted “the doctrine of the relationship of Church and State is nowhere unambiguously set forth” by the denomination, and referenced the fact that the Articles of Faith Committee itself had noted this ambiguity in terms of Chapter 23 of the Westminster Confession of Faith in its 1945 report, arguing that it was “vital to the life and witness of our Church that our confessional position be clearly set forth for all men [sic] to see.”<sup>34</sup> A clear solution to this urgent issue was also suggested, namely for the committee to return to the work it had done in its 1945 report (the page numbers are even cited in the overture) and either produce a “declaratory clause” to resolve the “ambiguity” or “otherwise, to clarify, as

---

<sup>29</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1946, 335, 77.

<sup>30</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1948. The report, 129–137, with WS Reid’s dissent published, 137.

<sup>31</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1948, 86.

<sup>32</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1948, 87.

<sup>33</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1949, 310. The committee report, 310–317.

<sup>34</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1949, 110. The quotations are taken from various sections of the overture.

may seem best to the Venerable the General Assembly, our teaching and our faith in this most urgent matter.” It was a brilliant overture; it suggested the committee’s work had gone too far afield and it needed to focus on this one precise task. The notes in the overture, which was supported by the presbytery, indicate that the seconder of the overture was the Rev. Dr. W. Stanford Reid.<sup>35</sup> The result of this overture was significant. Beginning in 1950 and continuing over the next few years, the work of the Articles of Faith committee was essentially put on hold. Instead, a joint committee, comprised of members of the Articles of Faith committee and a subcommittee of the Board of Evangelism and Social Action, was formed to undertake the task of devising such a statement. It is the joint committee which worked on the section relating to church and state relations that eventually became a doctrinal statement.

## **The Work of the Joint Committee: Preamble, Articles & Declaration**

In 1951 the joint committee gave its first substantial report to the General Assembly. From this point until the vote on one of the documents they produced, the “Declaration of Faith Concerning Church and Nation,” the joint committee worked strenuously to resolve what they noted in 1951 was an urgent issue: the church had no position on church and state. They also suggested that the church had inappropriately used the concept of liberty of conscience.<sup>36</sup> In their work, the committee sent study documents to presbyteries, received feedback and commented on the feedback, and produced three documents: the Declaration, a Preamble to the Article of Faith, and Articles of Faith Concerning Church and Nation. All three documents were presented to the 1951 General Assembly, though the text of the Declaration does not appear alongside the other two documents as part of the committee’s report in the Acts and Proceedings (1951). The reason for this may be that the Declaration had been distributed during Assembly and was being actively discussed following the 1951 General Assembly.<sup>37</sup> The joint committee was working to create a “Declaratory Clause” and spoke directly to their intent. As they had indicated to Assembly in 1950, their intent was not to produce a “mere interpretative statement to be added” but to replace the section on church and state within the Westminster Confession. In the committee’s words:

What your Committee proposes is a *Declaration* which will, if and when adopted by the Church under the Barrier Act, supersede chapter XXIII of the Westminster Confession *and* that rider in the Basis of Union which at present exempts the chapter from the doctrinal standards of our Church. It would then be incumbent upon the Church to replace the words, “as adopted...in the Basis of Union”, in the subscription questions, with words signifying the new form of adoption.<sup>38</sup>

Knowing the importance of their work, the Committee urged the church to “move slowly in so decisive a matter” and suggested that the church not rush to approve the Declaration, but study it and study the Articles of Faith which they had drafted, as the Declaration “purports to a distilled essence of the larger work, in a form which, we trust, will be readily comprehensible.”<sup>39</sup> The Declaration was thus intended to be the doctrinal statement that replaced Chapter XXIII in the

---

<sup>35</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1949, 110.

<sup>36</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1951, 87.

<sup>37</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1951. The Preamble, 88–91; the Articles of Faith, 91–98.

<sup>38</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1951, 88.

<sup>39</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1951, 88–89.

Westminster Confession of Faith. The deeper exposition of the issues was to be found in the Articles and its Preamble.

The committee introduced the church to its thinking on these issues in their 1951 report in which they included the Preamble and the Articles of Faith Concerning Church and Nation.<sup>40</sup> The Preamble laid out the theology in relation to God's sovereignty as well as a history of this issue, as understood by Reformed Christians. What is striking is that the enemy in this telling was not Naziism but the Roman Catholic Church. Luther and Calvin are portrayed as speaking against these "Romanist" claims to meddle in politics: "The Romanist power system is a more absolute and comprehensive *totalitarianism* than any of its secular imitations in modern world politics."<sup>41</sup> While Calvin and Luther had worked to counter this, the joint committee criticized the "Westminster Divines" because they created a problem due to their "disastrous unguardedness" in the third clause of the XXIII chapter by seemingly giving the civil magistrate a role in church conduct. After quoting this section of the Westminster Confession, the committee continued,

Political Totalitarianism is a form of The Church-and-State problem which has emerged in our century, and renders the cited unguardedness of the Westminster statement a most urgent matter for rectification. For example, whenever the German Nazi or Soviet Communist powers have sought to domesticate the Church to their totalitarian politics, they have argued their authority on just such terms as the citation [from the Westminster Confession of Faith] above.<sup>42</sup>

While acknowledging the contemporary challenge, the joint committee nonetheless continued to argue for deeper roots: "The modern pagan politicians learned this demonic vice of power-lust from the ecclesiastical model of all totalitarianism, the Romanist Papacy."<sup>43</sup> This was thus not a new issue as much as a continuation of a much longer struggle. The committee cited historical examples to show Reformed individuals resisting tyranny, but raised the question of whether the church as an institution had the right and responsibility to politically or even militarily work to or encourage others to stand up to an "evil government." The committee saw the dilemma as complicated by the two temptations either, on the one hand, to over-value the institutional church and thus transform a fellowship with Christ into "an ecclesiastical or political institution" or, on the other hand, to under-value the duties of citizenship.<sup>44</sup>

After stating the theology and history as the root of the problem in the Preamble, the Articles of Faith Concerning Church and Nations themselves turned to more specific issues such as citizenship, economics and politics. All were grounded in an understanding of scripture; indeed, the Appendix to the report offered a word-study of the words used related to power in the New Testament.<sup>45</sup> The sovereignty of God over all life was a major theme throughout, applying to economics as well as politics, and even to specific issues such as conscription. After rejecting the notion that the gospel was only spiritual and thus governments can determine what to do with other aspects of our lives, the committee noted: "Hence our decisions upon such questions as national conscription must be made solely in obedience to the will of our Lord."<sup>46</sup> (Precisely how this was

---

<sup>40</sup> This is the only time the Preamble appears. The Articles were reprinted in the 1952 report.

<sup>41</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1951, 90.

<sup>42</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1951, 90–91.

<sup>43</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1951, 91.

<sup>44</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1951, 91.

<sup>45</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1951, 98.

<sup>46</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1951, 94.

to be determined was not spelled out.) The church and Christians were engaged in the world. Christians were citizens in particular nations. Civil authorities had the right to keep order through police, to tax citizens, to conscript them into armies, and to subject them to other “lawful requirements.”<sup>47</sup> Loyalty was also owed to the church, and it was recognized that governments might make unlawful and unjust demands on citizens. The responsibility of those in power to listen to the church was clearly stated: “its duty to listen whenever a minister of Christ’s Word or any other member of the Church addresses its representatives in the Lord’s Name, reminding it, for example, of righteousness, temperance and judgment to come.”<sup>48</sup> If it was the duty of those in authority in civil governments to listen to the church, it was also the responsibility of the church to speak truth to the powers. But what if those in power refused to listen? The Articles of Faith addressed the difficult issues of “False Churches and Unjust Governments”; “When the Church Invalidates Her Relationship to the State”; and, “When a Civil Regime Invalidates itself.” In the latter case, the joint committee cautiously allowed that there might be situations where the church might be “obliged even to encourage and aid rebellion against the totalitarian regime.”<sup>49</sup> Resistance and even the support of rebellion were noted as possibilities. At the same time, the way in which “totalitarian” was framed needs to be recognized. The committee spoke against those who would “usurp or oppose the throne of Christ’s unique totalitarian authority” and included not only civil governments but also noted the “totalitarian pretensions of the Papacy.”<sup>50</sup> While new issues were emerging on the world stage, Presbyterians continued to note older foes.

The issues the joint committee raised in these documents created a considerable response from the church. The committee took these responses seriously and revised the Declaration to respond to some of these comments and criticisms.<sup>51</sup> At the same time the committee noted that they had not had the time to make major revisions to the 1951 draft of the Articles of Faith, but had reprinted them with only minor changes in the 1952 report.<sup>52</sup> The committee highlighted and responded to three major criticisms. The first was that their statements had been too Christological and not sufficiently Trinitarian, and this was addressed in general comments, as well as in their response to the major question “Is Jesus Christ Creator?”<sup>53</sup> A second major question was “The Extent of Christ’s Lordship.”<sup>54</sup> Finally the joint committee responded under the question “May the Church aid rebellion?” to concerns raised on this issue.<sup>55</sup> The committee continued to be cautious. The committee raised the question of what a nation even was given the creation of the United Nations, which it noted has the “aim at some kind of world government,” and whether “all active resistance may not be regarded as dangerously close to civil rebellion.” Discussions of “one world” had implications, the committee suggested, for any consideration of “national sovereignty”:

If a United Nations Council, recognized as having any real validity, outlaws war as a means of settling international disputes, then where is the war that is not rebellion? This is a factor of the problem

---

<sup>47</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1951, 96.

<sup>48</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1951, 97.

<sup>49</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1951, 97.

<sup>50</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1951, 97.

<sup>51</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1952, 155. For the report of the joint committee, 152–166.

<sup>52</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1952, 155, 159. The discussion is confusing, and it is not clear how many (or what) changes were made.

<sup>53</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1952, 156.

<sup>54</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1952, 157.

<sup>55</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1952, 159.

which we must earnestly consider before we make too easy a distinction between external and internal tyranny.<sup>56</sup>

The possibility of opposing unjust regimes was kept as a viable option by the committee. At the same time, the way in which this area received so much comment from the church and the way in which the committee begins to address the issue, bears close attention. It is worth noting the committee's response to "the most difficult of all questions referred back" to them, which, before commenting upon, they summarized as:

"Is it true to the witness of Scripture that the Church, as Church, will ever find herself obliged to encourage and aid rebellion?" Now, whatever may be one's theological pre-suppositions, however strongly one may be prejudiced by his present understanding of Scripture, a quick and easy answer in the negative is not a becoming answer to so deep and complex a problem as this—not in our age which has seen in all its brutal and devilish force the threat of totalitarian tyranny.<sup>57</sup>

Put simply, the committee was saying: "Don't just say 'No.' Think first. What have we just seen in our world!" That Canadian Presbyterians needed such a reminder within seven years of the end of World War II is worth pausing and considering. Loyalty, not protest (let alone rebellion), remained the default position. Notwithstanding this and the other questions raised by the church, the joint committee forged ahead with their work, outlining at the conclusion of their report the next steps as they prepared to share their revised work with the presbyteries.

## **The "Declaration of Faith Concerning Church and Nation"**

The culmination of the joint committee's work over the next two years came when a revised text of the "Declaration of Faith Concerning Church and Nation" was presented to the 1954 Assembly. This was a major source of debate at the General Assembly that year. Changes to the text were made during debates during the Assembly, and the final vote was not without opposition or dissent. The Declaration nevertheless passed at the General Assembly; indeed the Declaration was passed as an interim statement, and it came into force in 1954, even while the result of the votes under the Barrier Act were being awaited.<sup>58</sup> In 1955 the report on the votes under the Barrier Act were reported (28 presbyteries approved, 8 disapproved), and the Assembly voted again to approve the "Declaration of Faith Concerning Church and Nation."<sup>59</sup> The passage of the Declaration of Faith did not end the debate; indeed, at least three overtures in 1955 were related to issues of church and state. The presbytery of London noted their belief that the world situation made matters of the relationship between church and state to be a matter of "grave concern"; yet, while acknowledging the work already done, suggested that the church take steps to "ensure the further study and revision of the 'Declaration on Church and Nation' thus keeping the matter before the Church."<sup>60</sup> The Synod of Toronto and Kingston asked the General Assembly to consider "the implications" of Chapter XXXI of the Westminster Confession of Faith, which dealt with Synods and the civil

---

<sup>56</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1952. Report, 159.

<sup>57</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1952, 159.

<sup>58</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1954. The debate extended over several seditious. The motion is on 65; the dissent is recorded on 66.

<sup>59</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1955, 288, 46–47. Dissent, 90–91.

