Abstract

Arthur Marwick, in his seminal book, *The Sixties*, describes that decade’s crucial significance. What happened during these years transformed social and cultural developments for the rest of the century. Religious historians have described the period as a “watershed” and a “seedbed.” The most remarkable religious phenomenon in 1960s Canada was the rapid acceleration of a process of dechristianization that began to push the very denominational faith communities that had first evangelized Canada toward extinction. The purpose of this dissertation is to examine this “decade of ferment” through the lens of one of those denominations, the United Church of Canada. The saga of the United Church provides an important piece to the puzzle: “What happened to Christian Canada?”

The era began well. Many new United Church congregations emerged in the suburbs while others embarked on ambitious building programmes. Exciting change was in the air. Voices both inside and outside the church announced that a New Age was dawning, bringing with it both challenge and opportunity. Early in the decade, John A.T. Robinson’s *Honest to God* inspired a flood of inexpensive theological paperbacks that cheered modernization and reform. Most of these books (including those commissioned by church leaders as a catalyst to renewal) were highly critical of the status quo. The United Church’s liberal leadership invested in “the big change” through a New Curriculum, by embarking on ecumenical ventures (including union
conversations), through new approaches to mission and even by flirting with a “new morality.”
Within a very short time, however, the denomination found itself navigating a chaotic, fast-paced and destabilized world. The vaunted New Age witnessed a drop in church affiliation across all age groups. Further, internal fractures appeared that incited conflict across the conservative, moderate and liberal spectrum. “Managing” the decade’s challenges proved an elusive goal. The long sixties were, indeed, a revolutionary time. Sadly for the Canadian churches, the 1960s marked the era when John Lennon and others would begin to “imagine” a public square from which religion had been evicted.
Acknowledgments

In many ways this dissertation had its origins during the 1960s in an overheated Sunday school room that lurked under the south transept of Westdale United Church, Hamilton. Here, one Sunday, a gathered group of wary boys received their brand-spanking New Curriculum hardbound materials. The books had rolled off the Ryerson presses so recently that the fresh ink smell permeated the small space where we met together to read and learn. The curriculum writers aimed to make the Bible accessible to various ages of church school students, but they also sought to make the stories exciting and to render the biblical characters interesting. This was not an easy undertaking—but their work was soon evaluated favourably by what might be called “a very tough room.” I am not the only member of that small gathering to be sufficiently hooked by what they discovered between the covers of those newly minted books that they grew up to pursue careers in ministry.

It has been a pleasure to return to the New Curriculum books within the framework of a larger study of the United Church of Canada as it attempted to negotiate the ferment of the 1960s. I am indebted to all of my learning colleagues at Emmanuel College and within the Toronto School of Theology for their support, their encouragement, and their interest in this project. I have had the good fortune to be guided by three excellent historians: Prof. Brian Clarke, who has been both mentor and friend, Prof. Stuart Macdonald, whose perceptive criticism and insightful questions have made for a far better product, and Prof. Phyllis Airhart, who is wise and compassionate and who has a famously keen eye for detail. She is undoubtedly the best supervisor anyone could ever hope to have.

I must also offer thanks to my family and friends, as well as to the congregations of St. Andrew’s, Olivet, and Melrose for their kind tolerance over the many years of this project’s gestation. I am grateful to Brian Gedcke for generally keeping me on an even keel, but particularly for remaining unfazed during several frustrating computer glitches when he politely ignored my recourse to a vocabulary that threatened the good health of my office plants and set about quietly solving the problems. Finally, I thank my parents, Kenneth and Lillian Gardner, whose passion for life-long learning delightfully infected their children and grandchildren. This study is dedicated to them. Requiescat in pace.
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## Abbreviations

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AOTS</td>
<td>As One That Serves</td>
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<tr>
<td>BCOQ</td>
<td>Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCC</td>
<td>Canadian Council of Churches</td>
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<tr>
<td>CGIT</td>
<td>Canadian Girls in Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>E&amp;SS</td>
<td>Board of Evangelism and Social Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GC</td>
<td>United Church of Canada General Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M&amp;M</td>
<td>Missionary and Maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROP</td>
<td>Record of Proceedings of the United Church of Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCM</td>
<td>Student Christian Movement</td>
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<tr>
<td>UCA</td>
<td>United Church of Canada Archives</td>
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<tr>
<td>UCO</td>
<td>United Church Observer</td>
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<tr>
<td>UCRF</td>
<td>United Church Renewal Fellowship</td>
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<tr>
<td>UCW</td>
<td>United Church Women</td>
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<tr>
<td>WCC</td>
<td>World Council of Churches</td>
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Introduction

Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky
Imagine all the people
Living for today...

Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too
Imagine all the people
Living life in peace...

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will be as one

- John Lennon

The desk of my study sits in front of a large window from which I enjoy a fine view of the downtown core of the City of Hamilton, Ontario. For 135 years, a prominent feature of the architectural landscape has been Irish-Canadian architect Joseph Connolly’s impressive James Street Baptist Church. As I write, a team of demolition workers is in the process of dismantling the church’s massive wooden roof beams. Over the decades, these beams have supported an elegant vaulted roof, sheltering worshippers at first crowded, then of later years scattered, in the pews below. The band of James Street disciples had been dwindling for the past half century, while concurrently the structural repair needs of Connolly’s impressive stone monument increased. As a result, the congregation made a painful decision that led to their building’s purchase by a developer who moved with lightning speed to obtain a demolition permit. The plan is to replace the Victorian sanctuary with a thirty-storey glass condominium tower, but to retain the east elevation of Connelly’s edifice as a unique marquee entrance.

The James Street Baptist building materialized in 1879 in a bold attempt by the growing community of Hamilton Baptists to compete with the Presbyterians and their majestic limestone cathedral, St. Paul’s. The Baptists purchased a site directly across the road where they constructed their own gothic revival temple. With unintentional irony, the sign advertising the

condo tower replacing Joseph Connolly’s church describes James Street Baptist’s successor building as “another visionary development.” In a further twist, the sign also proudly announces the developer’s slogan (one that the Baptists might themselves have adduced in better circumstances): “transforming communities.” The new condo building is named in honour of the architect whose legacy its construction obliterates.

Like churches all across Canada, the James Street Baptists had struggled since the 1960s with the burden of a rapidly shrinking congregation, a large building and diminishing fiscal resources. Nevertheless, this church community cannot be accused of indolence. Over five decades the James Street Baptists made a valiant attempt to present itself to the citizens of Hamilton with a modern, “relevant” face. They established excellent programmes to reach out to a disadvantaged downtown constituency. In the 1980s the church embarked on an extensive restoration and interior updating that left the community massively in debt. In recent years, the congregation (associated with the Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec) followed the lead of its pastor and veered sharply to the right theologically. In an effort to make worship more culturally appealing, James Street’s Casavant pipe organ was silenced by an amplified praise band, while a power point screen replaced the outdated technology of hymn books. None of these strategies worked. The story of James Street Baptist Church from the 1960s to the second decade of this century is a tale that is being repeated in many Canadian communities throughout the North Atlantic world. It invites a significant question: What happened during the 1960s that brought about such a decidedly negative change in the fortunes of the mainline Protestant churches of Canada for whom the word “transformation” now provides a comforting euphemism for decline?

Arthur Marwick in his seminal book *The Sixties* declares the decade to be one of profound historical significance, indeed a “cultural revolution.”

2 Quoted in the *Daily Mail* in 1982, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher expressed a similar, though more disapproving view of this era of rapid change. She lamented an apparent death in these years of the moral values that had formed what she considered the core of a British Protestant legacy, the twin values of discipline and restraint: “We are reaping … what was sown in the sixties … fashionable theories and progressive claptrap.”

3 Marwick’s book lists a number of developments

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that characterize and express the significance of the years he calls the “long sixties”⁴ and which others have called the decade of ferment,”⁵ For instance, new subcultures and movements formed that were “generally critical of, or in opposition to, one or more aspects of established society.” Closely associated with the arrival of these subcultures and movements, there was also “an outburst of entrepreneurialism, individualism, doing your own thing.” Added to the mix was the “rise to positions of unprecedented influence of young people, with youth subculture having a steadily increasing impact on the rest of society, dictating taste in fashion, music, and popular culture generally.”⁶ There were important shifts in technology that included advances in telecommunications and the introduction of labour saving consumer products. Of particular significance was the arrival of the contraceptive pill which was available in the United States in 1961 and in Britain in 1962.⁷ Marwick also notes that there were upheavals in race, class, and family relationships. Nevertheless, the reason that changes of the sixties were both possible and lasting is attributable to a process that was more evolutionary than revolutionary. During the decade the various counter-cultural movements and subcultures, “being ineluctably implicated in and interrelated with mainstream society while all the time expanding and interacting with each other, did not confront that society but permeated and transformed it.”⁸

Somewhat surprisingly, Marwick’s weighty tome does not concern itself with religion. Nevertheless, the “long sixties” was a period of great upheaval and dislocation for religion—indeed many scholars assert that it is the crucial decade in the secularization or dechristianization of North America and Europe. Historian Callum Brown is unequivocal in stating that what happened in the sixties was “unique and epoch forming.” What he calls “secular secularization” is a permanent decline of religion that in his native Britain took two main observable forms: the terminal decline of virtually all of the large, organized conventional Christian churches and the permanent decline of the common Christian culture to which most people had adhered for centuries. While previous religious change had been non-simultaneous, appearing staggered between different nations, the unique quality of the 1960s was the suddenness and the scale of

⁶ Marwick, The Sixties, 17.
⁷ Ibid. The contraceptive pill was made available in Canada to married women around the same time, ostensibly only to regulate the menstrual cycle. It was legalized for contraceptive purposes in 1969.
⁸ Ibid., 13.
decline in nearly all the countries in Western Europe.\textsuperscript{9} Brown further suggests that transformations in the perceptions and attitudes of women hold the key to this change.

Hugh McLeod widens the chronology\textsuperscript{10} and the range of actors. McLeod has a broad and international perspective that includes attention to the long-term preconditions for, as well as the short-term precipitants of, the 1960s crisis. His approach examines three levels: those of long-term processes developing over a century or more; medium-term processes evolving over two or three decades; and “catalysts” such as the Second Vatican Council and the Vietnam War.\textsuperscript{11}

In their introduction to \textit{The Sixties and Beyond}, a volume of essays on the dechristianization of Europe and North America, Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau call the exodus from the institutional churches that began with a vengeance during the 1960s decade “catastrophic.” The central question that their collection addresses is the extent to which these factors resonate equally in various national and social contexts. Was there an overarching explanation, a set of causal factors to explain disaffection and decline? Or would historians be better advised to focus less broadly, concentrating on medium-range questions that allow for the presence of significant differences between societies? Such an approach would permit scholars to prioritize the importance of different causes. “Larger cultural and social changes which had an international resonance have to be balanced with the peculiar aspects of national religious traditions in order to explain both the periodization and the causes of religious decline in terms of both institutional and personal identities.”\textsuperscript{12}

The purpose of \textit{A Holy or a Broken Hallelujah} is to examine the extensive changes that occurred in Canadian Christianity during “the long sixties” through the lens of a particular national religious tradition, the United Church of Canada. The dissertation will affirm philosopher Charles Taylor’s support of the secularization thesis to the extent that most of the changes that the secularization thesis identifies (urbanization, industrialization, migration, the fracturing of communities) did have a negative effect on traditional religious forms. However, rejecting a “subtraction” theory, Taylor sees those aspects of modernity that we call “secular” not


\textsuperscript{10} Like Marwick, McLeod embraces the concept of the “long sixties” beginning in 1958 and ending in 1973-1974.


\textsuperscript{12} Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, “Introduction ‘Even the hippies were only very slowly going secular’: Dechristianization and the Culture of Individualism in North America and Western Europe,” in \textit{The Sixties and Beyond}, ed. Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau (Toronto & Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 5.
as a single, continuous transformation but as a series of new departures. Disagreeing with those like Steve Bruce, who view the endpoint of secularization following the upheaval of the 1960s as a widespread indifference to religion, Taylor sees a world characterized not by an absence of religion but by a proliferation of new religious and spiritual options; believing in God becomes one option among many. Moreover, the dissertation will agree with Taylor, Brown, McLeod and others who are convinced that “something has happened in the last half-century, perhaps even less, which has profoundly altered the conditions of belief in our societies.”  

While upholders of the secularization thesis would see the diminishing of Christianity as an inevitable outcome of modernity, the 1960s provide not only “a” but “the” hinge moment when a widespread “expressive” individualism (even though it had been present since the eighteenth century) suddenly became a mass phenomenon. The decade marked a significant break with the past.

There is now a wide consensus that the 1960s decade of ferment was crucial in the story of the decline of Christianity in the West. Nevertheless, scholars do not agree about the extent to which the decade marked a radical cultural and religious shift from the era that preceded it. The emphasis of scholars like Marwick, Grace Davie and Sidney Ahlstrom is on the more revolutionary nature of the 1960s and the extent to which it is “the” decade in which the death of Christendom could be officially pronounced. McLeod, as well as Christie and Gauvreau, on the other hand, caution against any view of the 1950s as some sort of “conservative foil” for the more radical time that followed. Further, in *The Sixties and Beyond*, Christie and Gauvreau draw together several articles that propose the churches themselves may have been dynamic agents of change. Some churches continued to articulate an essentially conservative moral message but many were also producers of “ideas of democracy and individualism and promoted an ideal of ecumenism which highlighted the idea of a religious marketplace.” This strategy ultimately proved unsuccessful since these churches “were not in the end effective in recasting their institutional authority.”

The 1960s began well enough for the United Church. The period that followed the Second World War has been described as the institution’s “Golden Age” and the way ahead

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14 Ibid.
16 Ibid., 6.
17 Ibid.
seemed to promise a continuation of this rich and energetic period in denominational life. Many established congregations embarked on ambitious building programmes and new pastoral charges emerged, especially in the burgeoning suburbs. Progress was the order of the day. Like other large Protestant churches the United Church’s institutional foundation appeared solid. Soon, however, cracks in that foundation began to appear. In 1962, the title of the Annual Report of the United Church’s powerful Board of Evangelism and Social Service (E&SS) took up the Gospel of Luke’s image of a “great chasm” (Luke 16:26) to describe the unjust gap between rich and poor within the human family. A year later the Bishop of Woolwich, John A.T. Robinson, deployed the same image in his book *Honest to God* with a decidedly different target. He accused Christians of ignoring the growing gulf between it and those the church was called to serve. This theme was taken up by critics on both sides of the Atlantic who claimed for the 1960s a definitive break with the past, and especially with the religious past. They announced the arrival of a revolutionary New Age. Moreover, they urged a New Reformation capable of burning away the dross of irrelevance to create a new kind of servant-church appropriate to the needs of the people of God in this dynamic New Age. These optimistic, yet challenging ideas resonated with the leadership of the United Church and especially with J.R. Hord, who took over as Secretary of the United Church’s E&SS in 1963. With prophetic zeal Hord sought to energize his denomination to provide for the 1960s an affirmative answer to Ezekiel’s question “can these bones live?”

In addressing the needs of the New Age, United Church leaders shared enthusiasm and concern in equal measure. They knew that a big change was upon them and recognized that change can bring with it both turmoil and lament for what is lost. Nevertheless, the denomination had weathered significant crisis and change in the past. What United Church leaders were convinced the church now needed were appropriate strategies to manage the crisis and make the church “relevant.” For others who would form the United Church Renewal Fellowship in 1966, such a strategy was heretical. The vertical relationship with God was being compromised by the agenda of the denomination’s liberal leaders who seemed to favour a horizontal relationship with neighbour accompanied by an eagerness to embrace broad cultural change. Good denominational management for the UCRF demanded resisting the wiles of the secular by affirming a recovery

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19 The Board of Evangelism and Social Service was established at the time of Church Union. It brought together Methodist and Presbyterian traditions in the fields of social and spiritual welfare. This powerful Board was involved in care facilities, chaplaincy services, the development of communications strategies, and the establishment of committees and commissions to investigate all manner of social and political issues.

of the authority of Scripture and the personhood of Christ, characteristics more consistent with the United Church’s evangelical heritage.

*The Perfect Storm* is a book by Sebastian Junger that tells the story of the ill-fated voyage of a New England fishing boat, the Andrea Gail and its fatal encounter with a huge storm that emerged as the result of a convergence of two powerful weather fronts with an Atlantic hurricane.\(^21\) The boat might have navigated one of these individual storms but it could not successfully combat “the perfect storm” that resulted from the merging of all three. The tumultuous decade of the 1960s was in some sense a “perfect storm” that profoundly disoriented the churches of the North Atlantic world. For the United Church of Canada, the decade initiated both decline and a crisis of identity. When it attempted to respond to a nation and a culture in rapid transition, the denomination found itself challenged theologically, institutionally and prophetically. The work of Phyllis Airhart aptly demonstrates that the assumptions on which the United Church was founded completely evaporated in the energetic disorder of the 1960s.\(^22\) Moreover, as Mark Noll points out, the early 1960s also marked the beginning of the end for Canadian public life defined by traditional religion.\(^23\) As the decade wore on, the United Church found itself occupying a very different world from the happier one it inhabited in the postwar years when its fortunes seemed to be rising. Not only had membership peaked; after 1966 it began to decline.\(^24\) While much of the power base of the denomination was rural, the reality was that Canada was continuing rapidly to urbanize. Further, the Protestant vision of Canada as the Lord’s Dominion had “presupposed a homogeneous population, a population Canada had never really possessed and one that, given growing numbers of non-British immigrants, it was increasingly unlikely to attain.”\(^25\) Different understandings of family structure were also evolving. Both inside and outside the denomination, people (and especially young people) began to question the perceived rigidity of denominational attitudes in several “hot button” areas of personal morality from alcohol consumption to sexual ethics. While the church leaders spoke of reform appropriate to a New Age, what they found themselves confronting by the end of the long sixties was something much closer to a revolution.

