

**THE  
CANADIAN  
SOCIETY  
OF  
PRESBYTERIAN  
HISTORY**

**PAPERS  
1988**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Paul Laverdure	1
Canada's Sunday: The Presbyterian Contribution, 1875-1950	
Chris Redmond	31
John Somerville in the General Assembly: Case Study of a Presbyterian Unionist	
Donald C. Smith	48
The Prophetic Tradition in the Reformed Church of Scotland	

Canada's Sunday.  
The Presbyterian Contribution, 1875-1950

by

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What can or cannot be done on the Canadian Sunday has been largely shaped by Presbyterian Church-State struggles during the height of the Social Gospel fervour of the early 20th century. Why politicians have debated Sunday laws can only be answered by studying the Presbyterians, William Caven, John Charlton, John G. Shearer and William M. Rochester, who were involved in shaping a national Canadian Sunday. The history of the Canadian Sunday is the history of the rise of Presbyterianism in Canada. It is, however, also the story of declining Presbyterian influence and of a Presbyterian retreat to southwestern Ontario.

In protest against the medieval multiplication of holidays and holy days, reformers repeated the commandment that all should:

Remember the sabbath-day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy cattle, nor the stranger that is within thy gates. (Ex. XX.1-8)

With the Westminster Standards of 1646-8, Presbyterians strictly identified the Fourth Commandment with Sunday. The Westminster Confession and both the Shorter and Larger Catechisms declared that every seventh day for Christians was Sunday and that all were to rest from all employment and recreation in order to worship God. Only works of necessity and mercy were

allowed.

In 1875, these confessions became the subordinate standards of the newly-united Presbyterian Church in Canada. In the young Church, a Committee on Sabbath Observance was formed. Synods sent petitions to the Federal Parliament to restrain railway business. Open government post offices, Sunday funerals in Ontario, and the holiday atmosphere on Quebec's Sunday were denounced. The fact that Ontario had almost ten times more Presbyterians than Quebec made for keen comparisons. Presbyterian Elder and member of Parliament, John Charlton, clamoured for a federal Sunday law. John A. Macdonald claimed that Sunday legislation was a provincial matter, since only provinces could make laws dealing with customs. Protestant Ontario promptly stopped the first Sunday newspapers which were profiting from Riel's 1885 Rebellion. Three groups -- the state, Quebec, and business -- became known as the main foes of Presbyterian righteousness.<sup>1</sup>

In 1888, a bold step in creating a Canada-wide and Christian Sunday was taken. Following a call from the 1886 Hamilton conference to save "the precious heritage of the Sabbath", the Church was asked to "gird herself for the struggle, rouse public interest on an issue so momentous, secure legislation ... and provide funds for the purpose of having the law enforced." Law

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<sup>1</sup>Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the ... Presbyterian Church in Canada (To be abbreviated as AP) 1875-1885.

usually acts as a deterrent and rarely as a guarantee of morality, but Presbyterians planned to turn the moral law into a government law so that the State would enforce it. Letters went out to the Christian denominations and, in 1888, at Ottawa's City Hall, under the Reverend W.D. Armstrong, convenor of the Presbyterian Church's Sabbath Observance Committee, the Lord's Day Alliance of Canada was founded.

The Presbyterian Sabbath Observance Committee had more doctors -- of divinity and otherwise --, lawyers, members of parliament and other notables than did the Committee on Missions, but the Sabbath Committee disbanded in favour of the Lord's Day Alliance. By 1896, the long reports of Sabbath transgressions from East to West, by the Governor General as well as by bootblacks, were cut to a few words in the Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Officially, temperance appeared to be the cause nearest to Presbyterian hearts and received the greatest amount of space. This was only apparent. Principal Caven of Knox College headed the Ontario Lord's Day Alliance branch while the Reverend Armstrong presided over the Dominion Alliance. Half the executives of the non-denominational Lord's Day Alliance were Presbyterians.<sup>2</sup> Year after year, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church sent resolutions to Sir John A. Macdon-

<sup>2</sup>Papers of the Lord's Day Alliance of Canada, deposited in the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library of the University of Toronto. (To be abbreviated as LDA) Item 71, Minute Book 1888, p. 15, 21 March 1889.

aid and money to the Lord's Day Alliance.

The Alliance took over the losing battle against Sunday streetcars, Sunday visiting, pleasure driving, walking, reading secular literature, sleeping, games, fishing, skating, Salvation Army parades, mining, farming, railway activities and secret Sunday tipping.<sup>3</sup> As far as Presbyterians were concerned, the Alliance was not stopping the worldliness fast enough. So, in 1899, again in Hamilton, a new Committee on Sabbath Observance and Legislation was launched with the Reverend John G. Shearer in charge. Shortly afterwards, at the Christian Endeavor Conference in Montreal, Shearer was asked to describe how "young people may be saved from dishonoring the Sabbath (quiet) by means of the bicycle."<sup>4</sup> Instead, he gave an impressive speech on how legislation could be passed and how the Lord's Day Alliance could improve its organization to stop the railways. The Alliance took Shearer up on his offer and appointed him their first full-time paid field secretary.

John Shearer was born in southwestern Ontario, of Scottish descent. At the University of Toronto, he studied what would now be political science and, at Knox College, theology under Dr. William Caven. Like Caven and Charlton before him, and

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<sup>3</sup>AP 1890. For an amusing celebration of secularism, see Christopher Armstrong and H.V. Nelles, The Revenge of the Methodist Bicycle Company. Sunday Streetcars and Municipal Reform in Toronto, 1888-1897 Peter Martin Associates, Toronto, 1977.

<sup>4</sup>LDA 71, Minute Book 1888, 8 August 1899.

social reformers elsewhere, Shearer believed that legislative reform of society would restrain individuals from breaking God's commandments.<sup>5</sup> When Shearer left his Hamilton pastorate - and its security -- he was at the cutting edge of Canadian social and political reform.

After a whirlwind tour of the Maritimes, Shearer called the first convention of the Lord's Day Alliance in the summer of 1901. There, old John Charlton thundered, "Christ's teaching depends upon the church and the church upon the Sabbath."<sup>6</sup> No simpler summary of sabbatarian concerns could be made. The older Presbyterians trusted Shearer's leadership; the Convention ratified all of Shearer's decisions. One appointment, of the Methodist clergyman, T. Albert Moore, as an associate secretary, was to have major consequences for the future of Protestant ecumenism in Canada. Moore would look back on a career as Secretary of the General Conference of the Methodist Church, first and almost perpetual General Secretary of the United Church of Canada, and its Moderator in the deepest crisis of the Depression, to remember Shearer as his inspiration at the Montreal Christian Endeavor Convention where Moore had been a

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<sup>5</sup>Richard Allen, The Social Passion. Religion and Social Reform in Canada 1914-28 University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1971, p.17. Sharon Patricia Meen "The Battle for the Sabbath: The Sabbatarian Lobby in Canada, 1890-1912" Ph.D. University of British Columbia, 1979, p.135, explicitly fitted Shearer into Allen's definition.

<sup>6</sup>LDA 38 p.111.

reporter.<sup>7</sup> Moore also came from Hamilton. Together, Shearer and Moore filled the young Dominion of Canada with Lord's Day Alliance branches and, by the end of 1902, there were 512 branches, with 220 in Ontario alone. Ominously, Quebec had ten. Only Prince Edward Island had fewer.<sup>8</sup>

The Alliance Convention of 1901 also shifted its administration from Ottawa to southwestern Ontario. Although Hamilton was the heart of the Canadian Sabbath controversy and home to the Presbyterian Free Church tradition seeking control of the State, Toronto had more money and more Presbyterians. As in so many other movements, notably the temperance and women's movements of the twentieth century, Toronto became the new centre of power. Amongst other power brokers, Borden, opposition leader, was signed on as a Vice-President of the Alliance.<sup>9</sup>

In 1903, the case -- of course -- of the Hamilton Street Railway versus the Attorney-General of Ontario was brought to the Privy Council in England. There, it was decided that the power to enact Sunday laws, like all religious laws, belonged to the Federal Parliament. The judges reasoned that, since Sunday laws were based on the Fourth Commandment, and as the other commandments, against perjury, murder, and theft, had become part of the criminal legislation of the Christian world, all reli-

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<sup>7</sup>United Church of Canada Archives, Emmanuel College, University of Toronto. T.A. Moore clipping file.

<sup>8</sup>LDA 41, p.151.

<sup>9</sup>LDA 38, p.115.

gious legislation was criminal legislation. Under the British North America Act, Canada's constitution, criminal legislation was in federal jurisdiction.<sup>10</sup> Thus, all provincial Sunday laws passed after Confederation in 1867 were void. The Hamilton Railway could run on Sunday. Only the laws from Charles I and II, forbidding sports, meetings, individual travelling, bull and bear-baiting seemed to be still in force.<sup>11</sup> Although the pre-Confederation laws could be effective at times, they were antiquarian and shaky. Sunday quiet melted away; workers were forced to their jobs; labour and the churches were in an uproar. The drive for one law for all Canada began.

Shearer broadened the Alliance by advertising its cooperation with all people. In reality, Shearer made contacts "either with an existing Sabbath observance association or with a Presbyterian minister whom he knew from General Assembly meetings."<sup>12</sup> He expected little from any except Presbyterians, Methodists or Congregationalists -- the three churches which formed the United Church of Canada.<sup>13</sup> Although Shearer reached

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<sup>10</sup>Ontario Reform Commission 1970, Report on Sunday Observance Legislation Department of Justice, Toronto, 1970, p.35. Also, George S. Holmsted, The Sunday Law in Canada Toronto, 1912, pp.69-70.

<sup>11</sup>AP 1904, p.267.

<sup>12</sup>Meen, p.178.

<sup>13</sup>LDA 5, 18 December 1905, Shearer to the Rev. P.L. Richardson.

out to Anglicans for a Western Secretary, he was unsuccessful.<sup>14</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century, most Anglicans were not interested in social reform.<sup>15</sup> Instead, the Lord's Day Alliance hired the Reverend William Marshall Rochester. Born in southwestern Ontario, he had impeccable academic credentials from McGill and had been in sabbatarian circles since 1893. Moreover, he had actually served in some Western pastorates.<sup>16</sup> He was, of course, a Presbyterian. Shearer made few attempts to contact Baptists. Roman Catholics were practically ignored, so sure were Protestants that Roman Catholics would not be interested.<sup>17</sup> The just-established newspaper, The Lord's Day Advocate, which quickly reached a circulation of 40,000, was consciously modelled on the size and format of The Presbyterian Record. The Advocate gave prominent space to Principal Caven and to his successor as Alliance president, J.K. Macdonald, Director of Confederation Life and a prominent Presbyterian.<sup>18</sup> The Reverend C.W. Gordon, or Ralph Connor to his many

<sup>14</sup>LDA 5 14 December 1905 Shearer to the Rev. Archdeacon Lloyd.

<sup>15</sup>Edward Pulker, We Stand on Their Shoulders. The Growth of Social Concern in Canadian Anglicanism Toronto 1986.

<sup>16</sup>AP 1893, Advocate III:7, May 1906.

<sup>17</sup>For Roman Catholics, see Meen p. 187 and LDA 2, 21 December 1900, Shearer to Mr. A. McKillop. For Baptists, see LDA 4, 24 August 1904, (Shearer) to Rev. S.C. Murray and LDA 1, 22 February 1900, Shearer to Rev. Thos. Wilson.

<sup>18</sup>The Lord's Day Advocate (to be abbreviated as Advocate) Vol. 1, number 8, (to be abbreviated as I:8) April 1904. II:3, December 1904 and II:8, May 1905.

literary fans, reported on "The Necessity of the Sabbath To The West". The resolutions of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church against Sunday funerals and parades were always faithfully reproduced. When the Reverend W.D. Armstrong, the former Secretary of the 1888 Ottawa-based Lord's Day Alliance, became Moderator of the General Assembly for 1905-1906, Presbyterian support for the Sabbath could not be more complete. Clearly, the Lord's Day Alliance, under Shearer, was a Presbyterian organization with Methodist help.

The Alliance moved on Ottawa in the guise of an inter-denominational and labour-supported mass-movement, demanding legislation from Laurier.<sup>19</sup> Shearer flooded Parliament Hill with petitions. The anti-Sunday forces were crushed; Seventh-day Adventists and Jews were dismissed as insignificant foreign minorities, American heretics, vicious Europeans, and strangers within our gates who had to conform to the Christian majority's wishes.<sup>20</sup> "An Act respecting the Lord's Day" was announced in 1906, in the same Speech from the Throne which described the entry of the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan into Confederation. On Sunday, except for works of mercy and necessity, the

<sup>19</sup>LDA 5, 20 November 1905, Shearer to Laurier.

<sup>20</sup>For petitions, see Advocate I:2, October 1903, III:2 and 3, December 1905 and January 1906, LDA 5, p.291, 7 December 1905, Shearer to Mackenzie, etc. For the xenophobia and anti-semitism of the Alliance campaign, see LDA 5, 20 July 1905, Shearer to Rev. I.B. Colwell, LDA 5, 8 June 1905, Shearer to Funk & Wagnalls, Meen pp. 207-8, and David Rome, ed., On Sunday Observance, 1906 National Archives of the Canadian Jewish Congress, Montreal 1979.

bill prohibited:

sales, the procecution of ordinary work or business, excursions, games for prizes, the opening of places of public amusement for which an admission fee is charged, (and) to advertise any performance or other thing prohibited ..."<sup>21</sup>

The Catechisms' teachings could hardly be better translated into legal terms.