<sup>60</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1955, Overture 14, 330–331.

magistrates.<sup>61</sup> Of greatest significance was the overture from East Toronto presbytery. (East Toronto had voted for the Declaration, but with dissents registered.) While recognizing the validity of the Declaration, the presbytery raised the issue of its status, specifically challenging whether it should be considered a subordinate standard and suggesting it be considered a “comment upon Chapters XX, XXIII and XXXI of the Westminster Confession of Faith.”<sup>62</sup> The presbytery questioned whether it had over-reached as it “contains no affirmation of its relative character but purports to be a definitive statement of doctrine to be subscribed in the letter” thus, the overture contended, infringing on “the Christian liberty now enjoyed.”<sup>63</sup> The overture also asked that the Articles of Faith Committee return to their task of developing a “complete Declaration of Faith” with the idea that this would be incorporated into it.<sup>64</sup> The status of the Declaration thus emerged as an issue, something not lost at the time: one member of East Toronto presbytery, Stuart Coles (who had been a member of the Articles of Faith Committee) dissented from the overture as it “constitutes a misunderstanding of the 1954 Assembly’s action.”<sup>65</sup> As Peter Bush has recently outlined in a fine article in *Presbyterian History*, the argument now concerned how one subscribed to these confessions of faith and what it meant to subscribe to a confession, as well as to the actual words used in the vows taken during the ordination service.<sup>66</sup> Despite the intentions of the joint committee clearly stated in its report in 1951, the Declaration did not replace the XXIII chapter or end the discussion on church and state relations. The joint committee had been very clear: the Declaration was to replace the XXIII chapter of the Westminster Confession of Faith, and thus there would be no need for any reference to “liberty of conscience,” yet somehow along the way this had been lost. The church now began to argue about what precisely it had just done.

## Conclusion

We have considered in detail the background to the “Declaration of Faith Concerning Church and Nation.” The importance of the 1942 Assembly cannot be underestimated. It was after this Assembly and the multiple issues related to church and state which were raised that the church for the first time since 1925 established a committee to deal with issues of doctrine, and that committee then took on the larger task of developing a contemporary statement of faith, and was well engaged in that role until the overture from the Presbytery of Montreal in 1949 re-routed the committee’s work back to the one component of church and state relations. It was the joint committee which worked on and developed, not only the “Declaration of Faith Concerning Church and Nation” (which in an edited form passed Assembly in 1954 and 1955), but also a Preamble and Articles of Faith that give us a deeper understanding of what the committee thought. Much of this background remains hidden; or, hidden in plain sight. The literature that exists includes many (though not all)

---

<sup>61</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1955, Overture 37, 343–344.

<sup>62</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1955, 288, the report on Remittances notes East Toronto passing this with dissents. Overture 30, 340.

<sup>63</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1955, Overture 30, 340

<sup>64</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1955, Overture 30, 340.

<sup>65</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1955, Overture 30, 340.

<sup>66</sup> Peter Bush, “The Church, Its Subordinate Standards, and the Ordination Questions,” *Presbyterian History* 64, no. 1 & 2 (Spring & Fall 2020): 1–5. Peter Bush is responding to another overture, Overture 46, sent by the Presbytery of East Toronto to the same General Assembly. The relationship between these two overtures deserves further consideration.

of these details. Yet, the dominant narrative, one which focuses on protest and the role of the Paris Deliverance and which dramatically simplifies these developments, remains.

In *Enduring Witness*, for example, John Moir placed the Confessing Church and the Paris Deliverance at the centre of this narrative, suggesting that the issue of liberty of conscience on matters related to church and state “was sidestepped for the next half century, until the plight of the Christian churches in Nazi Germany led the Presbytery of Paris to submit a memorial to the General Assembly of 1942.” While noting the overture from the Synod of Hamilton and London, it is the Paris Deliverance which continues to be portrayed as the stimulus to the creation of the committee in 1943, which after the war led to the text of the Declaration of Faith being adopted in 1955.<sup>67</sup> While noting both overtures to the 1942 General Assembly in his article on the Declaration of Faith, William Klempa nonetheless stresses the key role of the Paris Memorial, and of the theological contributions of W.W. Bryden and others, as they sought to respond to the experience of the Confessing Church in Germany.<sup>68</sup> Speaking directly to the Declaration of Faith’s contribution, Klempa suggests it arose “in response to a situation which had arisen in Germany” and notes the contribution specifically of Bryden and Gordon Peddie.<sup>69</sup> This tendency to note both overtures, but consider the Paris Memorial as the key event, is also evidenced in *An Historical Digest of the Work in Articles of Faith, 1942–1967*, the history written detailing the work of this important committee.<sup>70</sup> The most thorough discussion of the 1942 Assembly and the origins of the discussion can be found in A. Donald MacLeod’s article on “Ascendent Barthianism” but the transition to the joint committee after the 1949 Assembly receives less attention, and the theological quarrels of the late 1940s remain the primary lens through which the events are considered.<sup>71</sup> Canadian Presbyterians continue to tell a simple narrative of protest against potential totalitarian regimes leading to the development of the Declaration of Faith. A straight line continues to be drawn from the Barmen Declaration to the Paris Deliverance and then to the Declaration of Faith. As we have seen, the story is far more complex. Expressions of loyalty were as important as indications of protest.

Why have we told the story in this manner? This is a challenging question. In the documents themselves I have discovered no reference to the Barmen Declaration. This may have influenced Gordon Peddie and others, but I have not discovered any citation of this being made to the church at large in the reports made to the General Assembly. These concerns may lie deep in the

---

<sup>67</sup> John Moir, *Ending Witness: A History of the Presbyterian Church in Canada*, 3rd ed., (Burlington: Eagle Press, 2004), 254.

<sup>68</sup> William J. Klempa, “The Declaration of Faith Concerning Church and Nation Revisited,” in *Exploring the Faith: Essays in the History and Theology of the Reformed Tradition*, ed. William J. Klempa (Toronto: Clements Academic, 2009), 85–114. The overtures are referenced, 86–87, but the article later places a stress on the Paris Memorial, 88, 90–96.

<sup>69</sup> Klempa, “The Declaration of Faith Concerning Church and Nation Revisited,” 106.

<sup>70</sup> William J. Klempa, *An Historical Digest of the Work in Articles of Faith, 1942–1967* (Don Mills: Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1968). This can be seen throughout the document, but is notable on p. 2 where the Petition of the Presbytery of Paris and the overture from the Synod of Hamilton are noted as crucial in the creation of the committee, with no reference to the other overtures related to church and state which appeared at the 1942 Assembly.

<sup>71</sup> A. Donald MacLeod, “The Formation of the Articles of Faith Committee: Ascendent Barthianism in the 1940s in the PCC,” CSPH papers 2004, 11–20. Much of the same material is covered in the biography of William Stanford Reid: A Donald MacLeod, “A Confessional Canadian Presbyterian, 1941–1951: Ascendent Barthianism and the Limits of Ecumenism,” in *W. Stanford Reid: An Evangelical Calvinist in the Academy* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2004), 92–114.

background but the influence is less clear. What is surprising is other influences and statements (anti-United Nations; anti-Roman Catholic) that are in these reports. Second, part of the confusion lies in the documents themselves. What is worth noting is that within the reports to the General Assembly the story is told in different ways at different times. The joint committee highlighted the Paris Deliverance over both of the overtures in 1942 in its report in 1954 and this 1954 version seems to have been the narration which has been consulted.<sup>72</sup> The Knox College copy of the *Acts and Proceedings* for that year has been so well used that researchers are directed to a photocopy of the relevant section of the report, because this part of the bound copy is in such poor shape due to multiple photocopying. This is not true of any other year of the joint committee's work. The committee's own desire to highlight the Paris Deliverance may lie behind how we have told the story. This would emphasize more the theme of "protest," of a church refining its doctrine so it can take a stand against totalitarianism. As the late 1950s moved into the 1960s and 1970s this was an appealing theme! However, as I have attempted to demonstrate, expressions of loyalty were every bit as central to the determination of the church to re-think its position on church and state issues in the midst of World War II. Some Presbyterians may have been worried about a totalitarian state demanding loyalty from the church; however, to others, this was a distant possibility. Their concern was quite different. They were worried that the state was calling religious services, and ones including non-Christian prayers and also included Roman Catholics. And, they were concerned that they were not able to adequately express their loyalty to the nation. Loyalty and protest; both of these themes lie behind the creation of the "Declaration of Faith Concerning Church and Nation," the creation of a joint-committee of the entire church, and not exclusively the work of the Articles of Faith Committee.

---

<sup>72</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1954, 242. The report notes the 1949 overture from Montreal; it then references "earlier documents from the Presbytery of Paris in 1939 and in 1942."

# George L. Robinson and the History of Knox College

## Robert Revington

In 1915, Knox College—the Presbyterian Church in Canada’s theological college in Toronto—opened its current building near the centre of the University of Toronto campus.<sup>1</sup> On 30 September of the same year, Knox hosted a formal Dedication for the new building and invited many scholars and dignitaries. This evening should have been a celebratory moment in the college’s history and under ideal circumstances it would have also attracted positive publicity for the College. Alas, that was not the case. The festivities were diminished by a less positive story. Dr. George L. Robinson, a former Knox College professor, had returned to the college for the festivities. That same night, he had a heated exchange with some members of the Toronto media, who put him in the unenviable position of having to justify why his home country was not at that time fighting in the Great War. Indeed, the United States did not join Canada and the British Empire in the war until 1917. When Robinson defended American neutrality, his response provoked great anger. The resulting media attention overshadowed the formal Dedication of the new college building.

This study will cover the history of Robinson’s relationship with Knox College. Robinson’s interactions with the media defined the opening of the current Knox College building because at that time patriotic sentiments from the war overpowered an event as innocuous as the opening of a new theological college building. Robinson was well-respected in his time at Knox, although the fact that he was an American had also created a minor controversy when he was first hired.

### The Life of George L. Robinson

George L. Robinson (1864–1958) was a renowned biblical scholar.<sup>2</sup> A brief summary of his life and achievements is in order.

Robinson grew up in West Hebron, New York. He earned his undergraduate degree at Princeton. Then, he taught at a Protestant school in Beirut, Lebanon, from 1887 to 1890, mostly teaching English. During one of his vacations in Egypt, he met Jessie Harvey and the two eventually married. He later returned to Princeton for a Masters degree and then completed a doctorate in Berlin. Following that, Robinson taught at Knox College from 1896 to 1898. Subsequently, he had a successful career at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, although those years were also marked by two family tragedies; one of his daughters tragically died of a sickness and his first wife died when he was in his fifties.

---

<sup>1</sup> For the most detailed historical studies of both Knox College and the Presbyterian Church in Canada, see Brian J. Fraser, *Church, College, and Clergy: A History of Theological Education at Knox College, Toronto, 1844–1994*, McGill-Queen’s Studies in the History of Religion 20 (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995); John S. Moir, *Enduring Witness: A History of the Presbyterian Church in Canada*, 3rd ed. (Burlington: Eagle Press, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> For the biographical discussion which follows, see George L. Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson: A Short Story of a Long Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1957). For another brief biographical discussion, see John S. Moir, *A History of Biblical Studies in Canada: A Sense of Proportion*, Biblical Scholarship in North America 7 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 19.

In his academic career, Robinson worked on the *Abingdon Bible Commentary*.<sup>3</sup> He is also noted for his contributions to biblical archaeology. Of particular note, in 1900, he famously discovered a “High Place” (or sacrificial site) in Petra. Later, he visited the Cave of Machpelah in Palestine, where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are said to have been buried in Genesis.

## **Robinson’s Autobiography in the Context of Knox College History**

Robinson’s 1957 autobiography (*Autobiography of George L. Robinson: A Short Story of a Long Life*) deserves more attention in reconstructions of the history of Knox College. It has been overlooked in the scholarly literature. It should be noted that I discovered Robinson’s autobiography almost by accident at the library of McMaster University in Hamilton. Later, I discovered that Knox College’s own library did not have a copy of it. For that matter, I could not find a copy anywhere in the University of Toronto library system, although the McLelland Library at Presbyterian College in Montreal does have one. Given that Robinson wrote his autobiography almost fifty years after he taught at Knox, it was not hard to see how it could have slipped through the cracks. Neither Brian J. Fraser’s book *Church, College and Clergy: A History of Theological Education at Knox College, Toronto, 1844–1994* nor John S. Moir’s *Enduring Witness: A History of the Presbyterian Church in Canada* reference Robinson’s autobiography as a source.<sup>4</sup> Although Robinson taught at Knox College near the beginning of his career and for only two years, I concluded that I may have stumbled upon neglected source material about the history of Knox College—and by extension, the Presbyterian Church in Canada itself.

## **Robinson Comes to Knox College**

In his autobiography, Robinson recalls that in 1896, he returned to the United States after completing his theological education in Berlin. He writes: “Returning to America, after having spent two years in Germany, many good Presbyterians assumed that I had probably lost my fundamentals and had gone over to the higher criticism.”<sup>5</sup> Despite this concern, he was soon hired as the pastor at Roxbury Presbyterian Church in Boston. He had barely started at Roxbury Presbyterian when he began to receive job offers of a different nature from two institutions; he recalls that “both Knox College, Toronto, and McCormick Seminary of Chicago, were in need of professors of Hebrew and by telegraph and personal visitation I was offered a professorship.”<sup>6</sup> He adds that he had previously spent a week in Toronto for a conference “without any thought of their desire that I might fill their vacancy.”<sup>7</sup> At that time he had a personal dislike of the city of Chicago, and told a McCormick professor named A. S. Carrier, “I’ll go wherever the Lord calls me, but I will never go to Chicago!”<sup>8</sup> This reply was admittedly flippant and not entirely serious.<sup>9</sup> Even so, although Robinson was a world-class scholar on Isaiah, he apparently did not share Isaiah’s gift

---

<sup>3</sup> See George L. Robinson, “Ecclesiastes,” in *Abingdon Bible Commentary*, eds., Frederick Carl Eiselen, Edwin Lewis, and David G. Downey (New York: Abingdon Press, 1929), 614–621.