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\(^{24}\) See Reginald W. Bibby, *Fragmented Gods* (Toronto: Irwin, 1987), 14-15. As a percentage of the total Canadian population, the membership of the United Church had begun to decline by 1946.  
This dissertation will argue against claims about the 1960s made by both the conservative/evangelical and liberal/ecumenical ends of the spectrum. On the one hand, there are those like Kevin Flatt who assert that had the United Church of Canada remained true to an evangelical heritage it would not have suffered such significant decline. Others maintain the opposite viewpoint and insist that had the denomination grasped the garment of progressivism more quickly and decisively, the debilitating haemorrhage might have healed. Each group assigns blame to the other. Excluded, however, is the notion of a “middle space” between extremes, the place of pragmatic Christianity where I would argue many (and perhaps even most) members of the United Church have historically lived (and where they continue to live). To those who insist that the decline in the fortunes of the United Church and the loss of its prestige and authority in the public square would have been mitigated had its leadership taken a different course during 1960s decade, I argue, on the contrary, that the denomination was acted upon by strong cultural forces entirely beyond its control and that whatever path the church might have chosen, the outcome would likely have been substantially the same. What was firmly underway by the end of the 1960s was the dechristianization of Canada, a process that was resistant to the most skilful of the United Church leaders’ management skills and their enthusiastic willingness to embrace the “big change.” Prior to the 1960s, few imagined a world where Christianity, or more precisely Christianity in its various institutional incarnations, would simply cease to matter in any meaningful way to the majority of Canadians. By the end of the long sixties, a prophetic voice would be heard “imagining” just such a world where religion would be replaced by a kind of benevolent Humanism. In addition to declining church membership, what also gained traction in the 1960s was a radical decline in the social significance of religion of any sort. Christian Canada was receding and the dream being realized was not the dream of Robinson, Cox or Berton, of Hord, Dolan, McLeod or Forrest— but of John Lennon.

Since no circumstances fit neatly into a chronological “decade”, any study of a Christian denomination the 1960s must establish some clarity about when the decade that we call by that name took place and why it is regarded as such a critical period of change within and without Christianity in the West. In The Sixties, Marwick notes that there is sufficient prima facie

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27 John Lennon’s album “Imagine” was recorded at his home in May 1971.
evidence to suggest that, although no period is “hermetically sealed,” there was something commonly known as ‘the sixties’ that was of outstanding historical significance. While historian Callum Brown keeps the aperture fairly narrow by identifying the early part of the decade as most important, Marwick and scholars like Hugh McLeod prefer an expansive sense of “decade” that begins in 1958 and ends in 1973-4. For the purposes of this dissertation centred on the fortunes of the United Church, I adopt and adapt Marwick and McLeod’s sense of the “long sixties” beginning in 1958 with two optimistic events: the approval of the theological presuppositions of the church’s New Curriculum and an intentional re-engagement with soporific union negotiations with the Anglican Church. I end the study in 1975 with the United Church finding itself (with a mixture of annoyance and relief) jilted at the altar when the Anglican House of Bishops unambiguously proclaimed the Plan of Union unacceptable and evacuated any will in either weary denomination for the talks to continue.

The “signal shot” in the 1960s decade of ferment came first from the sphere of popular theology. Consequently popular theology is the focus of the first chapter of the dissertation. Encouraged by the long-time alignment of liberal Protestantism and book culture, changes in printing technology had allowed for the emergence of this new genre. To the astonishment of publishers and churches alike, books like John A.T. Robinson’s *Honest to God*, Harvey Cox’s *The Secular City* and Pierre Berton’s *The Comfortable Pew* disappeared from the store shelves to be consumed by a reading public that, even if it did not quite understand abstruse theological subtleties (or even get around to *reading* the books), nevertheless resonated with the argument that something had gone decidedly wrong with the Christian church. Indeed by mid-decade a *Time* magazine cover had even audaciously trumpeted the death of God. A common theme within the genre of during the 1960s was that if a prosperous, smug and inward-looking church continued to operate as if God were still in heaven and everything still right with the world it was jeopardizing its future. God must be pulled down from the sky. Popular theology fervently declaimed that “the times they are a-changin’” and that outmoded theological concepts needed to adjust with them. As is evident from print resources commissioned by the denomination, United Church leaders who longed for a “relevant” church were anxious to get on board. *Why the Sea Is Boiling Hot* and Rex Dolan’s *The Big Change* sought to assist anxious congregations that were wrestling with both with the exigencies of the decade and with what Robinson confidently

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30 “The Times They Are a-Changin’” was Bob Dylan’s third studio album. It was released in January 1964 and it is considered by many to have uniquely captured the flavour of the decade of ferment.
proclaimed was a “New Reformation” in Christianity. Such books offered hope that with appropriate reform, the crisis in Christianity could be weathered and the United Church strengthened for service. They declared solidarity with Dolan’s assertion that “we must get out of our ‘ecclesiastical fox-holes’ and get in step with God as He is seeking to unite humanity through the great personal, social and political events of our day.”

Because it has long been vilified by conservatives within the denomination as “the straw that broke the camel’s back” by eviscerating the United Church’s evangelical heritage, chapter two examines the New Curriculum and suggests ways in which this impressive undertaking in faith formation was sabotaged by the coincidence of its appearance, after much delay, during the “decade of ferment.” In the years that followed the Second World War, denominational educators had argued that its church school curriculum was in desperate need of revision and modernization. The New Curriculum planners were convinced that what was required was a “liberal project of renovating religion in light of modern knowledge” and that such a project “had to succeed in the marketplace of print.” The technological shifts of the 1960s, however, revealed that if the planners not altogether bet on the wrong horse—they had certainly selected an insufficiently agile one. Moreover, even as the handsome hardcover books began to appear in the early 1960s (arguably to the fiscal detriment of the United Church’s Ryerson Press), the books’ contents served to exacerbate latent tensions between liberal and conservative elements that had always skulked beneath the church’s apparent unity. In his work on the New Curriculum, Kevin Flatt’s negative evaluation argues that the controversy the curriculum initiated “represented a central part of a profound shift in the public existence of the denomination that jettisoned its evangelical past and redefined it as an explicitly ‘liberal,’ non-evangelical church.” While I cannot support such a conclusion, it is clear that the apparently progressive bent of the curriculum materials further tarnished the United Church’s shaky reputation with biblical literalists inside and outside its fold, while deepening the liberal/conservative rift within. During the long period of planning, what the builders and supporters of this distinctly Canadian curriculum could hardly have foreseen was that almost

31 Rex R. Dolan, The Big Change (Toronto: Board of Evangelism and Social Service, United Church of Canada, 1967), Publisher’s Note.
before the diverse volumes appeared they would be rendered obsolete—not by an evangelical backlash so much as by the destabilizing nature of the 1960s decade itself.

Chapter three focuses on ecumenical initiatives undertaken to confront the problems of a New Age and the more pluralist world that accompanied its arrival. The chapter examines, in particular, the 1961 New Delhi Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Second Vatican Council that convened in Rome in 1962 and continued to meet until 1965. Throughout its history the rhetoric of the United Church had often been vigorously anti-Roman Catholic. As Sandra Beardsall observes, following years of pamphleteering in the interest of “saving” Canada for Anglo-Protestantism, the United Church’s 1964 General Council surprised itself by sending an enthusiastic greeting to the third session meeting in Rome. The Second Vatican Council had a significant effect on the United Church, not only by challenging its identity (and softening its genetic anti-Roman tendencies) but also by influencing the re-shaping of the “official” liturgy of the denomination. Arguably Pope John XXIII’s aggiornamento also affected the outcome of efforts to bring to fruition an organic union with the Anglican Church of Canada. The Anglicans now found themselves encouraged by the Roman Church’s apparent new openness and began to dream of the possibility of being courted by a more congenial partner than the unabashedly Protestant United Church. In a period of ecumenical vitality, the re-energized union talks between the United and Anglican churches and Disciples of Christ seemed to embody an exercise in pragmatic ecumenism not seen since the postwar formation of the Church of South India (1947). The proposed Canadian union would ultimately fail, in part because the plans for organic union were based on a model of Christendom that no longer existed by the time the Anglican House of Bishops officially shut down the work of the union committees. There were, moreover, very different denominational mentalities underlying the dream of a unified Christianity, differences that consistently frustrated the work of coming together. The “relevance” even of a re-united holy, catholic and apostolic church became increasingly questionable in an era of dechristianization.

Chapter four shines light on the tectonic cultural shifts within Canadian culture during the 1960s by focusing on youth, sexuality and marriage as well as the strengthening voices of feminists, gays, lesbians and those often defined as “other.” It observes that the United Church encountered troubled waters as leaders, ministers and lay people attempted to comprehend and

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34 Sandra Beardsall, “And Whether Pigs Have Wings,” in *The United Church of Canada: A History*, 104.
negotiate the suddenness of this particular cultural change: the evaporation of Thatcher’s twin values of “discipline and restraint” in the arena of sexual relations and an apparent rejection of the model of ineluctable authority in favour of individual autonomy in ethical decision-making. As sociologist Grace Davie notes, the churches on their part were painfully aware of the rapidity of the changes that were swirling around them and sought ways to adapt and penetrate this shifting world. Progressives imagined that “all might still be well if the Church could shake off its image of belonging essentially to the past” in order to “present itself and its message as modern, up to date and, above all, relevant.”35 As the dissertation will outline, during the 1960s the United Church, under the auspices of the E&SS, attempted to update its message by producing a denominational handbook on sex and morality, but found its efforts challenged and ultimately undermined by significant generational disagreement. Even for the United Church’s liberal leadership, the rapidity of change in the arena of sexuality was overwhelming.

The final chapter addresses the attempt of the United Church to re-forge its identity by altering its approach to mission in the New Age as the denomination discerned that it served a world that was both multi-denominational and multi-faith. Moreover, church leaders firmly embraced the prophetic as they sought justice for that world. Two major crises of the decade, the War in Vietnam and the 1967 Six Day War in the Middle East proved especially challenging for the church’s liberal leadership. Support for the American draft dodgers and for the Palestinian refugees further exacerbated a widening rift between liberals and those conservatives who considered soul-saving more important than the vexed arena of world politics. The optimism at the beginning of the decade that accompanied the arrival of a New Age quickly dissipated as the decade wore on and as the vaunted New Age proved to be every bit as violent as the discredited old one. Further, the denomination’s desire to be of “friendly service” to the nation was rendered obsolete by a diverse and increasingly secular Canadian population that was proving to be indifferent to the opinions, actions, moral and political campaigns of the United Church and indeed of organized Christianity as a whole. By the end of the long sixties, workers were on the roof of the edifice of Christendom in Canada dismantling the roof beams.

Chapter 1
Behold, I Make All Things New

*I believe if we only think of the world around us in terms of change—rapid social change, speed and revolution, we miss the most salient point of all; that we are living in a brand new age of history—an age which is really different from the world into which we were born. For years we have heard about the new age that was coming. We spoke of the new man who was being fashioned by the new circumstances of life on this planet. Now it is time to recognize that the new age is here.*

Kenneth G. McMillan

In 1962, the redoubtable J. R. Mutchmor retired as secretary of the United Church of Canada’s Board of Evangelism and Social Service to become the denomination’s 23rd moderator. Another “J.R.” succeeded him as E&SS secretary: J.R. Hord. In this role, Ray Hord quickly began to establish his reputation as “a prophet of the New Age.” In company with other 1960s prophets, Hord railed against a complacent status quo. *Breaking the Barriers*, the 1964 Annual Report of the E&SS, was the first report to be issued under Hord’s leadership and in the introduction he sounded a distinctly progressive note. The church, he said, when functioning at its best, manifests the living body of Christ. Its mission is to continue Christ’s saving work of evangelism: spreading the good news that God has broken down barriers and has restored humanity in order that human beings might enjoy healthy relationships, not only with their Creator, but also with one another. However, Hord warned that “the modern church” had been distracted from this important reconciling work. Instead, it had become “institution-centred, preoccupied with its building or renovation programme, paying its staff and keeping all its organizational machinery running smoothly.” This institutional self-centredness opened a chasm between the church and the world it was called to serve. Such destructive behaviour must be reversed and the church’s useless baggage laid aside. The church itself must change: “if cherished traditions and present organizational structures are not effective instruments in evangelism, then they must give place to those which are more adequate.” Arming himself with that most highly favoured of 1960s ecclesial buzz words “relevant,” Hord proclaimed that in the

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2 Airhart, *A Church with the Soul of a Nation*, 227.
4 Ibid., 2.
unfolding New Age “bold new experiments” will be required “if the Christian fellowship is to become relevant in the family, social vocational and political groupings of society.”⁵ Because the church is under the wing of the Holy Spirit, its future form will, for the time being, remain unknown. Nevertheless, “we see guide-lines for the future in the establishing of storefront churches, the house-church movement, cell-groups and industrial chaplaincies, as evangelical Christians are seeking to make the gospel relevant to people where they are in office and shop, club and factory.”⁶

In his new responsibility, Ray Hord began to chart a very different course from his predecessor. As Phyllis Airhart observes, “an article in Star Weekly contrasted his efforts to tackle the ‘big issues’ that would make the church ‘relevant’ with Mutchmor’s penchant for moral issues such as drink, decadence, and divorce.”⁷ For Hord it was by moving out to reconcile and heal the world’s brokenness that the denomination’s historic pairing of evangelism and service would be demonstrable.

Hord’s declaration that the 1960s were a time of decision and crisis for the United Church was in one sense nothing new. Perhaps given the difficulties attendant on its birth, anxiousness and a tendency to employ the vocabulary of crisis were in the church’s denominational DNA. For example, the postwar report of the church’s Commission on Culture The Church and the Secular World (published in 1950) was pregnant with crisis language as it looked out on a battered world. Steeped in a neo-orthodox emphasis on the transcendence of God, the writers of the report observed that all secular cultures “attempt to engage in creative activity without reference to the Divine Creator from whom ultimately all power in Heaven and on earth derives.”⁸ The postwar culture of Canada, infected with “secular, non-theistic humanism,” was one of these derelict zones. Most “serious and profound thinkers,” the report continued, affirm that there is “a crisis in modern Western culture” which the church “cannot help but interpret” as “the judgment which inevitably follows as a consequence of sin.”⁹

Unlike the postwar Committee on Culture, Hord did not see the 1960s cultural “crisis” existing outside the church or likely to be solved by it through a transcendent sky-God’s

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⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Ibid.
⁷ Airhart, A Church with the Soul of a Nation, 227.
⁸ The Commission on Culture Presented to the Fourteenth General Council of the United Church of Canada, Toronto, September 1950, The Church and The Secular World (Toronto: Board of Evangelism and Social Service of the United Church of Canada, 1950), viii.
⁹ Ibid.
successful confrontation with the world’s “sin.” Something had changed by the 1960s. Lurking beneath the surface was a less robust faith in a detached but providential God. This circumstance may be attributable in part to a further legacy of Second World War: the Cold War and the new possibility of imminent nuclear annihilation. Technology giveth but it also taketh away.

By the time he assumed the role of E&SS secretary, Hord was firm in his conviction that in the 1960s the fundamental problem was not outside the church—it was the church. The church had failed to communicate with the world in comprehensible language; it had, moreover, been guilty of imagining that it could continue to sit in some kind of cloistered judgment over it. Hord continued his theme of overcoming the church’s self-obsession in another of his contributions to the same E&SS report; an article entitled “Every Christian is an Evangelist.” Here he asserted that while mass evangelism of the Billy Graham type might be the most accepted method of winning souls for Christ, it “has its limitations in our kind of world.” A major weakness “is that our traditional methods are not getting us outside the structures of the church. We are building up the church but not redeeming the world!”

Hord acknowledged the historic dual mandate of the E&SS when he noted that a personal commitment to Christ was a necessary beginning. Nevertheless, “it must never end there if it is to have any impact on our world. We must interpret God’s love in terms of just laws, fair wages, good housing, in charity toward the fallen, compassion for the needy, right relations with members of other races.”

For Hord, the E&SS, and other United Church leaders the 1960s decade represented nothing less than the dawning of a “New Age”—a New Age that would require a more apposite theology, a democratization of God’s presence in the world.

Looking back, it is clear that the voices announcing that the 1960s marked a distinct break with the Christian past were right on the money. The era of Christendom seemingly had ended and the United Church, like other churches, was struggling to understand and to come to terms with the implications of such a seismic shift for its mission and ministry. Breaking the Barriers is pregnant with the awareness that to carry on “business as usual” was to fossilize. The times were a-changin’ and the United Church, along with other mainline churches, sensed that Christianity in the New Age was teetering on the brink of something that John A.T. Robinson and others labeled “the New Reformation.” Such a major break with the past would require nothing less than a revolution in theology, ecclesiology and mission.

10 J.R. Hord, “Every Christian is an Evangelist,” Breaking the Barriers, 11.
11 Ibid.
The essentially optimistic theme of urgent, bold change for a New Age was front and centre in several works of “popular” 1960s theology in the first half of the decade: emerging in Britain with Robinson’s best selling *Honest to God* (and his subsequent *The New Reformation*?), continuing in the United States with Harvey Cox’s *The Secular City*, then less optimistically in the voices of the mid-decade “Death of God” theologians. In Canada the theme of bold change was taken up by Pierre Berton’s *The Comfortable Pew* and two controversial books by Ernest Harrison.  

Considering that the subject was theology, many of these books sold remarkably well; they were purchased (and sometimes even read) by a diverse audience representing the inhabitants of both chancel and nave. For its part, the United Church’s E&SS responded to the theological controversies swirling amidst the “Honest to God Debate” with three publications intended for congregational study. All three books reminded United Church members that their gaze should be ever outward; the world at large is the proper arena of God’s care and the church’s work. All three books also highlighted “change” as a central theme—almost a mantra. Intentionally following the lead and model of Methodism under the Wesleys (whose bold plan for evangelism proved effective in the Industrial Revolution) Stewart Crysdale’s 1965 sociological exploration *The Changing Church in Canada* points to new strategies for the United Church’s during the revolution underway in the Canada of the 1960s. Not to be outdone by the Anglicans in their courting of journalist/public intellectual Pierre Berton, the E&SS commissioned *Why the Sea Is Boiling Hot*, a booklet intent on “assessing the Church from outside.” As the booklet’s introduction proudly noted, by commissioning the work the denomination was bravely “baring its breast to the slings and arrows of outrageous newspaper columnists and editors.”  

Rex R. Dolan’s self-declared “Challenge to Radical Change in the Church” (the subtitle of his 1967 book *The Big Change*) attempted to dry the “current flood of literature critical of the church” and to offer instead “something constructive” that was nevertheless a direct challenge to the status quo. In the book’s Preface (where he expresses gratitude for Ray Hord’s inspiration) Dolan indicated that he was inspired to motivate both individuals and congregations of the United Church to make their church once again relevant. He further proposed to guide them through not “a” but “the” big change now underway that manifested in a number of important arenas—the role of the church, theology, outreach, and morality. These E&SS publications emphasized that to be Christian in Canada in the 1960s

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12 *Let God Go Free* (1965) and *A Church without God* (1966).
“was to be involved in mission and service in the world in a secular way (that is, political, worldly and historical), seeking to transform historical existence rather than merely religiously to react to or reflect upon it.”