In Parliament, however, the debate cut across party lines. Presbyterians and Methodists fought ferociously for every item. Roman Catholics, most Anglicans, and some Baptists opposed the law. Henri Bourassa denounced the entire bill as absurd. He objected to making "people virtuous by law, instead of relying on the individual conscience and the moral quality of the church ..."<sup>22</sup> David Henderson, a Presbyterian, saw any amendments to the law as a sacrilegious attempt to amend the Fourth Commandment.<sup>23</sup> The Sabbath was undoubtedly Sunday and no man-made exceptions were to be allowed to trespass "God's law." Always seeking compromise, Laurier admitted that the choice of Sunday created a law based on religion, but rest was part of natural law and thus required civil legislation to protect the workers.<sup>24</sup> In spite of Laurier's skills, the debate escalated

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<sup>21</sup>Official Report of the Debates of the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada. Second Session -- Tenth Parliament, 6 Edward VII. 1906 columns 19-20 (To be abbreviated as HC 19-20). For text of Bill, see Advocate III:6, April 1906.

<sup>22</sup>HC 5630, 5769.

<sup>23</sup>HC 5664.

<sup>24</sup>HC 5638

into a confrontation between French-Catholic and English-Protestant Canada. In the Senate, one Presbyterian challenged French Catholics to measure themselves by the standard God set up and Queen Victoria once exemplified. An Irish Catholic Senator replied that Catholics were in peril for their souls when they missed Sunday Mass; this Protestant law only fined people one dollar for failing to observe the Sabbath. Was this any indication of how much the Fourth Commandment was worth to Protestants?<sup>25</sup>

Hard bargaining went on. Quebec insisted on the sale of articles at the church for charitable purposes and the notarizing of deeds for people, usually farmers, who often could not take a weekday off to go into town to buy or sell land. Ontario got continuous manufacturing processes and through trains to transport perishable goods or livestock. Both sides were able to denounce the Jews until Henri Bourassa realized that French-Canadian cultural concerns were closer to Jewish fears for religious minorities than to the English-Protestant homogenization of Canada. In more than a hundred columns of xenophobic and antisemitic speeches, the Presbyterians and the Methodists did not distinguish themselves by tolerance. An exemption clause for the Jews or others who conscientiously observed another day as the Sabbath was thrown out. In a last attempt to

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<sup>25</sup>Debates of the Senate of the Dominion of Canada. 1906. Second Session -- Tenth Parliament Ottawa 1906 (To be abbreviated as Senate) pp. 1130-5, 1145-9.

dump the whole debate back on the provinces, the House of Commons gave Provincial Attorney-Generals the power to withhold permission to prosecute. This was meant to avoid petty persecutions among neighbors, but in fact it allowed provinces to determine what would be permitted on Sunday.

In summary, the law prohibited work, sports and amusements for gain, prize or reward, Sunday excursions by railway and steamboats, shooting, and newspapers. Shearer rejoiced that corporations could be fined as well as individuals. The State, Catholic Quebec, and business, the three concerns of the 1875 Sabbath committee, had been beaten. The "railway men are about the maddest crowd you could find in this Dominion," Shearer wrote, "It is something new for them to be beaten and to be beaten by preachers and their like is too humiliating altogether."<sup>26</sup> Canadian Presbyterians rejoiced with Shearer and gave him a Doctorate of Divinity. He was promoted out of the Alliance to head the new Presbyterian Department of Moral and Social Reform.<sup>27</sup>

One day before the Federal law came into force, Quebec rammed through a provincial Lord's Day Bill to take precedence over the Federal law. It incorporated the Jewish exemption clause and also allowed everyone to "be and remain entitled to

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<sup>26</sup>LDA 5, 14 July 1906, Shearer to J.B. Mitchell.

<sup>27</sup>Advocate III:10, August-September 1906, LDA 6, 24 April 1907, G.D. Bayne to Shearer, LDA 74, 4 July 1907, Minutes of the Executive Board, Special Meeting.

do on Sunday any act not forbidden by the" laws of Quebec.<sup>28</sup>

Canadian Roman Catholics, like Anglicans and Baptists, all minority denominations, were wary of the State getting too close to religion, something Presbyterians were willing to risk. As long as the State would listen to its self-appointed Presbyterian conscience, Presbyterians were happy with an unusual union of Church and State.

The Sunday forces next expanded to go after Quebec. In administration, this meant the hiring of more Presbyterians. Although Shearer had left, the Reverend W.G. Hanna, another southwestern Ontario Presbyterian minister, was hired for eastern Canada. In 1909, a special Quebec secretary was brought on staff. The Reverend George W. Mingie had been an academic whirlwind at McGill University and Presbyterian College. His bilingualism and legal studies made him an obvious choice for the Lord's Day Alliance in Quebec.<sup>29</sup> Although older faces were fading away - John Charlton died in 1910 - other Presbyterians took their places. The famous missionary, Jonathan Goforth, wrote on "China and the Lord's Day." The Reverend F.B. Duval, a Lord's Day Alliance supporter, became Moderator of the Presbyterian General Assembly in 1908. When T.A. Moore left in 1910 to become Secretary of the Methodist Board of Temperance and Moral Reform, Rochester replaced him as General Secretary and began a

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<sup>28</sup>Advocate IV:3, March 1907.

<sup>29</sup>Advocate IV:10, October 1907. VI:10, July-August 1909.

fifteen-year reign. The Reverend J.S. Watson, a Queen's University graduate and a Presbyterian was hired in 1912 as secretary for Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Only Alberta and B.C. enjoyed the services of a Methodist organizer.<sup>30</sup>

Presbyterians in the Alliance fought against the Toronto laws forcing municipal workers to work at toboggan slides on Sunday, against the sale of ice cream in Hamilton, American Sunday newspapers in Windsor, band concerts in Regina, Seventh Day Adventists in China, and Prime Minister Borden's habit of Sunday golf in Nova Scotia.<sup>31</sup> Although they sometimes stooped to spying on men rushing to buy American papers off a Napanee train, the Lord's Day Alliance lawyers did win important court battles. Although this would be one of the last times mercy was defined so narrowly, Judge William Middleton, a Presbyterian, ruled in 1911 that, for the sale of food to be an act of necessity or mercy, the purchaser had to eat the food on the spot, in order to demonstrate need.<sup>32</sup> No one could carry ice cream, cigars, or any food out of a store on Sunday. More

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<sup>30</sup>Advocate VII:5, March 1910, VII:8, June 1910, V:9, July-August 1908, VIII:7, May 1912.

<sup>31</sup>For Sunday slides, see the Toronto newspapers of 1912 and Patricia Meen's article, "Holy Day or Holiday? The Giddy Trolley and the Canadian Dunday, 1890-1914" Urban History Review February 1980, pp.49-63. For Hamilton ice cream sales, look at Hamilton Times 8 July and 6 August 1909. For American newspapers, Prime Minister Borden and band concerts, see LDA 6. Legal decisions and other matters are in the Advocate.

<sup>32</sup>Henry James Morgan, ed., The Canadian Men and Women of the Time: A Handbook of Canadian Biography of Living Characters William Briggs, Toronto 1912.

importantly, however, the Quebec Lord's Day Act was brought to the Supreme Court in 1912 and was declared unconstitutional.

The Quebec government was forced to observe the stricter Federal Lord's Day Act; it was was forced to prosecute the Jews. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church reported proudly on the successes of the Alliance. Rochester received his Doctorate of Divinity.

After 1914, nothing seemed to go right. The forces for moral reform watched with horror as the war ripped away the illusions of peace and progress the long Victorian era had fostered. In a joint Canadian war effort, business and the State ran over the Sunday laws. Within months, military necessity justified parades, open theatres for the weary soldiers, Sunday newspaper war extras, full-blast seven-day manufacturing, and patriotic entertainments to raise money and recruits. War justified it all and the Canadian war effort was blessed by the denominations that turned constantly toward England, the Methodists and the Anglicans.<sup>33</sup> They stopped supporting the Lord's Day Alliance. Even Presbyterians were shaken; some thought that the Lord's Day Alliance "might possibly lose caste with the public if we insisted too strongly on the letter of the law."<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup>J.M. Bliss, "The Methodist Church and World War I," Canadian Historical Review Vol. XLIX:3 (September 1968) pp.213-33. For an example of the Anglicans, see LDA 9, 14 June 1915, Rev. D. MacDonald to Rev. R.W. Ross.

<sup>34</sup>LDA 8, 15 August 1914, George M. Wood to Rochester.

Stopping the "thin edge of the wedge" became difficult across Canada, but in the Maritimes, where the soldiers were stationed before going overseas, it was impossible.<sup>35</sup> "So it is repeated again and again, in editorial, in letter, in public address, that the soldier works and fights on Sunday," Rochester complained, "There seems to be no downing of this specious plea."<sup>36</sup> Quebec openly ignored the federal law and reimposed its own more lenient and unconstitutional legislation.

Everyone and everything was thrown into the Great War. The war needed ammunition to be manufactured on Sunday, or Canadians would die defenseless. It needed clothing, shoes, and Sunday work on farms for food. Above all, the war and the Red Cross demanded Sunday shows, vaudeville, cigarettes, military band instruments and alcohol.<sup>37</sup> When Rochester questioned the means Canadians were using to win the war, the Winnipeg Free Press general manager pointedly suggested that useless clergymen might

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<sup>35</sup>For Halifax, see LDA 8, 15 August 1914, George M. Wood to Rochester. For New Brunswick, see LDA 7, 3 December 1914, Amon A. Wilson to Rochester.

<sup>36</sup>UCA Advocate XIV:3, April-May 1918.

<sup>37</sup>For shells and ammunition, see LDA 9, 29 June 1915, Joseph Wearing to Rochester and 12 November 1915, Canada Crushed Stone Corp. to Rochester. For clothing and food, see LDA 7, 15 November 1915, Hugh A. Dougall to the Alliance and UCA Advocate XIV:3, April-May 1918. For smokes, alcohol, vaudeville and musical instruments, XIII:18, October-November 1917 and LDA 10, 29 March 1916, Rev. D.W. Snider to Rev. J.D. Fitzpatrick. For the Red Cross involvement, one can read LDA 7, 1 December 1914, the Mayor of St. John, N.B. to Rochester.

find some work with Patriotic fund-raising events.<sup>38</sup> Rochester, however, had already campaigned for these causes. Two of his four sons were already in the field and, by the end of the war, two would be dead and one would be home with wounds. Rochester's hair went white with the stress. The abuse from the war boosters, however, still piled up on his desk.<sup>39</sup>

There were some small consolations. The Sunday war-time extras were blatantly commercial. As one Lord's Day Alliance employee recited for the Attorney General of Ontario, newspapers were

Sixty-nine pages of rubbish, Twenty-two pages of rot,  
 Forty-six pages of scandal vile  
 Served to us piping hot.  
 Seventeen hundred pictures - Death, Disease and Despair -  
 Lies and fakes and fakes and lies  
 Stuck in most everywhere.  
 Thirty-four comic pages Printed in reds, greens and blues:  
 Thousands of items we don't care to read  
 But only two columns of news.

Sunday papers were stopped by the government, since they contained little news, upset people with inaccuracies in their casualty lists and had no right to inform families of casualties

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<sup>38</sup>LDA 10, 3 January 1916, E.H. Macklin, The Manitoba Free Press, to Rochester.

<sup>39</sup>UCA Advocate XIV:7, October 1918. LDA 11, 25 November 1916, D.W. Snider to Rev. W.E. Prescott. Also, I am grateful to Mr. Lawlor Rochester for allowing me to consult the records compiled by his uncle, Lloyd B. Rochester, ed. The John Rochester Family in Canada (Fourth Edition) Ottawa, 1976. Lloyd Rochester was Dr. Rochester's nephew.

before the official telegram arrived.<sup>40</sup> The 1918 Spanish influenza brought the newspapers to retaliate by suggesting that churches should remain closed on Sundays in order to prevent the spread of disease.<sup>41</sup> Some churches obediently closed.

The American Sunday opening of the Panama-Pacific World Exposition gave shocked Canadians a chance to be annoyed with American neutrality. Problems in Canada were blamed on American branch plants, but when the United States entered the war, complaints about the allied Americans became very rare. When recruiting dropped off, so did Sunday recruiting shows. The war, not morality, controlled everything.<sup>42</sup>

As the war dragged on, people began to wonder about the war and the post-war world. They listened to the Presbyterian ministers, E. Leslie Pidgeon and Dr. Rochester about the need of the men for rest. The Alliance spokesmen claimed that "one of the great underlying causes of the war raging in Europe today, and one of the most apparent reasons for the Divine

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<sup>40</sup>LDA 11, 21 November 1916, Snider, citing the Catholic Citizen, to Hon. I.B. Lucas, Attorney General of Ontario. See also Public Archives of Ontario, Record Group 4-32, (Ministry of the Attorney General, Criminal and Civil Files) file 1915-740, 13 May 1915, Rochester to Hon. I.B. Lucas.

<sup>41</sup>Eg. Montreal World 13 October 1918, "Montreal to Have Churchless Sunday." News 17 October 1918, "Only One Service in City Churches Urged for Sunday."