<sup>4</sup> Fraser, *Church, College, and Clergy*; Moir, *Enduring Witness*.

<sup>5</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 50.

<sup>6</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 51.

<sup>7</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 51.

<sup>8</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 51.

<sup>9</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 51.

for prophecy since—after teaching at Knox—he would eventually live almost sixty years in Chicago. In August 1896, he ended his time at Roxbury Presbyterian Church in Boston and accepted the position at Knox College, and admitted, “few men have so short a pastorate as I had at Roxbury.”<sup>10</sup>

In his autobiography, Robinson writes:

Knox College in 1896 was the principal theological seminary in Canada. Sir William Mortimer Clark, who became later the lieutenant governor of Ontario, was the chairman of the Board of Managers; and the Very Reverend Dr. William Caven was the highly honored Principal. Both of these men were recognized generally as representatives of Christian faith.<sup>11</sup>

Elsewhere, Robinson describes Principal Caven (after whom the Knox College Library is now named) as both a “friend” and “one of the most capable administrators and spiritual counsellors of the Presbyterian Church in the Dominion.”<sup>12</sup>

Robinson’s hiring at Knox was not entirely smooth. Brian J. Fraser notes that at Knox, Robinson replaced Professor Robert Yuile Thomson after the latter’s tragic early death; Thomson was only in his thirties when he died.<sup>13</sup> Thomson’s death roughly coincided with the retirement of William Gregg.<sup>14</sup> When Robinson and Hope W. Hogg of Oxford were nominated by the college board before General Assembly, Fraser records that “a storm of criticism appeared in letters and editorials in the weekly church press.”<sup>15</sup> *The Presbyterian Record* noted that there was resistance to these appointments because Knox was hiring “strangers” from abroad rather than well-qualified Canadian graduates of Knox College itself.<sup>16</sup> While Robinson (the American) was approved and warmly welcomed, Hogg’s nomination was replaced with one for James Ballantyne—a former Knox graduate originally from Stratford, Ontario who, like Robinson, had also spent time at Princeton and in Germany.<sup>17</sup> After the initial controversy, it may be observed that Robinson’s arrival at Knox was covered in *The Expository Times*.<sup>18</sup> The article described him and James Ballantyne as being “in the very springtide of life and sensitive to the religious movements of our time.”<sup>19</sup> Robinson’s inaugural address at Knox was cited favourably for showing that one could use higher criticism but still hold traditional viewpoints.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the initial controversy, Robinson moved into a comfortable life as a scholar in Toronto. In his autobiography, Robinson gives his precise address from 1896: 619 Spadina Avenue.<sup>21</sup> He writes that the family’s hostess was one Mrs. Whiteside, “a widow with two children, a boy and a

---

<sup>10</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 52–53. Even so, the church “consented” to his departure on good terms (53).

<sup>11</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 54.

<sup>12</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 137.

<sup>13</sup> Fraser, *Church, College, and Clergy*, 97–99.

<sup>14</sup> Fraser, *Church, College, and Clergy*, 99.

<sup>15</sup> Fraser, *Church, College, and Clergy*, 99.

<sup>16</sup> *Presbyterian Record*, May 1896, quoted in Fraser, *Church, College, and Clergy*, 100.

<sup>17</sup> Fraser, *Church, College, and Clergy*, 100–101.

<sup>18</sup> “Notes of Recent Exposition,” *The Expository Times* 8, no. 5 (1897): 193–201.

<sup>19</sup> “Notes of Recent Exposition,” 197.

<sup>20</sup> “Notes of Recent Exposition,” 197. See also George L. Robinson, “The Place of Deuteronomy in Hebrew Literature,” *Westminster* 1, no. 5 (1896): 201.

<sup>21</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 54.

girl in their early teens”; Mrs. Whiteside would live to be more than 100.<sup>22</sup> Robinson’s house on 619 Spadina is no longer standing, but it was in the general vicinity of where the University of Toronto Athletic Centre on 55 Harbord Street now stands, near Graduate House. It would have been on the opposite side of the street as the current Knox Presbyterian Church building, which stands on 630 Spadina Avenue. It is worth mentioning, given a detail in the later controversy, that by the time Robinson returned to Toronto for the 1915 event, the street had changed; Knox Presbyterian Church was not on Spadina when Robinson lived there two decades earlier. At any rate, Robinson also recalls: “The College was located two blocks from us in a large and imposing building situated in the very middle of broad Spadina Ave.”<sup>23</sup> This is a reference to the old Knox College (now the Daniels Building) at 1 Spadina Crescent; it was the college’s home from 1875 to 1915.<sup>24</sup> Robinson writes: “Each professor had his own lecture room, with an anteroom for his own personal convenience.”<sup>25</sup>

Robinson’s autobiography provides valuable testimony about the formal culture and etiquette of Knox College and the Toronto of this era. Relationships between students and faculty were different then than they are today, as seen in Robinson’s statement: “Professors were not expected to speak to their students when they met either in the halls of the College or on the street.”<sup>26</sup> Yet Robinson compares this to how Francis L. Paton—a former Knox graduate and eventual president of Princeton—“found it somewhat irksome to be expected to say ‘Good Morning’ to a student even in Princeton.”<sup>27</sup> Likewise, he shared his memories of the etiquette of home dinners he was invited to while at Knox—including one particular occasion hosted by Sir William Mortimer Clark and his wife.<sup>28</sup> At one of these dinners, when Robinson offered to help Mrs. Clark into the dining room, she taught him a point of etiquette he had never heard before: “In Britain a married man never offers his *left* arm to anyone but his wife.”<sup>29</sup> Apparently, this stipulation did not affect his *right* arm, which she took.<sup>30</sup>

Robinson writes that Knox’s academic year was six months—from October to April—and he liked the fact that this gave time for his wife Jessie and daughter Henrietta to visit family in Cairo in 1897.<sup>31</sup> That summer, he spent a few months visiting Leiden, Paris, and London.<sup>32</sup> While in London, he encountered an unnamed “close relative” of Winston Churchill.<sup>33</sup> He also met the Free Church minister Sir William Robertson Nicoll, and introduced himself as a Knox College professor; they made arrangements for Robinson to print a series of articles on the dating of the Book of Deuteronomy for a periodical that Nicoll edited.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 54.

<sup>23</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 54.

<sup>24</sup> The college returned to this site for its 175th Anniversary Convocation in 2019.

<sup>25</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 54.

<sup>26</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 54.

<sup>27</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 54.

<sup>28</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 55.

<sup>29</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 55.

<sup>30</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 55.

<sup>31</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 55.

<sup>32</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 55–56. He had the frightening experience of having his daughter go missing in London for a short time.

<sup>33</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 56.

<sup>34</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 56–57.

After that summer, Robinson reflects that, “my second year at Knox College was perfectly satisfactory, as was the first.”<sup>35</sup> He made a notable contribution to the College at this time. Robinson lamented the fact that Knox College lacked financial scholarships equivalent to those he had received as a student at Princeton, and shares the following:

I set about and found two or three of the church, well-to-do friends who responded, and \$600 was given for a Graduate Fellowship in the Old Testament Hebrew Department and the same amount for the New Testament Greek. The winner of the Old Testament honor was Gilbert Wilson, one of our strongest preachers for years in Chicago; and the winner of the New Testament honor was E. A. Wicher, who for well-nigh thirty years taught the New Testament in the San Francisco Theological Seminary, at San Anselmo, California.<sup>36</sup>

Although the numbers do not match, this may be the same scholarship Fraser was discussing when he wrote:

At the urging of George L. Robinson, the college established its first two travelling scholarships in 1898 of \$300 each to enable recipients to engage in further study outside Canada. The express purpose was to develop in Canada scholars who would be qualified to take chairs in the country’s colleges and universities.<sup>37</sup>

Despite his general satisfaction with life in Toronto, Robinson did not stay at Knox much longer. Although Robinson had turned them down before, Cyrus H. McCormick continued to court Robinson for McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, telling him: “If not at the end of your first year at Knox, then at mid-year following; if not then, then at the end of your second year at Toronto!”<sup>38</sup> Robinson says that he asked different people for advice and claims that God told him, “Better forget your antipathy for Chicago!”<sup>39</sup> In addition to Divine prompting, it probably did not hurt that McCormick offered him a full professorship and a larger stipend—large enough for “a good house” of his own on campus.<sup>40</sup> Yet, as it happened, when he told Sir Mortimer Clark he was leaving Knox for McCormick, Clark replied, “But why didn’t you come to me before deciding? We had a promotion to offer you.”<sup>41</sup> Robinson told him: “It was not I who really decided the matter.”<sup>42</sup> Robinson reiterates that he did not really want to go to Chicago, but he felt that “God just seemed to point before me an open door and bade me enter; and I felt I must obey.”<sup>43</sup> He let go of his dislike of Chicago as he “heard the Master calling.”<sup>44</sup>

Robinson admitted that Knox College found an excellent replacement for him: John E. McFadyen, who was a student of George Adam Smith of Glasgow.<sup>45</sup> Like Robinson, McFadyen

---

<sup>35</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 56–57.

<sup>36</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 57.

<sup>37</sup> Fraser, *Church, College, and Clergy*, 109. Fraser references *A&P*, 1898, 231.

<sup>38</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 57.

<sup>39</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 57.

<sup>40</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 57.

<sup>41</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 57.

<sup>42</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 57.

<sup>43</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 57–58.

<sup>44</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 58.

<sup>45</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 58.

had also studied in Germany for a time, and Moir writes that McFadyen would become the Presbyterian Church in Canada's "most renowned higher critic" and that "his influence as an apologist of higher criticism extended well beyond his classroom at Knox."<sup>46</sup>

Though his replacement was quite competent, Robinson admitted, in his words, that "it was with sincere love and deep regret that I gave up my work at Knox."<sup>47</sup> Robinson's wife also seems to have made an impression in Toronto. Elsewhere in his book, Robinson quotes an obituary of his first wife Jessie; this obituary stated of those years that "in Toronto ... Mrs. Robinson began to make her influence felt in the foreign missionary work of the Church."<sup>48</sup> Nonetheless, Robinson's return to Toronto in 1915 was anything but harmonious.

## The 1915 Controversy at the Knox College Formal Dedication

Seventeen years after moving out of Toronto, in Fall 1915, Robinson was one of many invited guests for the formal Dedication of the new Knox College building; he writes that Sir William Mortimer Clark had directly invited him and specifically notes that Sir William, his wife, and their daughters were all quite "friendly."<sup>49</sup> Robinson went alone because his wife was sick by that time.<sup>50</sup> Robinson recalls: "It was reported that ten prominent educators from Great Britain were present at the Formal Dedication."<sup>51</sup> In his account of that night, he adds: "I delivered my address with care, conscious of the quality of the audience; and I sat down with unaccustomed appreciation and applause from the audience. I feel obligated to say this much, because of what was precipitated by the daily newspaper reporters."<sup>52</sup> Robinson's later reflections make clear that the rest of the evening was not so pleasant and tragically overshadowed this great occasion in the press coverage of the event. As already mentioned, Robinson made headlines because some newspaper reporters (who he described as "eager patriots") asked Robinson—an American—to justify his country's neutrality while Canada and the British Empire were fighting in Europe.<sup>53</sup>

In Robinson's account, when the evening was adjourned, these "eager patriots" approached him and asked for his opinion about the war.<sup>54</sup> He describes the exchange as follows: "I replied, 'I am a neutral, and come from the States; President Woodrow Wilson urges us to declare our neutrality with emphasis, always and everywhere.' They quickly responded: 'Then you are pro-German!' I answered, 'It takes two to fight!'"<sup>55</sup> Robinson laments: "This was enough. Toronto papers were aflame! In fact from Halifax to Vancouver the morning papers printed the incident promptly, and the mayor of Chicago telegraphed, 'Intern him!'"<sup>56</sup> As will be seen, the original press coverage shows that Robinson said quite a bit more than he indicates here. In any case, this incident set off a fury not only in Canada, but among those in the United States who disagreed with the President Woodrow Wilson's policy of neutrality.

---

<sup>46</sup> Moir, *Enduring Witness*, 174–75.

<sup>47</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 58.

<sup>48</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 89.

<sup>49</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 86.

<sup>50</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 86.

<sup>51</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 86.

<sup>52</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 86.

<sup>53</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 86.

<sup>54</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 86.

<sup>55</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 86.

<sup>56</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 86.