Most writers of 1960s popular theology assumed a degree of ecclesial strength and adaptability that would insure institutional survival once the “New Reformation” took hold. The crisis could be “managed.” They expressed confidence that with the right (more often than not liberal/progressive) tweaking, accompanied by a reorientation of focus from inward to outward, the ship would remain seaworthy. After all, as the opening quotation in Why the Sea Is Boiling Hot confidently proclaims: “only the strong offer themselves for martyrdom.” What they failed to understand while navigating the boiling sea was the form such martyrdom would take. As we now know the movement that was underway was not, as Robinson and his school imagined, from a deceptive Christian culture to a more “honest” one; the change in the culture of Canada of the 1960s was from Christian to non-Christian. And, as Mark Noll shrewdly observes in his article “What Happened to Christian Canada?” one of the ironies of the Canadian religious landscape of the 1960s was that during this fraught decade “Canada’s most important churches themselves advocated, promoted, and facilitated rupture with hereditary patterns of Canadian religious life.”

1 The Signal Shot: Bishop John Robinson and the Honest to God Debate

John A.T. Robinson’s Honest to God was published in 1963 and it launched a major controversy with its insistence that theology (or at least the kind of theology then on offer in the churches) was not the kind of theology appropriate to the New Age that was struggling to be born. Robinson’s critique had not sprung fully formed from the brow of the 1960s. There was a longstanding tradition of criticism of the churches either from outside or inside. Historian Nancy Christie effectively demonstrates that the postwar period of affluence and expansion that resulted in much glorious suburban church building was not universally applauded by those North American Christians who witnessed it. John Kenneth Galbraith in his book The Affluent Society

16 Why the Sea Is Boiling Hot, v.
and William H. Whyte in *The Organization Man* “saw themselves as social critics and public intellectuals who believed in the need for leadership among exceptional men as a necessary corrective against the destabilizing and corroding effect of the banality of middle-class suburbia.”

19 Gibson Winter in *The Suburban Captivity of the Churches* (1961) pointed toward the sad plight of inner city congregational remnants as the postwar Protestant church marched to the suburbs.

20 Another prescient book was sociologist Peter Berger’s *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies*. Like other writers, Berger cited the Protestant churches of postwar North America for their blatant and shallow sanctification of the American middle-class way of life, what he called the cozy “O.K. world” of the culture and its religious establishment. The problem, he suggested was that the religious establishment of the Protestant churches had not only failed to lead people to the way of Christ, it may actually be designed to prevent any such encounter with the Christian message. To counter the American Protestant churches’ cozy relationship with the “O.K. World,” Berger called for a rebelliousness of attitude. He advised that “if rebellion against the inertia and indolence of our cultural climate carries with it a certain amount of uncouthness and occasionally unfairness to what is best in our traditions, this is a minor consideration.”

21 As fate would have it a man who was feeling rebellious was soon struck by an illness that would afford him the leisure to gather and distil his recent theological reading and to commit his thoughts to paper. The result was John A.T. Robinson’s *Honest to God*, one of a series of iconic 1960s paperbacks from the Student Christian Movement press that sought to examine the church’s confrontation with the New Age. He dedicated the book to his own children “and their generation.” Its famous cover photo reveals a modernist sculpture of a young man in thought, perhaps intended to be representative of the younger generation for whom, he alleges, Christian orthodoxy had become a tremendous stumbling block to what he considered to be intelligent (and relevant) faith.

22 In the book’s preface Robinson offered his credentials: “it belongs to the office of a bishop in the church to be a guardian and defender of its doctrine.”

23 Nevertheless, he found himself exercising this solemn protective duty at a critical juncture in time that required both

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for God in the Suburbs (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994) attempts to explain the religion of North Americans in the 1950s both for its own sake and to aid in understanding what happened to religion and society in the years that followed.

19 Ibid., 322.


21 Ibid., 178.

22 “Seated Youth” was a 1918 sculpture by Wilhelm Lehmbrock.

wisdom and discernment, “for I suspect that we stand on the brink of a period in which it is going to become increasingly difficult to know what the defence of Christian truth requires.”

The problem for the church of the advancing twentieth century is located in a misplaced emphasis on God’s transcendence, “a growing gulf between the traditional orthodox supernaturalism in which our Faith has been framed and the categories which the ‘lay’ world ... finds meaningful today.” Such a division exists not solely between Christian and non-Christian, it also appears within Christianity itself where there is divergence between supporters of orthodox supernaturalism and those who find themselves put off by thinking that they “quite legitimately they find incredible.” Speaking candidly, Robinson confessed that the dividing line that runs down the middle of the nave “runs right through the middle of myself.” Though he was conscious of his position as a Church of England bishop (whose accustomed role is to defend the church’s doctrine and heritage), Robinson surprised himself in the realization that in any discussion between Christians and humanists, most of his sympathies lay on the humanists’ side.

Robinson asserted that what was new to the 1960s decade was a widening gulf between those who professed to be orthodox and others who found themselves called by their time into a “radical questioning” of the traditional Christian framework of metaphysics and morals. He observed a similar exploring spirit in the writing of California’s Bishop James Pike and in the work a fellow Cambridge scholar, Alec Vidler, editor of the monthly journal Theology (whose Soundings and Objections to Christian Belief also appeared in 1962-3). Like Vidler, Robinson proposed that the dawning New Age would see “an increasing alienation, both within the ranks of the Church and outside it.” While Robinson, perhaps disingenuously, claimed not to contrast his own “honesty” with the integrity of those who disagreed with him, he expressed surprise at the vehemence of people who claimed to be guardians of orthodoxy, but who were in reality impediments to “the true defence of the Gospel.” He predicted that many Christians who held conservative views would consider his conclusions in Honest to God to be radical or even

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24 Ibid., 7.
25 Ibid., 8.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid., 20.
30 Ibid. 9.
heretical; nevertheless, as a liberal, his eye was firmly fixed on a future time when thinking Christians would probably judge his work “to have erred in not being nearly radical enough.”

In his book Robinson begins with the doctrine of God and works outward. The title of the French edition of Honest to God is Dieu sans dieu which effectively sums up the paradoxical and often contradictory character of Robinson’s analysis of the doctrine of God, an analysis that Albert Outler called “at a sort of halfway point between an honest-to-God atheism and an honest-to-God theism.” For Robinson, traditional theistic notions of a God ‘up there’ or ‘out there’ are mere human projection, an idol that needs to be torn down. He recognizes that such is the language still employed by most Christians (particularly of an older generation) and that the loss of such language may prove disruptive or disorienting; nevertheless Robinson is adamant that such simple, nay simplistic, piety is an obstacle to contemporary seekers. He finds himself “firmly convinced that this whole way of thinking can be the greatest obstacle to an intelligent faith—and indeed will progressively be so to all except the ‘religious’ few.” If Christianity intends to survive or recapture “secular” humanity during the ferment of the 1960s, “there is no time to lose in detaching it from this scheme of thought.”

Robinson replaces outmoded piety and traditional theism with a distillation of Paul Tillich’s concept of God as the ground, source and goal of being. This strategy has significant implications for Christian morality and ecclesiology. Moving seamlessly from theology to ethics, Robinson proclaims in his chapter describing “The New Morality” that “it is impossible to reassess one’s doctrine of God, of how one understands the transcendent, without bringing one’s view of morality into the same melting-pot. Indeed the two are inseparable.” Further, there is no need to prove that a revolution is required in morals since such a revolution has already broken out. Robinson notes that the perspicacious are aware that a revolt in the field of ethics “from supranaturalism to naturalism, from heteronomy to autonomy” has been occurring since the Enlightenment. What he proposes for the New Age of the 1960s, however, is a version of situation ethics gleaned from his reading of an article by Joseph Fletcher in the Harvard Divinity Bulletin. Robinson (following Fletcher) asserts that Christian ethics is not a scheme of codified

31 Ibid., 10.
33 Robinson, Honest to God, 41.
34 Ibid., 43.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., 105.
conduct. “It is a radical ‘ethic of the situation’, with nothing prescribed—except love.” Love, according to Robinson is intrinsically good; the well-being of people must always come before inflexible rules, the way of Christ before religion.

In the final chapter, Robinson describes the implications for the church of his “Recasting the Mould.” He calls the phrase “organized religion” a fearful one, and remarks that it is “calamitous that Christians should have come to find themselves committed to its defence.” Though the church has an obvious concern with religion, and must in some sense be organized, he cautious that it should also be careful at this crucial juncture not to prove Pharisaic: “For the last thing the church exists to be is an organization for the religious. Its charter is to be the servant of the world.” In order to facilitate the kind of “stripping down” that thinkers like Robinson’s theological hero Dietrich Bonhoeffer have proposed, the church “must become genuinely and increasingly lay—providing we understand that much misused word aright.” Reform will mean an empowering of the whole people of God in the world not just some of them. Lay persons, he says, are the ones best positioned to bring the church out of the rarefied cloister.

According to Robinson, the basic commitment to Christ for many has been “buttressed and fortified” by lesser commitments to a doctrine of God, a particular “myth” of the Incarnation, a limiting moral code or pattern of religion. The danger is that the church will cling to such buttresses instead of to Christ. Some Christians may even misidentify the buttresses as the way to Christ. Nevertheless for “growing numbers” the buttresses “are barriers rather than supports.” In the process of change, “we are still only at the beginning of our task. But the beginning is to try to be honest—and to go on from there.”

Aided by his popular culture transformation into a media celebrity, Robinson’s “signal shot” ricocheted in the North Atlantic world in ways that no one could have imagined, let alone predicted. Before the end of 1963, SCM had published a successor volume called The Honest to God Debate. In this book, SCM editor David L. Edwards offered some cogent responses to Honest to God that were gathered from scholars and the public at large. These included letters

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38 Robinson, Honest to God, 134.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid., 141.
41 Ibid.
sent in by readers (some positive and supportive, others accusing Robinson of heresy and the betrayal of his office as bishop). Another section of the book contains twenty-three reviews followed by new material in the form of essays written by theologians John Macquarrie and David Jenkins, chaplain of Queen’s College, Oxford, as well as a defensive chapter by the Bishop of Woolwich himself.

In his introductory contribution to the volume, “A New Stirring in English Christianity,” Edwards examines the controversy that began almost immediately to swirl around Honest to God and he offers some reasons why the volume “appears to have sold more quickly than any new book of serious theology in the history of the world.” Edwards points out that what set Honest to God apart from other incarnations of liberal Christianity was not so much the radical nature of the book’s content (he acknowledges that in many ways Robinson had merely repeated earlier thought); rather, the difference was to be found in the publicity given to Robinson’s book by BBC television and a British newspaper, The Observer: “The Bishop of Woolwich, a former Cambridge don, became in the eyes of the public the high priest of Christian radicalism.” Though Robinson’s theology was not especially innovative, he wrote in a way that was accessible and engaging. Somewhat improbably, a suffragan bishop of the Church of England not only became a media celebrity, he also found himself sparring theologically (to the delight of the British media) with the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Notwithstanding the Archbishop’s warnings (or perhaps because of them) Honest to God was a popular choice for church study groups throughout the North Atlantic world. Some of the official response of United Church leaders to Robinson’s Honest to God theology is accessible in Breaking the Barriers. Located in the section of the report titled “Evangelism” is a book review by the George Johnston, Principal of the United Theological College at McGill. The review is followed by a summary (also by Johnston) of the Honest to God debate. In the book review, Johnston is enthusiastic. He describes the book as “a phenomenon,” and notes that it went through four printings within a month of its publication; shortly thereafter it passed the 100,000 sales mark. Nevertheless Johnston observes that the popularity of the book with the reading

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44 Asked by The Economist if current theologians of the Church of England were making a major contribution to contemporary theology, Archbishop Michael Ramsey answered that he didn’t believe they were doing so: “I think they are taking their part in the general give and take of discussion and statements, but not a great deal of really constructive theology is being done at the moment by Anglicans.” See “The Economist Interviews the Archbishop of Canterbury,” The Economist, June 13, 1964.
public is odd for two reasons. First, the author is a bishop of the state Church of England and a professional theologian; second, “believe it or not, the book is about ‘God’!” Tongue firmly in cheek, Johnson summarizes the most controversial aspects of Honest to God and the ensuing media frenzy, noting that “the ‘hoi polloi’ have rushed to buy it, many have read it with wonder and/or horror, and the Archbishop of Canterbury has had to issue a counterblast defending the status quo of images and ideas about God.” Johnston, like other commentators, points out that most of the ideas in Honest to God were not Robinson’s own, but those of an earlier generation of thinkers, “revolutionaries in the expression of the Christian faith” who wanted to discard the traditional modes of speech in order “to commend the faith to the men of the age to come, the age of man’s sovereignty over Nature and the universe.” Robinson’s reformulation of traditional theism that evicted the sovereign God beloved of neo-orthodoxy is at the heart of Robinson’s discussion but there were also implications for biblical interpretation and for the Christian life. “Life is to be lived-out in the world come of age, not within holy cloisters. We are summoned to a sacred secularity, for that is the destiny awaiting Man when he is at ease with the divine Ground.” Robinson is further convinced that contemporary Christians have no need either for a “myth” of the Incarnation or some kind of assurance of Christ’s victory over the powers and principalities of the world. On the subject of morality, Johnston summarizes Robinson: “we are set free from a particular code of morals. And with these gains comes the likelihood of commending our faith to modern men and women.” Johnston affirms both Robinson’s “honesty” and his courage. He observes that Robinson’s publisher was unprepared for the “furore and the immense sales” for the simple reason that the views expressed were derivative and far from recent. However, what is new, Johnston perceptively notes, is the way that these theological ideas are presented. “Bishop Robinson seems to have hit on a style that has got through to the man on the street.” As is customary in the E&SS reports, the next paragraph of Johnson’s review is lifted for emphasis through the use of both bold and italic typeface:

The questions raised are very real. Modern man, “come of age” or not, wants a faith to sustain him and perhaps knows that, as an adult, he is just as godless as before and unfortunately more

46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid., 18-19.
49 Ibid., 19.
50 Ibid.
and more powerful. The human spirit has not matured at the pace of the human brain and hand.\textsuperscript{51}

Six months later, when speaking about the phenomenon of \textit{Honest to God}, Johnston’s supportive tone had modulated to concern: “Our own age is crucial because we have made breakthroughs that take the breath away. And yet, at this very time, Western man for all his technology is beset in a crisis of faith.” As a result of this crisis many people are insecure, immorality flourishes in many forms and “even the religious institutions of society appear to some to be crumbling.”\textsuperscript{52} Johnston suggests that it is this “peculiar situation of our generation” that accounts for the “remarkable ferment” recorded by editor David Edwards in SCM’s \textit{Honest to God} sequel. In this second review Johnston is much more critical of Robinson’s work, calling \textit{Honest to God} “a bad book, muddled, full of undigested ideas, and above all, lamentably ignorant of much traditional teaching.”\textsuperscript{53} Johnston does agree with Robinson that the “childish images” of God that so many Christians seem to hold are false and, “of course, have to go.” He is also in agreement that men and women of Christian integrity need to examine (and ultimately revise) their moral ideas and practices. Johnston calls, however, for a revision rather than a rejection of theism: “The time has come to stand up for a Theism that is intellectually respectable and ready to be counted in practising the great Christian virtues of charity, purity, meekness, peacemaking and so on.”\textsuperscript{54} Even in the more free-wheeling 1960s there is a limit to what Johnston’s liberal mind will tolerate. He concludes by affirming some form of orthodox theistic Christianity as the best defence against chaos of unsettled times: “If we are to escape with honour from the crisis of this age, we must … hold on to faith in Being as a gracious, personal God and indeed the God and Father revealed in that wonderful man, Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{55}

In the wake of \textit{Honest to God} (and David Edwards’ successor volume capitalizing on the controversy the book generated) the SCM press seized the initiative by publishing several other books that amplified the idea that a revolution was now underway within Christianity. One of those was Roger Lloyd’s \textit{The Ferment in the Church}. Canon Lloyd was the Vice-Dean of Winchester Cathedral and he had been a regular contributor to the \textit{Guardian}. Judiciously included at the end of Lloyd’s book was “A Reading List” on the subject of what SCM now

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} George Johnston, “More About the ‘Honest to God’ Controversy,” \textit{Breaking the Barriers}, 20.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 22.
called “The 1962-64 Ferment.” In his book, Lloyd argues strongly that “change” is the price that must be paid if the Christian church is to have any hope of appealing to a culture radically transformed by progress: “Everything that lives must change. Where change is grudged or refused, no vitality is lift. It is true of every institution, every person, every art, and every religion too.” Alluding to Vidler’s title, Lloyd notes that there had been preliminary “soundings” of profound theological change in the works of Bultmann, Bonhoeffer and Tillich. In England, however, the most important manifestations are Vidler’s book of essays “and the Bishop of Woolwich’s now famous Honest to God.” Of the two works he thinks that Robinson’s will prove the more influential. Nevertheless, Lloyd points out that what elevated Honest to God to the status of a publishing sensation was “a really brilliant title, a skilled use of publicity, and the low price of the book.” Despite even these advantages, he advises that the real secret to Honest to God’s popular success lies elsewhere. “Somehow it caught the right moment and it matched a concealed but widespread mood.” Until it was published the tendencies of probing Christian thought were moving independently and in isolation, known to specialists but not to the lay person. “To be effective and to reach their goal they needed to be fused. Even when this had been done, there was still the need of a trigger to make the contact and release the power in so loud a bang that the modern adult man could hardly fail to hear it. Honest to God was both the synthesis and the trigger.”