<sup>42</sup>Toronto Star 11 February 1916, "Recruiting League Fears Meetings Have Lost Force." For Anti-Americanism, see LDA 7, 8 June 1914, Rev. Robt. Young to Snider, 9 June 1914, Miss Sarah Cairns to Mingie, and LDA 9, 1 June 1915, Rochester to the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

chastisement of the nations is that Europe had, to a shocking degree flung away the Christian Sabbath."<sup>43</sup> Sabbath desecration seemed a more appropriate reason for such a terrible war, such a divine retribution, than a murdered Austrian Archduke.

Whatever the cause, the war became an example no one ever wanted to repeat. A new world order was meant to rise from the war's ashes. From 1919 to 1925, a new attempt at world peace and

progress was made. The Paris Peace Conference declaration for

"The adoption of a weekly rest of at least twenty-four hours, which should include Sunday wherever practicable" was incorporated into the League of Nations 1921 Labour recommendations.

The Government of Canada in 1925 followed suit in declaring for

one day's rest in seven.<sup>44</sup> Rochester was elected chairman of

the World Commission on The Christian Sabbath at the World's Christian Citizenship Conference. He thanked God for the

survival of the Canadian Sunday as a day free from newspa-

pers, theatres, and paid sports.<sup>45</sup> The Presbyterian General

Assembly thanked Rochester for the reputation Canada's Sunday

had around the world.<sup>46</sup> Even in Quebec, an independent Sunday

<sup>43</sup>LDA 79, 1915, Ontario Lord's Day Alliance Annual Report. LDA 9, 18 November 1915, E.L. Pidgeon to Rochester.

<sup>44</sup>UCA Advocate XV:6, June 1919. And Privy Council Order 1537, 7 September 1925, reported in XXI:11, November 1925.

<sup>45</sup>William M. Rochester, Report of World Commission On The Christian Sabbath. Read at the Third World's Christian Citizenship Conference. National Reform Association, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (1920?) 11p.

<sup>46</sup>AP 1920, 22.

League was organized by the Jesuits to combat the problems in the inhuman factories.<sup>47</sup> In 1924, Canadian Presbyterians celebrated the Olympic victory of the Scots Presbyterian, Eric Liddell, in the 400 metres after he refused to run the 100 metres when the trials were held on Sunday.<sup>48</sup> It seemed a golden age; it was a fragile dream.

Criticisms soon came from all parts of the country. The Calgary Albertan ran a letter begging for the Sunday opening of libraries. Was their closing, "like the bagpipe, an unwelcome and noisome legacy from bonnie Scotland ..."? There were altogether too many Scots and, probably, Presbyterians in Calgary for this letter-writer.<sup>49</sup> Complaints of seven-day work-weeks reached J.S. Woodsworth in Parliament, who commented that the Alliance should bother the employers more and the ice-cream salespeople less.<sup>50</sup> Montreal's La Presse said the Alliance held a minority opinion and could be ignored; Le Canard said they could not be ignored; they should be kicked out of town.<sup>51</sup> The past moderator of the Presbyterian Church in 1922,

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<sup>47</sup>Papers of Joseph-Papin Archambault, s.j., "Ligue du dimanche" in Archives of the French-Canadian Province of the Society of Jesus, St. Jerome, Quebec. See also, Le Repos dominical. Ligue du Dimanche, Montreal 1927.

<sup>48</sup>LDA 157, 2 May 1924 Saskatoon Phoenix, Advocate XX:8, August 1924.

<sup>49</sup>LDA 160 Albertan 10 February 1925.

<sup>50</sup>Advocate XX:7, July 1923.

<sup>51</sup>LDA 69, La Presse 18 November 1922. LDA 152, Le Canard 5 March 1922.

C.W. Gordon, when he sold the film rights to his novels, had to suffer seeing them turned into films shown on Sundays in the States. Toronto newspapers attacked him mercilessly.<sup>52</sup> Alberta declared gasoline a necessity and allowed its sale on Sunday. Concerts and dancing spread across the Prairies. Finally, in 1923, the Manitoba government allowed excursion trains to run in Manitoba.<sup>53</sup> Governments, Quebec and businesses successfully ignored the 1906 law.

The idea of a righteous Canada propelled some Presbyterians to form a powerful church to influence Canadian life. As the Montreal Star humorously reported, "Church Union Will Never Be Successful Until the Fordites, and - The Sabbath Recreationists, and - The Seventh Day Golfites and Similar Denominations Come Into the Union."<sup>54</sup> The desire for stricter Sunday laws probably brought some Presbyterians to support the union. Although some members of Winnipeg's St. James' Presbyterian Church brought the Sunday union vote into the courts as illegal as well as immoral,<sup>55</sup> names prominent in Presbyterian social reform movements and the Lord's Day Alliance, disappeared from the General Assembly lists and reappeared in the United Church minutes. C.W. Gordon, the Pidgeon brothers, and the Alliance's

<sup>52</sup>LDA 154, 9 June 1922, Toronto Star and Toronto Telegram.

<sup>53</sup>Advocate XIX:6, June 1923, XX:6, June 1924, XIX:4, April 1923.

<sup>54</sup>LDA 157, 12 January 1924.

<sup>55</sup>Advocate XX:7, July 1925.

own solicitor, went the United way. Shearer would have joined the United Church to promote God's Kingdom in Canada, but he had died just a few months prior to union.<sup>56</sup> When Rochester remained with the continuing Presbyterian Church, the news went across the country. The Reverend George Mingie wrote bluntly to Rochester, "I think your stand may help in Ontario where the large number of Presbyterian Church(e)s are," but not with donations elsewhere.<sup>57</sup> With religious loyalties polarized, money for interdenominational causes, such as the Lord's Day Alliance, disappeared.<sup>58</sup> Rochester left the Alliance to become editor of the Presbyterian Record. For lack of money, the Lord's Day Advocate folded.

The United Church, with T.A. Moore firmly in the secretary's seat and George Pidgeon as Moderator, welcomed a delegation from the Lord's Day Alliance, but its welcome was not as warm as the one given Rochester by Presbyterians. The United Church was undergoing a reevaluation of its social concerns before moving on to the conquest of Canada. On the one hand, the United Church New Outlook reported that there was some doubt whether the Jewish Sabbath Commandment was a permanent Christian obligation.<sup>59</sup> On the other hand, the Presbyterian Church

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<sup>56</sup>John S. Moir, "J.G. Shearer. Crusader for Christ's Kingdom pp.16-7 in The Presbyterian Record April 1975.

<sup>57</sup>LDA 13, 5 May 1925, Mingie to Rochester.

<sup>58</sup>LDA 13, 9 May and 5 June 1925, Mingie to Rochester.

<sup>59</sup>Advocate XXII:9, September 1926.

strongly commended to its people "the profound importance of maintaining by precept and example the sacredness and integrity of the Lord's Day."<sup>60</sup> The Record under Rochester had on average one editorial every year dedicated to the Sunday question. There was no doubt in Presbyterian minds that the Sabbath was a permanent Christian obligation.

The Depression, however, ended all the hopes of the late twenties. The Sabbath Committee that Rochester created within the Presbyterian Church disappeared into the Committee on Church Life and Work. This was no centralization as before the First World War; this was the result of budget cuts. The Lord's Day Alliance underwent the same fate. Field secretaries were retired and George Mingie was forced out, taking the moribund Quebec branch with him. He complained that Toronto did not understand Quebec, was behind in his salary, and that it was staffed mainly by United Churchmen.<sup>61</sup> Quebec's Ligue du Dimanche went its own frustrated way, directed by Papal encyclicals, not the Shorter Catechism.

In the hot, dusty days that followed, it was almost impossible to stop Sunday prairie baseball games even by American Negro teams. Musicians in Calgary had once called Sunday theatres, the "Thin Edge of the Wedge," but by 1932 the Archdeacon of Vancouver accused job-hungry musicians of ham-

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<sup>60</sup> Advocate XXI:7, July 1925.

<sup>61</sup> LDA 15, 10 December 1929, Mingie to Dr. Charles H. Huestis.

mering in the wedge. Workers could be had seven days a week. William Aberhart crudely identified his Social Credit crusade with God's will and preached politics from his Sunday radio pulpit. The stronghold of Canadian sabbatarianism, Ontario, shook when Liberal Premier Hepburn suggested that Ontario might allow money-making excursion trains for ski parties. Walkathons in B.C., miniature golf on the Prairies, and late Saturday-night burlesque shows in Windsor seemed petty to governments worried about communism and anarchy.<sup>62</sup>

Presbyterians sadly complained about Canadians' ignorance of true religion. In 1938, on the fiftieth anniversary of the Lord's Day Alliance, in a survey of Sunday conditions from East to West, the Presbyterian Church reported that the Maritimes generally respected Sunday while B.C. did not. Quebec and Ontario were restless, while the Prairies were hostile to Sunday observance. The Maritimes were also relatively homogeneous in population and were economically stagnant. British Columbia was too diverse, the Prairies too concerned with the Depression, and the distrust between Ontario and Quebec too great to build a consensus on a Canadian version of Christ's Kingdom.

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<sup>62</sup>For the baseball games, LDA 17, 14 November 1931, Regina, Sask. For musicians, LDA 161, 2 February 1926, Calgary Herald and LDA 17, 19 November 1932, F.C.C. Heathcote to Hon. R.H. Pooley, Attorney General of B.C. For Aberhart, LDA 18, 4 July 1935, Reverend George Webber to the Hon. J.F. Lymburn, Attorney General of Alberta, 12 June 1936, Huestis to Webber. For Ontario, LDA 17, 11 December 1931, Hon. William H. Price, Attorney General of Ontario to Huestis.

Nineteen thirty-eight brought Canada and the Lord's Day Alliance out of the lethargy of Depression. Planning for the future, however, was impossible; Hitler's armies marched and the C.B.C. aired news flashes all day Sunday. The C.B.C. promised that its Sunday advertising would be in good taste, but what was good taste in a time of mass propaganda?<sup>63</sup> Radio stations eventually just cut much of their religious programming. The government suspended the Federal Lord's Day Act to allow full war-time munitions production. One by one, the field secretaries of the Alliance answered the call as war chaplains. Only the very old and the young were left. T.A. Moore died in 1940. Rochester fell on a Toronto street with a stroke. At the same time, the Federal government, under the War Measures Act, suspended all provincial laws relating to Sunday, something that had not been done even during the First World War.<sup>64</sup>

The Second World War brought out new I.O.D.E. and Red Cross Patriotic Softball Sunday Tournaments and Concerts. Ski trains pulled out of Toronto in order to attract needed American tourist dollars. The film industry, led by Warner Brothers and Famous Players, gave their unused theatres for Sunday shows, in the supposed hope that non-stop entertainment would stop the

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<sup>63</sup>LDA 21, 8 September 1939, Gladstone Murray, C.B.C. General Manager to Rev. George Webber and LDA 24, 1 May 1943, Murray to Webber.

<sup>64</sup>Privy Council Order 8535, 4 November 1943, Canadian War Orders and Regulations 1943 Vol. IV:6, Ottawa 1943.

spread of V.D. among the enlisted men.<sup>65</sup>

Presbyterians, faced with the onslaught, at first denounced the conscious paganizing of their Christian civilization.<sup>66</sup> But, after Church Union, they were weak in numbers and in influence. Ottawa again pushed men to fight and to die on Sunday. The State had become too big and too impersonal to control. Its war-time power overshadowed individuals and churches. When the nuclear dawn arrived, Sunday laws seemed almost annoyingly petty.<sup>67</sup>

In the post-war world, the Presbyterian General Assembly continued to deplore the secularization of Canadian life.<sup>68</sup> The president of the Lord's Day Alliance was Peter Dunn, the Minister of St. Paul's Presbyterian Church, Hamilton. The new field secretary for Eastern Ontario and English Quebec was the

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<sup>65</sup>The Windsor Star, 2 January and 1 October 1942, gives an example of boosting Patriotic games and concerts. LDA 24, November 1942 holds a news release "From the National Executive Committee of the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire." For ski trains, see LDA 169, Toronto Daily Star, 29 November 1940 and LDA 22, 25 October 1940, "Press Release for Friday by G.D. Conant, Attorney General of Ontario." For the films, see LDA 25, 24 March 1943, Ralph P. Bell, Director-General, Aircraft Production Branch, Department of Munitions and Supply to Webber. For an explicit and negative discussion of V.D. and films, see Lord's Day Bulletin September 1944, "V.D. Control and Sunday Entertaining."

<sup>66</sup>LDA 22, 22 February 1941, William Barclay, Moderator, signed a joint letter to the Legislature of Ontario.

<sup>67</sup>LDA 29 "Report of a Visit to Oshawa, January 28th and 29th 1948 by the Rev. A.R. Skinner re Sunday Activities of Mayfair Lanes Bowling Alleys, and Oshawa Skating Rink."

<sup>68</sup>"Resolution of the Board of Evangelism and Church Life and Work" 1946.

Presbyterian minister, A.B. Casselman. Unlike 1906, when the Alliance gathered in Hamilton for its anniversary in 1948, all the key people were old, reminders of past dreams. The identification with the Presbyterian Church was so strong the Globe and Mail called the Alliance General Secretary, Dr. George Webber, a Presbyterian.<sup>69</sup> He was a Methodist United Church minister; he was also seventy-two years old.