Later that week, during dinner with Sir William and Lady Clark, Robinson received a phone call from the minister of Knox Presbyterian Church on Spadina.<sup>57</sup> As part of his visit, Robinson was scheduled to give a public lecture at the church, but the minister told him, “We were expecting to hear you lecture, as scheduled, in Knox Church, but if you do, I fear we may provoke trouble.”<sup>58</sup> Robinson agreed and told the church to immediately cancel the event.<sup>59</sup>

Fraser’s account of this controversy obscures the fact that it was at the formal Dedication, but he adds some additional details. After writing that “patriotic sentiment ran high,” Fraser notes that Robinson’s cancelled lecture was supposed to be on “Palestine and the War” for the alumni conference.<sup>60</sup> In other words, Robinson’s lecture also pertained to the war, so it is not hard to see why it was cancelled. Also, the Queen’s University philosophy professor John Watson also spoke on the war at the Knox Dedication, but in more patriotic terms.<sup>61</sup>

Robinson was not sure if anything more would come of the incident, but he remained in Toronto for another day, and notes that Knox gave him an Honorary Doctorate.<sup>62</sup> He says that he thanked Sir William’s family for being excellent hosts and then returned to Chicago.<sup>63</sup> In his autobiography, Robinson concludes his account of that time by quoting a letter he received from the Rev. Robert J. Johnston of Montreal.<sup>64</sup> With reference to the Honorary degree from Knox, Rev. Johnston wrote that he sent “heartly congratulations on the reception of new honors from a college that you served so splendidly for all too brief a period.”<sup>65</sup> Looking back at Robinson’s time at Knox, Rev. Johnston reflected: “The time however was long enough for you to find your way into the hearts of many in Canada; and there, I need not assure you, you have and will have an abiding place.”<sup>66</sup> Alluding to the media controversy at the Dedication event, Rev. Johnston wrote:

The little tempest which Toronto (a city never characterized by too broad a spirit) raised over your interview with one of the papers will not, I trust, be sufficient to mar the pleasure of your visit. It is not of course for one at a distance to criticize, but I cannot but regret the exhibition of narrowness which the incident offered.<sup>67</sup>

Indeed, the controversy was widespread and Robinson underplays the extent of his comments in his autobiography. Robinson’s account omits some of his harsher statements, but in his defence, he was writing decades later and is unlikely to have consulted the newspapers from that time. At the time of the original controversy, a report in the *Vancouver Daily World* noted that Robinson said “that Britain was as much to blame for the war as Germany because Britain had developed her navy while Germany had developed her army.”<sup>68</sup> According to the article, Robinson also claimed that “Britain’s attempt to starve Germany by cutting off supplies ... was savage and

---

<sup>57</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 87.

<sup>58</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 87.

<sup>59</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 87.

<sup>60</sup> Fraser, *Church, College, and Clergy*, 117.

<sup>61</sup> Fraser, *Church, College, and Clergy*, 117.

<sup>62</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 87.

<sup>63</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 87.

<sup>64</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 87.

<sup>65</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 87.

<sup>66</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 87.

<sup>67</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 87.

<sup>68</sup> “A Degree in Question,” *Vancouver Daily World*, 1 October, 1915, 6.

inhuman though strictly legal.”<sup>69</sup> The article adds: “The reverend gentleman then went on to point out that although Germany was stooping to barbaric methods the conflict in her case was a matter of life and death.”<sup>70</sup> Again, Robinson does not mention these remarks in his autobiography. The article offered some further editorial comment, as it praised “loyal Toronto” for cancelling Robinson’s lecture, but the unnamed author also argued that Knox should immediately rescind Robinson’s honorary degree.<sup>71</sup> The article sarcastically ends as follows: “Anyone who declares the British navy brought about the war and who excuses German atrocities on the ground that Germany is in a life and death struggle (as if Britain and France were not!) needs an elementary course in history and in the principles of evidence rather than a degree in divinity.”<sup>72</sup>

Yet the ideas he expressed were against public sentiment on both sides of the border—as the reaction in Chicago suggested. Back in Chicago, a headline in *The Chicago Tribune* read: “Canada Honors Chicago Theolog [sic] Then is Lashed.”<sup>73</sup> The article said that “Toronto was startled” by Robinson’s words.<sup>74</sup> It added that “many could scarcely comprehend it when they heard Dr. Robinson describe England’s effort to starve Germany as savagery.”<sup>75</sup> It also attacked Robinson because he had said that England could have done more to protect the *Lusitania*.<sup>76</sup> This report noted that Robinson had said that he shared the pacifism of William Jennings Bryan.<sup>77</sup> The Chicago paper stated: “Surprise at his interview is caused not so much by the fact that an American should hold such views, but that holding them he should accept an honor from a Canadian college.”<sup>78</sup> The article went on to say that “much criticism is arising against the college.”<sup>79</sup> It records an exchange between media and Knox principle Alfred Gandier, as a reporter asked Gandier, “Do you think he was a suitable man for Knox to honor?”<sup>80</sup> Gandier replied: “Of course we knew nothing of his position on this question and perhaps it was none of our business.”<sup>81</sup> The reporter asked, “If you had known his position would it have made any difference?”<sup>82</sup> Gandier answered, “Of course I can’t say as to that.”<sup>83</sup> It is worth nothing that Robinson’s autobiography presents an essentially harmonious picture of his time staying with Sir William Mortimer Clark in Toronto, but according to this newspaper article, “he and Sir William had a heated argument over his views.”<sup>84</sup> George M. Marsden notes that by the *end* of the First World War, the American periodical *The Presbyterian* was calling the war a “crusade,” saying to “Smite Until Germany is

---

<sup>69</sup> “A Degree in Question,” 6.

<sup>70</sup> “A Degree in Question,” 6.

<sup>71</sup> “A Degree in Question,” 6.

<sup>72</sup> “A Degree in Question,” 6.

<sup>73</sup> “Canada Honors Chicago Theolog Then Is Lashed: The Rev. G. L. Robinson Accepts Degree; Blames England For the War,” *Chicago Tribune*, 1 October, 1915, 4.

<sup>74</sup> “Canada Honors Chicago Theolog Then Is Lashed,” 4.

<sup>75</sup> “Canada Honors Chicago Theolog Then Is Lashed,” 4.

<sup>76</sup> “Canada Honors Chicago Theolog Then Is Lashed,” 4.

<sup>77</sup> “Canada Honors Chicago Theolog Then Is Lashed,” 4. In addition to his pacifism, Bryan is known for his later participation in the Scopes Trial.

<sup>78</sup> “Canada Honors Chicago Theolog Then Is Lashed,” 4.

<sup>79</sup> “Canada Honors Chicago Theolog Then Is Lashed,” 4.

<sup>80</sup> “Canada Honors Chicago Theolog Then Is Lashed,” 4.

<sup>81</sup> “Canada Honors Chicago Theolog Then Is Lashed,” 4.

<sup>82</sup> “Canada Honors Chicago Theolog Then Is Lashed,” 4.

<sup>83</sup> “Canada Honors Chicago Theolog Then Is Lashed,” 4.

<sup>84</sup> “Canada Honors Chicago Theolog Then Is Lashed,” 4.

Consumed,” and telling readers that it was they who were justified in hating “the Hun.”<sup>85</sup> Nonetheless, Robinson faced criticism in his own country even though he expressed these ideas before the United States entered the war.

As Fraser writes, “Knox issued a formal statement criticizing his views.”<sup>86</sup> The text of this statement is included in a wire service report found in in the *Calgary Herald* on 2 October 1915. It was subtitled “Knox College Senate is Sore at Prof. Robinson of Chicago,” and stated the following:

That if the views of Prof. George L. Robinson of Chicago, regarding the war had been known, Knox college [sic] would not have conferred on him the degree of D. D. is the opinion of the alumnae of the college and leaders of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. That Dr. Robinson is entitled to hold his own views on the war is admitted, but it is considered that, in view of the fact that he was a guest of a portion of the British Empire, his interview accusing Britain of being equally responsible with Germany, and as waging inhumane warfare, were in the worst possible taste.

They consider that holding such views Professor Robinson had no right to accept the honor. There is considerable talk of rescinding the honor which was conferred upon Dr. Robinson and twelve other ministers and theological workers Wednesday, when Knox formally opened its new buildings. It is unlikely, however, that such drastic action will be taken.<sup>87</sup>

An identical statement was repeated in newspapers all over Canada. The celebration of Knox’s new building was thus dimmed by the college’s need to distance itself from its former faculty member. Indeed, in Montreal, a short blurb in *The Gazette* criticized Knox College for giving Robinson the degree and stated: “These are times when colleges need to be careful as to whom they delight to honor. A man’s political opinions may suffice to disrupt his reputation for theological acquirements.”<sup>88</sup> Not long after, on 7 October, an article titled “A Pacifist’s Dilemma” in the *Star-Phoenix* in Saskatchewan stated:

That estimable neutral, Professor George L. Robinson of Chicago, who recently expressed the opinion that Great Britain was as much to blame for the war as Germany, is also of the opinion that the European powers should have put Turkey in her proper place a century ago. So they should, but Professor Robinson ... might say just exactly how that was to be accomplished so long as Turkey refused to be put in that place.<sup>89</sup>

Ultimately, this media coverage shows that there was a tension between patriotism and free speech at this time—and Knox College was not the only place in Toronto to have such a controversy. There were demonstrations of loyalty to the British Empire at the University of Toronto campus at this time, so the reaction should not be a shock. In addition, the Robinson

---

<sup>85</sup> Quoted in George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 299–300.

<sup>86</sup> Fraser, *Church, College, and Clergy*, 117.

<sup>87</sup> “Would Not Have Given Degree Had They Known: Knox College Senate is Sore at Prof. Robinson of Chicago,” *Calgary Herald*, 2 October, 1915, 12.

<sup>88</sup> *The Gazette*, 4 October, 1915, 8.

<sup>89</sup> “A Pacifist’s Dilemma,” *Star-Phoenix*, 7 October, 1915, 4.

controversy has a contemporaneous parallel in the case of Immanuel G. A. Benzinger.<sup>90</sup> Benzinger was a German from the University of Berlin. He was hired to teach biblical studies at the University of Toronto—but arrived on the eve of the First World War. After the war began, Toronto newspapers attacked the university for being unpatriotic by choosing to hire Benzinger. The pacifist professor James Frederic McCurdy added to the controversy by choosing not to stand for “God Save the King” at a local Toronto church.<sup>91</sup> Benzinger did not stay long, but the university faced criticism for the decision even years after the fact.<sup>92</sup> In 1916, an article in *Saturday Night* magazine referenced University of Toronto president Robert Falconer and the controversy, and stated that “the president has never shown much independence save in his notion that German professors ought to be kept on the payroll of Toronto University even if our country is at war with the Hun.”<sup>93</sup> Both these controversies show that at this time wartime patriotism directly impacted how theologians from outside Canada would be received.

### **Conclusion: Robinson’s Place in Knox College’s History**

Robinson’s place in the scholarly literature deserves more discussion. Although Robinson was a pacifist, his views on the Bible were largely traditional. Granted, Fraser groups Robinson among four other Knox faculty hired near the turn of the twentieth century—including James Ballantyne, W. Halliday Douglas, John D. Robertson, and Robinson’s successor John E. McFadyen.<sup>94</sup> Fraser identifies Robinson and the other four as “men open to a more progressive orthodoxy” and adds that they

all combined a solid grounding in the evolutionary moral and religious worldview of Idealist philosophers, the historical methods of the believing practitioners of higher criticism, and the movements among university students, inspired by Dwight L. Moody and Henry Drummond, to spread the intellectual and social benefits of Protestantism throughout the world.<sup>95</sup>

At the same time, Robinson’s “progressiveness” should not be overstated. Both then and now, Robinson would undoubtedly be considered a conservative biblical commentator. In the 1950s, he noted that he was at Princeton in the 1890s at the same time that Professor Charles Augustus Briggs of Union Theological Seminary faced heresy charges, and lamented: “Today Princeton is teaching the chief claims which Briggs advocated: that Moses did not write all that is ascribed to him in the Pentateuch, nor Isaiah all of the book ascribed to him. My own views were the traditional ones, and still are.”<sup>96</sup> Moreover, Robinson contributed an essay on the Book of Isaiah for *The Fundamentals* (1910–1915)—a 12-volume collection outlining conservative Protestant beliefs

---

<sup>90</sup> For a discussion of the Benzinger case, see John S. Moir, *A History of Biblical Studies in Canada: A Sense of Proportion*, *Biblical Scholarship in North America* 7 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 41–44.

<sup>91</sup> Moir, *A History of Biblical Studies in Canada*, 43.

<sup>92</sup> Moir, *A History of Biblical Studies in Canada*, 44.

<sup>93</sup> *Saturday Night*, 4 December, 1916, quoted in Moir, *A History of Biblical Studies in Canada*, 44.

<sup>94</sup> Fraser, *Church, College, and Clergy*, 97.

<sup>95</sup> Fraser, *Church, College, and Clergy*, 97.