Robinson’s own successor volume to Honest to God was provocatively titled The New Reformation? This work appeared in 1965 and it builds on many of Honest to God’s themes. More important, it expands on the growing sense, expressed by Canon Lloyd and a chorus of liberal voices, that the 1960s decade represented a definitive break with the past—nothing less than a New Age. This book, which the Trappist monk Thomas Merton considered far more significant than Honest to God, offers an expanded and revised version of a lecture series that Robertson presented at Hartford and Cornell Universities during May 1964. Robinson attributes the germ for his thinking on the subject of a 1960s “New Reformation” to a remark by the

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56 The list begins with Alec Vidler’s Soundings followed by E. L. Maskall’s reply; Robinson’s Honest to God with the reply by Archbishop Ramsey; books associated with “the Honest to God” debate; books by Werner Pelz, Richard Acland, Reginald Fuller as well as Paul van Buren’s The Secular Meaning of the Gospel. Also advertised is Robinson’s anticipated follow-up book The New Reformation?
58 Ibid., 29. Another book in the SCM series that acknowledges the cultural significance of Robinson, while disagreeing with his conclusions, is the work of another bishop, Lesslie Newbigin. His Honest Religion for Secular Man riffs on Robinson’s now famous title but responds to it by taking a moderate stance that declares the value of traditional Christianity during its time of trial. See Lesslie Newbigin, Honest Religion for Secular Man (London: SCM Press, 1966), 88-89.
Roman Catholic Cardinal Bea, Vatican Secretariat for Christian Unity who, in the light of the work of the Second Vatican Council, declared the Counter Reformation to be officially over. Robinson concludes that it is just as well that the period of civil war within Western churches is at an end because in this turbulent decade the churches now find themselves “engulfed in a larger campaign” that makes continued division dangerous; for, “we are trembling on the verge of a new Reformation.” He observes that the whole October 1964 issue of The London Quarterly and Holborn Review was devoted to a symposium on this very theme and, moreover, that Roger Lloyd, the “otherwise cautious” Canon of Winchester Cathedral had declared that the prospect of a New Reformation was clearly in sight. Robinson indicates that while it is “absurd and presumptuous to exaggerate the signs of the times,” there is also another sense in which new Reformation is an inadequate category for “the crisis of our age.” The Reformation was a provincial quarrel within Western Christianity that ignored the multi-faith context of the world as a whole. Such ignorance was no longer possible in the world of the mid twentieth-century with its global perspective.

But there is (for the church) an even more unsettling and important question requiring earnest consideration. Robinson notes that use of the term “reformation” pre-supposes sufficient health within an organism to make renewal possible. “There is, however, much from within the organized Church, and still more for those observing it from without, to raise the question rather insistently: ‘Can it possibly be the carrier of the new life for the new age?’ Is the Church not an archaic and well-protected institution for the preservation of something that is irrelevant and incredible? In other words, Robinson thinks that questions are now arising both inside and outside the church about its very capacity for “reformability”—can the bones live?

Robinson found himself encouraged that the 1960s decade disclosed both sides of the Atlantic abuzz with theological conversation. He mentions having read Harvey Cox’s The Secular City and he calls it “a major contribution.” Also, while his own book was in the proof stage, Robinson observed two further exciting developments “from across the Atlantic.” The first of these was an article in the 1964 Christmas issue of Time magazine which, according to Robinson, adumbrates how widespread is the sense of an “eve of Reformation” spirit running through the church and demanding of it “an openness to quite radical change in its new secular

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61 Ibid.
62 Ibid., 13-14.
63 Ibid., Preface.
setting.” The second bright light was Pierre Berton’s *The Comfortable Pew* which Robinson declared “the most penetrating and, indeed, prophetic book by an outsider taking a critical look at the church.” Robinson also found “a sign of real hope” in the fact that Berton’s book was commissioned by Canadian Anglicans.

2 Ferment across the Pond, Secular Cities, Dead Deities and Uncomfortable Pews

The *Time* magazine article that so impressed Robinson was a cover feature on the contemporary state of Christianity subtitled “The Servant Church.” That a popular news magazine should devote space to issues of theology and ecclesiology suggests both that the idea of a “new Reformation” had somehow entered the consciousness of the average American churchgoer and that the subject of church renewal was still sufficiently important in 1964 to penetrate the sentimental consumer traditions surrounding the normative North American celebration of the Christmas season. The *Time* article offers a concise and cogent summary of arguments in favour of church reform and suggests that some sort of “new Reformation” was indeed already underway. Below an epigraph from Revelation 21:5: “Behold, I make all things new,” the writer opens with an observation about the current state of the Christian church: “Divided and fragmented [the churches] remain the most durable of man’s institutions—together constituting the ‘ever-reforming church’ that in crisis finds within itself the means of rebirth and renewal. And as in the days of Augustine, Francis and Luther, signs show that a renewal is taking shape in Christianity.” *Time* quotes Rev. Don Benedict, director of the Chicago City Missionary Society who cites “a kind of pre-Reformation spirit” that is running through the church; Christians stand on the threshold of “great changes.”

The *Time* writer points to the *aggiornamento* of the Second Vatican Council as further evidence of major transformation occurring within Christianity as well as to new ecumenical initiatives among Roman Catholics and Protestants who now “make common cause in facing the world.” Besides ecumenism, the article notes other events are changing the chemistry of Christianity. There has been a “recognition that the postwar religious revival in U.S. churchgoing

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64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
67 This quotation would also announce the theme of the Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Uppsala, 1968.
69 Ibid.
was to an important degree a numbers game—and a peacetime reflection of foxhole faith born out of the fear of the bomb.”\textsuperscript{70} There does seem to be some new life in the suburban churches evidenced by “the number of Christians who form study groups to read the Bible and such avant-garde works as Bishop John Robinson’s \textit{Honest to God} and Paul Tillich’s \textit{Systematic Theology}.”\textsuperscript{71} Nevertheless, many church leaders believe that “the present vitality of Christianity is simply a kind of spiritual Indian summer.” Convinced that most of the structures of the church have outlived their usefulness, many of these all-out reformers want a “new Pentecost”—what David Edwards refers to as “a return to the womb and a new birth for the Christian community.”\textsuperscript{72} These leaders foresee a day when there “may be fewer Christians but more dedicated ones, and when the church will be built around the active cell of believers rather than the territorial parish.”\textsuperscript{73} The church will be concerned with the building of the realm of God “by transforming the organisms of the secular city.” The greatest challenge to the churches is “secularization” and a growing sense that God, or at least “the personal, omnicompetent deity of Christendom,” finds “lordship over the world” threatened by a steady growth in scientific knowledge and technological competence.

Another book of popular 1960s theology that surprised its author when it went into multiple printings is Harvey Cox’s \textit{The Secular City}. The book became an international bestseller that was translated into fourteen languages, eventually reaching a million readers. Cox’s introduction provides a rapid review of what he calls “secularization” (as distinct from “secularism”) and its relationship to a parallel movement of the mid-twentieth century, urbanization:

The rise of urban civilization and the collapse of traditional religion are the two main hallmarks of our era and are closely related movements. Urbanization constitutes a massive change in the way men live together, and became possible in its contemporary form only with the scientific and technological advances which sprang from the wreckage of religious world-views. Secularization, an equal epochal movement, marks a change in the way men grasp and understand their life together, and it occurred only when the cosmopolitan confrontations of city living

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 46.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
exposed the relativity of the myths and traditions men once thought were unquestionable.\textsuperscript{74}

Nevertheless, Cox does not despair of secularization—he optimistically welcomes it. Cox says that secularization marks the turning of human attention away from the world beyond and toward this world and this time. He notes that the forces of secularization “have no serious interest in persecuting religion. Secularization simply bypasses and undercuts religion and goes on to other things. It has relativized religious world-views and thus rendered them innocuous. Religion has been privatized.”\textsuperscript{75}

For Cox, the age of the secular city “is an age of ‘no religion at all.’” The secular city no longer looks to religious rules and rituals for its morality or its meanings. For some religion is a hobby, for others a mark of national or ethnic identification and for others it is an aesthetic delight: “For fewer and fewer, however, does it provide an inclusive and commanding system of personal and cosmic values and explanations.”\textsuperscript{76} It will do no good, says Cox, to hope that religion and metaphysics will be back – they are disappearing forever. And if secularization “designates content of man’s coming of age, urbanization describes the context in which it is occurring.”\textsuperscript{77}

Cox suggests that the starting point for a new theology of the church in the New Age is a theology of social change. “The church is first of all a responding community, a people whose task it is to discern the action of God in the world and join in His work.”\textsuperscript{78} The action of Cox’s democratized God occurs through historical events, which Cox suggests should more properly be called “social change.” The church should reject an “ideology of preservation and permanence.” It cannot be past-oriented but must be defined and shaped by what God is now doing in the world. The emerging city is similarly in flux and process, painfully worked out by humankind. “The idea of the secular city exemplifies maturation and responsibility. Secularization denotes the removal of juvenile dependence from every level of society; urbanization designates the fashioning of new patterns of human reciprocity.”\textsuperscript{79} Freed from adolescent illusions, humanity

\textsuperscript{74} Harvey Cox, \textit{The Secular City} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 1.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 3.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 125.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 131.
must assume the status of maturity and responsible stewardship. The acceptance of provisionality is part of maturity.”

For its Easter 1966 edition *Time* upped the theological ante in its coverage of the transformation of North American religion in the New Age through the use of a deliberately provocative cover. “In large red letters across the front were written the words: ‘IS GOD DEAD?’ The starkness of the black background against which the red letters appeared came to symbolize the national reaction to the new theological fad.”

The accompanying *Time* article cited both the continued growth of atheism in the U.S. and the increasing popularity of what was popularly called “Death of God” theology. The most prominent mid-decade “Death of God” theologians were Gabriel Vahanian, Paul Van Buren, William Hamilton, Thomas J.J. Altizer, John D. Caputo and Rabbi Richard Rubenstein. Vahanian’s book *The Death of God* had, however, appeared earlier (1961). Vahanian argued that modern culture had lost all sense of the sacred. According to Vahanian, there is neither transcendent purpose nor a sense of providence; for the modern mind, God is dead. A renewed sense of the deity will only be created by a post-Christian, post-modern culture. Van Buren and Hamilton identify Jesus, not as a person of the Trinity (an irrelevant concept), but as a model human being who acted in love. As Richard Lints summarizes: “What separated the Death of God theologians from nineteenth-century Protestant liberalism was the commitment on the part of the latter to the history of ideas and the former to the institutions of mass culture. Communication technology had ‘levelled’ ideology in the twentieth century and these theologians realized only too well that those on the bottom of the social ladder were now gaining access to the corridors of cultural power as a result.”

Perhaps the most widely heard Canadian voice in the lively theological debate initiated by Robinson’s *Honest to God* was that of Canadian journalist and media personality Pierre Berton. Even though in the early 1960s Berton would not have imagined a landscape from which mainline the Protestant churches could disappear, Berton clearly did become convinced in the process of writing *The Comfortable Pew* that he was experiencing an era of urgent transformation and that this transformation usher in a distinctly New Age (the subtitle of *The Comfortable Pew* is *A Critical Look at Christianity and the Religious Establishment in the New* 

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80 Ibid., 145.
82 Ibid., 171. Always timely, the United Church’s E&SS report for 1966 (appropriately named *Dead or Alive*) offered three articles on the Death of God theologians.
Age. Berton might well be viewed, then, as a Canadian prophet of post-modernity. The Modern Age that replaced the medieval era at the dawn of the Renaissance is, he says, the Modern Age no longer:

Some new name will have to be found for the age that we have already entered and down whose corridors we are plunging at break-neck speed. In this book I have called it simply, the New Age. For this New Age we need a new kind of Church. The mentality of the New Age is secular, not religious, and any church that survives and flourishes and reaches the hearts and souls of men must be aware of this.

Berton’s book, like the books of Robinson and Cox, became a runaway best-seller in Canada, the United States and Britain. It was written by a self-identified agnostic to provide a critical view of the institutional church from “outside.” Nevertheless, it was commissioned very much “from the inside” by the Anglican Church’s Department of Religious Education with the sure and certain hope that it would (as it indeed did) prove provocative. The book’s commission reflected a sincere concern among Canadian Anglicans, like other Christians in the early 1960s, to learn to “listen” to the diverse voices of the culture swirling around them. Like Robinson’s Honest to God, Berton’s book birthed a response volume that was also issued through the Anglican Church’s Department of Religious Education (The Restless Church, edited by William Kilbourn). In addition to the astonishing number of copies of Berton’s book sold, Kilbourn observes that publication of The Comfortable Pew marked a “remarkable event” in Canadian life.

It was the subject of hundreds of newspaper editorials, articles, and cartoons, and several dozen radio and television programs. One city newspaper published no less than eight different reviews of it. There can scarcely be a Protestant church or parish hall in the country in which the name of the book or its author was not at least mentioned in 1965, and in some, at times, it almost seemed as if people were talking of nothing else.

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83 As he was in the process of writing the book, Berton was increasingly convinced that nothing less than a New Age was dawning. In his holograph revisions to the first draft of The Comfortable Pew, Berton at several points replaces different phrases referring to the time in which he is living with words that clearly identify the sixties decade as “the New Age”: “our age” becomes “the New Age” at 2.33; “of today’s society” becomes “of The New Age” at 2.42; “in the era of emancipation” becomes “in the New Age” 2.46; “our modern society” becomes “the New Age” at 4.17. McMaster University, Rare Books, Pierre Berton Papers, Box 38.
85 Like the United Church, the Anglicans were evolving a “New Curriculum” with an intentionally liberal/modernist perspective.
Significantly, at the time of the book’s commissioning, Berton had been gifted with a copy of Robinson’s *Honest to God* as well as a subscription to the *Canadian Churchman*. Despite the divisive nature of Robinson’s work and the ensuing debates within the Church of England, the Anglican Church in Canada remained sufficiently confident of its own institutional integrity to invite critical examination with a view to self-improvement. Writing in the *Canadian Churchman* in January, 1965, Michael Creal of the Anglican Church’s Department of Religious Education explained the Department’s choice of author:

> The point of principle seems clear to me: unless we are indulging in sheer deceit when we talk about the Church existing for the sake of the world, we have no choice but to work hard at listening to the ‘world’ in order to understand it. Why not ask someone in particular to speak to us from the outside, just as some European Dominicans once invited the celebrated atheist Albert Camus to address them in order that they might better appreciate a point of view which was becoming widely influential?  

As Ernest Harrison explained in the Berton book’s foreword (“An Uncomfortable Gamble”), procuring an outside viewpoint should have considerable value in advancing dialogue between “ourselves” and “other people.” Harrison further suggested that the waning of Christendom may be a blessing in disguise for the church as it seeks renewal. In his own evaluation of the Anglican Church’s strength Harrison remained sanguine, expressing confidence in the church’s essential rootedness. Nevertheless he introduced a note of cautious concern: “as Mr. Berton points out, we have to consider the possibility that the Church might cease to function within the next century. He does not wish this to happen, but thinks that it will if there is no radical change.” Though Harrison believed that the church had the strength to endure in the years leading to the twenty-first century, he was convinced that it had entered an era in which God was doing something

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87 Ibid., 322.
89 Ernest Harrison “Forward,” in Pierre Berton, *The Comfortable Pew*, 8. Harrison was a member of the Anglican Church’s Department of Religious Education who was himself disciplined by his bishop for heterodox views, especially his rejection of the historic creeds which, he challenged, fail the 1960s test of “relevancy.” Harrison published *Let God Go Free* in 1965 followed by *A Church without God* in the following year, both of which acknowledge a substantial intellectual debt to Robinson. His original title for the latter, *Mother Church Is Dead and Gone—What Do the Children Do Now?* aptly reflects Harrison’s thinking. See Ernest Harrison, *A Church Without God* (Toronto & Montreal: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1966), 7. Harrison also noted that the most attractive feature of what he termed The New Theology was “its assumption that man is called to a personal responsibility in his relationship with God, called to decide for himself what are the doctrines of the church.” See also Ernest Harrison, “The New Theology Won’t Hurt You,” *The United Church Observer* (hereafter *UCO*), January 15, 1967. 26.
unique, disorienting and radically transformative. Where Robinson tended to equivocate, Harrison did not. Like Roger Lloyd, he proclaimed that Christianity in the sixties decade was entering into a New Age of equal importance to the revolutionary era of the sixteenth century that had undermined the hegemony of the Church of Rome in Western Europe: “the radical reformation has already begun and … this book may be one of its symptoms.” Such thought was not confined to members of the clergy; it was also echoed in a reader’s letter Berton received following the book’s publication:

You made reference to a “minority” within the Church, which, though not as vocal as it might be, is beginning to speak more openly of the need for a radical re-thinking and restructuring of the Church’s mission. Within the Church there is a radical minority calling for a new Reformation, and it includes among its members many who would go much further than you have gone. They do not fear that the Church may die within the next few decades: they believe that the Church as it is presently structured must die if ever it would find its true life again.

In his Preface to *The Comfortable Pew* Berton explains that when he was approached with the idea of supplying a critical view of the Anglican Church, he found it “so refreshing” that he could not ignore it. Although there is much about the church that he claims to find “discouraging,” a propitious sign is that books like his own “can be written, not in the face of Church opposition but under its auspices and even with its blessing.” The church may be in trouble, but it is worth reviving and “whether it declines and falls” it has contributed a foundation for Western ethics and democracy. Nevertheless, significant “events and portents” in the 1960s indicate that “the Church may be struggling to make a genuine and honest effort to join the twentieth century, that, indeed, it may be on the verge of a fundamental revolution as earth-shaking as the Lutheran Reformation.” Berton wonders, however if such a revolution will arrive in time.

Following an autobiographical chapter “Why I Left the Anglican Church” Berton divides his book into three parts. The first section focuses on “The Abdication of Leadership.” Here he traces the church’s failure to be counted on major issues of social justice, or indeed to be engaged in any meaningful way with the culture in which it situated. Out of “aloofness” the

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90 Ibid., 9.
93 Ibid., 25.
church has separated itself from the world, or at least from the world of those for whom it has responsibility. This abdication of responsibility is evident in several ways. Berton first traces the Canadian church’s cozy relationship with the principalities and powers to the “misplaced idealism of World War I.” The evidence of how in Canada “the Church lined up with the establishment to become, in effect, an arm of the recruiting offices can be discerned in any study of the published sermons of that day.” Following the Second World War, when the church should have been declaring the nuclear arms build-up to be an abomination, it has failed to utter appropriate condemnation. Even the normally outspoken United Church of Canada “does not seem to be able to unite behind any single firm conclusion regarding the use or development of nuclear weapons.” In the light of the capacity of nuclear arms to destroy the world, talk of “restraint” is risible: “What is moral or Christian about the preparations for a war that can make the air unbreathable and the world unlivable? The Church, in short, must ask itself questions based on the world as it is and not as it was. The Church must join the New Age.”

On the issue of racial injustice, the church has fared no better in supplying positive leadership. Because it is an agent of the status quo, it has failed positively to address Canada’s domestic racial crises, especially the shameful treatment of indigenous people and the unjust internment of the Japanese and Japanese Canadians during the Second World War. While in the light of Gospel teachings better behaviour might reasonably be expected from churchgoers on matters of racial inclusivity, there seems to be “no appreciable difference between the views of practicing Christians and society as a whole.” Similarly, Berton records that the church has remained silent on the ethics and morals of business and industry, leaving journalists to pick up the slack. In matters of sexual morality, the church’s anti-sex conservatism has been a decidedly negative force. “Many of our sexual problems today – including the present morbid interest in the subject that allows it to be exploited commercially – spring directly from the repression of sex by a Church that considered the body essentially wicked.”