With European immigrants and returned soldiers, Canada exploded into a northern version of the pursuit of happiness. The Financial Post and the Globe and Mail urged the government to demilitarize the country and to allow seven-day gas stations.<sup>70</sup> Although this undid some of the positive labour legislation from the war, it encouraged profitable tourism and trucking. Bowling alleys, penny arcades, shooting galleries, merry-go-rounds, and sidewalk hotdog stands opened. Since the National Hockey League decided not to move Hockey Night in Canada from its traditional Saturday spot, originally chosen to avoid the Sunday law, baseball became Canada's national Sunday sport, as Lester B. Pearson memorized American baseball scores.

In 1950, Ontario passed a Lord's Day Act of its own, assuring municipalities that it would not grant permission to prosecute any sporting activities a municipality had voted to

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<sup>69</sup>6 August 1948.

<sup>70</sup>The Globe and Mail 30 May 1945, 15 May 1946. The Financial Post 25 May 1946.

allow.<sup>71</sup> All Canada watched to see what Toronto "the Good" would do next.<sup>72</sup> Mayor Allan Lamport's multi-ethnic and religiously-plural Toronto immediately voted for Sunday sports. Dr. C.L. Cowan, the Scottish-born former moderator of the Presbyterian Church and minister of Hamilton's St. Andrew's Church, succeeded for a short time in keeping Hamilton from following Toronto's example. In an interview with the Hamilton Spectator, he called Sunday sports "the thin edge of the wedge to eventually gain an open Sunday." One would have thought that the butt of the wedge had already been shoved in. Canada followed Toronto, not Hamilton.

What was the Presbyterian influence on Canada's Sunday? Business between 1875 and 1900 was symbolized by the railway. Successful opposition to Sunday railways came from Presbyterians like John Charlton and William Caven organized in a newly-united Presbyterian Church. From 1900 to 1925, the push for a united Christian Canada threw up Shearer and Rochester, both Presbyterian ministers originally from southwestern Ontario, to wrestle effectively with Quebec, business, and the State. At Church Union, the Presbyterian river split into two weaker streams. War and depression and again war took the initiative out of Presbyterian hands. War Measures Act, Excursion Acts, One Day in Seven Acts, provincial acts and municipal acts

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<sup>71</sup>LDA 32, 6 May 1950, A.S. McGrath to Venerable Archdeacon G.W. Plumridge.

<sup>72</sup>LDA 31, 4 May 1950, Rev. W.N. Byers to Webber.

continued to place more power in government hands. Cultural homogeneity was being fostered by the United States, not by Protestants in Canada. By 1950, the death of the older, idealistic generation concerned with matters of Church and State coincided with the rise of a new generation more concerned with the Church and the world. Nuclear proliferation and economics were both legacies of the Depression and the wars. A Bill of Rights, then a Charter, and later court decisions made all religious legislation unconstitutional, but the hardy federal Lord's Day Act stayed until 1985.

In protecting the Lord's Day Act, Presbyterians from 1925 to 1950 were forced to a weak position more characteristic of 1875 than to their later influence with the State. This influence, however, from 1875 to 1925 had been gained by southwestern Ontario Presbyterians, of mainly Free Church background, who chose to ignore that the 1875 Basis of Union did not adopt all of the Westminster Confession and, actually, contained an important warning.

The Westminster Confession of Faith shall form the subordinate standard of this Church; the Larger and Shorter Catechisms shall be adopted ... it being distinctly understood that nothing ... 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>73</sup>

In spite of southwestern Ontario's desire to have Christ declared Lord over both Church and State (and the Church as lord

<sup>73</sup>AP 1875, p.5, section 2.

over State), the State would not live according to Christian morality nor would it impose Presbyterian Sunday morality on Quebec or on any province or on any business; it was up to individuals to follow the fourth commandment in their own way. The Presbyterian Church, however, on petition from the Presbytery of Paris, in the Synod of Hamilton and London, worked feverishly between 1950 and 1954 on a declaration about the Church and the nation.<sup>74</sup> Another round in the Sunday law controversy was about to begin in Parliament, in the newspapers, in labour unions, and all across Canada, but not in the Presbyterian Church. It knew where it stood and it would influence Canada when it could. For Presbyterians, there was no separation between the church and the State and no freedom of conscience when it came time to "Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy."

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<sup>74</sup>Gordon A. Peddie, "The King of Kings". The Basis of Union 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 by Gordon A. Peddie, B.A. together with The Petition of a Memorial of the Presbytery of Paris to the General Assembly, 1942. Toronto 1942.

JOHN SOMERVILLE IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY:  
CASE STUDY OF A PRESBYTERIAN UNIONIST

by Chris Redmond  
University of Waterloo

This is the story of a forgotten man. John Somerville is hardly the most prominent figure in the history of Presbyterians in Canada, but there was a time when no leader was better known to the readers of *The Presbyterian* magazine, or more often mentioned in its pages. He was born in 1846 in Vaughan, north of Toronto, and brought up in the United Presbyterian congregation of Knox Church, Elder's Mills. He attended the University of Toronto and taught school before attending Knox College. Within a few days of the Presbyterian union in 1875, he was called to Division Street Church in Owen Sound, where he served for thirty-one years.<sup>1</sup>

Somerville showed a genius for administration. He was clerk of his presbytery for a quarter of a century; he was the youngest moderator the Synod of Toronto and Kingston had ever had; he was an external examiner at Knox College, then a member of its senate. He served on national committees - chiefly home missions, but several others as well, including the committees which prepared the 1896 and 1914 hymnals. In all his career, he missed only three General Assemblies - once for family reasons, once when his presbytery did not send him, and once when he was in England attending the worldwide Missionary Conference of

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<sup>1</sup> Official records of Knox Church, Elder's Mills, now in the Presbyterian Church Archives; records of the University of Toronto in its archives; John Somerville papers in the Presbyterian Church Archives. An important trace of Somerville appears in *A Canadian Geologist*, the autobiography of W. J. Loudon (Toronto: Macmillan, 1930), at p. 5. Loudon was one of Somerville's students at Weston, and recalls him glowingly.

1888.<sup>2</sup>

Somerville came to prominence in the church after the death of its one full-time bureaucrat, Robert Warden, in November 1905. Warden had served as "western agent" of the church; convener of the home missions committee; and junior clerk of the Assembly. Since his death his son, Alexander, had been "acting agent and treasurer"; the home missions secretary had been serving as acting convener; and Robert Campbell of Montréal, the senior clerk of the Assembly, had carried a double load. He had asked Somerville to help prepare the business for the Assembly, and delegates spoke of Somerville as "the natural successor" of Warden as clerk.<sup>3</sup> (He had also been nominated for moderator by two presbyteries, but he withdrew.) Although the clerkship was hardly a full-time post, it was too heavy for a minister in active service. Finally the Assembly agreed to offer Somerville "a permanent position in the Church offices", at a salary of \$2,500 a year - Division Street was paying him \$1,600. The offices he would hold were joint clerk of the Assembly; convener of the home missions committee; convener of the committee on statistics; member of the board of trustees, which supervised investments; and member of the committee on emergencies. He continued on the hymnal committee and the augmentation fund committee.

Moving to Toronto, he became the salaried head of a business office, riding to work on the streetcar and carrying on the church's affairs from a suite in the Confederation Life building at Richmond and Yonge. The church owned no real estate for a "headquarters", and for the rest of his life Somerville worked from rooms 429 through 433 of the red-brick rabbit-warren that was Toronto's best-known office building. (Once a telegram from the other side of the world reached him addressed simply "Somerville, Confederation, Toronto".)

When the Assembly met in Montréal in 1907, he was a busy man. There were several routine accomplishments at that Assembly: more western presbyteries, a theological college in British

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<sup>2</sup> The principal source for a biography of Somerville as churchman is the *Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly*, cited herein as A&P. With regard to the 1888 conference, the Somerville papers in the Presbyterian Church Archives include a number of letters he wrote home describing the event.

<sup>3</sup> *Advertiser*, London, June 7, 1906.

Columbia, and - for the first time - a national committee on the settlement of vacancies. Somerville and his life-long friend J. B. Fraser, who had presented an Owen Sound overture on the subject, were both named to that committee.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the most important achievement was the creation of a position which was titled "agent for temperance, social and moral reform", and given to J. G. Shearer. Shearer also headed the Moral and Social Reform Council of Canada, and Somerville immediately became one of the Presbyterian representatives to that body.

That Assembly not only kept Somerville busy as clerk, it heard much from him about finances. Alexander Warden had resigned as treasurer, and Somerville was asked to take over temporarily. Warden had apparently wanted greater discretion in the handling of funds, and had taken advantage of loose supervision to make some questionable investments. Somerville, with the status of "interim" treasurer, had been in charge for three months of the fiscal year which ended in February 1907, and at the Assembly he presented the financial statements for 38 separate funds of the "western section" - Ontario, Québec and the provinces to the west. A total of \$1.3 million had passed through the books in 1906-07. That figure is somewhat misleading, since the old-fashioned bookkeeping system treated the beginning-of-year balance as a revenue item. The actual cash flow for the year, in modern terms, was about \$550,000.

None of the news was good - the authorities had had to raid the reserve funds to cover deficits for the year. But the shortfalls were of less concern than the state of the accounts. Said the auditors:

A large part of the Foreign Mission expenditures cannot be satisfactorily traced to their ultimate destination. . . . The impossibility of a satisfactory audit under the existing system is being noted. . . . This report is submitted without reflection on the Rev. Dr. Somerville, the Interim Treasurer. Dr. Somerville has inherited a decrepit system but has given your auditors every assistance in his

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<sup>4</sup> Fraser had been a classmate of Somerville at Knox, and a son of William Fraser, a clerk of the General Assembly from 1875 to 1891; his brother, Douglas Fraser, was for many years in charge of the church's Sunday School publications department. Their collaboration in a series of overtures is apparent in the minutes of presbytery, synod and General Assembly, and Fraser succeeded Somerville as clerk of presbytery in 1906. He wrote "An Appreciation" of Somerville in *The Presbyterian* immediately after Somerville's death (the issue of June 12, 1919).

power.<sup>5</sup>

He was the obvious candidate to take the treasurer's position permanently. Within hours after he accepted, he took the floor of the Assembly, asking for rules about what receipts were required for mission money sent from his office to a presbytery, and about standards for the auditing of presbytery funds. He had been in the church long enough to remember the chaos after the death of the previous treasurer, William Reid, in 1895, and now there were the disasters left by Alexander Warden. He was determined that such confusion should never be repeated.

Somerville more than anyone else was in charge of trying to raise givings to equal the spending on what were called the "schemes of the church". He wrote in 1907: "Will not every minister this year take measures to secure an average of six cents per week for the Schemes from every member of his congregation?"<sup>6</sup> Next year the Assembly created a "committee on systematic giving", and persuaded Alfred Gandier of Knox College to chair it. Results came quickly, through the introduction of the "duplex envelope", which let every churchgoer designate something for the local church and something for the national "schemes" each Sunday. Somerville has been given the credit for inventing it. In 1910, his office reported receipts up by more than \$100,000 from the previous year. The goal now was five dollars a year from the average church member - ten cents a week - but only one presbytery, Westminster (Vancouver), was living up to the standard. "The people need to be taught how to give," said Somerville in his statistical report in 1911, "for prayers and alms are coupled very closely together in Scripture."<sup>7</sup>

If improved giving was needed, so was improved budgeting. The 1912 Assembly heard a good deal of complaint about how church funds were being handled. A Winnipeg businessman cried that the church offered no challenge to its wealthier members: "Men are not going to put their money into a badly organized business."<sup>8</sup> There were calls for a central agency to budget and plan more

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<sup>5</sup> A&P 1907.

<sup>6</sup> *The Presbyterian*, August 20, 1907.

<sup>7</sup> A&P 1911.

<sup>8</sup> *Journal*, Edmonton, June 8, 1912.

efficiently than the existing uncoordinated and remote committees. Somerville pointed out that it was hard to be efficient when the bulk of a year's income arrived in the last few days of the fiscal year. He probably looked, as a newspaper commentator wrote the following year, like "the family advocate preparing to read a distressing will, his spectacles most deeply touched".<sup>9</sup> But administration was not really the issue. Hard-headed speakers wanted a central agency to relate the church's spending to its policies and plans. The Assembly created a "board of finance" with authority to fix the budgets of the various "schemes" and to canvass the church.

That board laid down a challenge: let the "western section" raise a million dollars this year for home and foreign missions, the colleges, aged and infirm ministers and the rest of the schemes. The goal was so remote that when \$685,000 was actually collected it was a triumph. "Although we have not attained to the million dollar ideal which was set before the church," Somerville said, "we should express our deep gratitude to God, who has inspired His people with such an increased spirit of liberality." Money was coming to occupy the central place in the Assembly's business which had once been occupied by theology.<sup>10</sup>

During an Assembly, Somerville would be in such a whirl that he might even lose track of the days. Campbell generally sat through all the sederunts taking the minutes, but he was likely to be somewhere behind the scenes in a temporary office. There is a letter from him to Campbell in which he explains the cause of some misunderstanding:

I was not in the meeting any time during the Assembly when the minutes were read. My time was daily taken up in getting the Docket for the day typewritten in time for presentation.<sup>11</sup>

Somerville spent the 1910 Assembly as the house guest of that year's moderator, John Forrest, president of Dalhousie University. There was much for the clerk to do, in an Assembly filled with sharp words over church union, the status of Queen's University and any number of other issues. Forrest got the best of

<sup>9</sup> *Globe*, Toronto, June 10, 1913.