<sup>96</sup> Robinson, *Autobiography of George L. Robinson*, 42.

printed in the United States.<sup>97</sup> Here Robinson argued again that the prophet Isaiah wrote the entire canonical Book of Isaiah—a view that is unquestionably conservative and was so at that time as well.<sup>98</sup> Robinson concluded that if modern scholars denied that the historical Isaiah had the ability to predict events centuries after his own time concerning Cyrus of Persia, then the latter part of the book lost much of its “religious value.”<sup>99</sup> In Mark A. Noll’s discussion of the essays in *The Fundamentals*, Noll writes, “it is hard to avoid labeling this position a defensive one,” but Noll adds: “To be sure, the authors often argue it with skill, as when George Robinson carefully summarized the historical, literary, linguistic and prophetic arguments against a unified Isaiah, only to find them wanting.”<sup>100</sup>

With regards to the controversy in 1915, Fraser writes that “Robinson’s views were not unusual for progressive churchmen of his age, especially from the United States.”<sup>101</sup> Fraser compares the controversy to how “James A. Macdonald voiced sentiments similar to Robinson’s a month later at a peace rally in San Francisco and had to step down as managing editor of the Toronto *Globe* as a result.”<sup>102</sup> More recently, Amy J. Shaw argued that “all the mainstream churches in Canada supported the country’s war effort,” but the fact “that this stance conflicted with their pre-war attitude did not go unnoticed at the time.”<sup>103</sup> Even so, Shaw concludes that in the Canadian context:

In forming a picture of the conscientious objector within the established churches, then, we see a man without a strong political base or reliable organizational support. Those who refused to participate in the war, censured and ultimately rejected by their larger communities, were unable to form a foundation of support amongst others of similar beliefs through which to counter this. It would seem that, in Canada’s conservative mosaic, concerned as it was with respect for established churches over personal vagaries of conscience and for the identity and freedom of groups over those of individuals, these men had probably the most difficult experience of all Canadian conscientious objectors.<sup>104</sup>

It is clear that in this Canadian context, Robinson’s pacifist views were unlikely to find favour.

Ultimately, Robinson was an excellent scholar who seems to have been appreciated by at least some of his students. He deserves credit for orchestrating those early travel scholarships. Even so, although his name is not well known today, his ill-considered remarks during the First World War are what generated the most attention in his associations with the college. Although his time teaching at Knox was largely positive, by an ironic coincidence, he created controversy when he

---

<sup>97</sup> George L. Robinson, “One Isaiah,” in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, Vol. 7 (Chicago: Testimony Publishing Company, 1910), 70–87.

<sup>98</sup> Robinson, “One Isaiah,” 70–87.

<sup>99</sup> Robinson, “One Isaiah,” 87.

<sup>100</sup> Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 42.

<sup>101</sup> Fraser, *Church, College, and Clergy*, 236 n. 12.

<sup>102</sup> Fraser, *Church, College, and Clergy*, 236 n. 12. For other studies of Canadian pacifism during this period, see Thomas P. Socknat, *Witness Against War: Pacifism in Canada, 1900–1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987); Brian J. Fraser, *The Social Uplifters: Presbyterian Progressives and the Social Gospel in Canada, 1875–1915*, SR Supplements 20 (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1988).

<sup>103</sup> Amy J. Shaw, *Crisis of Conscience: Conscientious Objection in Canada During the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 103.

<sup>104</sup> Amy J. Shaw, *Crisis of Conscience*, 119.

was *first* selected to teach at Knox because he was not Canadian, and two decades later, he created a much greater controversy because he publicly supported American neutrality in a room full of Canadians. Notwithstanding this point, we should be grateful for what his autobiography teaches us about this period in Knox College's history.

# Young People and the Future of the Presbyterian Church: Rebuilding Post-Union

Rebecca Jess

The Presbyterian Church in Canada, prior to Church Union in 1925, boasted high numbers in their programmes for children and young people. The reported numbers from the Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People's Societies for 1924 included over 33,000 children in the cradle roll, over 4,100 young people's organizations, and over 6,600 who came into full communion. The budget was high: over \$100,000. The life and work related to children and young people looked very promising with many thousands being involved in one programme or another across the country.<sup>1</sup> These numbers would not be so impressive in the following year's report. The decision of many to leave the Presbyterian Church in Canada in favour of Church Union and the creation of the United Church in Canada left the anti-unionist Presbyterian Church members in a place of uncertainty and great change. However, in the years following Church Union, the Presbyterian Church in Canada did not close itself down; it went immediately into a mode of rebuilding and restoring. This was true in many areas of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, including the restoration of its programming for youth. The Presbyterian Church in Canada recognized the need to continue to grow and to place a good deal of development into their young people, particularly because they were the future of the church.

The 1925 Union left the Presbyterian Church with very few resources. Materials were scarce; there was very little in terms of office equipment and supplies. The church had also lost its records relating to this area, so it was difficult for the newly appointed Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People's Societies to make comparisons and statements in terms of growth.<sup>2</sup> On top of this, they had lost many of their teachers, officers and students. Despite these setbacks, the Presbyterian Church in Canada made the decision to move forward and gain momentum in whatever way possible. While youth programmes could have been given very little consideration during this rebuilding process, the church made it a priority to appoint new members to the Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People's Societies and to continue with the faith formation, education, and training of its young people.

Though growth within the 10 years subsequent to Church Union in 1925 was slow, the youth of the Presbyterian Church in Canada were successfully taught two of the primary aims of the Presbyterian Church at that time: what it means to be Presbyterian, and what it means to be Canadian. More than ever, the Presbyterian Church in Canada had a strong desire to raise and train young people in a manner that helped them to feel a deep sense of pride for both their denomination and their country. Their success with this aim stems from the efforts of the Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People's Societies; print publications, including magazines and books; and a focus on both retaining and further developing youth leadership through specific programmes and camps.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1925*, 221.

<sup>2</sup> *Acts and Proceedings, 1926*, 51.

## The Board of Sabbath Schools & Young People's Societies

Appointed in June of 1925 after the division of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, the newly arranged Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People's Societies included ten executive members who "began the work of reorganization with great enthusiasm."<sup>3</sup> One may wonder about the veracity of such a statement after the loss of so many physical resources, records, leaders, and students, but there is little doubt from the report given in the *Acts & Proceedings* from the Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People's Societies in 1926 that they put forward a strong effort to bring programming, events, and training back to life within the church. The work that follows outlines the specific ways that this Board, as a committed and dedicated sect of the greater church, did not allow for its youth to be left behind in the wake of the divided church.

In their 1928 report in *Acts & Proceedings*, the Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People's Societies aptly articulate their desire for youth within the church to be trained today for the sake of the future:

For, what the church will be in the course of a few years depends upon the kind of men and women the boys and girls of to-day become. In the ordinary course of events almost every important position in the church and state will have been vacated within twenty-five or thirty years. These positions must be filled by those who are in training to-day. It is ours to make that training as thorough and complete as possible. The state provides trained leaders for our schools and colleges. But those institutions do not provide an all-round education. To the home and church we must look for the cultivation of the devotional and spiritual life of the rising generation.<sup>4</sup>

### Publications

One of the first things noted within the Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People's Societies 1926 report is an assurance that the church would be supplied with teaching publications for its Sabbath Schools. While the report is not clear about whether the church pre-Union had its own curriculum and education publications that were lost to the United Church, it is clear that the Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People's Societies used its connection with the Board of Christian Education of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America in order to begin receiving the Westminster Lesson Helps and Illustrated papers from Westminster Publications in Philadelphia through a Canadian agent (the Upper Canada Tract Society).<sup>5</sup> Due to high rates of postage going from America to a foreign country, Westminster Publications wanted to make a change in distribution. Eventually the Board's Executive worked out the issuing of a Canadian edition of Westminster Helps with The Upper Canada Tract Society as their distributor. While all these efforts to supply the Presbyterian Church in Canada Sabbath Schools with curricula were likely very appreciated and necessary to the continuation of Christian education within the church, they also led the Board to lean towards not just filling the need with what was available, but to a vision that included producing their own "purely Canadian Lesson Helps."<sup>6</sup> They began with a

---

<sup>3</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1926, 51.

<sup>4</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1928, 97.

<sup>5</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1926, 51.

<sup>6</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1926, 51.

leaflet, “The Lesson Leaf,” that was written by a member of the Board, Rev. N. A. MacEachern, which they printed in Toronto. These Canadian Lesson Helps were well-received and only encouraged the Board to create more of their own Canadian Presbyterian materials. One of the other very early works undertaken by the Board was a publication for Rally Day with a suggested programme and supplement; this was widely lauded and was reported as “the best ever produced.”<sup>7</sup> Its reception encouraged “needy” Sabbath schools to request further assistance with Lesson Helps and programme plans from the Board. With such positive feedback and confirmation of the need for their services, the Board continued in their quest to produce its own distinctly Canadian and Presbyterian publications and succeeded in adding slowly to the number of leaflets they produced. Reports indicate the Board’s appreciation for having American publications to draw from, though it is clear that sharing American stories and lessons connected to American holidays was wearisome for many in the denomination, including the Board.<sup>8</sup> However, in 1929 their tenacity came to fruition in a new and innovative way.

## “The Challenge”

After Union in 1925, the Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People’s Societies determined to provide publications that were both Presbyterian and Canadian. While the lesson planning and education resources they received in conjunction with the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. were helpful, it was important for the Board and for the teachers and ministers across the Presbyterian Church in Canada that eventually materials be from a Canadian perspective. Being in a growing nation with a large influx of immigrants, it was important for the Presbyterian Church in Canada to help define what it meant to be Canadian through Canadian stories and through a push for Canada to be Protestant—or, better yet, Presbyterian. Through Canadian Presbyterian publications, the Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People’s Societies could encourage the faith formation of young people while also promoting Presbyterianism and national pride.

One of the greatest hurdles to this goal was money. There was little in the budget to help start up publications. The best way to fund a publication was to use subscription income to help pay for it; but of course, there were no subscriptions until there was a publication. The Board focused its efforts on creating just one publication to begin with: “The Challenge.” “The Challenge” was a magazine made for “Seniors and Young People”—teenagers and young adults.<sup>9</sup> Its first quarterly publication came out in October 1929. It was eight pages long and resembled a newspaper in style. A number of people across the denomination worked to write sections of the publication and edit it all together. Its purpose is stated in the first edition: “To every high and noble service for Christ and the church ‘The Challenge’ will seek to call the youth of the Presbyterian Church in Canada,”<sup>10</sup> and in the Board report in *Acts & Proceedings* in 1930, “the purpose of this magazine is to give help to leaders and members of teen-age girls’ and boys’ groups and Young People’s Societies.”<sup>11</sup> The first page listed a series of very short stories, some Biblical in nature, where someone was challenged in the way they followed Jesus. Its final “challenge” was as follows: “Our church—its

---

<sup>7</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1926, 52.

<sup>8</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1928, 98.

<sup>9</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1932, 121.

<sup>10</sup> Presbyterian Church in Canada, The Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People’s Societies, “The Challenge” 1, no.1 (Oct–Dec, 1929): 1.

<sup>11</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1930, 156.

life, its work, its great future—, calls out young people to devote their lives to Jesus Christ, and to train themselves for His service. CHALLENGE!”<sup>12</sup> It was clear that the Board intended to use this publication as a means to help teach and train its readers to be committed in their service to Christ and to their church. The publication included a variety of articles, information, and a Bible study section. The Bible study section included weekly scriptures for each of the three months the magazine covered, quiz questions based on that quarter’s lessons, a biblically-themed puzzle, and a short story related to the overall theme.

Many pages within those first quarterly issues of “The Challenge” were given over to articles that also acted as advertisements for programmes that the Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People’s Societies were really pushing for the youth to join; this included Young People’s Societies, separate boys’ and girls’ programmes, and summer camps and training schools. While there were some general interest stories and articles in “The Challenge,” it seemed that the more pressing interest of its contributors and editors was to encourage young people to institute Young People’s Societies within their churches and to help train leaders to run those societies. An article in the very first issue of “The Challenge” gave instructions on how to organize a Young People’s Society in a church and provided information on how to obtain “Topic Cards” from the Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People’s Societies that would provide programme information and ideas related to devotional, missionary, literary, and social activities for a Young People’s Society to use. While the magazine did recognize that these topic cards might not apply to every group across Canada, their use was still greatly encouraged. This was especially the case since the idea of Young People’s Societies was that they were organized and run by young people: “the best programme will be one that has been freely discussed and adopted by the young people themselves.”<sup>13</sup> The magazine also encouraged youth to write in with questions, difficulties or concerns that they, as the Young People’s Society leaders, were facing in order to receive answers and suggestions within the pages of the following quarterly issue of “The Challenge.” The magazine wanted to be a worthwhile resource to the youth that subscribed to it.

Along with being a useful resource, “The Challenge” was also ready to continue instilling its readers with information about being Presbyterian. A trivia column took the kind of information you might find in a General Assembly statistics report and listed that information with a “Did You Know?” heading—presumably with the hope that, if the material was presented in an interesting way, the youth would actually read and retain it. A “For Discussion” section also graced the pages, and listed a series of questions that would encourage its readers to vision for themselves. Questions included, “what are some of the things for which many young people strive? Are they most worthwhile?” These questions were then connected to Biblical dreamers and visionaries like Joseph, Moses, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. This was not meant to be a magazine simply for entertainment, but a resource to help train and prepare readers to be intelligent thinkers and visionaries within the life in the Presbyterian Church.

The only major complaint recorded about “The Challenge” was that it was only offered quarterly. From its conception, the Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People’s Societies and the magazine’s editors worked to gain subscriptions so that eventually the magazine would arrive monthly. In just three years the Board reached this goal and “The Challenge” was started afresh in January of 1932 as a monthly magazine. This revamped version of the magazine feels less like a spiced up variation on General Assembly reports and more like what one might expect in a magazine for youth, with greater focus on entertaining articles about Canadians, life in Canada,

---

<sup>12</sup> “The Challenge” 1, no. 1 (Oct–Dec, 1929), 1.