The second part of the book, “The Tyranny of the Religious Establishment” explores a paradox. Berton observes that although the church “has never been statistically fatter, its

94 Ibid., 31.
95 Ibid., 36.
96 Ibid., 39. Christie observes that Berton was able effectively to “tap into a cultural sensibility which was at once wary of certain aspects of modernity but which also embraced the concept of the need for a ‘New Age’ of culture that looked to the future rather than to the past.” See Christie, “Pierre Berton and The Comfortable Pew,” 343.
97 Ibid., 49.
98 Ibid., 62.
influence seems to be waning.”

This loss of influence comes about because leaders of the religious establishment worship at the shrine of American culture and public opinion rather than modelling the claims of the Christian gospel. They are cozy with a foreign and dominant world culture when they are called by the pattern of their founder to be counter-cultural. The church perpetuates itself as an institution at the cost of faith. “The Christian faith … which in its beginnings was anything but respectable is now the basis on which community respectability and prestige rests.”

Writing at the end of the optimistic period of the 1950s, he suggests (like Peter Berger, Harvey Cox and others) that the spectacular growth in church plant construction masks a certain shallowness in the nature of the church members’ affiliation. The “practice of shopping for one’s religion on the basis of its usefulness, as one shops for any well-advertised product, tends to weaken religious faith.”

Further, clergy are discouraged from any activity that might draw their attention away from the duty of maintaining a sterile religious establishment:

Now in the second half of the most mercurial century in the Christian epoch, at the beginning of the New Age, the Church still resists the change in men’s minds. It is not merely that the Church’s techniques and its language belong to a forgotten era making its message murky; it is also that the Church is in danger of forgetting exactly what that message is.

In the book’s third section, “The Failure of Communication,” Berton outlines ways that the church has neglected its mission to be “relevant.” These tendencies include an annoying pretension “to absolute rightness,” the use of archaic (and to the majority of ordinary people incomprehensible) language, mediocre or even poor preaching that eschews the prophetic, rejection of the tools of modern media to communicate the Christian message, and finally an investment in outmoded dogma that undermines rather than models a lively faith in Christ. The problem in a nutshell is that the Canadian church (Berton uses the word to denote the largest Protestant churches of English Canada) has lost its way by identifying too closely with the

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99 Ibid., 69.
100 Ibid., 80.
101 Ibid., 74.
102 Ibid., 98.
103 Berton excluded the Roman Catholics and fundamentalists from his journalistic purview. He noted that the Roman Catholics did not “come pounding on my door asking for publicity; nor did they complain if I got things wrong.” The Anglicans he found “snobbish and testy” about giving him help and their sermons were rarely newsworthy. The United Church people tended to be either very crusty or very eager with the press. “Certainly they were worth cultivating, for they often had something to say, at least from a newspaperman’s point of view, especially in the fields of drink and morals.” Berton claimed that the fundamentalists, evangelists and smaller, exotic sects “continued to repel me as a human being, just as they intrigued me as a reporter.” Ibid., 21. Nancy Christie speculates that Berton’s distaste for fundamentalist Christianity is rooted in his conviction that “evangelicalism was
Establishment, American culture, and the values of the suburban middle class. The church is lukewarm, lacking in any kind of passion and those who decline from church attendance are not so much opposed to it as indifferent. “Christianity has, in the past, always been at its most vigorous when it has been in a state of tension with the society around it. That is no longer the case … the voice of the Church, when it has been heard at all, has been weak, tardy, equivocal, and irrelevant.”

Berton’s final chapter peers into the future, asking the question: “is revolution possible?” He begins with a summary of his main theme:

The thesis of this book is that the Christian philosophy and ethic has been shackled by its institutional chains; that “religion,” as we know it today in all its organizational manifestations, is something quite different from the Christianity of Galilee; that it tends to attract a different kind of person from the kind that followed the original precepts; that, in its desperate effort to preserve its established entity, the Church has become fossilized; and that this fossilization has prevented it from moving with the world.

Berton sees the necessity for a violent revolution (“violent in the psychological and social rather than the physical sense”) in order to save Christianity. He notes that other, more competent minds have sensed this coming upheaval especially John Robinson “who has become unwittingly and perhaps unwillingly the spokesman for the inarticulate within the Church” as one who sees and proclaims the urgent need for a new mould and metamorphosis of Christian belief and practice; for “without that kind of revolution, he believes the Christian religion will come to be abandoned.” Other prophets like James Pike and British journalist Monica Furlong have made similar predictions. There are even faint glimmers of change within the major Canadian Protestant churches. Of note is the fact that both the United and the Anglican churches in Canada are engaged in a “kind of public soul-searching.” Both churches “have demythologized (to use Bultmann’s term) their Sunday School texts, and the United Church especially, through its Board
of Evangelism and Social Service, has been doing its best to place itself squarely in the mainstream of social progress.”

Distinguishing carefully between “Religion” and “Christianity” Berton suggests that religion as we know it is coming to an end. Christianity, if it is to survive, “must rid itself of religion’s trappings and false goals.” Genuine Christians “do not need or want what is called ‘religion’ in the New Age.”

Having digested Robinson, Berton agrees that the image of a transcendent God also needs to go: “We no longer need to cling to the daddy on the cloud; we need to revere the spirit within ourselves, and in the world around us, which represents ultimate reality, which gives a purpose to existence.”

Imagining a world where churches are without buildings, sermons, the familiar concept of God, Bible stories—or even religion itself, Berton tries to answer those readers who might ask the question “what is left?” His answer is the same as Robinson’s: love. “What is left, in God’s name, is what was there at the outset: Christian love, in all its flexibility, with all of its concern for real people rather than for any fixed set of rigid principles.”

Initially, Berton says he imagined that the “revolution” ushering in the New Age would arise from “the theological schools” but he soon realized that they too were mired in an archaic institutional agenda. Instead, somewhat confusing calm Jesus with charismatic Lucifer, Berton imagines a heroic (and, as Christie complains, unambiguously male) messiah/warrior figure who will re-form the church, lead it into the New Age and be rewarded for his troubles by some modern means of crucifixion.

As The Comfortable Pew continued its meteoric climb on the Canadian best seller list, two important United Church voices offered contemporary assessments of Berton’s controversial tome. In a review of The Comfortable Pew published in The Canadian Forum, February, 1965, N. Bruce McLeod (who within a decade would be elected the United Church’s youngest

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107 Ibid., 130.
108 Ibid., 139.
109 Ibid., 140.
110 Ibid., 141.
111 Christie complains that, “in short, Berton’s juxtaposition of hypocritical religion and meaningful Christianity was at its foundation a remarkably gendered construction which identified women with religion’s ‘trappings’ and ‘inelastic morality,’ and which associated manly autonomous individuals with the historical trajectory of progressive change and more authentic modernity.” Christie, “Pierre Berton and The Comfortable Pew,” 339.
112 Ibid., 144. Christie complains that the emergence of this messianic figure is inconsistent with the rest of Berton’s argument for lay empowerment. Berton’s description of this heroic figure may owe something to Roger Lloyd’s The Ferment in the Church where Lloyd describes the “hero” of the new Reformation. See Lloyd, The Ferment in the Church, 121.
moderator) calls the book’s autobiographical first chapter “far and away the best.” For McLeod, what is most alarming in Berton’s argument is not that it is a full-scale attack, but rather a description of the growing apathy of those for whom the church, in its smug remoteness from the world, had gradually ceased to matter except “for those who liked That Sort of Thing.” He notes that Berton’s final chapter asking “Is Revolution Possible?” examines the question of whether the dry bones can live again but offers a “somewhat pessimistic” maybe. Bruce McLeod is adamant, however, that church people for whom the book was written should welcome Berton’s assessment, and should also be grateful to the Anglicans for having the savvy to commission the book from an outsider. He supports Moderator E.M. Howse in heartily recommending The Comfortable Pew as required reading for United Church theology students and professors alike. McLeod says that it also deserves a careful examination from people “many of whom are engaged in ... trapping children in Confirmation Classes while the Mystery is still effective and before the listening age.” Echoing the self-assessment of the Bishop of Woolwich, the issue on which McLeod challenges Berton is not that Berton has gone too far in criticising the church, but that he has not gone far enough. For McLeod, an impassioned Berton is searingly effective. However, when Berton becomes a “detached pundit” citing decades old sociological studies he lacks the incisiveness of a Peter Berger. Also held up for criticism is Berton’s superficial treatment of the vexed issue of Christian pacifism as well as an outdated tendency to assume that the church consists chiefly of an ordained ministry who, in Berton’s mind, should be freed from parish responsibilities and persuaded to work incognito as taxi drivers and television commentators. According to McLeod, no criticism that the Berton as “outsider” levels at the church has not been spoken from inside “elsewhere, earlier and better.” Nevertheless, insofar as Pierre Berton’s book makes Christians uncomfortable in their pews, “it is to be welcomed with open arms by those who care at all about the Church.”

Observer editor A.C. Forrest also responded to Berton’s book in two articles. The first was a February 1965 article in Maclean’s (“A Churchman Talks Back to Critic Pierre Berton”).

114 Ibid.
115 Howse also stirred controversy when he announced during an Easter interview that he did not believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus. See Beardsall, “And Whether Pigs Have Wings,” 107.
117 McLeod notes with disdain the “prideful announcement” of the Canadian churches that they would unite in building a three million dollar pavilion at the centennial Montreal World’s Fair rather than “a tent with a barrel to receive money for the world’s hungry.” Ibid.
118 Ibid., 263.
119 Ibid.
The second was a review in the *Observer* titled, “What Berton would say differently if writing for the United Church.” In the *Maclean’s* article, Forrest wrote:

> For more than a year now we have been expecting a sort of Canadian version of Bishop John A.T. Robinson’s *Honest to God*, that best-selling English paperback that questioned the Biblical view of a three-decker universe and a fatherly God ‘up there’ in His heaven, keeping a personal view on His favourite world. Well, Berton’s *The Comfortable Pew* … is not that, because Berton is no Bishop John Robinson. But it is a lot easier to read than the bishop’s best-seller and should make a significant contribution to the *Honest to God* debate. It is, I believe, Honest To Berton. He has important things to say, and Pierre Berton as usual invites discussion and welcomes debate. It should perk up Lent at a time when theology has again become the subject for living-room and country-store debate.\footnote{120}

According to Forrest, despite its obvious popularity the book has two fundamental weaknesses: it over-generalizes and it fails to recognize the emphasis within Protestantism on the leadership of clergy and people. Berton also does not attempt to speak to Roman Catholics, though he thinks they will find his views relevant, and he leaves out conservative evangelicals because “they belong to another world.”\footnote{121}

In his *Observer* review, Forrest reiterates many observations made in *Maclean’s*. He calls Berton’s book “short, readable, sometimes prophetic, sometimes wrong—and very irritating to us preachers. And, I am convinced, utterly honest.”\footnote{122} Forrest observes that the book is more an attack on the inadequacy of the pulpit than the comfort of the pew but that “his comments will make the pew, or at least the people who can tell you the church they stay away from, more comfortable still. His criticisms take the careless and indifferent off the hooks of their own consciences, for he assures them things are obviously the clergy’s fault.”\footnote{123} Forrest points to Berton’s identification of the church with The Establishment as the chief weakness in Berton’s argument. Like McLeod, he is also critical of Berton’s tendency to ignore the role of the work and witness of the laity “in that workaday world where Berton thinks the clergy ought to go.”\footnote{124} Berton’s most telling criticisms of the church, Forrest suggests, are the very criticisms made

\footnote{120}{A.C. Forrest, “A Churchman Talks Back to Critic Pierre Berton,” *Maclean’s*, February 6, 1965, 16.}
\footnote{121}{Ibid.}
\footnote{122}{Ibid.}
\footnote{123}{A.C. Forrest, “What Berton Would Say Differently if Writing for the United Church,” *UCO*, February 1, 1965, 31.}
\footnote{124}{Ibid.}
most often by preachers about themselves. “This is a time when Bishop Robinson, the New Curriculum, and many others have put theology back into the cow-stable, on the street-corner and in the pub. It will be a sad waste if we within the church protect ourselves from valid criticisms by picking holes in Berton’s thin spots.”

Forrest identifies Berton as “a supporter of the United Church” where his wife, Janet, is an active worker. He then directs his gaze to what Berton might have said differently had the book been commissioned by the United Church rather than the Anglicans. In response, Berton points out that most of his criticisms are applicable to Protestant churches in general. However, he speaks well of the United Church’s sermons and attitudes which he finds “are more relevant than the Anglican Church.” Nevertheless, all the mainline Protestant churches are consistently late out of the gate on issues of social justice: “So often the atheists and agnostics were ahead of them.” Berton also says that the historic United Church tendency to obsess about alcohol and the Lord’s Day contributes to the denomination’s fusty image in the minds of the Canadian public. Moreover, on issues such as nuclear disarmament and abortion, Berton notes that the United Church is “already behind the thinking of non-church people.” Berton further predicts that the denomination will soon find itself reconsidering its inflexible attitude toward pre-marital sexual relations: “There are going to be even greater revolutionary social changes and the church has go to look at them. And it will do it, but not soon enough. It follows instead of leading.”

3 Can These Dry Bones Live?

The issue of both telling and showing that a revolution is underway in the church’s life and mission is a central theme of the 1966 E&SS Annual Report, *Dead or Alive*. In the title essay, Ray Hord uses the vision of Ezekiel’s valley of dry bones as an apposite image for the United Church past mid-decade. The question that God asks Ezekiel is the question that God is now asking the church. “Can these dry bones live?” Hord notes that there are “critics and even prophets’ who declare that the church lacks the vitality and power any longer to function as Christ’s body. To correct the problem some are inclined to tinker with worship, while others begin a building programme “only to discover a need for other forms of congregation in addition to the parish structure.” Theologians and clergy are discovering that their language is

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125 Ibid.
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid., 33.
impenetrable not only to those outside the church but to those also within it. Hord further asks, “Why are ministers and laymen leaving the church? Could it be that the church is dead?” Quoting Scottish ecumenist J.H. Oldham, Hord once more observes that the way forward is not to protect the institution but to recover a sense of servanthood. The church must live again but the task of putting flesh on the bones will not be an easy one. Then quoting Episcopal priest and evangelist Samuel Shoemaker, Hord quips: “Putting an eager seeker after Christ into the conventional church is like putting a live chicken under a dead hen.”

Part of the United Church plan of listening to the world was to follow in the footsteps of its potential union partner, the Anglican Church, and to invite the critical advice of journalist/critics, including Berton. The preface to Why the Sea Is Boiling Hot: A Symposium on the Church and the World commissioned by the E&SS describes the kind of turbulence being experienced in Canada and beyond at mid-decade:

This is an age not only of one revolution but many. A revolution in technology threatens catastrophic changes in patterns of employment, promises leisure we do not know how to use, concentrates frightening power in the hands of a few machines and decision-makers and steadily increases both our affluence and our sense of helplessness. A revolution in education has extended our knowledge faster than our understanding and too often invalidated for us the beliefs of our fathers without offering a more adequate faith. A revolution in the demands of the economically downtrodden and the politically disinherited threatens to burst asunder the very structures of world order.

Like the view of Protestant Christianity in The Comfortable Pew, the portrait of the 1960s United Church offered in the book by contributors Pierre Berton, Michael Barway, Arnold Edinborough, June Callwood, Joan Hollobon and Eric Nichol is not a flattering one. Nevertheless, the journalists’ complaints cover fairly familiar territory for readers either of 1960s popular theology or the annual reports of the E&SS. They focus on “the tendency of the Church to hold back from the world.” Why the Sea Is Boiling Hot describes an institution that is trite, petty and intolerant, a place where remote leaders babble in a language that is largely incomprehensible to those who sit in their comfortable pews. In his article, Berton compares the Christian church of the 1960s to the religious establishment in 1930s Germany which, in its

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129 Ibid.
130 Ibid.
failure to speak out against fascism, ended up “condemned not only by the world but also by its own collective conscience.”¹³³ Even members of the United Church, who boast about “how relevant their sermons are” will stand condemned by future generations who will likely judge it to be “behind the times on issues that lay just below the surface.”¹³⁴ Barkway takes on the issue of church finances, noting that the United Church is quite simply “big business, whatever way you look at it.”¹³⁵ An analysis of denominational finances would disclose that most local congregations raise money which they then proceed to spend on themselves. The “big business” of the church is not, therefore, so much involved in trying to promote the Kingdom of God as it is in “maintaining and improving the comforts and conveniences and prestige of our local temples, kitchens and gymnasias.”¹³⁶ In summary, Barkway views most church activities as “so tawdry that they seem completely irrelevant to the world ‘where people are, working, living and dying.’”¹³⁷ Arnold Edinborough’s essay offers his portrait of the ideal 1960s clergy person. Such a person is not interested in worldly rewards but very much interested in such public concerns as “socialized medicine, national pension schemes, public housing, the atom bomb, segregation and immigration laws and other matters of public importance in terms of the gospel.”¹³⁸ Sadly such a leader is not to be found in charge of most congregations because of “certain barriers between the laymen and the clergy which have been allowed to grow up through the apathy of the congregation and the unwitting arrogance of the clergy.”¹³⁹ In the training of ministry personnel, Edinborough calls for much more emphasis to be placed on “psychiatry, psychology and politics” rather than “the scholarly emphasis on the Greek and Hebrew texts” which are really the territory of elite specialists. He further recommends that people should enter ministry “at a more mature age” than those who come to it straight from university. He advises that “whether it be by worker priests, by lay readers, by reshuffling of the training of the full-time minister, or by a combination of these” the present barriers between lay and clergy must be erased “if the faith is to survive.”¹⁴⁰ June Callwood describes United Church congregations as “a hearty church-cum-clubhouse arrangement that teems with expansion, committees, fund-raising and group meetings.”¹⁴¹ These robustly middle class entities are dominated by a ruling group, “usually