<sup>10</sup> *The Presbyterian*, March 27, 1913.

<sup>11</sup> JS to Robert Campbell, September 20, 1917, now in the United Church Archives.

Robert Campbell, a loyal Queen's man, in the university debate, but Campbell bested both Forrest and Somerville two days later when it turned out that the moderator and the junior clerk had lost track of what day of the week it was.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, there were statistical and financial reports for Somerville to present and defend, and the minutes show him as the maker or seconder of a dozen routine motions.

The details of administration, a novelty to most of the delegates for a week or ten days each June, were his concern year round. What survives of his correspondence suggests the weight and range of his administrative work. He would receive money from hundreds of congregational treasurers across Canada, and allocate it, either according to the vague instructions that came with it, or (in later years) according to the budget. Money might also come in for special purposes, such as the relief of the Presbyterians in Fernie, British Columbia, after a disastrous fire in the summer of 1908. He wrote: "It is a rule of the Church office that letters are answered and receipts for money sent the day these are received."<sup>13</sup>

He also had to look after investments for the board of trustees, and do the bookkeeping for delegates' travel expenses to the Assembly. When the nominating committee wanted a blank book for its minutes in 1910, he supplied it. When the church published a *Year Book* that same year, he wrote the article in it about church government. Responses could be unexpected: in the summer of 1911, a parcel containing three silver cups arrived at his office from the Japanese consulate with thanks for the help given by Canadian Presbyterians six years earlier when famine had threatened Japan.<sup>14</sup>

But usually his thanks came in the form of more committee work - a committee to sort out the Aged and Infirm Ministers' Fund, the nominating committee, the foreign missions committee for two years. In 1913 he was officially given the old title of Western Agent of the Church; then there came a salary increase to \$3,000. Most typical was his work as chairman of the statis-

<sup>12</sup> *Herald*, Halifax, June 9, 1910. This was also the Assembly at which John Fraser, lieutenant-governor of Nova Scotia, gave his dramatic speech in favour of church union, in which he began: "I love the old blue banner of Presbyterianism. It has flourished over many a field of martyr blood. . . ."

<sup>13</sup> *The Presbyterian*, March 17, 1910.

<sup>14</sup> *The Presbyterian*, August 3, 1911.

tics committee, whose duty was to compile a fat report listing every congregation and mission with its membership and givings. The work naturally fell on the chairman, whose reports year after year complained of missing and unreliable information from congregations and presbyteries, especially remote ones. In 1910 he wrote this tribute to Stephen Childerhose, a giant of a man, the superintendent of missions in northern Ontario:

Anyone who will take the trouble to look back over the statistical reports of [the North Bay] Presbytery while he was Convener will see how few were the blanks in them. That this should be the case shows how closely he supervised his work.<sup>15</sup>

That says more about Somerville than it does about Childerhose.

As treasurer of the church, Somerville was also treasurer of Knox College, and a member of its board of management, which was busy with an ambitious plan to sell the Spadina Crescent property and build near the University of Toronto. When the cornerstone here on St. George Street was laid on September 26, 1912, Somerville helped to lead the devotions. Inside the stone, along with coins and newspapers, was put a copy of a brochure he had written: *A Historical Sketch of Knox College 1844-1912*.<sup>16</sup>

He continued to serve in his favourite aspect of church work: home missions. In 1907 he spoke of explosive growth, with "fifty to eighty new fields" being added to the church's work each year.<sup>17</sup> In the second decade of the century the emphasis on city missions grew, and there were more and more missions to ethnic groups: Finns, Ruthenians, French-Canadians in the west as well as in Québec. Somerville apparently took a special interest in the mission to the Jews. He was present when the cornerstone was laid in 1912 for a Christian Synagogue in downtown Toronto, and when the building was dedicated the following year.<sup>18</sup> He also served on the salary augmentation committee for several years, and once on the French evangelization committee.

When the 1908 Assembly created an order of deaconesses, Somerville was named to the board of the Deaconess Training Home in Toronto. His wife, Martha, also served on that board, repre-

<sup>15</sup> *The Presbyterian*, January 27, 1910.

<sup>16</sup> *The Presbyterian*, October 3, 1912, and secular newspapers of the same week.

<sup>17</sup> *The Presbyterian*, March 21, 1907.

<sup>18</sup> *The Presbyterian*, September 12, 1912, and June 19, 1913.

senting the Woman's Home Missionary Society, and they both worked on its committees. Somerville later became the chairman; when he spoke at the opening ceremonies for the new building in November 1909, most of what he said was about paying off the mortgage.<sup>19</sup>

These institutions and projects – the Deaconess Home, the hymnal, the management of home mission funds – were strictly Presbyterian activities. But there was always a sense that Presbyterians were part of a larger church, including all Christians or at least all mainstream Protestants. Anglicans, Presbyterians and Methodists first met in 1888 to talk about possible union. The result was an expression of "earnest desire for closer relations", and reappointment of a Presbyterian committee on the subject. Somerville was immediately interested enough to present a paper to a group of colleagues in Owen Sound on "Essentials of Church Government According to the New Testament, with a View to Church Union". It is significant that government was the first issue to be tackled; a colleague was to present a paper later on "doctrine and church union".<sup>20</sup>

Real progress in cooperation between the churches came at the local level, and the progress was led by the Owen Sound presbytery, where Somerville was the dominant figure. Revival meetings there, jointly sponsored by Presbyterian and Methodist churches, were a novelty in 1888.<sup>21</sup> As early as 1892, the presbytery voted to confer with local Methodists about mission work in the tiny community of Daywood, which could not support two competing Protestant churches.<sup>22</sup> Two years later there was a broader agreement about work in the Bruce peninsula. The Presbyterians would withdraw from McIvors and Purple Valley, the Methodists from three other towns.<sup>23</sup> Such arrangements continued for a decade, and in 1904 the Owen Sound presbytery cheerfully reported to the home missions committee that "We would not go back."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *The Presbyterian*, November 11, 1909.

<sup>20</sup> *Advertiser*, Owen Sound, March 20, 1890.

<sup>21</sup> Minutes of the session of Division Street Church, now in the United Church Archives, September 23, 1888.

<sup>22</sup> Presbytery of Owen Sound, minutes, April 19, 1892. These minutes are now held by the United Church Archives.

<sup>23</sup> Presbytery of Owen Sound, minutes, September 18, 1894.

<sup>24</sup> A&P 1904.

A more dramatic development came at Wiarton, second-largest community in the Owen Sound presbytery. In 1891, the Congregational church there lost its minister, and instead of calling a new one it agreed to form "one federated congregation" with the Presbyterians, its governing body being made up of the Presbyterian elders and the Congregationalist deacons. Either partner would have the right to withdraw at any time, but neither ever did so. As a result, St. Paul's Church, Wiarton, has a fair claim to have been the first congregation of the United Church of Canada, 34 years before the United Church came into existence.<sup>25</sup>

The movement from frontier cooperation to national union was a slow one, and Somerville was involved almost from the beginning. After the subject of union was opened again by William Patrick and his colleagues early in the new century, the 1904 General Assembly created a special nominating committee to set up a Committee on Union. Somerville was assigned to chair the nominating committee. What it presented was a large committee with William Caven, the principal of Knox College, as convener, and Somerville among its members. Treating the matter as purely administrative, the Assembly directed that the committee's routine expenses be "levied proportionately upon the various Schemes of the Church", just as the treasurer's expenses were. The result was a committee which carried the prestige of the whole church, and drew on all its funds, although its purpose did not meet with universal approval.

Somerville was on hand in December 1904, when the union delegates met in Knox Church, Toronto, and created five subcommittees. He was appointed co-chairman of the administration subcommittee along with Chester Massey of the Methodists and William McIntosh of the Congregationalists. In 1905, Somerville's subcommittee was the only one to sound a warning note. It reported that it saw obstacles to a quick union, although they "are not likely to prove more difficult than many that were successfully dealt with in former union movements".<sup>26</sup> That is a revealing phrase: the union negotiators thought a combination of Methodists and Presbyterians would be the same kind of event as the 1875 Presbyterian union and the 1884 union of the

<sup>25</sup> Minutes of the Presbytery of Owen Sound, now in the United Church Archives, January 20, 1891.

<sup>26</sup> A&P 1906.

Methodists. The main difference would be size.

The joint union committee met again in 1906, after Somerville moved from Owen Sound to Toronto. His committee reported that most of the difficulties had been solved or easily could be. "In the working out of Union," the report suggested, "the result should be the amalgamation of many congregations." That would allow the minimum salary for ministers to be \$1,000 a year, plus a manse. The committee found "serious difficulty" in one area: pension funds. It would be hard to merge the Presbyterian fund, in which membership was voluntary, with the Methodist fund, in which ministers were required to participate.<sup>27</sup>

At the 1907 Assembly, Somerville told the delegates, with his expert knowledge as convener of the statistics committee, that "Presbyterians and Methodists are ministering largely to the same fields, in some cases two ministers for less than thirty families." He asked whether such duplication was "a wise administration of the Lord's funds". If the challenge of immigration and the size of the west were truly understood, he said, Presbyterians "would be obliged to face the question of union".<sup>28</sup>

It took two more meetings of the joint committee to finish a plan of union. The committee on administration, now being chaired by a Methodist, was working in subcommittees on colleges, publishing interests, missions, and pensions. Three were making progress, but the fourth was still finding difficulties in reconciling Methodist and Presbyterian pension plans. Somerville was a member of that group, and he brought its report to the joint committee in 1908. The solution was just an agreement to keep both of the pension funds in operation under their existing rules; future United Church ministers would join a new (and compulsory) fund. With that last difficulty out of the way, the joint union committee finished its work, sending a complete Basis of Union to the three churches. Somerville's subcommittee had saved the entire project of church union.

But opposition was boiling by the 1910 General Assembly. Delegates had plenty of time to discuss things as the train rolled eastward to Halifax, and one provided a little comic relief with a story about the real gap between Presbyterians and Meth-

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<sup>27</sup> A&P 1907. The Acts and Proceedings in general contain detailed reports of the union committee's work year by year.

<sup>28</sup> *Daily Star*, Montréal, June 12, 1907. *The Presbyterian*, June 30, 1907.

odists. A Presbyterian minister had been invited to preach in a Methodist church, and seized the opportunity to present some tough Calvinism to his listeners. They took it respectfully, but at the "after-meeting" the minister blushed to hear the prayer of a member of the Methodist congregation: "O Lord, we thank Thee that we do not believe one word of the sermon we have just listened to!"<sup>29</sup>

In the presbytery of Toronto, at a special meeting in November 1910, it was Somerville who moved to approve the remit on the Basis of Union. There was some discussion before the subject was referred to a committee, of which he was a member. The presbytery discussed union again in December and January, and in February came the vote. Somerville was not present: as happened several times in his career, he had fallen ill at a time of crisis, and his appendix was removed on February 26.<sup>30</sup> His vote on his own motion might have made the difference. Instead, the show of hands brought a tie, 32 members in favour and 32 against, and when the roll was called the motion was defeated, 35 to 31.<sup>31</sup>

That year the home missions committee set up a subcommittee on "cooperation with other churches". Somerville was one of its members. Policies were worked out by which the churches would avoid competing in sparsely settled areas. One church or the other would withdraw from each frontier district, in anticipation of complete union soon. By 1914 the home missions report could speak wryly of such efforts in northern Ontario . . .

we endeavoured, and with some success, to make Methodists out of Highland Scotch Presbyterians, and Presbyterians out of German and Icelandic Methodists.<sup>32</sup>

The 1911 Assembly learned that Toronto had voted with the minority: 50 presbyteries had voted "yes" on union and 20 "no". What it then did was call the now famous referendum on three questions. The task of sending out ballots to 400,000 voters fell chiefly to Somerville, the virtuoso of church administration and economy. He wrote:

<sup>29</sup> *The Presbyterian*, June 16, 1910.

<sup>30</sup> *The Presbyterian*, March 2, 1911.

<sup>31</sup> Presbytery of Toronto minutes, February 1911. The presbytery did endorse "the closest union in work and fellowship . . . and organic union if possible".

<sup>32</sup> A&P 1914.

Is there any necessity of printing the preamble which gives the history of the negotiations, and is not needed by the people in coming to a decision? It will save a number of pages if it is not included. . . . It will take possibly \$1200 to print, and \$800 to send the parcels out to ministers and missionaries.<sup>33</sup>

By mid-October the ballots and accompanying documents were on their way. Almost immediately there was a chorus complaining that only the first two questions appeared, and a note invited "suggestions or alternatives" on a separate sheet. Opponents had been expecting a flood of replies to the third question, suggesting some form of church federation as an alternative to union; they saw a pro-union bias in the disappearance of their question from the main ballot. Somerville noted that a yes-or-no answer to the question "Have you any suggestions?" would be meaningless. But at the end of December, apparently on Robert Campbell's orders, a new ballot was sent out, with the third question appearing on the same page as the first two below a row of perforations. Local churches could use whichever ballots they preferred.<sup>34</sup>

About two-thirds of those voting said yes to union, with slightly weaker support for the Basis of Union than for the principle. "Organic union is not feasible at present," the union committee reported. The next year in Edmonton, for the first time, the Assembly recognized the existence of "union congregations", authorizing the creation of joint committees to oversee them. In an attempt to heal the wounds, by bringing all points of view onto the union committee, several opponents of union were added to the membership. Another opponent, Ephraim Scott, who would be the first Presbyterian moderator after the 1925 schism, made a gesture of good will:

It was moved by Dr. Scott, seconded by Dr. Somerville, that a message of fraternal greeting be sent to the representative heads of the Congregational and Methodist Churches. The motion was carried.<sup>35</sup>

The committee was sent away with 746 "suggestions or alternatives". But Somerville wrote to a friend: "I cannot very well understand how a single person of the nearly 300,000 Communi-

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<sup>33</sup> Somerville to William Patrick, July 27, 1911, now in the United Church Archives.