<sup>13</sup> “The Challenge” 1, no. 1 (Oct–Dec, 1929), 5.

and the work of Presbyterian missionaries. This presentation was more distinctly a human interest format than the previous articles in “The Challenge.” The new version of “The Challenge” included fictional stories that were distinctly Canadian, as well as illustrations and photos to enhance both the stories and articles. There was a new section called “My Canada” that focused on the history of a specific city or town in Canada each month. Of course, faith-based material was still important to the aims of “The Challenge,” so a new section entitled ““Neath Nathaneal’s Fig Tree” was instituted. Rather than offering a series of weekly scriptures, the magazine now had the space and opportunity to select a few themes or topics and explore them more deeply. A section made for Young People’s Society leaders was still included, though with a greater focus: the “YPS Topic” section provided discussion starters and devotionals related to a biblical theme that could be used at meetings.

“The Challenge” also continued to offer sections for girls and boys separately. The titles of these sections changed over the following years, but there was always space dedicated to the cultural interests and programmes offered for specific genders.

Despite the fact that “The Challenge” came about during the Great Depression, subscriptions continued to rise and the magazine was found in more and more homes across Canada. In fact, an ad within the final 1931 issue of the original “The Challenge” called to all youth: “Wanted: 20,000 Presbyterian Young People to become readers of THE CHALLENGE.”<sup>14</sup> While statistics do not reflect that the subscriptions accumulated anywhere near that figure, it is noteworthy that the publication managed to move from being a quarterly magazine in 1929 to being a monthly magazine with an increased number of subscriptions by 1932. That said, the magazine itself was not against posting ads for itself within its pages. One advertisement in its January 1932 issue included the following statement: “Your loyalty to Canada and to the Presbyterian Church *demand*s that *your* Sunday School subscribe for THE CHALLENGE.”<sup>15</sup> The Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People’s Societies stood behind their work in “The Challenge” and wanted all Presbyterian Canadians to be familiar with the magazine and get behind it as well.

## Programmes

Publications were one way of engaging youth and encouraging their understanding of faith, Presbyterianism, and what it means to be a Protestant Canadian, but one of the major features of “The Challenge” in particular was that it not only promoted denominational and national pride, but also specific programmes offered within or alongside the Presbyterian Church in Canada. Church programmes were not meant as merely entertaining ways to engage youth and keep them occupied; church programmes were an intentional part of youth development and placed leadership and faith forming demands on its participants. A great deal of pressure was placed on youth to join youth programmes or to become leaders within youth programmes. After the loss connected with Church Union, it was important for the Presbyterian Church to bolster its youth programmes and find ways to both grow the overall numbers and train the youth to be faithful, dedicated members of the denomination. In their 1926 report, the Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People’s Societies stated that they have “given very special attention to the work amongst our Young People” and that the Board “unanimously agreed that a society founded on the

---

<sup>14</sup> “The Challenge” 2, no. 5 (Oct–Dec, 1931), 8.

<sup>15</sup> “The Challenge” 1, no. 1 (Jan, 1932), 8.

principles of the Christian Endeavour would best meet our needs.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, the Board recognized that there were organizations that focused on the intellectual and athletic needs of youth, but the church’s role would fill the distinct function of spiritual development, and while there were some youth programmes already in place across the country—in particular C.G.I.T. (Canadian Girls in Training) groups—there was still “considerable demand for some modification of the constitution that will make the training of these boys and girls more distinctly Presbyterian.”<sup>17</sup> In the 10 years following Church Union, the Presbyterian Church, through the Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People’s Societies, pushed for greater membership in its existing programmes (namely the Young People’s Society) and developed new youth programmes with a focus on training young people to be leaders and active participants within the church.

## Young People’s Societies

Young People’s Societies were an important part of youth leadership development and faith formation within the Presbyterian Church in Canada. However, immediately following Church Union, there was a much lower number of Young People’s Societies across the country. The Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People’s Societies made it clear in their reports that this was not because young people were choosing not to be a part of the church; on the contrary, as the church slowly reorganized, they chose to get involved in whatever other areas of church life they could, including Mission Band, Young Ladies’ Auxiliary, Sabbath School teachers, members of organized Bible classes, and choir. While this information appeared to please the Presbyterian Church in general, it was the aim of the Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People’s Societies not to give up on rallying the youth into Young People’s Society groups within their churches or geographical areas. Having a singular body of youth following the same kinds of meeting plans, leadership opportunities, and faith development was important to the future Presbyterian Church; the church needed to be unified in its vision of faith, worship, and its mission goals. Without Young People’s Societies to help with the unification of youth, the future of the church would be at greater risk of becoming divided in its understandings and beliefs, which no one wanted to see after the turmoil that division had already caused for the church. On top of this, the Board sincerely believed that the Young People’s Societies “should have a real place in the training of the future membership of the Church” and the most important aspect of that training needed to be the cultivation of devotional and spiritual life through Bible Study—“the Society that does not place that Book in the very heart of its programme is doomed to failure.”<sup>18</sup> For those within a local Young People’s Society in 1927, the Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People’s Societies issued a Topic Card that was based on the Christian Endeavour programme and included two study books: “The Royal Road” was published by the Women’s Missionary Society and detailed the stories of Presbyterian missionaries; and, “Presbyterianism” which was a series of sermons written by Dr. R. W. Dickie. It is evident from the selection of these study books that the Board wanted to use them as resources that would encourage a greater understanding and appreciation of the particularities of being Presbyterian, including knowledge of history and doctrines, and the missional work that the church was doing in Canada and overseas. This theme continued over the years with annual reports outlining the study books that were suggested for the use of members in

---

<sup>16</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1926, 52.

<sup>17</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1926, 53.

<sup>18</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1928, 99.

the Young People's Societies. In all cases, the study books focused on some form of Presbyterianism (history or doctrine) and stories of Presbyterian missionaries working in Canada or in foreign countries.

In a report from the *Acts and Proceedings* in 1930, the Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People's Societies noted an overture that suggested a "banding together of the young people of the Presbyterian Church in Canada in one Presbyterian National Assembly, patterned after General Assembly."<sup>19</sup> While the Board appreciated this idea, they announced that there was more work to be done before a national gathering of youth could occur; the Board was realistic with its ideals and wished for there to be a Young People's Society in every congregation, as well as Presbyterian Young People's Societies gatherings, and hoped to work up to Synodical Young People's Societies gatherings. These, they stated, would be needed in order to pave the way towards a national Young People's Societies gathering. At the time of their report in 1931, membership within Young People's Societies groups had begun to grow more steadily—perhaps with the help of "The Challenge"—and annual or semi-annual Young People's Societies rallies were being held in a number of Presbyteries. The Board also continued to stress to the denomination that every congregation should work towards having a Young People's Society in order to instruct and train its young people because "from its ranks should come workers for every other organization in the congregation."<sup>20</sup>

Their diligent work and tireless effort to increase the number of Young People's Societies across Canada provided some hope for the future of the church. Within 10 years of Church Union the number of Young People's Societies increased, as did the number of youth involved in them. Where in 1926 only 448 Young People's Societies were reported, by 1935 there were 611. While the Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People's Societies and the Presbyterian Church at large likely hoped for far greater numbers, their efforts did lead to a 36% increase over 10 years, or 163 newly established Young People's Societies. Considering that other areas of the church, including numbers in Sabbath Schools, saw both increases and decreases over that time, it seems quite appropriate for the church to celebrate the fact that their work with and for the Young People's Societies made a notable impact. While numbers and statistics played a key role in tracking the growth and change in the church post-Union, what could not be as clearly tracked over 10 years—but likely had a strong impact on the Presbyterian Church overall—was the fact that each of those young people who participated in Young People's Societies received intentional and thoughtful faith formation, as well as leadership opportunities and a real chance to have both a present and future voice in the church. The Presbyterian Church was not looking to silence its youth into submission, but looked to give them a real place and set of tasks within the work of the church. This, I would argue, was a more impressive objective than striving to increase numbers.

## Teenage Boys' and Girls' Programmes

As well as having Young People's Societies, the Presbyterian Church in Canada either provided or supported a few other programmes for young people. Some of this programming was ecumenical (such as C.G.I.T. and Boy Scouts) and the Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People's Societies felt these groups met the needs of its youth, but also wished to further enrich their ecumenical and Sabbath School experiences with training that was more distinctly

---

<sup>19</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1930, 157.

<sup>20</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1932, 123.

Presbyterian. As such, in 1928 the Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People's Societies reported the publication of two small pamphlets to assist leaders in starting up Presbyterian programming for teenage boys and girls; these pamphlets were aptly named "Programme Suggestions for Teen-age Girls" and "Programme Suggestions for Teen-age Boys" and were sent to every minister and Sabbath School superintendent in the autumn of 1927.<sup>21</sup> The Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People's Societies hoped these pamphlets would act as a kind of constitution to create some uniformity in the organizations being created for young people across the country. Though copies of these pamphlets no longer exist, it can be presumed that they placed a good deal of focus on Bible-based lessons and discussion and Presbyterian doctrine.

Girls' programming grew fairly quickly across the denomination. As of 1927 the church established a dedicated Secretary of Girls' Work who visited girls' groups in congregations, Presbyteries, Synods and girls' camps across the country. With this role, the girls' organizations had a reliable source to call on for extra help, resources, encouragement, and support. This half-time position was funded by the Women's Missionary Society, so on top of having the support of the Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People's Societies, it also had the established support of the Women's Missionary Society to back it up. By 1935 there were 480 registered girls' organizations in churches across the country. Young women were not only provided Bible studies, but also taught how to be leaders in Christian education and were encouraged to go through deaconess training. Much of their programming also centred on missionary education and they were encouraged to participate in camp programmes which incorporated leadership training alongside fun and fellowship. In fact, Girls' Work was considered important enough that the Girls' Work Secretary, Edith Sinclair, was given the opportunity to lead a talk with the graduating class of 1935 at the Presbyterian College in Montreal.<sup>22</sup> "The Challenge" featured a Girls' Work section which included programme ideas and outlines for girls' groups, general interest articles, short stories, book suggestions, and a "Problem Corner" where leaders could write in with their questions, challenges, and issues and receive answers and suggestions from "Aunt Solver."<sup>23</sup>

While post-Union girls' organizations within the Presbyterian Church in Canada seemed to flourish, Presbyterian boy's organizations did not take root to the same degree. It was not until 1929 that a distinctly Presbyterian programme for boys was started. Called "The Order of the Burning Bush," the programme was designed for ages 12–18 and was meant to "encourage the organization of teen-age boys in every Presbyterian congregation throughout the Dominion." Groups were to meet as regularly as possible and its aims involved "the whole life of the boy developed toward Christian discipleship" and to have "every boy trained in reverence, loyalty and service."<sup>24</sup> After the initiation of this programme, the Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People's Societies petitioned for a dedicated Boys' Work Secretary in order to help train and direct the leaders of "The Order of the Burning Bush." In August of 1929 a Boys' Work Secretary was employed under the appointment of the Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People's Societies. However, due to health problems, this Secretary had to resign less than a year later and the Board was at first unable to fill the position, and was then unable to afford it. In order to try and help "The Order of the Burning Bush" succeed as much as possible without a Boys' Work Secretary to help guide it, "The Challenge" offered an entire page devoted to Boys' Work. This section encouraged readers to form their own "Burning Bush" order with explanations on how to organize

---

<sup>21</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1928, 100.

<sup>22</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1935, 143.

<sup>23</sup> "The Challenge" 1, no. 1 (Oct–Dec, 1929), 11.

<sup>24</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1929, 105.

this order, information about programming guides, and suggested devotionals, intellectual activities, and physical activities. The Boys' Work section of "The Challenge" also included general interest articles (particularly around the theme of how to achieve success and why boys should consider going into ministry), and suggested hobbies for boys (which included everything from stamp collecting to "boy scientist"). While the Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People's Societies put in an honest effort to help "The Order of the Burning Bush" take off as a programme for teenage boys in the Presbyterian Church in Canada, without a dedicated secretary to fortify the programme, it was not nearly as successful as the girls' week-night programmes.

## Summer Camps & Training Camps

While year-round programmes and publications were key to building and maintaining both the faith lives and the faith organizations of Presbyterian young people, there was also a great deal of emphasis placed on summer camps and summer training programmes. Post-Union, the Presbyterian Church in Canada wasted no time in putting together summer training and camp programmes. In 1925, Knox College hosted a week-long training camp that included Bible studies; training classes related to leading Sunday School for a variety of age groups; and daily outings to places in and around Toronto, including the provincial parliament, the zoo, and a sail to Toronto Island. Similar camps were held in other areas of the country as well—Keat's Island in British Columbia being a notable location for many years. The camps were used as a place, especially in the years immediately following Church Union, to do model meetings of the Young People's Society in order to persuade more youth to join. In the first issue of "The Challenge," the outcome of the camp at Knox College was described as follows: "with higher ideals of Christian service, and deepened purpose, and holy consecration, these young people of our Church have returned to their congregations filled with that enthusiasm which will carry forward the work of our Church to greater success."<sup>25</sup> The camps' focus was on more than fun and fellowship, and even more than just Bible study—they were an intensive training ground for future leaders of the church.