¹³⁴ Ibid., 4.
¹³⁵ Michael Barkway, “Is the Church Big Business?” in Why the Sea Is Boiling Hot, 9.
¹³⁶ Ibid., 11.
¹³⁷ Ibid., 12.
¹³⁹ Ibid., 17.
¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 18.
middle-aged and affluent” that retains power and silences dissent. Like a “busy and slightly boring luxury cruise ship” such congregations fail to join in caring for a broken world from which, according to Callwood, they remain perplexingly detached. Instead of a “universal brotherhood” such congregations tend to consist of an “in” group—a power-elite that holds the purse strings, and an “out” group “who are disinclined by reasons of apathy or frustration to form any strong opinions at all.”142 It is worthy of notice, says Callwood, that the church is haemorrhaging teenagers, who are dropping away from the church in droves. This is an age group that is “singularly opposed to the sham” and for whom churches prove themselves “phony and superfluous.” Most churches, Callwood complains, have withdrawn fastidiously from legitimate concerns and especially from those suffering on the margins of society. Instead there is “a de-humanizing pride in bigness, a preoccupation with pettiness and a viewpoint not taller than the steeple—but not including the Cross.”143 Joan Hollobon’s essay takes issue with the incomprehensible “insider lingo” of the churches. Hollobon notes that “the church’s jargon, its technical terms, like grace, salvation, redemption, atonement, simply have no meaning” to anyone who is not an insider.144 She condemns the arrogance of preachers who not only dare to speak on God’s behalf but choose to do so in incomprehensible language. Hollobon points to John Robinson, who has written of such things, and who for his trouble “has been taken to task by fellow churchmen and his own honesty impugned.”145 She suggests that intelligent people, Christian and non-Christian alike, may find themselves “fascinated by the ferment of thought in the churches, Roman Catholic and Protestant,” but when such “outsiders” enter the local church “hoping for some reflection of the new ferment of ideas” they will, more likely than not, be disappointed. Hollobon summarizes her argument by declaring that if the church really desires to get its message across, “it had better make up its mind not only what the real core of its message is, but decide to write it in plain English.”146 Eric Nicol’s essay compliments the United Church on its decision to invite criticism. He points out, however, that while some leaders in the United Church may voice an opinion or adopt a policy that is “daring and progressive” and “often well ahead of the conventional mass of public opinion,” the church as a whole finds itself mired in the mixed blessing that is the Bible. Often it is forced in some fashion to try to reconcile scripture with what it “recognizes to be the practical, necessary and enlightened course of action.”147

142 Ibid.
143 Ibid., 24.
145 Ibid., 29.
146 Ibid., 31.
According to Nicol, the step that clergy and lay people alike fear to take is to acknowledge that belief in Christian principles is really far more important than sharing faith: “the vertical schism between the orthodox believers and the non-orthodox humanists no longer serves the greater needs of humanity. It should be replaced by the horizontal division between men of good-will—call them Christianists, if the name serves—and those motivated by hate, fear, greed and the rest of the hellish daemons that float freely through God’s temples from Birmingham, Alabama to Cape Town.”148

In the concluding chapters of *Why the Sea Is Boiling Hot* the E&SS indicates that however difficult the criticism of the journalists is to hear, the crisis is manageable. It offers a map for evangelism in the new world of the 1960s, a way forward for “Canadian Christians amid Revolution” and a partial answer to the invited criticism from the journalists. According to the E&SS, “the throbbing guns of change are dropping explosive shells of controversy among the Christian churches today with an intensity that has produced a revolutionary atmosphere in almost every denomination.”149 The formation of the United Church of Canada in 1925 has been one of the first shells fired in this revolutionary process but “the spirit of revolution” is even more obvious in the 1960s decade. It manifests in the deliberations of the Second Vatican Council, the efforts of all the Protestant churches to struggle “with the issues stirred up by Bishop Robinson’s ‘Honest to God’,” as well as the Baptist Church’s ongoing discernment about its relationship to the WCC and the ecumenical movement. Moreover, the United Church has introduced, as part of the New Curriculum, “a document with interpretations of Biblical writing so controversial that it has claimed repeated headlines in the daily press.”150 The E&SS notes the efforts of individual Canadians in this New Age to experiment with their religion—“some quietly, some in a revolutionary fashion but all at considerable cost in intellectual, physical and financial effort.”151 Most important, the E&SS wants those church members who have taken up *Why the Sea Is Boiling Hot* for group study to know that United Church understanding of evangelism is morphing into something different from historic patterns with which they might be familiar:

> The forms of 20th Century Evangelism are as many and varied as the varieties of religious experience. Mass evangelism, with its

149 Ibid., 51.
150 Ibid.
151 Ibid.
great rallies and crusades, was the Church’s answer to frontier life and the restless populations of the 19th Century. In many areas today, similar evangelistic crusades and rallies are held, with closely related cottage prayer meetings and gospel fellowships … Some congregations today are spearheading their evangelism, not with preaching, but with community assistance programmes growing out of careful assessment of local needs.\textsuperscript{152}

Although the United Church’s historic link between evangelism and social service will continue, the emphasis is shifting and servant-Christians are moving out into a damaged world to provide healing. The E&SS applauds the experimental efforts of those Christians who boldly move out to meet the demands of the New Age and who are courageously leading onward toward the future. “The witness to which they beckon the Church is no new moralism, but a call to join the living Christ in the service of men … our witness must be aware of and concerned with this revolutionary world in which we live.”\textsuperscript{153}

By way of discerning what other policies might be needed for a church in the New Age, the E&SS also commissioned a study from sociologist and United Church minister Stewart Crysdale (who had been appointed an assistant secretary to the board at the same time that Ray Hord became secretary). \textit{The Changing Church in Canada: Beliefs and Attitudes of United Church People} was published in 1965. The book’s front cover is simple but arresting. It is designed to highlight the word “changing” through the use of upper case and a white typeface against a bold purple background (the rest of the title is in black). The word “changing” is centred (the black words are flush left) and also bisected by a black line with the tops of the letters shifted slightly to the left in a not-so-subtle acknowledgment that change, while it may let in light, can potentially also be divisive and disorienting. In his Foreword to Crysdale’s book, Hord admits to heightened concern at the state of the Canadian church at mid-decade. He cites the example of decline among white Protestant churches in Manhattan, very few of which continue to be self supporting, and asks whether the same might happen in Canadian cities. Hord affirms the importance of Crysdale’s sociological study of the Canadian church which concludes that the effects of urbanization in Canada are broadly similar to situation of the United States and Europe (a decided concern for a denomination like the United Church with an influential rural power base). As Crysdale states: “Highly industrialized and urbanized society in Europe left the church far behind in the last century. A similar process of disengagement is developing in

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., 55.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., 56.
In planning an ambitious National Project of Evangelism and Social Action, the United Church is helping people to relate the Gospel to their daily lives. Such rapid social change “requires flexibility in forms of worship and methods of ministry, rooted in the New Testament but also relevant to the present age.” This flexibility is particularly necessary since the launching of the United Church’s New Curriculum “has revealed wide divergencies in theology among members and adherents.” Further, Crysdale’s survey also “indicates a positive relation between an urbanized style of life and theological liberalism.” Ministers and church leaders would do well to “understand the effect of social change upon religious beliefs as well as the effect of religious belief upon social change.”

According to Hord, Crysdale’s data suggest that Pierre Berton’s observations both in *The Comfortable Pew* and his contribution to *Why the Sea Is Boiling Hot* are simultaneously correct and incorrect. Crysdale finds that United Church clergy do not always obstruct change but actually have more progressive views than the laity on some issues (like Medicare and civil liberalism). Nevertheless, Berton is astute in proclaiming a breakdown in communication between pulpit and pew.

Like others in the 1960s, Crysdale rejected separation of the world into “sacred” and “secular” spheres overseen by an all-powerful heavenly being. In an essay “The Church in Industrial Society,” Crysdale observes that the Christian Gospel is “scandalous” in rejecting any possible sacred/secular division. And “just when social scientists, historians and theologians have decided what things are sacred as against secular, along, come people like ‘Honest to God’ Robinson, Tillich, Bonhoeffer and others to upset everything. They insist that God is working through the so-called secular agents just as he is in the august and revered institutions set apart for the direct pursuit of religion.”

In the introduction to his statistical survey, Crysdale indicates that his enquiry into the beliefs, social attitudes and social situations of members of the United Church is intended to be an objective study of things as they are and not a dream for what they might be. The purpose of such a social scientific study is “to aid the church to reappraise her mission in modern Canada.” Crysdale identifies two central foci: “one is the question of agreement or consensus in beliefs

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155 The “National Project” originated in the United Church’s Centennial Committee. Hord and the E&SS subsequently conceived it as a means of moving church people out of church buildings and into the community. See Airhart, *A Church with the Soul of a Nation*, 230-31.
157 Ibid.
under the pressure of basic changes in society. The other is the implementation of beliefs in such major issues as civil liberties and public responsibility for welfare and economic planning.”  

Amid divergent views from pulpit, nave and media about what the church’s role ought to be, factual knowledge is needed to guide policy decisions in the local, regional and national arenas. Crysdale lifts up diversity as a sign of strength rather than a weakness, but he has a caution: “a large measure of agreement in basic beliefs and purposes is necessary for the church to hold together and play an influential role in society. Unity is an important issue in the church, as it is in the nation as a whole.”

Crysdale’s study documents “change” at a number of levels. Since there is a close connection between views on religion and social conditions, such as socio-economic status, education, age and urbanism, the United Church must become adaptable when there are shifts in any of these arenas: “the old-time religion, that was ‘good enough for father,’ may not be ‘good enough for me.’” A problem arises in attempting to observe change in measurable terms. One way to do so “is to construct an indicator of urbanism and examine the correlation between the degree to which people are urbanized and their interpretation of beliefs and social attitudes.”

Among the problems that urbanization raises, Crysdale lifts up the exodus to the suburbs (and the United Church’s abandonment of urban cores to non-Protestant immigrant populations), the generation gap between progressive younger members and conservative elders and disagreement between ministers and their congregations over social/moral issues. On the hopeful side, he notes that some clergy and laity are attempting to adapt the work of the church to the new and urbanized style of Canadian life.

In his examination of the attitudes of United Church members toward their faith, Crysdale’s research shows that there is consensus around belief in the work of God and Christ, the means of grace, and right action toward others. Where there does not appear to be consensus centres around “abstract propositions concerning the meaning and destiny of life, formal membership in the church, legalistic views of salvation and moralistic codes of behaviour.”

The section of Crysdale’s book likely intended to be of greatest use to United Church leaders is the pragmatic concluding chapter where he outlines the implications of his study for

159 Crysdale, *The Changing Church in Canada*, xi.
160 Ibid.
161 Ibid., 6.
162 Ibid., 8.
163 Ibid., 38.
the church’s mission. Crysdale notes the denomination’s increasing diversity and he says that flexibility will be crucial to a church that “wishes to be relevant to many of them.” Further, “the pressures of rapid social change intensify the potential for conflict and cleavage between groups within a congregation. Happy are the ministers and elders who anticipate this.” Understanding, tolerance and grace are needed, especially since tensions increase “as the ministers concerns and messages become more especially relevant to the distinctive life sets of a minority sub-group.” Most significant for Crysdale, however, is the link between urbanization and liberalism:

We found that these distinctions in theology were persistently related to the extent to which the style of life was urbanized. The urban ethos or tone is spreading rapidly in all kinds of communities, through education, mass media, mobility and increased personal interaction. In consequence, theology generally is inclined to become more liberal. However, groups which are exposed suddenly and superficially to urbanism are apt to react negatively to the spread of liberal beliefs.

For the most part, Crysdale suggests that urbanism has a positive effect as a levelling and unifying influence that brings together clergy and laity, and as urbanism and liberalism extend, denominations will also come closer together because urbanism and ecumenism are also related. Crysdale has one important caution, however: “the crucial question for the church is whether urbanism, in reducing tensions between groups within the church and between the church and the ‘secular’ world, will also reduce religion to a liberal moralism which lacks roots of faith in God and in Jesus Christ.”

A second volume commissioned by the E&SS and focused on the need for transformation in the church was Rex Dolan’s *The Big Change* (subtitled *The Challenge to Radical Change in the Church*). It is largely a condensation of the work of others and it offers both a review of the sixties “ferment” in theology and a liberal programme for providing an optimistic way forward into the New Age. To accompany Dolan’s work, Rev. Warren Bruleigh, the co-ordinator of the National Project of Evangelism and Social Action prepared a study guide. As Martin Marty’s Foreword celebrates, Dolan’s book is “future-oriented.” It provides “positive guidance”

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164 Ibid., 79.
165 Ibid.
166 Ibid., 80.
167 Ibid.
168 Four editions appeared 1967-68. The book was an amplification of addresses given in various places during 1965-66 in which Dolan took aim at traditional forms of evangelism and urged congregations to address themselves to pressing social concerns. See Airhart, *A Church with the Soul of a Nation*, 231.
in the midst of “the current flood of literature critical of the church.” In their Publisher’s Note at the beginning of the volume, Ray Hord and Clarke MacDonald are blunt in their anxious assessment of the turbulent 1960s decade and its increasing impact on the Canadian churches: “We live in times of global revolution. Every institution, including the church, must change its structures and methods in order to fulfil its purpose in society. The Big Change by Rex R. Dolan is a provocative study of the new theology, the new morality and the new evangelism.”

Dolan begins with a now familiar 1960s theme. He identifies a “lack of confidence in the church” that results from the church’s failure to address “the burning issues of the day” while at the same time it exhausts its energies in keeping its own machinery running. He further points to the “irrelevance” of the worship, theology and organizations of the church. “The church … seems bent on addressing itself to, and preparing itself for an age that no longer exists.” While the church does so “great shock waves of change are vibrating against its walls scarcely heard within.” Nevertheless, there are signs that the church is “attempting to rectify its failings.” This, says Dolan is “the big change” that is underway. Heavily influenced by Robinson and Lloyd, Dolan identifies the nature of the 1960s ferment with the Protestant Reformation:

The situation today is not unlike that of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries when the church, under criticism, embarked on reform. The reform of that day we have called the Protestant Reformation—the reform today, for want of a better term, we call “the new reformation”. The current reformation differs in many respects from that of Luther’s day. It is not primarily concerned with the validity of popes, interpretation of scripture, freedom of conscience. The new reformation is an attempt to update the church, to make it relevant and useful – the effective instrument of a better world.

As an enthusiastic cheerleader for “big change,” Dolan is anxious to encourage the clenched Christian reader to move in a positive and satisfying (because participatory) direction: “essential to finding a part in the reformation is the nurture of a particular attitude or disposition, namely the willingness to change. Without such an attitude little progress can be made. The fear of change must be overcome and change welcomed.” Aware of the expanding power of a 1960s youth culture, Dolan advises that where change is not possible, the older generation should at

\[\text{169} \text{ “Publisher’s Note” in Dolan, The Big Change.}\]
\[\text{170} \text{ Dolan, The Big Change, 3.}\]
\[\text{171} \text{ Ibid., 4. Dolan’s “Appendix A” identifies Martin Buber, Paul Tillich, Rudolph Bultmann and Dietrich Bonhoeffer as the pre-eminent “architects of change.” 97-100.}\]
\[\text{172} \text{ Ibid.}\]
least have the grace to get out of the way and to allow the younger to “experiment with forms
that express its feelings and ideas in a way that is meaningful to this generation.” Dolan
elevates a favourable attitude toward change to the status of the sacramental: “change is the new
form of sacrifice demanded of the Christian today.” Because such sacrifice is demanding, many
will fail to undertake it. Nevertheless, “the readiness to be flexible is the challenge to Christians
in our time.”

The church, says Dolan, must change in response to the mutability of the world itself.
This tendency toward constant change is chiefly embedded in two areas in the 1960s: the
continuing, and accelerating technological revolution and the hegemony of scientific attitudes in
every area of life. Moreover, if the church is serious in its self-description as the living body of
Christ and instrument of the Spirit, then change will be indigenous to the church: “Rigidity and
inflexibility are the marks of death; change is a characteristic mark of life. Where there is life
there is change. The contemporary tumult in the church is not anything which we should hope
will pass, for if it does we should soon pay our respects to a dying church.” Fear and anxiety
must be eschewed and change cheerfully embraced in the church’s life and mission. First, the
church needs to carry its Gospel message into the world. Second, it needs to recognize the
leadership of the laity who are the ones best positioned to be in touch with the world through
their vocations. The new job of the clergy is to assist the laity in its ministry. This shift is marked
by a parallel shift away from dogmatic theology. Where in the past theological and biblical
problems were primary concerns “of the clergy and the more sophisticated laity,” the stress is
now “laid upon human concerns, personal problems and public issues. The shift to people is
apparent in the current trend in preaching.” Like it or not, “the church today has been
bequeathed a revolution.”

In his chapter on the church’s life and mission, Dolan reiterates the model of “the servant
curch.” He notes that the church has lost its pre-eminence in the public square and he cites John
Lennon’s provocative assertion that the Beatles are more popular than Jesus as an example of an
attitude that the world (and certainly its youth) now holds, but that church people find difficult to

173 Ibid.
174 Ibid., 5.
175 Ibid., 15.
176 Ibid., 18.
177 Ibid.
Nevertheless, Dolan finds hope in writers like Harvey Cox who offer constructive changes that allow the church to minister creatively in the secular city. “The new target need not be feared. The church is to serve the world.”

Because worship and work are one, Dolan says this new “servant” attitude will have implications for changes in worship, especially when it comes to worship that is archaic, lacking in vitality and impeding the church’s mission. Prayers should be “relevant and realistic” and if the pulpit is to make contact with the world, it must be “less dogmatic.” Further, says Dolan, there is a need for openness on most theological questions and ethical issues. The style of sermon delivery is also important in the church of the New Age: “material may be open-ended but delivery condescending and heavy. The tone of voice in preaching must avoid seeming to be judgemental.” Like Robinson, Dolan suggests that the church “will be judged on the basis of the honesty of its questions rather than the ultimacy of its answers.” Educating the laity for its enhanced role is crucial and Dolan envisions the making over of men’s clubs like AOTS and women’s organizations like the UCW so that they might become vehicles for lay training.