<sup>34</sup> *The Presbyterian*, December 28, 1911.

<sup>35</sup> A&P 1912.

cants should have very much attention paid to a suggestion for change in the Basis. Of course it is possible that some individual may actually be wiser than the whole Committee. . . ."36

By 1914, disagreements over union permeated every aspect of the Assembly's work. A clash came when A. S. Grant, the beloved head of the mission machinery, objected to Somerville's criticism of the home missions board's financial planning. Somerville replied by reading a letter from a western missionary, "pleading for something better than the present system of competition" between churches. Grant threatened to resign unless the Assembly would abandon union. Eventually he was persuaded to return anyway, amid "tremendous cheering and waving of hats and arms", and the Assembly went on to endorse union.<sup>37</sup>

Friendly relations continued, a little strained by all the delays. The 1913 Assembly followed the usual procedure of sending a delegation to visit the Toronto Conference of the Methodist Church, which was meeting nearby; Somerville was one of the three delegates. In August 1914, when the Toronto presbytery met to induct a new minister at Queensville, it welcomed the local Methodist minister as a "corresponding member" of presbytery.<sup>38</sup> (The Owen Sound presbytery had done the same thing back in 1894.)<sup>39</sup> And across the country, union congregations were continuing to form. Somerville's statistical report in 1914 noted that problems were arising as such congregations ceased to consider themselves either Presbyterian or Methodist — and ceased to contribute to missions, colleges and other national causes.

The 1915 General Assembly met in Kingston under the shadow of a World War. Harvests and the economy were bad, and the Assembly asked the board of finance to look for ways to cut costs. The unpleasant spirit of budget discussions can be seen in an exchange at the next year's Assembly about Somerville's own salary; it took a formal resolution to settle that he had been given a raise from \$3,000 to \$3,500 three years earlier.<sup>40</sup> Much

<sup>36</sup> JS to E. D. McLaren, September 25, 1912, now in the United Church Archives.

<sup>37</sup> *The Presbyterian*, June 18, 1914.

<sup>38</sup> Published minutes of the Presbytery of Toronto, August 4, 1914. (Somerville was not present.)

<sup>39</sup> Minutes of the Presbytery of Owen Sound, January 29, 1895.

<sup>40</sup> A&P 1916. The Acts and Proceedings of the 1913 Assembly are certainly ambiguous on this point.

of the financial rancour was certainly related to union, because the costs of the union committee continued to be paid from a levy on all national funds. Somerville had to defend the committee's budget in the public press in the fall of 1916.<sup>41</sup> Eventually a separate fund was created.

The long struggle was draining time, money and energy from every aspect of the church's work. The 1916 Assembly ordered a new vote under the Barrier Act and a new referendum of the whole church. That vote was conducted in an atmosphere of suspicion, though Somerville as treasurer and clerk – and a member of the committee in charge of the ballots – must have tried to look impartial as well as busy. He grumbled: "The last vote taken required 16 tons of paper to print the documents."<sup>42</sup> A series of union resolutions came to the 1916 Assembly, a jungle of parliamentary procedure for poor Somerville and Robert Campbell. The outcome was a resolution "definitely committing the Church to union" but conceding that the "date . . . be not fixed". The idea was to delay action until the end of the war. Finally the 1917 Assembly buried the hatchet, which would not be dug up again until after Somerville's death.

There were many calls on his time and energy in these years, and he was not a strong man. In the summer of 1914 he had travelled to Alberta and had the joy of baptizing a grandson who bore his name,<sup>43</sup> but then the shadow of the War fell over Canada, and darkened all of life. His own two sons went to Europe with the Canadian Expeditionary Force: one in a fighting capacity, the other in the new Dental Corps. He spoke of the consolation that he and Martha found in the Psalms during the tumult and sorrow.<sup>44</sup>

And his church duties were endless. Not all the committee conveners and presbytery clerks were as reliable and cooperative as they might have been. His salary was splendid for a clergyman, to say nothing of an income he still apparently drew from the family farm in Vaughan. And the Somervilles moved in a social circle which included the lieutenant-governor of Ontario

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<sup>41</sup> See especially the attack on him by Donald H. Currie in the *Daily Witness*, Montréal, November 21, 1916.

<sup>42</sup> Expense statement now in the Church Union Papers, United Church Archives.

<sup>43</sup> Letter from M. Audrey Fawcett of Ottawa, a granddaughter of Somerville.

<sup>44</sup> JS to Robert Campbell, January 9, 1919, now in the United Church Archives.

himself, Sir William Mortimer Clark, an elder of Knox Church and for several years chairman of the church's board of trustees. But the treasurer worked hard, and his colleagues worried about him.

His duties occasionally took him outside Canada, to meetings of the Presbyterian Alliance. Somerville's first brush with this group probably came in 1892 when it held its general council in Toronto. (He had missed the 1888 council in London, though he was in the city that month for the world missionary conference.) He was at the 1899 council in Washington, but apparently not at later ones.<sup>45</sup> He was more closely connected with the Western hemisphere Section of the Alliance, which met every year. Somerville was chosen to be a delegate to the 1906 meeting of the Western Section, and though he did not attend, he was elected a member of the executive committee. He did attend the 1907 meeting in Pittsburgh, and read a paper about the progress of church union negotiations in Canada; in 1908 he was also present, and in 1909 he read a second paper about church union. At that meeting, he was appointed one of two vice-chairmen of the Western Section. In 1910 Somerville gave a report on "cooperation in home mission", which held up Canada as a shining example to the rival Presbyterian churches of the United States. When the Western Section met in 1917, he was elected chairman for the ensuing year. That made him chairman when the Section met in February 1918 at Princeton.<sup>46</sup>

That was a final honour for Somerville, who had never enjoyed the highest honour of his own church, the moderator's chair. He was nominated for it again in the spring of 1918 - by the presbyteries of Owen Sound and North Bay, though not by Toronto - but his name was never introduced.

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<sup>45</sup> The only evidence of his presence in Washington is from the minutes of the Owen Sound presbytery (September 26, 1889), which gave him leave to be absent in order to attend. The apparently incomplete records of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, which is the modern successor to the Presbyterian Alliance, indicates that he was one of the joint clerks of the 1909 and 1913 councils, but does not seem to have attended in person.

<sup>46</sup> Minutes of the Western Section, as available from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and from the Historical Foundation of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches (Montreat, North Carolina). The 1917 gathering was reported in the newspaper *The State*, Columbia, notably for March 8, 1917.

That Assembly almost did not take place. With wartime austerity making budgets tight, the Emergency Committee had met (in Somerville's office) to consider calling it off. They decided to hold the Assembly, but there was an understanding that, with union barred from the agenda anyway, nothing controversial would come up when the Assembly met in London.<sup>47</sup> The business included temporary arrangements for the work of the theological colleges as the war continued, and loyal support for the government's Food Board. A "Forward Movement", to involve large-scale fund-raising as well as new spiritual dedication, was approved, the details to be handled by a Committee of Fifty which naturally would include Somerville.

On Sunday, June 9, delegates and their friends had an afternoon communion service in St. Andrew's Church. The moderator and two colleagues had been appointed to conduct the service. In the end a fourth minister took part as well: John Somerville. Robert Haddow of *The Presbyterian* described Colin Fletcher, John Neil, George Bryce and Somerville:

These four tried and true and trusted leaders of our Church made a rare and striking group with their whitened heads and venerable faces as they conducted this solemn service. The rain was falling without, and the wind was swaying the tall trees around the church as in the silence of the great church the impressive liturgy of the supper proceeded.<sup>48</sup>

It was Somerville's last General Assembly; he died at home on May 31, 1919.<sup>49</sup> *The Presbyterian* called him "A Man Greatly Beloved":

Conservative in his thinking, in his attitude towards Biblical criticism, and in his theological outlook, he was exceptionally open-minded and progressive in matters of action. In many respects Dr. Somerville was an ideal Church official. He was devoted to his office and discharged its duties with careful and unwearied fidelity. But the pomp of office was entirely absent. He was always approachable and willing to help with information or counsel.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *The Presbyterian*, April 25 and May 9, 1918.

<sup>48</sup> *The Presbyterian*, June 20, 1918.

<sup>49</sup> Principal obituaries: *The Globe*, Toronto, June 2, 1919. *The Presbyterian*, June 5, 1919. Said the *Bulletin* of Bloor Street Church, Toronto, which Somerville attended: "He filled the high position entrusted to him by the Church with singular fidelity, and during his long pastorate in Owen Sound his influence, especially on the lives of the young men of the community, can never be fully estimated." (June 8, 1919)

<sup>50</sup> *The Presbyterian*, June 5, 1919.

George Pidgeon, later the first moderator of the United Church, performed the funeral service at Bloor Street Church; Alexander Macmillan delivered the eulogy.<sup>51</sup> The day of his burial was the day before the General Assembly opened in Hamilton. There, tributes to Somerville flowed; Robert Campbell spoke of "his sane, wise judgment and unfailing urbanity".<sup>52</sup>

A brief summary of Somerville's life naturally ends with financial figures: In 1918, \$1.1 million had passed through the church's books, twice as much as the treasurer had been handling when Somerville took office in 1907. That fact clearly reflects his contribution to the church's growth, just as the success of the union committee does. If he has a memorial - beyond the plaque on the pulpit in Owen Sound where he preached for thirty-one years - it is the administrative structure of the United Church of Canada. Those who admire the United Church's ability to speak with a voice from its national offices on St. Clair Avenue, and also those who resent the influence of its national bureaucracy, can give John Somerville much of the credit for what they see in the United Church.

And yet he lived and died a Presbyterian, serving the Presbyterian Church in Canada with his talents in the pulpit and in committee work and in the business office. And Presbyterians, whichever name they now use, owe him thanks and recognition.

<sup>51</sup> Manuscript in the Somerville papers, Presbyterian Church Archives.

<sup>52</sup> *The Presbyterian*, June 12, 1919.

THE PROPHETIC TRADITION IN THE REFORMED CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

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On June 3, 1846, Thomas Chalmers, the greatest Scottish churchman of his day, probably the greatest since John Knox, delivered the address at the laying of the foundation-stone of the new Free Church College in Edinburgh. On that day in the middle of the 'forties' - after a decade of appalling misery and want for great masses of the labouring population, and in a year when tens of thousands of poor Highlanders were suffering from starvation - those assembled at the head of the Mound, including many of the working classes, heard him declare:

"We leave to others the passions and the politics of this world; and nothing will ever be taught, I trust, in any of our theological halls, which shall have the remotest tendency to disturb the existing order of things, or to confound the ranks and distinctions which now obtain in society. But there is one equality between man and man which will be strenuously taught - the essential equality of human souls; and that in the highest count and reckoning of eternity, the souls of the poorest of nature's children - the raggedest boy who runs along the pavement, is of like estimation in the eyes of heaven with that of the greatest and noblest of our land."<sup>1</sup>

Continuing his address, Chalmers defended the existing pyramidal social structure of society with the monarchy and aristocracy perched 'upon its summit', the other privileged and 'respectable' classes immediately below, with a gradual widening in the descent downwards to the great masses at the base of the pyramid - the 'mighty host who swarm upon its surface'. He expressed a desire for the elevation of those at the base, but not by claiming for them the privileges of, or equality with those above them, but by lifting the whole base, with superstructure intact a little higher:

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1. The Witness, June 6, 1846, p.2.

"Let kings retain their sceptres, and nobles their coronets - what we want is a more elevated ground floor for our general population, and this without derangement to the upper stories of the social and political edifice." 2

Thus spoke the most representative churchman of his day - the man who, more than any other, concerned himself with the moral and social well-being of the people. Such was the social outlook of the Scottish Church in the first half of the 19th century.

I begin this lecture on the prophetic tradition in the Scottish Church with these quotations because Chalmers' views reveal something of the extent to which the Church of his day had abdicated its historic Reformed responsibility for prophetic social criticism. In this crucial period in the development of modern industrial society, the Reformed Church in Scotland, in all its branches, failed to exercise its prophetic task in relation to the social, political and economic issues of the time. Not surprisingly, this abdication had fateful consequences for the Church's witness in a rapidly changing society.

How and why did this abdication of Christian social criticism come to take place? Before we begin to examine the prophetic tradition in the Scottish Church following the Reformation, however, let us briefly note the main thrust of the social teaching of the Reformers, and of Calvin in particular, from whom the Scottish Reformers derived their model and inspiration.

With the coming of the Reformation in the 16th century, many areas of Europe threw off the papal allegiance, thereby undermining the authoritative structure of Christendom through which the Church had maintained control over medieval civilization. Yet the great Reformers did not break with the medieval Church's sense of responsibility for the whole life of society. They would have been appalled at any suggestion that the new freedom from the control of Rome, or their fresh emphasis upon the personal responsibility

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2. The Witness, June 6, 1846, p.2.

of each individual before God both on matters of faith and ethics, would lead to any lessening of the Church's traditional efforts to influence social, political and economic life.