According to "The Challenge" in 1930, "Prior to June 1925, very few Presbyterian Summer Schools were held in Canada. Since then the number has gradually increased."<sup>26</sup> This comment could be readily made after the summer of 1930 when the Presbyterian Church in Canada had been able to offer two more camps in Ontario at their own dedicated (not rented) locations: Glenmohr on Lake Simcoe, and Kintail on Lake Huron. These were added to the property already owned and operated for summer camp training programmes on Lake George in Sault St. Marie.<sup>27</sup> On top of this, by 1930 almost every Synod across Canada was offering some sort of training camp, Young People's Society camps, Girls' camp and/or Boys' Camp. Editions of "The Challenge" that came out in 1932 provided a great deal of information about and stories from summer camps; the playful joys of summer camp were accented, as well as the leadership opportunities they offered. Summer camp could also be seen as a uniquely Canadian experience, adding to a specific understanding of what it meant to be both Canadian and Presbyterian—faith formation in the wilderness!

---

<sup>25</sup> "The Challenge" 1, no. 1 (Oct–Dec, 1929), 7.

<sup>26</sup> "The Challenge" 2, no. 1 (Oct–Dec, 1930), 10.

<sup>27</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1931, 141.

## Conclusion

In the closing of their report in 1926, the Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People's Societies stated their hope that "the year that lies before us be one of consolidation and progress. It is the earnest desire of all that a flourishing Sabbath School and Young People's Society should be found in every congregation."<sup>28</sup> While the Board likely imagined this desire becoming a reality more quickly and substantially than the actual outcome, it can be said that in the 10 years following Church Union, the Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People's Societies made strong headway with its desire to prepare the future leaders of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. Setting numbers aside, the church could take heart in the fact that the youth who were participating in Presbyterian programming and who were reading "The Challenge" were being provided a uniquely Presbyterian faith formation that would affect their individual futures as well as the future of the church. The efforts of the Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People's Societies saw growth and change in their youth and successfully set the standard and a foundation in youth programming and publications for the years following 1935 as well. While numbers may not have grown at a staggering rate, it can be said that the in-house publications and focus on youth programmes really helped to mold a generation of youth who could sincerely identify themselves as both Presbyterian and Canadian.

---

<sup>28</sup> *Acts and Proceedings*, 1926, 53.

# Major John Norton, Teyoninhokarawen: An Almost Forgotten Hero

Angus J. Sutherland

In a review of Carl Benn's book, *A Mohawk Memoir of the War of 1812*, J. C. A. Scaggs of the University of Virginia writes, "The name of Mohawk leader John Norton is not unknown to Canadians ..."<sup>1</sup> I believe that Professor Scaggs is in error; the vast majority of Canadians have no knowledge of John Norton or his accomplishments. In my early reading of several books on First Nations history, I had never seen the name of John Norton. The first edition of the *Canadian Encyclopedia* (1988) makes no mention of him whatsoever.<sup>2</sup> Stories of the part played by First Nations in the War of 1812 have mentioned Tecumseh and his brother, but have too often missed the very important role played by John Norton. In my personal opinion, John Norton's role in the conflict was far greater than that of Tecumseh.

In my own schooling and reading, I had heard much of names such as Sir Isaac Brock, Sir Gordon Drummond, Laura Secord, Joseph Brant, Sir Walter Scott, and William Wilberforce. When I purchased the book *The Journal of Major John Norton 1816*, it was because I thought an insider's view of the War of 1812 would be fascinating. While this proved to be true, I found myself at the same time introduced to a man who was both a Scot and a Cherokee by birth, who purportedly spoke four European and twelve First Nations languages, who wrote extensively on matters touching Canadian and First Nations history, who was a soldier and leader of the First Nations warriors during the War of 1812, who was the first translator for the British and Foreign Bible Society, and who, in the course of his life, met all and befriended most of the persons named above.

For many years, the journal of John Norton lay all but forgotten in the library of the Duke of Northumberland at his estate in Alnwick Castle. Norton dedicated his journal to the man who was Duke of Northumberland at the time of writing, and the manuscript has been passed down through the family since then. At the end of the Second World War, microfilms of the journal were made and placed in the British Museum and the Library of Congress. The work was effectively rediscovered by the Champlain Society in 1966.<sup>3</sup> As a result, it is only in recent years that this hero of the War of 1812 is beginning to be remembered and to be given the honour that he is due.

The purpose of this paper is to present, in the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth, an outline of the life of John Norton, with an emphasis on his Christian faith. I am indebted to Dr. Carl Benn of Ryerson University and Dr. Timothy Willig of Indiana University South Bend for their recent studies and writings on the history of this period. Dr. Benn's contribution of the updated introduction to the 2011 edition of *The Journal of Major John Norton 1816* improves greatly on the 1970 edition. Dr. Willig is currently writing a biography of Norton. It is notable that Norton's

---

<sup>1</sup> Carl Benn, *A Mohawk Memoir of the War of 1812: John Norton, Teyoninhokarawen* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), back cover.

<sup>2</sup> Fortunately, this oversight has been corrected in later editions.

<sup>3</sup> John Norton, *The Journal of Major John Norton, 1816*, eds. Carl F. Klinck, James J. Talman, & Roger Hall, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., The Publications of the Champlain Society 72 (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 2011), xxiii.

biographers cannot write of his life without making strong and clear comments on his Christian faith; the man and his faith cannot be separated.

As I begin, I note that in this paper, the word “Indian” will only appear in direct quotes from the period or in official names, for example, the “Indian Department.” Otherwise, the terms “First Nations” or the specific names of the indigenous nations will be used. Likewise, it should be noted that the terms Iroquois, Haudenosaunee, and Six Nations are interchangeable.<sup>4</sup>

## The Early Years

John Norton’s story begins in the Carolinas in the early eighteenth century. After a battle, a Cherokee child of approximately eleven years of age was rescued from a burning building by a Scottish soldier, whose name, presumably, was Norton. The child was taken back to Scotland, raised there, and given the name John Norton. As a young man, he met and married, or entered into a relationship with, a woman named Christian Anderson. The couple had a child on 16 December 1770, baptised him the following day at the Parish Church in Crail, Fife, and gave him the name John Norton.

John’s early Christian education was undertaken by the parish and it seems that he took the teachings to heart. At the age of 16 he followed his father into military service, signing on as a drummer with his father’s regiment, the 65<sup>th</sup> Foot. Detachments of the regiment were sent to Quebec in 1785 and 1786 and both Johns, father and son, arrived in Canada among them. Christian Anderson also came to Canada, serving as a domestic to one John Coffin, one of several of that surname who were in government in Montreal and Quebec.

It was not unusual in those days for men to join the military in order to get passage to the new world, only then to desert the military and find a place to settle and work. It must have been like a home-coming for John Sr. who found himself, both in the Montreal area and a little later in Western New York at Fort Niagara, coming into contact with the Haudenosaunee whose speech was of the same linguistic family as Cherokee.

Having been taught the Cherokee language—at least in part—by his father, John Jr. was as aware of his native heritage as he was of his Scottish birth. Twice, John Jr. ran away from Fort Niagara: first in March 1787; and, having been returned to his regiment, again in June of that year. While desertion normally carried severe penalties, John Jr. was granted a discharge in February 1788 at the instigation of the Coffin family, perhaps being bought out of the army—a practice that was allowed at the time. The assumption is that his mother used what influence she had to arrange for his safe release. Benn comments, “his desertion, which normally would be regarded as disreputable, did not seem to affect the readiness of army officers to work with or respect him during the War of 1812, suggesting that there were mitigating circumstances surrounding the events of the 1780’s.”<sup>5</sup> John Norton Sr. deserted in 1789 when stationed just south of Montreal. He disappears from history at this point; nevertheless, there is some evidence that he made his way back into the territory of his people, the Cherokee.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> In his journal, Norton most often used the term ‘Five Nations’, even though the sixth, the Tuscarora, had joined the confederacy by that time.

<sup>5</sup> Benn, *A Mohawk Memoir of the War of 1812*, 28.

<sup>6</sup> Benn, *A Mohawk Memoir of the War of 1812*, 28.

## **John Norton among the Haudenosaunee<sup>7</sup>**

After his discharge, John spent a little time with the Cayuga in New York State, then took a position as a school teacher in Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory, near Belleville, Ontario. Unhappy with the lot of a teacher, he found his way to the Ohio territory where he worked as a trader while actively supporting the cause of the natives there who were facing American expansion. He worked as an employee of a trader named John Askin. An article from the Missouri Gazette in this period, quoted by Carl Benn, spoke of Norton this way: “He frequently had a few goods on credit, but always, like an Indian, he never traded for profit. All he wished for was to trade ... enough ... furs to pay his merchant, and the remainder of his goods were given to his Indian friends and relations.”<sup>8</sup>

Around this time, Norton was noticed by Chief Joseph Brant or Thayendanegea of the Haudenosaunee. Brant and many of his people lived along the Grand River, having been offered land there as an expression of thanks for their support of the British during the American War of Independence. Brant, seeing great value in Norton—his experience as a soldier, his love and support for First Nations peoples, his Christian faith (which Brant shared), and his considerable linguistic skills—eventually adopted John as a nephew and as his successor as a leader of the Six Nations of the Grand River. With increased responsibilities, he received the name Teyoninhokarawen, which translates as, “it keeps the door open.” Norton said it signified “frankness and an open heart.”<sup>9</sup>

Norton was recommended by Brant as a translator for the Indian Department, and Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe approved the recommendation. Norton took up the position in 1796. Brant was pleased to have an ally and observer within the department. In 1800, Norton resigned from the Indian Department. His resignation may coincide with the appointment of William Claus as Deputy Superintendent General of the Indian Department. Claus, though respected for other accomplishments, was in open opposition to Joseph Brant and to John Norton throughout his tenure in this position, which he held until his death in 1826. It seems that this opposition may have had its roots in the fact that Brant, if unsatisfied with the decisions of the Indian Department, did not hesitate to go over their heads to his influential friends in Britain. Claus, for his part, did not hesitate to use lies and misrepresentations, or to manipulate others in order to undermine the purposes of Brant and Norton. It may be fairly stated that John Norton’s single greatest enemy was William Claus.

## **Tension with William Claus and the Translation of the Gospel of John**

An example of this animosity between John Norton and William Claus is shown when, in 1804, Joseph Brant delegated John Norton to go to Britain for the express purpose of getting the British to approve of the contentious Haldimand Grant, which gave to the Six Nations the land for five miles each side of the Grand River from mouth to source. Brant gave Norton letters of introduction to his influential friends and Norton set out. His journey took him through New York state where he came in contact with an unnamed man, “a Quaker, who without any previous knowledge of him felt such an interest in his behalf as to furnish him with several letters of introduction to his friends

---

<sup>7</sup> Please note that from this point on the use of the name John Norton will refer solely to the Scottish-born son.

<sup>8</sup> Benn, *A Mohawk Memoir of the War of 1812*, 30.

<sup>9</sup> Benn, *A Mohawk Memoir of the War of 1812*, 36.

in England.”<sup>10</sup>After a short stay in New York, John Norton travelled to Britain where he quickly befriended a man named William Allen, another Quaker, who was one of those working towards the end of the slave trade. Through Allen, Norton was introduced to a group of people:

a network of friends and families in England, with William Wilberforce as their centre of gravity, powerfully bound together by shared moral and spiritual values, by religious mission and social activism, by love for each other and by marriage. Their greatest and most celebrated achievement was the abolition of the slave trade and then slavery itself throughout the British Empire and beyond.<sup>11</sup>

Today, this group is known as the Clapham Sect.

Teyoninhokarawen made a strong impression on the people of Clapham. In his journal entry for July 30, 1804, William Wilberforce “noted that, ‘we are all extremely struck with Mr. Norton (Teyoninhokarawen)’, expressing admiration for ‘his blended modesty and self-possession’ and ‘his good sense and simple propriety of demeanor.’”<sup>12</sup> For his part, Norton was “confirmed and reinvigorated in his Christian faith by Wilberforce and other members of the Clapham Sect, with whom he continued to correspond.”<sup>13</sup> In Norton’s own words, “I have been, as it were, led by the hand to the abode of those who love and revere the system and precepts He has ordained for us, and daily study by what means they may fulfil His will; I have been much rejoiced by the additional strength and aid I have thereby received in religion.”<sup>14</sup>

Through powerful contacts, Norton was making headway, but William Claus learned of the venture and arranged a meeting of hand-picked opponents of Joseph Brant, getting them to disavow Norton and his purpose. Brant and other supporters were not invited. A letter of disavowal, signed by so-called ‘chiefs,’ was sent to Britain, effectively ending Norton’s bid to have the Privy Council approve the Haldimand Grant.<sup>15</sup> Despite this disheartening failure, there was still something to be achieved. The so-called Clapham group was at the time organising what was to become the British and Foreign Bible Society. They harnessed John Norton’s presence and skills by having him translate the Gospel of John into Mohawk and this became the first publication of the Society. Norton returned without the Haldimand Grant having been given official sanction, but came instead with 500 copies of his translation of the Gospel of John to be distributed to the Six Nations people.

Norton’s introduction to the translation includes these words, commemorated in a stained glass window in Her Majesty’s Royal Chapel of the Mohawk: “Let us strictly adhere to what the Lord has transmitted to us in the Holy Scriptures, that thereby the unbelievers may know that love we bear the commandments of God.” This is the edited quote; the full statement of Norton’s is as follows: “Let us strictly adhere to what our Lord has transmitted to us in the Holy Scriptures, that

---

<sup>10</sup> Norton, *The Journal of Major John Norton*, xlvi.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Tomkins, *The Clapham Sect: How Wilberforce’s Circle Transformed Britain* (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2010), 12.