Using Robinson as a model, the core of Dolan’s book explores the current “ferment in theology” and its implications. Addressing the mid-decade anxiety caused by the “God is dead” pronouncement, Dolan observes that the necrotheologians offer “gropings, clues, suggestions, not finished theologies.” Worthy of more serious attention in his view is Robinson, whose Honest to God has “pointed up the inadequacy of traditional ideas about God and called for strategic changes.” While Dolan acknowledges that most of the issues and themes Robinson explores are not new, what Robinson and the necrotheologians say is novel because “they speak to a secular age. Today technological achievement has made dependence on science more common than dependence on God … Science is, so to speak, edging God out of existence. This situation is new and fills current discussions of old theological issues with urgency and interest.” Dolan notes that some find less value in Robinson’s constructive material than in his protests. Robinson’s re-statement of Tillich’s “Ground of all Being,” however, provides a new

178 Ibid., 25.
179 Ibid., 28.
180 Ibid., 33.
181 Ibid., 34.
182 Ibid., 40.
183 Ibid., 39
184 Ibid., 40.
approach to supernaturalism that is more likely to resonate with the current generation than traditional theism: “From the interest of the public in Robinson’s book we would say that Robinson’s new supernaturalism speaks to our age with an authority not possible with the old.” Dolan also resonates with Bonhoeffer/Robinson’s version of Jesus as the “man for others” and rejects ancient creedal statements that tend to be “overly technical and hence artificial, diminishing the significance of [Jesus’] humanity.” The four alleged “proofs” of the divinity of Jesus (virgin birth, perfection, miracles and resurrection) have no traction in the modern world. What characterizes and defines the nature of Jesus divinity is love. Jesus’ divinity viewed through the lens of his concern for others is illustrative of the kind of approach we must seriously explore “if we would interpret Christ to a non-religious age.”

Taking up the organizational the pattern of Honest to God, Dolan follows his theological discussion with a re-examination of the church’s mission in the light of radical change. Like his theological hero, Robinson, he concludes with a chapter outlining “Changes in Morality.” These changes he identifies particularly with young people for whom, in the realm of morals, “the lid is off.” In the changed church, pragmatism will be an essential guide rather than behavioural rules: “Conformity to traditional codes of conduct is no longer a virtue. Standards of morality are based on the question, ‘Will it work?’ … it’s an age of relativism when men acknowledge that there is more than one way to look at everything and that includes morals.” Although many factors have brought about a reconsideration of moral codes, Dolan identifies as one of the most significant the breakdown in respect for authority. “The young have lost confidence in the old authorities, whether they be the authority of parents, teachers or the church.”

Most alarming of all is the rapidity of change in the arena of sexual morality. Dolan summarizes the work of the contemporary guru of “progressive” attitudes toward sexuality, an American marriage counselor named Albert Ellis. Ellis had expressed controversial views on pre-marital sexual relations (which he called harmless pleasure) and virginity (which Ellis called “an overt display of arrant masochism”). On the subject of fidelity within marriage, Ellis had noted (with no apparent concern) that an increasing number of 1960s couples were practising “civilized adultery.” Ellis’s radical sexual openness, however, proved too much even for a seasoned liberal/progressive United Church academic like Rex Dolan: “Whatever succeeding

185 Ibid., 47.
186 Ibid., 58.
187 Ibid., 79.
188 Ibid.
ages may say, the behaviour advocated by Ellis for our age would lead to disaster.”  
Nevertheless, notes Dolan, the “old morality” is no longer authoritative. “There is a lack of confidence in the traditional forms of Christian morality. Change is with us; the old is passing and alternatives in morality are making their appearance. One of the more responsible is a series of ethical emphases called ‘the new morality’ or ‘situational ethics.’”  
Dolan is inclined to support situational ethics as more useful to the 1960s era because the “new morality” is fundamentally pragmatic. “It refuses to generalize. It insists on being specific. Before judging others or oneself, one must enquire concerning the particular factors involved in each moral situation. Circumstances do, often, alter cases.”  
Love appreciates the particularity of people by focusing on the individual in individual circumstances: “the new morality puts persons first.”

In his postscript “First Steps” Dolan acknowledges that the United Church reader of his little book may well be “overwhelmed by the range and extent of changes under way and may find it difficult to see where he can fit into the new reformation”  
Dolan offers two possible initial steps. The first step involves a change in attitude. “Preliminary to any part in the big change is a willingness to change, a willingness to examine the current criticism of the church with a view to transformation.” Second, study and discussion by themselves will not do: “some plan of action should follow.”  
Dolan concludes The Big Change by anticipating a major concern among church members: change and reform bring with them anguish and anxiety because they raise the spectre of loss. However, he advises the readers of his book to be courageous as they embark on this much-needed new reformation that will render the church relevant to the 1960s New Age.

In Dead or Alive, the provocatively named 1966 E&SS Annual Report, secretary Ray Hord referred to Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of dry bones and asked the provocative question, “can these dry bones live?” By this point in the decade, the answer was far from clear. As theologians like Robinson and Cox insisted, God must be pulled down from the sky to be the ground of humanity’s being. Many critical voices from inside and outside the church had proclaimed that there was a profound discontinuity between the church as institution and the compassionate ways of its founder. For Pierre Berton, the answer to Ezekiel’s question about the

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189 Ibid., 80.
186 Ibid., 81.
191 Ibid., 88.
192 Ibid., 83.
197 Ibid., 93.
194 Ibid., 94.
potential for resurrection was a resounding “maybe.” The liberal leadership of the United Church had a more affirmative answer. What was required in a period of rapid social change was a transformation of the character of the church. A big change was needed. For the New Age a new church must arise, be enfleshed and enlivened. It would be an outward-looking church, a servant church. The era might be a revolutionary one, but with the help of educational tools like the New Curriculum the revolutionary crisis might be faithfully managed. The more conservatively inclined among the United Church’s membership were, however, concerned. Was the denomination in the 1960s welcoming and embracing a new kind of theology that would lead culture—or be led by it?
Chapter 2
A Brief Spin in Our Ford Edsel: The New Curriculum

Vosper: I would say that my deeply held beliefs and values have not transitioned me beyond what I believe the United Church is and the United Church I was raised in. I was a product of the New Curriculum. I never had an authoritative, judgmental God who overlooked everything I did. Jesus taught me to skate in my backyard. I had a relationship with him as a friend – that was how it came out in the curriculum.

denBok: Of course. But you don’t need church for any of that. The only thing church has to offer that other organizations don’t do better is the God thing.

Vosper: So let other denominations do it, and let The United Church of Canada—which is the only denomination on the planet that might ever actually say in its documents that the bible is not the authoritative word of God for all time—move forward into discourse with others.

denBok: But Gretta, do you think that’s even remotely possible?

Vosper: No. We’re two, three generations too late. We should have kept with this work in the 1960s.

denBok: Or honourably split, way back when.

Vosper: Honourably split, way back when. Exactly.

Rev. Gretta Vosper in dialogue with Rev. Connie den Bok

In a review of the United Church’s New Curriculum for the May/June 1966 issue of Religious Education, Ronald Fellows makes an unkind, if apt, comparison. Noting the vast amount of time and energy expended by the Ford Motor Company in the nine development years preceding the 1957 introduction of the infamous Edsel, he recalls that the model was quietly laid to rest after only two years of production because the automakers had misjudged the market. With a flood of compact cars arriving from other sources, the Edsel was “a case of the wrong car at the wrong time.” Similarly, Fellows observes, after a dozen or so years of development, “the United Church of Canada, like the Ford Motor, has gone all out to produce a new product.” Perusing the twenty pounds of books that make up the materials published in 1965 alone, he suggests that while the theology is sound and the styling distinctive, the New Curriculum may be the wrong vehicle for the wrong time: “it is just possible … that Editor-in-Chief Peter Gordon White and company have produced an education Edsel.”

Fellows was indeed prescient. Despite the sizable

investment of time and resources expended in its development and lavished on its production, the United Church’s distinctively Canadian New Curriculum received considerable criticism, not only from within the denomination, but also from outside of it. For such a noble and expensive effort, this curriculum that had been conceived and designed for a different era (and a different church) from the one in which it eventually emerged, appeared with great fanfare, then quickly and quietly disappeared from regular use in United Church congregations. By the 1970s the low-key “Loaves and Fishes” curriculum, produced on a modest budget and reproduced by means of improved Gestetner cyclograph technology, had replaced its majestic predecessor in most denominational church schools.

The New Curriculum was, like the baby-boom generation it served, a product of the years that followed the Second World War. However, because it actually rolled off the presses in the early 1960s, the curriculum appeared to be the embodiment of the 1960’s theological ferment that came to widespread public attention following the publication of John Robinson’s *Honest to God* and its “popular theology” successors. The media, who had previously regarded the properties of theological argument as at best arcane and at worst soporific, realized that the United Church’s apparent departure from orthodoxy in its church school curriculum was causing fundamentalist critics to see red. Newspapers like *The Toronto Star* did their best to fan the flames of such controversy both inside and outside the denomination with the help of juicy, if misleading, headlines. The work of historian Kevin Flatt (and indeed any survey of online resources from theologically conservative organizations within the United Church) asserts that the New Curriculum, perhaps more than any other single factor, is responsible for straining liberal/conservative tensions to the breaking point. The curriculum is even blamed for the denomination’s precipitous numerical decline in the years that followed.

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3 Airhart, *A Church with the Soul of a Nation*, 266.
1 Design and Development of the New Curriculum

Although the formal beginning of New Curriculum development was in 1952, some of its roots reach back further. It might, for instance, broadly be argued that the New Curriculum was a manifestation of a long-standing relationship between liberal Protestantism in North America and the middle class enthusiasm for reading books. In what can only be described as supreme irony, one of the unforeseen problems of the curriculum’s huge investment in books as a lively medium was that the curriculum made its appearance during the years that marked a transition from literate to post-literate within North American culture. Early in the 1960s decade, media guru Marshall McLuhan in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* predicted (with some accuracy) that the dominant print culture that had endured since the Renaissance would shortly end to be succeeded by something he called “electronic interdependence.” Understandably lacking McLuhan’s prophetic insight, the framers of the New Curriculum rejoiced in the hegemony of the book culture. In such rejoicing the men and women involved in the curriculum’s development can be comfortably located within the longstanding love affair of liberal Christianity with the printed word as a principal tool for redeeming the world. In his 2013 book *The Rise of Liberal Religion*, Matthew Hedstrom argues that in contrast to the familiar formulation that calls for believers to remain “in but not of the world,” liberal Protestantism sought to redeem culture through full participation in it. This sensibility entered the United Church’s DNA as an inheritance from its founding denominations, but especially from Methodism which by the end of the nineteenth century proclaimed a brand of evangelism that recognized the church’s desire not only to bring the beatitude of the gospel to humanity, but also to be a healing agent. Such thinking is reflected in the Canadian Methodist Church’s decision to alter the name of the “Department of Temperance and Moral Reform” to the “Department of Evangelism and Social Service.” It is also discernable in reports such as the United Church’s post war Commission on Culture titled *The Church and the Secular World*, as well as in the tone and the wide-ranging concerns of the comprehensive E&SS annual reports which intentionally gathered information, not only from within the denomination, but from a wide variety of global and even secular sources beyond it.

Hedstrom makes a convincing case for his contention that the popularization of religious liberalism in North America has “happened largely in and through books.” He says that

in the centuries since the Protestant Reformation and the invention of moveable type, print culture and religious culture had grown increasingly intertwined at the popular level. Only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, did the economic, cultural, social, and religious forces align to make the consumption of mass-market books a part of everyday American spiritual practice.7

Hedstrom indicates that although historians and social critics have long understood the media and the consumer marketplace to be defining aspects of modern North American culture, there has been insufficient attention to the way that religious liberals “coordinated massive, nationwide cultural programs during much of the twentieth century—especially reading programs—that exerted significant religious influence.”8 While scholarly work on religious liberalism has tended almost exclusively to focus on Protestant churches and seminaries, it has failed to note “liberalism’s seeds found fertile ground” not only in churches but all across the North American landscape. Hedstrom claims that the “cultural victory” of liberal Protestantism came about “not because more Americans joined liberal churches but because liberal religious values and sensibilities became more and more culturally normative.”9

From Hedstrom’s comments on the love affair of liberal Protestantism with books one can infer a reason for the United Church of Canada’s decision, at considerable and even risky expense,10 to incarnate its curriculum materials in book form—and handsomely produced hard cover books at that. But the United Church was by no means alone in discerning the need for a vital programme of Christian teaching and training in the years that followed the devastation of the Second World War. Howard Colson and Raymond Rigdon’s Understanding Your Church’s Curriculum (1969) speculates that future historians of Christian education in North America will categorize the decades following the war “as the most eventful period of Christian education in modern times.”11 Colson and Rigdon point out that several forces influenced the need for major

7 Ibid., 4.
8 Ibid., 5.
9 Ibid.
10 In her dissertation on the demise of the Ryerson Press, Ruth Bradley-St-Cyr names the New Curriculum among the factors that led to the 1970 sale of the venerable Ryerson Press to the American firm McGraw-Hill. The assumption that the curriculum books would be newly purchased in each year of each cycle was quite simply mistaken since many churches chose instead to save expense by hoarding them. See Ruth Bradley-St-Cyr, “The Downfall of the Ryerson Press” (Ph.D. diss., University of Ottawa, 2014).
11 Howard P. Colson and Raymond M. Rigdon, Understanding Your Church’s Curriculum (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1969), 20. Colson and Rigdon were members of the U.S. Southern Baptist Convention and were actively involved in producing curriculum materials for that denomination. They were also colleagues in the Cooperative Curriculum Project, a four year study (1960-1964) that was conducted by more than one hundred curriculum specialists from sixteen North American Protestant denominations.
changes in curriculum materials. These forces include: “a revival of interest in Christianity and
the church, a resurgence of concern for theological realities, and dramatic advances in
education.” They observe that following the Second World War, as society attempted to re-
stabilize, there was a resurgence of interest in Christianity and in the church. This growth, in
turn, led to a reappraisal of the education materials that were then in use or available. “In the
light of the needs and concerns of the day, the curriculum materials were tested and many of
them were found wanting.” Colson and Rigdon assert that “thoughtful” church and
denominational leaders “recognized a need for a complete reorganization of curriculum designs
and the development of materials which would help to communicate the relevance of the
Christian faith to the contemporary needs and concerns of people.” This need was amplified by
new and innovative approaches to education and this “general ferment” in education, in turn,
acted as a stimulant to Christian educators who were engaged in the preparation of curriculum
materials for use in churches. The uniqueness of the gospel challenged them “to discover and
utilize the best insights from all sources in developing curriculum designs and instructional
materials.”

Colson and Rigdon’s book also underscores the significance of several curricula that
emerged in the postwar years. The first, and perhaps the most influential for the eventual birth of
the United Church’s New Curriculum, was the “Christian Faith and Life Curriculum” of the
Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. It was published in 1948 and interestingly it “represented a
deliberate break by a major denomination away from the theological liberalism that had
characterized the religious education movement.” Reflecting instead the concerns of neo-
orthodoxy, the curriculum provided a three-year cycle of themes: “Jesus Christ,” “The Bible,”
and “The Church.” The second major new church curriculum to appear following the Second
World War was the Seabury Series published by the Protestant Episcopal Church which was
introduced in 1955 and later expanded and renamed “The Church’s Teaching.” Colson and
Rigdon report that “The Church’s Teaching” is “based on the theological assumption that what is
being communicated in Christian education is the gospel, that the communicator is God himself,
and that the context of this communication is the covenant community.” When translated into
learning theory, “this is interpreted to mean that the gospel is encountered and is most likely to

12 Ibid.
13 Ibid., 21.
14 Ibid., 24.
15 Ibid., 26.
16 Ibid., 27.
be responded to through a balanced exposure to the meaning of God’s historic action and his action now in people’s lives, with due consideration to the eschatological nature of God’s action in all history.”

After reflecting on the status of changes in the Christian education in several American denominations, Colson and Rigdon point out that many new curriculum designs and materials emerged as the result of extensive denominational studies. Most of these curricula had at least three things in common. First, “in sharp contrast with many church curriculum plans in vogue prior to World War II, most of the materials developed since 1946 have clearly stated theological objectives.” Second, the approach is holistic to combat the fragmentation that had characterized educational programs in many churches prior to World War II when each of the various educational organizations—Sunday school, the missionary organizations, the Sunday evening training program, and others—“had their own program and curriculum.” Third, because the Sunday school movement had came into existence from outside of the churches, there continued to be a sense within that although it might be housed in the building and sponsored by the community, the church school was not an integral part of the church itself. Thus an important factor that led to the curriculum studies following the war was “the growing conviction of many church leaders that the church itself has a basic education function.”

The official impetus for the United Church’s New Curriculum is located in the minutes of the General Council of 1952 where a memorial from Alberta Conference highlighted the American Presbyterian Church’s “Christian Faith and Life” curriculum, praising it for its “revolutionary” character and requesting the production of something similar from the United Church’s Boards of Christian Education and Publication. Most congregations were using a version of a graded uniform curriculum that originated in the United States. This uniform curriculum featured a six-year cycle during which the whole Bible would be read through. In the light of new research about the way that children learned, the uniform curriculum fell short in its attentiveness to appropriate learning strategies for various ages. As Kevin Flatt further points out, the idea of a denominational curriculum, tailored specifically to the United Church also

18 “Among other denominations conducting major studies leading to an introduction of curriculum materials are the Disciples of Christ, the Church of the Brethren, some Mennonites, the Church of God, and the United Church of Canada.” See Colson and Rigdon, Understanding Your Church’s Curriculum, 32.
19 Colson and Rigdon, Understanding Your Church’s Curriculum, 33.
20 Ibid., 34.
21 Flatt, After Evangelicalism, 78.
would have appealed “to the broadly nationalist orientation of the denomination.”

The request went before the sessional committee on Christian Education and the committee agreed that the existing curriculum did indeed deserve a thorough review. The sessional committee then asked the General Council to instruct the Board of Christian Education and the editors of the Sunday school publications to undertake such a study; it further instructed that the curricula of all mainline Protestant denominations should be reviewed with the intention of developing a distinct curriculum for use in the United Church.

The board duly conducted its study of other North American denominational curricula. By 1956 it had undertaken preliminary consultations with the conferences of the church, significant theologians and educational experts. The board unveiled a plan to develop a curriculum over the next five years. Such development would be carried out by a curriculum workshop made up of personnel from the Board of Christian Education as well as the Department of Sunday School Publications of the Board of Publication. Peter Gordon White, whose name would become practically synonymous with the New Curriculum, was hired as Editor-in-Chief.

After studying various denominational curricula and consulting with experts in curriculum development, the members of the New Curriculum workshop set about providing a set of theological and educational presuppositions that would guide further development. Using the United Church’s 1940 Statement of Faith as a basis, the workshop attempted to strike a theological balance that was inclusive and that, as workshop member Bill Blackmore proposed, would attempt to be “middle of the road” in a way that would be both appealing and acceptable to United Church members. The “Presuppositions for the Development of a Curriculum for the Sunday Schools of the United Church of Canada” appeared in 1957. They were intended “to

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22 Ibid., 77. A letter to the Observer’s “Question Box” in September, 1962 asked: “What is your opinion on using lesson books other than those published by the United Church of Canada for teaching a class in a United Church Sunday School?” The response indicated that although American-produced lesson books were thought to be good, they had a clearly American historical bias: “If you continue with foreign aids, you’ll miss the most important development in teaching The United Church has experienced.” UCO, September 15, 1962, 37.
23 Flatt, After Evangelicalism, 77.
24 Ibid. Flatt observes that the institutional/organizational structure involved in the New Curriculum’s development was nothing short of byzantine. Ibid., 78n.
25 Kevin Flatt, After Evangelicalism, 77-78.
26 W. Blackmore, “Theological Presuppositions in Sunday School Curriculum Building,” United Church of Canada Archives (hereafter UCA), United Church of Canada Board of Christian Education 198/8, quoted in Flatt, After Evangelicalism, 82.
function as the guiding master plan for the curriculum, and as such the final version was going to come before the General Council for its approval.”