Nor did any significant diminution of the Church's concern take place in the first decades of the Reformation. Luther, the most conservative of the Reformers in his political and economic theory, defended the traditional medieval controls on economic life such as the just price and the ban on usury, as the best means of preserving the Church's influence in economic life among nations now ruled by 'godly princes'.

Calvin was equally insistent that, in spite of the loss of the central authority of Rome, the ideal of a unified society, the 'corpus Christianum' should remain. He had a more positive and dynamic sense of the role of the state in regulating society than did the medieval Church. To quote historian Roland Bainton:

"For Calvin, the state should serve the Church after the manner of the kings of Israel, and public life should be controlled by the ministers after the manner of the prophets." 3

Ernst Troeltsch, in his monumental work, The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches, considers Calvin's community at Geneva to have been more comprehensive in its social influence than any Europe had yet seen. He describes Calvinism as:

"'Christian Socialism' in the sense that it moulded in a corporate way the whole life in the State and in Society, in the Family, and in the economic sphere, in public and in private, in accordance with Christian standards. It took care that every individual member should receive his appointed share of the natural and spiritual possessions of the community, while at the same time it sought to make the whole of Society, down to the smallest detail, a real expression of the royal dominion of Christ." 4

This was the society that John Knox so admired when he was in Geneva and

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3. Roland H. Bainton, "Ernst Troeltsch - Thirty Years After," Theology Today, April 1951, p. 87.  
 4. E. Troeltsch, The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches, vol. 2, p. 622.

which he later sought to reproduce on a national scale in Scotland.

As we shall see, it was into this Calvinist social tradition that Scotland was to enter.

In one important respect, namely, the relaxation on the prohibition of usury, Calvin differed from Luther and the medieval Church. Nevertheless, though he made allowance for a certain moderate rate of interest under certain conditions, this must not be interpreted to mean, as some have done, that Calvin sought to relax the Church's control over economic activity. We need not enter here into the familiar controversy over the relationship between capitalism and the Protestant ethic. Research has made at least one thing clear, however - that capitalism was flourishing long before the Reformation. It is misleading, therefore, to suggest that Protestantism in general, and Calvinism in particular, was responsible for the growth and development of capitalism, and for the loosening of Church control over economic life.

The Reformation came at a time when profound changes were taking place in the medieval pattern of civilization. The spirit of the Renaissance had long been at work proclaiming freedom from authority and Church control. The Church could either continue to stress the old methods and regulations even though they were generally disregarded and failed to apply to the changed circumstances, or, as Calvin rightly saw, it could reassert the lordship of Christ over the whole of society by seeking to subject the activity of the new commercial age to meaningful and relevant disciplines and controls. The use of productive interest, which was essential to the new capitalist economic order, necessitated a change in the traditional Church attitude to usury. But no one who is familiar with Calvin's various qualifications upon the levying of interest and the iron discipline which the Church at Geneva placed over commercial life, could seriously claim that Calvin either desired or allowed free play of the capitalist spirit.

In the end, of course, Calvinism, in various lands (like Lutheranism and Roman Catholicism) failed in its attempt to restrain the commercial spirit and to regulate economic life. But, as R.H. Tawney has shown in his classic work, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism, this failure lies with later Calvinism, and not with Calvin himself. Calvin and his immediate followers strove to relate the Christian ethic in relevant terms to the whole life of a society that was in the process of rapid change. But increasingly in the 17th century Calvinist theologians failed to follow this process through; failed to think out the implications of the Christian faith in terms of the social, political and economic movements of the time. Gradually the stress in Christian social teaching was shifted to the moral virtues of individual kindness, thrift, temperance and honesty, while the aims and methods of commercial life were left largely unquestioned; gradually Church discipline and control exercised over social and economic activity weakened in the face of the rising commercial spirit of the time, and the valid and necessary individualism inherent in the Reformation theology, when applied to other areas such as business and commercial activity, was given a false authority divorced from all the restraints of the traditional social teaching of the Church. Such individualism, when allowed free reign in the economic field, soon came to regard worldly success as evidence of divine favour and proof, therefore, of honest industry and frugal living. So the Church, having gradually accommodated itself to the virtues of capitalism, found it increasingly difficult to offer any relevant guidance or criticism to the developing institutional structures of society. In the words of Tawney:

"In an age of impersonal finance, world-markets, and a capitalist organization of industry, its traditional social doctrines had nothing specific to offer, and were merely repeated, when, in order to be effective, they should have been thought out again in new and living terms . . . The social teaching of the Church had ceased to count, because the Church itself had ceased to think." 5

Thus the great synthesis of Christianity and civilization, the 'corpus Christianum', which the medieval Church had built up and which through modification and improvement the Reformers, especially Calvin, had sought to preserve, gradually disappeared. The unified culture had fallen apart -- resolved into 'departments' of life -- politics, business, 'religion'. Each had an independent existence, and like parallel lines could never meet. Such was the Church's relationship to society on the eve of the Industrial Revolution.

Since we are primarily concerned with the prophetic tradition in Scotland, let us now look specifically at the situation there as it developed from the time of the Reformation.

In much the same manner as Calvin, Knox and the other Scottish Reformers sought to regulate social, political and economic activity as well as moral and religious life. However, only when Calvinism reached Scotland was it tried on a national basis rather than a civic one. The 'holy community' of Geneva which Knox regarded as the 'most perfect school of Christ', was the pattern for the whole Scottish nation.

It was in the application of the concept of discipline to both Church and state that the comprehensive social concern of the Scottish Reformers is to be seen. Discipline was not merely a negative concept, but in this early period especially, it was also a positive and dynamic one signifying the corporate and social concern of both Church and state for the whole of national life.

The concept of the 'two kingdoms', the Church and the state, both ordained by God, meant that while each had its own respective sphere of responsibility, they worked together as twin instruments in seeking to build up a unified and disciplined Christian society. Clearly this division of responsibility did not mean that the Church gave up its right to criticize

the existing order in the name of Christ. The right to criticize the Civil authority is quite explicit in the Second Book of Discipline, Chap. 1, Sect. 14: "The ministers exercise not the civil jurisdiction but teach the magistrate how it should be exercised according to the Word."

The plan of the First Book of Discipline for a comprehensive, compulsory system of education, and for adequate provision for the poor is well known. The unwillingness of the greedy lords of Scotland to accept this radical scheme and grant the Church its rightful endowments for the purpose, meant that the efforts of the Church to carry out its social task, especially in these two areas, was severely hampered. But this setback did not mean that the Church gave up its efforts to subject the whole nation to the discipline of the Gospel. Indeed, the first decades of the Reformation period are marked by frequent pronouncements and declarations by the Church criticizing royalty, the nobility, landlords, merchants, and any others who refused to accept such discipline as it applied to social, political and economic as well as moral questions. One Church historian quotes James VI as saying:

"A Scotch presbytery, 'agreeth with monarchy as God and the Devil. There Jack and Tom and Will and Dick shall meet and censure me and my Council'." Above all else in this first century following the Reformation, says Professor A.M. Fairbairn writing in 1901, the Church of Scotland was truly "the Church of the people rather than any class. The last thing that can be laid to its charge is that it was the creature or tool of the sovereign or of the aristocracy, or even of the clergy". 6

The following example from the First Book of Discipline, concerning the treatment of the poor by landlords, is typical of the directness of the Church's prophetic criticism:

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6. A.M. Fairbairn, "The Scottish Church and the Scottish People," The Contemporary Review, vol. LXXIX, Jan. 1901, p. 139.

"With the grief of our hearts we hear that some Gentlemen are now as cruel over their tenants as ever were the Papists, requiring of them whatsoever before they paid to the Church; so that the Papistical tyranny shall only be changed to the tyranny of the Lord or of the laird. We dare not flatter your Honours, neither yet is it profitable for you that we so do. If you permit such cruelty to be used, neither shall ye, who by your authority ought to be gainstand such oppression, neither (shall) they that use the same, escape God's heavy and fearful judgments."<sup>7</sup>

This freedom with which Scottish churchmen exercised their prophetic task in society is one of the most noteworthy features of early Reformed documents. Political rulers, including Kings and Queens, the aristocracy, economic practices, unjust laws, social pretensions -- all were subjected, in the name of Christ, to forthright and outspoken criticism both by individual ministers and by the Church courts.

Ivo Clark in his History of Church Discipline in Scotland has shown that in their scheme of discipline as applied to economic matters, the Scottish Reformers did not differ in substance from the Church before the Reformation. On the matter of usury the early Reformed standards were strongly critical of the practice.

Knox's Order of Ecclesiastical Discipline states that "'if there be any blasphemers, drunkards, slanderers, usurers - they ought not to escape either admonition or punishment.'" Clark goes on to show that while usury is not mentioned in the First Book of Discipline, in the Second Book it is put among the sins for which ministers may be deposed. Clark notes that as late as the beginning of the 18th Century, there is still evidence of Church opposition to usury. Walter Steuart of Pardovan, "writing between 1708 and 1711 'of the Vocational Faults of Ministers and Probationers', says that ministers are not to take usury, and if they do, they are to be deprived".

But, as in Calvin's Geneva, regulation of interest seems gradually to have replaced outright prohibition. In Scotland, as in Geneva, the Church seems to have followed this course without in any way relaxing its right to

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7. W. Croft Dickinson, ed., "The First Book of Discipline", in John Knox's History of the Reformation in Scotland, vol. II, p. 303.

criticize social and economic practices. For a whole century after the Reformation, the Scottish Church never ceased to speak out against social injustice. What contemporary Christian criticism of the social and economic order could be stronger or more direct than that voiced by the General Assembly in the year 1596:

"Sacrilege in all estates, without any conscience, growing continually more and more, to the utter undoing of the Kirk and staying to the planting of the Gospel -- cruel oppression of the poor tenants, whereby the whole commons of the country are utterly wrackit by the extreme dear setting of their rooms and holding out of their corn by untimeous teinding and extreme thraldom in services. Oppression under pretext of law, by usury and by contacts against law, forstalling of markets, ane regrateing by gentlemen burgesses and commons, whereby the prices of victual is marvellously raised, to the great hurt of the poor, and suchlike girnelling of victuals, and withholding of them from markets and not threshing them out in due time." 8

In 1645, the General Assembly in issuing a 'solemn and seasonable warning' to the nation, declared that:

"If, among our nobles, gentrie and barons, there have been some studying their own private interests more than the publick, and 'seeking their own things more than the things of Christ, or oppressing and defrauding the poorer sort or the needie, because it was in the power of their hand;' . . . shall not God search all this out?" 9

Three years later, the Commission of the General Assembly again condemned the prevalent public sins of the day, including acts of economic injustice -- "'arbitrary and uncontrolled oppression and grinding of the faces of the poor by landlords and others in place and power'".<sup>10</sup> In the same year, the Assembly went so far as to issue an act censuring ministers who, through fear and timidity, did not preach against public sins and injustices. It warned that those who failed to exercise their prophetic calling faithfully would be deposed from the ministry.

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8. Alexander Peterkin, ed., The Booke of the Universall Kirk of Scotland, p. 435. (Spelling modernized as in Clark, op. cit., p. 217).
  9. Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1638-1842, Church Law Society ed., p. 124.
  10. General Assembly Commission Records 1648-9 (Scottish History Society 1896), p. 86, quoted in S. Mechie, The Church and Scottish Social Development 1780-  
p.x.

The General Assembly (of 1648) "appoint and ordain, that every minister do, by the word of wisdom, apply his doctrine faithfully against the publick sins and corruptions of these times, and particularly against the sins and scandals in that congregation wherein he lives, according to the act of the Generall Assembly, 1596, revived by the Assembly at Glasgow, 1638; appointing that such as shall be found not applying their doctrine to corruptions, which is the pastorall gift -- cold, and wanting of spirituall zeal -- flatterers, and dissembling of publick sins, and especially of great personages in their congregations -- that all such persons be censured according to the degree of their faults, and continuing therein be deprived".<sup>11</sup> Clearly there was no 'hands off politics and economics' for the Church of Scotland in this period!

This strong note of prophetic social criticism is clearly evident in the declarations of the General Assembly up to the middle of the 17th century. Then followed a long and bitter period of turmoil and strife in Scottish political and ecclesiastical history. In 1653 Cromwell forcibly dissolved the General Assembly and it did not meet again until 1690. When, at the end of this turbulent and unsettled period the Church again began to act and speak through its Assembly, a decided change can be seen in its social outlook. The vital prophetic awareness of the Reformers has virtually disappeared; the positive and dynamic concept of discipline which sought to bring the whole life of society -- of peer and peasant alike -- under the kingly rule of Christ, has been gradually perverted into a negative and oppressive system. Social and economic sins -- selfishness, pride, avarice, greed and exploitation by the wealthy and influential classes -- which had always been the object of the Church's criticism equally with the more individualistic moral sins, came to be ignored in the 18th century as the latter came into greater prominence.

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11. Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1638-1942, op. cit., p. 188.