<sup>12</sup> Kevin Hutchings, *Transatlantic Upper Canada: Portraits in Literature, Land, and British-Indigenous Relations* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2020), 146.

<sup>13</sup> Hutchings, *Transatlantic Upper Canada*, 149.

<sup>14</sup> John Norton, *Address to the Six Nations: Recommending the Gospel of Saint John* (London: Phillips & Fardon, 1805), 5.

<sup>15</sup> Timothy D. Willig, *Restoring the Chain of Friendship: British Policy & the Indians of the Great Lakes, 1783–1815* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 175–177.

thereby the unbelievers, in viewing us, may become enamoured of the Gospel, and may know that we are truly pious by the love we bear the commandments of God.”<sup>16</sup>

John Norton continued to work on behalf of the Six Nations of the Grand River. Joseph Brant died in 1807 and Norton took on many of Brant’s projects. Both Brant and Norton believed that the future of the First Nations lay in agriculture and they sought the help and teaching of the British to help their people learn the necessary skills. They also dreamed of a future homeland for the First Nations of Canada and the United States. They envisioned a future where Native peoples could live and work together in a country all their own.

Concerning Norton’s motivation behind this work, Willig writes,

Norton’s zeal for acculturationist reforms stemmed in large part from his genuine Christian faith... Norton had internalised and personalised his faith to a much greater degree than most Mohawks. Wherever he went, he sought opportunities to worship with other Christians, and he was determined to eventually bring all Native peoples to the knowledge of the beliefs he had adopted.<sup>17</sup>

Carl Benn comments further on Norton’s faith:

Despite his Protestantism, Norton had apparently married once or twice through native custom rather than through the rites of the church. And he participated in spiritually charged indigenous rituals, such as the war dance ... He also spoke with esteem of the nativist spiritual reform associated with the Seneca prophet Handsome Lake (Ganeodiyo). Norton showed his respect when they met in 1809, telling the Seneca, ‘I am thankful that it has pleased the Almighty to make you the means of bringing many to walk in the paths he has marked out for us.’ As well, he used both native and newcomer religious language in more or less the same breath, and equated the Great Spirit with the Christian God.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, in his notes on the Gospel of Saint John, Norton equates “Yehova” with Rawennyoh, the Mohawk word for God.<sup>19</sup>

## The War of 1812

In 1809–1810, John Norton undertook a journey by canoe from the Grand River to the land of the Cherokees in the neighbourhood of present day Tennessee. His journal tells of this adventure and offers a fascinating description of these North American territories at the beginning of the nineteenth century. While there is evidence that his main purpose was to meet his father’s people, Norton also saw this as an opportunity to share his faith. Willig writes,

At the Cherokee village of Willstown in present-day northern Alabama, he addressed the chiefs in council there, ‘lay[ing] before them, that which is due from man to God; the frailty of the one, the great mercy of the other, a brief account of the creation; the fall, and the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus; with the duties he inculcates, and their application to life.’<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Norton, *Address to the Six Nations*, 6.

<sup>17</sup> Willig, *Restoring the Chain of Friendship*, 166.

<sup>18</sup> Benn, *A Mohawk Memoir of the War of 1812*, 63.

<sup>19</sup> John Norton, *The Gospel According to Saint John: In the Mohawk Language*, American Bible Society (New York: D. Fanshaw, Printer, 1818), 117.

<sup>20</sup> Willig, *Restoring the Chain of Friendship*, 166–167.

At the threat of war between the Canadas and the United States, Norton returned to the Grand River area. When war broke out, he was asked by Sir Isaac Brock to take leadership of the Native warriors supporting Great Britain, being given the rank of Captain. Benn tells us, "As the threat of hostilities grew, Teyoninhokarawen hoped that the military's expanding influence would allow the Iroquois to confirm clear title over the land granted to them by Frederick Haldimand in 1784 ... Yet as the international situation deteriorated, he set these issues aside for the moment at Brock's request."<sup>21</sup> Because he had been working for recognition for the Haldimand Grant for so long, this must have been a difficult decision, but it is clear that Norton believed that the British were far more likely to enable the creation of a First Nations homeland than was the United States government.

During the war, Teyoninhokarawen led loyal warriors of several First Nations at the Detroit front, in other parts of Michigan, and predominantly, at the Niagara front. His leadership is most notable at Queenston Heights. With Sir Isaac Brock killed and a force of some 6,000 Americans holding the Heights, Teyoninhokarawen and his warriors, numbering about eighty, set about harrying the American troops until reinforcements could arrive. Norton addressed the warriors: "Comrades and brothers, be men. Remember the fame of ancient warriors, whose breasts were never daunted by odds of number ... Let not their numbers appal you. Look up! It is he above that shall decide our fate."<sup>22</sup> With war whoops and 'attack and withdraw' tactics they unnerved the Americans to the point that, when reinforcements eventually arrived, the British found an enemy that was thoroughly demoralised. The American presence had shrunken to a degree due to casualties; but, for the most part, due to desertion back to the river. In the end, the American presence was left with roughly "only five hundred effective men on the heights by this time."<sup>23</sup> In essence, Teyoninhokarawen and his warriors won the battle of Queenston Heights.

The First Nations' contribution to the victory was finally recognised in 2016, notably on the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the completion of Norton's journal, prompting this comment from Canadian author and amateur historian Don Cummer:

I wish I could have been there! Last Sunday, at the highest point of the park at the top of Queenston Heights where a decisive battle was fought 204 years ago, a monument was unveiled honouring the warriors from First Nations who played such a pivotal role in the War of 1812. Among the figures portrayed in the monument is John Norton (his Mohawk name was *Teyoninhokarawen*), one of the most intriguing people in Canada's history ... If not for John Norton -- his tactical brilliance at Queenston Heights and his political acumen at Burlington Heights -- I doubt whether Canada would be a country today.<sup>24</sup>

## Return to Britain and Canada

Following the war, Norton was given the brevet rank of Major in recognition of his leadership, bravery, and service to the Crown. He was also given land along the Grand River close to where the town of Caledonia now stands. However, Norton did not rest on his laurels. He continued to

---

<sup>21</sup> Benn, *A Mohawk Memoir of the War of 1812*, 75.

<sup>22</sup> Benn, *A Mohawk Memoir of the War of 1812*, 126.

<sup>23</sup> Benn, *A Mohawk Memoir of the War of 1812*, 133 n. 38.

<sup>24</sup> Don Cummer, "John Norton -- recognition at last!," Don Cummer, posted Oct 4, 2016, <https://www.doncummer.com/new-blog/2016/10/4/john-norton-recognition-at-last>.

work for the betterment of the Grand River Haudenosaunee. He had taken a wife (his third, it seems, and this one more than twenty years his junior) in 1813, and had a son from a previous marriage, who was born in 1799 and also bore the name John. It is notable that this marriage was according to the rites of the Church of England. Following the war, Norton returned to Britain, taking his young wife and son with him and enrolling them in schools in Dunfermline, Scotland. He worked on completing his journal, and while there took the opportunity to contact the friends he had made on his earlier journey, lobbying for the good of the First Nations in the British Canadian colonies. He was received by the Prince Regent, later King George IV, and was given a gift of high quality rifles for use by the Grand River peoples.<sup>25</sup>

Norton's activities on behalf of the Grand River Haudenosaunee appeared to have paid off. In a letter dated 2 January 1816, Henry Goulburn, Undersecretary of State for War and the Colonies, told John Norton,

'I am directed to assure you that there is no difficulty on the part of His Majesty's government to admit that the grant of the Grand River, which was after the peace of 1783 made to the Five Nations and their posterity, is a grant as full and as binding upon the government as any other made in Canada to individual settlers.' He also wrote that the Six Nations had the authority to apportion land within the tract as they saw fit, while the Crown possessed no such right unless the Chiefs asked it to intervene.<sup>26</sup>

While Norton expected some resistance from a stubborn Upper Canadian government, he nonetheless believed this declaration would be implemented, and, on his return to Canada in early 1817, enthusiastically reported his success to a council of the Six Nations. However, the Indian Department, "by a vigorous resilience to anyone opposing their agenda, ... ignoring their superiors across the ocean, ... took advantage of their control over the distribution of information, used their enviable political skills, and ... in the end they got their way."<sup>27</sup> Corruption within the department was not universal, but, as Benn writes, "the story, as it related to the Six Nations in Norton's day was a grim one indeed."<sup>28</sup>

Timothy Willig writes, "Norton came to resent the department as the primary obstacle preventing the process of acculturation and political autonomy for the Indians dwelling in Upper Canada."<sup>29</sup> Willig continues, "The Mohawk leader further suggested that the 'government ... turn the vast expence [sic] of the Indian Department towards the end ... of bettering the situation of the Indians.'"<sup>30</sup> We can perhaps sympathise with his desire to defund the largely corrupt Indian Department.

Norton did not give up writing letters and seeking help from Britain. Meanwhile, he worked his farm, and he continued serving the church, baptising people along the Grand in the absence of ordained clergy.<sup>31</sup> Along with his work towards the land claims of his people, Teyoninhokarawen longed for the Six Nations to learn of Christ, but repeated requests for clergy to be sent from Britain to serve the Six Nations had gone unheeded. Timothy Willig writes,

---

<sup>25</sup> Benn, *A Mohawk Memoir of the War of 1812*, 284.

<sup>26</sup> Benn, *A Mohawk Memoir of the War of 1812*, 287–288.

<sup>27</sup> Benn, *A Mohawk Memoir of the War of 1812*, 289.

<sup>28</sup> Benn, *A Mohawk Memoir of the War of 1812*, 289.

<sup>29</sup> Willig, *Restoring the Chain of Friendship*, 170.

<sup>30</sup> Willig, *Restoring the Chain of Friendship*, 172.

<sup>31</sup> Benn, *A Mohawk Memoir of the War of 1812*, 292.

Norton rejected the idea that Natives could not become Christians while they were still thriving cultures and independent peoples. He believed that genuine Christian missions should attempt to bolster the Natives' quality of life and independence, and prevent the Indians slide into the status of wards. Norton believed that the negative white influence in undermining Native cultures had particularly prejudiced indigenous peoples against 'the light of the Gospel'.<sup>32</sup>

## Final Days

In 1823, Norton had a violent confrontation with an Onondaga named Joseph Crawford or Kahishorowanen. It was reported as a duel at the time, and centred on Norton's wife, but lacked the gentlemanly attributes attributed to duels. As the men struggled for a gun, it went off, the bullet passing through Crawford's thigh. He died two days later. Norton, aggrieved at the death, offered himself up to the authorities for trial at Niagara. He was found guilty of manslaughter and fined 25 pounds. Carl Benne states, "One newspaper claimed Teyoninhokarawen endured more than was necessary, noting that his 'conduct in the affair was truly honourable, and he no doubt would have been acquitted altogether if he had not, from feelings of delicacy, withheld his best defence.'"<sup>33</sup> He left his wife, while still providing for her care before leaving, and left Upper Canada, travelling south to the land of the Cherokee. In 1824 he arrived at the Dwight Mission (Presbyterian) in Arkansas Territory, and arranged to have his mail sent there. He travelled to Texas, continuing to connect with Christian Missions. A record from a Moravian mission gives the only reference to his death, indicating that John Norton died in 1827 in his 57th year.<sup>34</sup> Where exactly he died and where he is buried is unknown.

Teyoninhokarawen was long forgotten, but various biographers and historians are currently unearthing his story and restoring his name to the history of the Six Nations, to Upper Canada, and to the War of 1812. In the 1790's, an unnamed contemporary described him as "a very intelligent, modest, and unassuming young man, who could discourse on any subject, but in all his conversations about Indians he complains of the injustice they receive from the intrigues of white people."<sup>35</sup> Roger Hall, general editor for the Champlain Society's 2011 edition of Norton's journal, refers to Teyoninhokarawen as "a complex man who stood astride two cultures with sensitivity, kindness and intelligence."<sup>36</sup>

Above all, Teyoninhokarawen showed himself to be a faithful follower of Jesus Christ. Having a foundation in faith established by Presbyterians, encouraged and emboldened by Quakers and Anglicans, he shared and participated readily with all Christian missions he came across in his travels, and exhibited a genuine love for all people, though especially the First Nations people in Canada and the United States. He called his people to faith and he called the governments of the insurgent settlers to justice; may his voice continue to speak today.

This paper barely scratches the surface of Norton's story, but hopefully will encourage those who read it to discover more of this hero of our past, especially noting that, in all his endeavours—

---

<sup>32</sup> Willig, *Restoring the Chain of Friendship*, 169.

<sup>33</sup> Benn, *A Mohawk Memoir of the War of 1812*, 293

<sup>34</sup> Benn, *A Mohawk Memoir of the War of 1812*, 296.

<sup>35</sup> Benn, *A Mohawk Memoir of the War of 1812*, 33.

<sup>36</sup> Norton, *The Journal of Major John Norton*, ix.

in war, in adversity, and in peace; in facing antagonism, injustice, prejudice and hardship—his faith in Jesus Christ shines through.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> For further reading, see Carl Benn, *The Iroquois in the War of 1812* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998); Arthur C. Parker, *The Code of Handsome Lake, the Seneca Prophet* (Albany: University of the State of New York, 1913).