The Revolution settlement of 1690 which safeguarded and established Presbyterianism in Scotland undoubtedly led to a great weakening of the Church's social criticism. Henceforth, the Church of Scotland's position of privilege and power in the nation was dependent upon the safety and stability of the 'status quo' - the monarchy, the aristocracy, and the existing social class arrangements and political and economic structures. This strong vested interest in the existing order tended to silence the Church's criticism of that order and was one of the strongest reasons for its social passivity in the 18th and early 19th centuries. A cursory survey of General Assembly pronouncements from 1690 to 1830 reveals the appalling extent to which the Church believed that establishment implied the duty of the Church to defend and teach obedience to the existing laws and institutions of society. The following portion of an address to the King in 1782 reveals this basic assumption which dominated all the Church's social thinking:

"Convinced that we owe our existence and protection, as a National Church to the stability of that government under which we live, we take a warm interest in the train of striking events which, in the course of Divine Providence, we have been called to behold; and it is a constant study to cherish and diffuse sentiments of loyalty amongst the people with whom we are connected." 12

It was in this period of the late 18th century that the practice arose of issuing so-called Loyalty Addresses to the Crown and the Government. This development marked a significant change in the Church's relation to the state -- from one of prophetic criticism to one of unquestioning support and approval. This practice, which has carried over into our Canadian Presbyterian Church to this day, became an annual exercise in the Established Church and, after 1843, in the Free Church. It was never adopted, however, by the more liberal, voluntary Churches -- the Secession and Relief Churches and, after 1847 the United Presbyterian Church.

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12. Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1638 - 1842, op.cit. pp. 808-9.

The decline in radical social criticism can be detected from the beginning of the 18th century but the subservience of the Church to the state and the ruling classes is most evident after the middle of the century when the Moderate party in the Church gained the ascendancy. The Moderates had their roots in the new rationalism of the 18th century Enlightenment. In reaction to the political and religious strife of the previous century, the Moderate party sought to bring the Church into conformity with the spirit of reason, moderation and tolerance. Thus, they were men who cherished and shared in the urbane and polite atmosphere made possible for the cultured few by the growing prosperity of Scotland towards the end of the century. Since both the Moderates and the aristocracy were bolstered by the patronage system which upheld the special rights and privileges of each group, each in turn catered to the interests of the other. Under such influences, therefore, the Scottish Church, controlled by the Moderates, capitulated to the spirit of the age and the vested interests of the day, and exchanged its prophetic freedom for a docile servility.

Nor was the other major party in the Church at the time, the Evangelicals, less guilty of neglecting their social responsibility. Though extremely critical of the worldliness of the Moderates and their subservience to the power and influence of the state, the Evangelicals nevertheless displayed an essentially negative attitude to the state, being largely indifferent to the importance of the institutions and structures of society. Individual salvation and personal piety was the essence of the Christian faith. In the end, to quote one Scottish historian, "this world was of no real importance; and therefore Evangelicalism, though abounding in philanthropy, had no social message". 13 Perhaps the social outlook of

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13. A.J. Campbell, Two Centuries of the Church of Scotland 1707-1929. p. 172.

the Church in the 18th century can be summed up by saying that while the Moderates were too 'this-worldly' to engage in any serious social criticism, the Evangelicals were too 'other-worldly' to do so.

One of the by-products of the Church's Calvinist orthodoxy and pietistic moralism in this period was a recurring emphasis on the duty of a 'passive obedience' to the divine will and to all laws and authority. For well over a century -- from the mid 1750's until almost the close of the last century -- the Church's social teaching inculcated the Christian duty of 'passive obedience' to the 'powers that be'. The 'powers that be are ordained of God' was interpreted in countless sermons and church publications as meaning that the existing order in society -- social, political and economic -- was ordained of God. Therefore, to oppose the 'status quo' was an act of disloyalty both to the civil authority and to God who ordained it. By virtually deifying the 'status quo' in this way, it was inevitable that the Church tended to regard all movements advocating any basic structural change in society, be it social, political or economic, with suspicion, if not horror. Therefore, in these early and middle decades of the 19th century, in opposition to the growing democratic sentiment in Scotland, and the widespread demands for more liberal institutions all branches of the Church tended to stress only one aspect of biblical teaching -- the Christian duty of accepting the existing order. In contemporary Church teaching and preaching almost no attempt was made to indicate the other aspect of biblical teaching: namely that the Gospel demanded social justice and righteousness as well as social peace, harmony and order, and that in attempting to preserve the latter, the former could not be sacrificed. Biblical passages which emphasized an unconditional 'passive obedience' were favourite texts of the time. Romans 13, 1st Peter 2 - "Submit yourself to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as

supreme; or unto governors . . . for so is the will of God," and Proverbs 24:21 - "Fear thou the Lord and the king; and meddle not with them that are given to change," were particularly useful sermon texts to discourage Christian support for those advocating any basic reforms in society. This determination to preach to the masses a gospel of contentment and obedience to the civil powers was professed annually by the General Assembly in the Loyalty Addresses to the King or Queen. Typical was one addressed to the Queen and government by the Church of Scotland conveying

"the strongest assurance of the resolution of the Ministers and Elders of this Church to inculcate the duty of combining with the offices of piety, fidelity to the Sovereign, respect for the laws, and submission to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake." 14

Fortunately, said one Free Church minister in a sermon on "Christian Loyalty," true Christians are not among those who seek to change our institutions. Indeed, he says

"those who are best acquainted with such matters will be the first to state that the discontented, on such occasions, mainly consist of persons who make no profession of religion at all; and that their dissatisfactions are restrained and rendered safe by the sounder and more loyal principles of their fellow-workmen, who, as part of their religion, 'fear God' and 'honour the king'." 15

In sermons of the day, it was common practice in preaching submission and obedience to the poor to appeal to the Incarnation - the 'passive obedience' and submission of Christ to the will of God and his meek acceptance of his poor and lowly state among men, as the divine example for them to emulate. If the Son of God was willing to accept this lowly position on the social pyramid, never complaining about his poverty, and passively submitting to unjust treatment, cruelty and even death, it obviously amounted to something like blasphemy for the lower classes to murmur

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14. Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 1848, p. 42.

15. John G. Lorimer, Christian Loyalty, p. 35.

and complain about the lowly station God has assigned them.

Along with this teaching on the duty of 'passive obedience' the prevalent theology of the day was such that it contributed to the Church's fateful social conformity and prophetic silence. The rigid theological doctrines of orthodox Calvinism harmonized well with the Church's equally rigid understanding of natural law embracing all the immutable divine laws - moral and physical - built into the structure of the universe. Scholastic doctrines such as that of double predestination lent strong support to deterministic notions of the operation of divine providence in the natural order. It was accepted, for example, that inequality and privilege was the mark of all the activity of God's providence, both in the 'spiritual world' - in the divine act of election and reprobation - and in the 'physical world' - in the divine ordering of people's lives and of social and economic relations. The existing arrangements in society, like the divine plan of salvation, were determined by the inscrutable will of God. Social elevation and material comforts, like salvation, were not intended for all but were, in the wise providence of God, reserved for the few. The divine structure of the universe permitted no other arrangement. Just as sinful men and women could not question the justice of the divine decree of election, so they were not allowed to criticize the natural laws by which God governed the world. Neither salvation nor a just society could be achieved by human effort. Social privilege and economic inequality, like sin, was part of the structure of the universe.

It is not difficult to understand how the Church's preaching of 'passive obedience' contributed to the alienation of the working classes from the Churches. In turn, nowhere was the Church's failure to understand and sympathize with the legitimate hopes and aspirations of the common people of Scotland more evident than in the hostile attitude it adopted towards contemporary working class movements.

C.F. Smith in his detailed study of the Statistical Accounts written in the 1790's and the 1840's (these were sociological studies of the social and economic state of each parish in Scotland written by the parish ministers), notes how the ministers were strongly biased in favour of capitalism and against labour. In their eyes, "strikes are anathema and unions which are struggling both to organize themselves and to create a bargaining power are regarded as subversive of all authority." (The Attitude of the Clergy to the Industrial Revolution as Reflected in the First and Second Statistical Accounts, p. 236). This bias "certainly appears in the tendency of the Statistical Accounts to describe employers as public-spirited gentlemen and workers' leaders as 'selfish and designing knaves'." (Ibid, pp. 326-7). Also, "we rarely hear of the combinations of masters, though frequently of those of workmen . . . Their hostility to trade unions is in marked contrast to their tacit acceptance of employers' unions and their praise for chambers of commerce." (Ibid., pp. 322-3). With such a bias it was inevitable that "neither the economic nor the political aspirations of the workers in their attempts to exert an influence, received any degree of sympathy from the clergy - for they were symptoms of a revolt against the established order." (Ibid., p. 256)

An open letter appearing in a Scottish newspaper in 1840 addressed to the ministers of the Church reflects the view of the articulate self-conscious segments of the Scottish working class:

"You pretend to be the followers of him who was, is, and shall continue to be the poor man's friend, even the meek and lowly Jesus. Yet, notwithstanding this, I find you constantly arrayed on the side of power, taking part with the oppressor, opposing every measure that would tend to enlighten the minds of your fellowmen, or alleviate human suffering, and soften the pillow of distress . . . You ought to teach that all mankind are equal in the sign of God, and that there is no real distinction but that arising from superior virtue . . . But this you have not done, you have taught that God is partial, and a being of vindictive wrath, that the poor man ought

to be content, though in a state of starvation, that it is the will of heaven that one man should work hard, and be half-starved, while others do nothing and live on the fat of the earth; that the poor, though oppressed, ought not to repine, but submit with patience to the 'powers that be'." 16

Clearly, here developed the fateful split -- which was to widen as the century progressed -- between the self-conscious segment of the working classes and a middle class dominated Church which could not understand the needs and problems of workers caught up in the impersonal and ruthlessly competitive world of capitalist industry.

Blinded by their antiquated paternalistic and individualistic concepts carried over from agrarian society, churchmen constantly preached social doctrines which were largely irrelevant to the condition of the massive wage-earning proletariat bound together in a new solidarity of shared hardships and common goals. They stressed the paternalistic ideal of the father-children relationship of masters and employees which ran counter to the growing sense of brotherhood, equality and solidarity which had taken root among the working classes in the industrial context. This sense of group loyalty among the workers arising out of their shared experience of hardship and exploitation churchmen did not understand, and so they were openly critical of the uses the workmen made of their corporate power.

With disastrous consequences for the future, therefore, churchmen taught the industrial workers to shun methods of corporate action such as political reform and trade union activity as a means of bettering their social and economic condition. This they taught at the very time when the exploited workers' most crying need was, in fact, just such instruments of power through which they could acquire effective protection against the arbitrary will and unchecked power of the owners of industry; through which they could assert their dignity and rights as human beings in the face of

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16. The Scottish Patriot, February 15, 1840, p. 97.

a ruthless 'system' which treated them not as persons but as 'hands' to be bought and sold in the marketplace, to be disposed of when trade was slack, and discarded when ill or old and worn out. Not surprisingly, the demoncratically-inspired but politically and economically disinherited industrial workers, having been denied the sympathy much less the support of the Church -- a Church which, unfaithful to its own Reformed social heritage, no longer championed the cause of the poor, the underprivileged and the oppressed -- turned increasingly to other agencies for support and leadership. Not a few in this period came to regard the Church as an arch-enemy hindering the social and economic advance of the workers. Clearly, it is here, in the initial phases of the development of industrial society that we must look to find the roots of the modern day aliention of the industrial working classes from the Christian Church.

To sum up, we should note that as a consequence of these theological, social and economic presuppositions, and the loss of its dynamic for prophetic criticism, it is not surprising to find that the 19th century Scottish Church almost invariably opposed the progressive movements of the time -- State intervention to limit child labour in the mines and factories, the evolution of political democracy, reform of penal institutions and the system of poor relief, and, as we have seen, the rise of the trade unions.

Unfortunately, time does not permit us to consider in detail the recovery of prophetic social criticism as it began to express itself in the Scottish Church toward the end of the last century. Let it be said in conclusion, however, that by the early years of this 20th century the recovery was well under way. For almost a century churchmen had accepted the worst features of industrial society -- its slums, depressions, poverty and the general degradation of the working-class -- as an unfortunate but incidental flaw in an otherwise harmonious and beneficial operation of the

unregulated capitalist system. Now, at last it was evident that many were beginning to question both the ethical validity and the economic soundness of the system.

Many diverse factors, both sociological and theological, were at work in producing this gradual alteration in the Church's social thought. Among these was the rapid growth of socialist thought and influence, the decline of classical 'laissez-faire' economics, the findings of the new social sciences illuminating the causes of social problems, the influence of a more democratically based electorate, and a more militant and socially-aroused labour movement. Theologically, a new emphasis on the social message of Jesus and the prophets, together with an understanding of the Kingdom of God as an expression of the divine will and purpose of humanity, and therefore, as a Christian ethical criteria for judging society, made it at last possible for the Church to recover the other long neglected aspect of biblical teaching concerning the social order -- namely, that note of prophetic protest and criticism whereby all constituted authority and existing institutions stand under the judgment of God because of their sin and their inability to reflect fully the divine justice. Henceforth, since social and economic institutions and arrangements would be seen to be a consequence of historical development -- as the product of fallible human activity and design -- and, as such, not directly ordained by God in their present form, they could at last be regarded as proper objects for Christian criticism and reformation. Consequently, it was increasingly difficult to use Christianity to support the notion of a providentially-ordained status quo, nor appeal to the inscrutable will of God as a justification for arbitrary class and economic inequalities in society.