The Presuppositions document was divided into two major segments, the first of which articulated the theological basis and educational principles at work in the evolution of the plan while the second offered a description of content. Before forwarding the Presuppositions, however, the workshop group sought the opinions of a wider body and sent a draft of the Presuppositions and a version of the teaching plan over a three-year cycle to a wide cross-section of theology professors, ministers and General Council Office officials. Although the Presuppositions document was generally well-received, there was criticism, especially from those steeped in neo-orthodoxy, that the child-centred approach advocated by the workshop members undermined a God-centred approach, and that the proposed topics for each year of the cycle: “Self,” “Neighbour,” and “God” (centred on the three questions: “Who am I?”; “Who is my neighbour?” and “Who is God?”) were too human-centred, or theoretical and psychological rather than biblical. After studying the comments that they had received, the curriculum workshop produced a revised version of the Presuppositions which was forwarded to the conferences of the church for further comment and study. When the plan finally came before the 1958 General Council, representatives from Manitoba Conference heavily criticized the document and proposed that the neo-orthodox “Faith and Life” curriculum of the American Presbyterian Church should be substituted. The Conference criticized the “complexity,” “content” and “theological inadequacy” of the document. As Kevin Flatt recounts,

fortunately for the curriculum development staff, and significantly for the future path of the United Church, theological professor George Johnston adroitly saved the “New Curriculum” from the abyss of discarded ideas through some artful procedural tactics—an example of the benefits of procedural knowledge for those church insiders accustomed to dealing with the church courts … Johnston proposed a counter-resolution, moving that the actual presuppositions themselves be approved, but that the attached curriculum plan be referred to the presbyteries of the church for

28 Peter Gordon White later commented that there was also shock on the floor of General Council at the assumption of the curriculum planners that Sunday schools no longer necessarily functioned all the way through the year. The planned curriculum seemed to be “giving people permission not to be there in the summer.” New Curriculum Consultation, Emmanuel College, Toronto, October 1996.
further examination. In the end, the General Council rejected Manitoba’s memorial and adopted Johnston’s resolution instead.\textsuperscript{30}

George Johnston himself described the process by which further changes were made in an article published in the June 15, 1959 issue of the \textit{Observer}. Forbearing to mention his own part in “saving” the New Curriculum, Johnston recalled that the Manitoba memorial was rejected and that approval was given to the Presuppositions document, though “grave doubts were expressed whether the curriculum plan of the Presuppositions was really in accord with its stated principles, or with the Bible.”\textsuperscript{31} The presbyteries were instructed to report their views on the plan by March 1, 1959. If criticism justified further delay, the Boards of Christian Education and Publication were then to prepare a revision and submit it to the executive of the General Council for approval and, if necessary, also consult with the Committee on Christian Faith. As Johnston summarizes, “thus the democratic machinery of the Church was set in motion to deal with a matter of widespread interest and urgent importance.”\textsuperscript{32} Johnston suggests that the glacial pace of curriculum development was fully justified by the magnitude of the work being undertaken:

\begin{quote}
It is obvious that there is remarkable unanimity in the church about the special importance of the Sunday school. The educational enterprise lies right at the centre of church life. Even if the new plan is not finally in use before 1964 or 1965, it will be worth while to wait. Every young man with high standards of personal conduct knows that it is wise to bide till the right girl comes along! It is the same with a vast programme of education in which ministers, teachers and parents work together to bring up children and young people in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}

Reflecting on the genesis of the New Curriculum at a forum held in 1996 at Emmanuel College and organized by professors Phyllis Airhart and Wenn-In Ng, Peter Gordon White suggested that a further reason for the nervousness about the curriculum evident in the ranks of the 1958 General Council was that “this thing was not going to be done cheaply and it was a threat to the publishing house which was a great, functioning place.”\textsuperscript{34} Ironically, the General Council \textit{did} accept the very part of the curriculum design that was most likely to make it fiscally vulnerable. Beginning with the production of adult materials first, on the assumption that adults were the real teachers, was a noble pedagogical concept. Economically, however, it could

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 94.
\textsuperscript{31} George Johnston, “What Sunday Schools are Going to Teach,” \textit{UCO}, June 15, 1959, 24.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} New Curriculum Consultation.
potentially spell disaster for the Ryerson Press, since there was a pragmatic reason for beginning with the production of materials for children: such materials tended to be much cheaper to produce and were likely sell at a much higher volume than books targeted at adults.\textsuperscript{35}

In his \textit{Observer} article, Johnston reported that eighty-one of one hundred and four presbyteries subsequently sent back their findings and the majority were content to trust the officials and writers in the development of the curriculum. None the less, there was a “substantial body of well-informed opposition, and it called for quite radical changes.”\textsuperscript{36} Help was sought and a conference took place in Toronto at the end of February 1959 to evaluate the curriculum plans. Professor Campbell Wyckoff of Princeton University Seminary was invited as an external expert. According to Johnston, academics had a tendency to side with those seeking radical change to the Presuppositions document. The revisions were finished by May of 1959 and they were clearly designed to win approval of the church’s more orthodox constituents. Johnston’s article summarizes the most significant change in approach from what had earlier been presented to the 18\textsuperscript{th} General Council: “it is now frankly stated that God’s revelation of himself, and the record of this in the Bible, will be the directing principle of the Sunday school lessons. At all age-levels the whole Gospel must be taught with integrity—even if this means that somehow the very young have to learn the meaning of sin, salvation, heaven and hell.”\textsuperscript{37} Further, Johnston notes a fresh and more explicitly Trinitarian definition of the purpose of Christian education that aligns the New Curriculum with the American Presbyterian “Christian Faith and Life” curriculum that had been identified as a preferred resource by Manitoba Conference:

We are told that the “scope” of such work should cohere with all that we believe about God the Holy Trinity. It should proclaim how God loves sinners, both through the lessons and also the lives of teachers. It must make central God’s Word in Jesus. It has to say something to parents and their families about birth and death, about the final destiny of mankind and the whole creation. Above all, such educational work should seek to be an instrument in the hands of the Holy Spirit of God.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{35} An important meeting later took place between White, the head of the Ryerson Press, and the Board of Finance chaired by the President of the Bank of Nova Scotia, Norman McLeod. The principal problem was that if the Press were forced to produce the New Curriculum and at the same time to continue to provide the old church school materials for those congregations that might still want them, it would experience a revenue shortfall of approximately one million dollars. The Board of Finance expressed confidence in the New Curriculum and agreed to cover the shortfall, should it occur. New Curriculum Consultation.

\textsuperscript{36} Johnston, “What Sunday Schools Are Going to Teach,” 24.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 26.
In his article, Johnston acknowledges that the nature of church schools varies widely across the denomination; nevertheless, he maintains, because through the sacrament of Baptism the church affirms its responsibility for Christian nurture, “a school should operate within the whole Church as a teaching and evangelistic fellowship.” Families also have an important part to play, “for it is in the home life that character is formed.” The curriculum plan would seek the active co-operation of parents. Despite an apparent retrenchment in a more orthodox direction, Johnston notes that the New Curriculum still aimed for theological balance. Its perspective needs to be wide because “character is tested in the world, so there must be teaching on social problems, national life, and international issues.” For its part the Committee on Christian Faith sent the plan forward with its blessing and on November 3, 1959, the General Council approved it. As Kevin Flatt summarizes, the curriculum developers diligently set about testing new materials and building awareness and support within the denomination. “The publicity surrounding the New Curriculum in the period trumpeted its official backing by the church establishment and tirelessly repeated the goal of making the curriculum the total approach of Christian education in the church, affecting every congregation and individual member.”

By the time the *Prospectus for a New Curriculum for the Sunday Schools of the United Church of Canada* appeared in 1961 and received widespread distribution as part of the New Curriculum publicity campaign, the sense of enthusiasm and optimism evident during the 1950s began to be subverted by a growing sense of anxiety and dislocation. Worrisome events in the world outside the church walls had penetrated the consciousness of those within. The Prospectus was organized in a tripartite structure that includes an imaginary opening dialogue, a reprint of the “Presuppositions Toward and Understanding of Curriculum” (approved by the General Council Executive in November 1959), and an outline of “The Curriculum Plan” that includes the annual themes of the planned three-year cycle. The opening quasi-satirical dialogue of the Prospectus is conceived as a conversation between someone charged with explaining the church’s “new plan for achieving the purpose of Christian education” and a downright ornery and occasionally belligerent “small voice from the back row” (subsequently called “the s.v.b.r”). As the dialogue proceeds, the s.v.b.r becomes converted, as a result of the imaginary question and answer session, from an obstructive (“Now just hold it right there”) to a conciliatory stance.

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39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
42 A brief version of the curriculum plan appears in *Close the Chasm*, 115.
(“I may not get it all in one reading. But I’m interested now”). This imagined dialogue nevertheless acknowledges a tension that needed to be addressed within the United Church as a whole: there was a gap between the scholarly writers and editors of the New Curriculum and those sitting in the pews, many of whom remained isolated from the advances in biblical scholarship since the nineteenth century.

Also evident in the opening of the Prospectus dialogue is palpable unease resulting from the Cold War and its attendant nuclear threat. The New Curriculum, as it encouraged a sharing of the Christian message, was clearly intended to address such anxiety head on and to offer hope during the birth pangs of what now seemed to be a New Age in the offing:

Our world is in convulsion. A new kind of world is struggling to be born. Maybe the old one is going to blow itself to bits. Does the gospel mean anything for a generation that must face problems of this magnitude? Familiar patterns of living are breaking up. New patterns aren’t clear. It’s exciting. Also more than a bit frightening. Racial groups jostle each other. Political groups threaten each other. On our own street, in our own house, things aren’t the same. Life isn’t neat or tidy any more. The family itself seems somehow threatened. Some neighbours are divorced. Some are drinking too much. Why? Does the gospel really mean anything? Or is it jaded too? Most of us don’t like to admit that we’re anxious. Sometimes vaguely. Sometimes bravely. Anxious nevertheless.

Not feeling as gripped by existential angst as the New Curriculum spokesperson, the dialogue’s cautious s.v.b.r. raises the issue of whether such morbid thoughts are appropriate for the children of the Sunday school (“But this is adult stuff”). This observation leads to a somewhat patronizing explanation from the curriculum spokesperson of why the New Curriculum planners elected to begin with the education of adults. Helpfully, the Curriculum representative does outline to the s.v.b.r. how the process of introducing the materials will proceed. Though Flatt indicates that the curriculum planners made it only “two thirds of the

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43 “Christian education is a program of action undertaken by the church in order that the gospel—the good news of God’s redemptive action in Jesus Christ—may be more widely known and appropriated.” Board of Christian Education and Board of Publication of the United Church of Canada, Prospectus for a New Curriculum for the Sunday Church Schools of the United Church of Canada. (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 1961), 7.

44 Ibid., 9-10.

45 “That’s right, this is for adults. We can’t live a faith we don’t know, we can’t teach a faith we don’t live. The New Curriculum is for grown up people.” Ibid., 11. In her evaluation of the New Curriculum, Beardsall indicates that it was, indeed, on the adult level that the curriculum was most successful: “Adults went back to Sunday school or formed study groups in their homes, and it seems to have been at this adult level that the impact was greatest.” Beardsall, “And Whether Pigs Have Wings,” 109.
way to a Trinitarian structure (somehow having missed the intimate connection between the Holy Spirit and the continuing witness of the church), the overarching plan was, indeed, Trinitarian. The three annual themes were “God and His Purpose,” “Jesus Christ and the Christian Life,” and “The Church and the World.” These three themes were to repeat every three years. The Prospectus noted that although it was intended “for everyone” the curriculum would strategically begin with material aimed at adults. Some publications (a series of magazines, for example) were already in print. Each year from 1960 to 1966 had been mapped and suggestions had been sent to ministers, superintendents and Christian Education chairs to assist them in getting ready for the curriculum. Further, there was to be a four year preparatory period, when adults were to be given opportunities to deepen their faith, and when leaders and teachers were to be trained. At the end of the preparatory period (September 1964) teacher’s guides and pupil books for all departments would move into regular use throughout the denomination.

Having now established the details of the curriculum plan, the Prospectus closed with “Some Distinctive Features of the New Curriculum.” First, it reiterated that the curriculum was intentionally aimed at every adult in the congregation: “the New Curriculum requires mature Christians who are aware of their mission to communicate the Gospel and who will be prepared to teach out of the experience of their Christian faith.” Second, the presence of a common annual theme would encourage the minister to “take his rightful place in heading up the leadership of the total congregation for the New Curriculum” and also provide for “unity for the total curriculum of the local church.” Third, the New Curriculum would emphasize the central role of the family in the work of Christian nurture. Fourth, it provided a coordinated leadership plan. The new departmental leadership education manuals were to be available for each church school department a year before the teachers’ guides and students’ books come into general use. Pointing to the exhaustive consultation process that had been underway for nearly a decade, the Prospectus underscored the uniqueness of a curriculum plan that was intended “for the whole United Church of Canada by the whole United Church of Canada.” Further, it noted than considerable effort had gone into insuring that the materials themselves, unlike those of previous curricula in use in the United Church, would be both handsome and enduring. Sidestepping the potentially irksome question of cost, the Prospectus emphasized the curriculum’s magisterial

46 Flatt, After Evangelicalism, 95.
47 Prospectus for a New Curriculum, 15. The four years of preparation are also supplied with themes: 1960-61 is “The Promise”; 1961-2 is “The Message”; 1962-3 is “The Call”; 1963-64 is “The Covenant”.
48 Ibid., 45.
quality. These would be books that adults, youth and children would respect and would be proud to own and use.”\textsuperscript{49} Lest there should be fear that the traditional “special concerns” of the United Church of Canada “such as stewardship, temperance, discipleship, Christian vocation, and mission” might be absent from the curriculum, the Prospects provided assurance that these subjects would be treated in all age groups in the units where such concerns may arise naturally. Finally, the materials of the New Curriculum would be readily identifiable through the use of a nifty logo that promised to be “smart,” “modern,” and “distinctive.”\textsuperscript{50}

2 The New Curriculum Encounters a Bumpy Road

In 1962, the first adult volume of the New Curriculum made its appearance. \textit{The Word and the Way} was the work of the Queen’s Theological College professor of systematic theology, Donald Mathers. The book’s introduction narrates the exhausting journey of the New Curriculum to date. It notes, in particular, that hearings held across Canada during the previous decade had revealed the conundrum that the church was asking its members to teach Christianity before discovering its meaning for their own lives. In response, the curriculum planning committee made the daring decision to produce as its first publication a book, not for children, but rather for adults. According to Peter Gordon White, \textit{The Word and the Way} is a basic book, a summary of fundamental Christian convictions—“a modest beginning for a large undertaking.”\textsuperscript{51}

Doubtless to the considerable surprise (and relief) of the Boards of Christian Education and Publication, Mathers’ book became a Canadian publishing success story. The E&SS noted the book’s “enthusiastic acceptance throughout the Church” in explaining its resolution that “this Board urge continued study of ‘The Word and the Way’ both as a means of making more articulate the faith of our people, and providing opportunity for Christian fellowship.”\textsuperscript{52} As Grace Lane reported in “Best Seller” (her cover story on \textit{The Word and the Way} written for the August 1962 issue of the \textit{Observer}), “in Canadian publishing, 10,000 copies puts a book into the best-seller category … In the first three months, 25,000 copies of the book were sold—15,000 of the guide. By Christmas it is expected that the 50,000 mark will be reached.”\textsuperscript{53} In her review of 

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 47.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 48.
\textsuperscript{53} Grace Lane, “Best-Seller,” \textit{UCO}, August 1, 1962. Kevin Flatt is less impressed than the \textit{Observer} by the publication numbers and he argues that “the book’s reach was limited” because only about twelve percent of the
the genesis of the book (and the New Curriculum as a whole), Lane identified doctrinal illiteracy as the chief reason that the United Church had undertaken the complete revision of its church school curriculum: “it suspected that far too many of its members, in spite of their loyalty to the church, really knew nothing significant about its fundamental doctrines.”

In his introduction to *The Word and the Way*, Peter Gordon White similarly remarked both on the need for adult learning and on the failure of earlier United Church curricula to form adult disciples:

> This book is for men and women who need a mature faith to meet the demands of their adult life. It was written as a result of one of those accidental discoveries about which one should say reverently, “Thank God we found out.” A few years ago a number of hearings were held across Canada to determine what was desirable in a New Curriculum for Sunday church schools. To the dismay of the survey team, many of the people consulted said in effect, Why ask us, what do we know about it?\(^{55}\)

The implications were clear; the church was asking its members to teach a Christianity about which they knew little (and quite possibly cared less). According to White, three questions “seemed to sum up all the others”—and coincidentally aligned nicely with the new, improved Trinitarian thematic structure of the New Curriculum: “First, how can we know God today, hear his word, and respond to his claims? Second, who is Jesus Christ and what is the meaning of his life for us? Third, what is the church and what does it mean to belong to this community?”

Kevin Flatt has written extensively alleging the pivotal role of the New Curriculum in deliberately undermining the self identification of the United Church of Canada as a liberal evangelical denomination. Using diction redolent with insinuation, Flatt views the curriculum as the weapon of choice in the concerted effort of the church’s liberal elite to defeat the church’s historic evangelical identity and to re-tool the United Church as a progressive Protestant denomination from which at least three historic evangelical emphases would be excised. Flatt summarizes these emphases as: “evangelicalism” which sought to secure the conversion of non-believers; the promotion of moral reform, or the corporate attempt of the church to improve individual moral behaviour in accordance with a God-given morality derived from the moral standards of the Bible; and an evangelical programme of Christian education that sought to

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54. Ibid.
56. Ibid. As noted above, the three annual New Curriculum themes were God and His Purpose, Jesus Christ and the Christian Life, and The Church and the World.
promote knowledge of the Bible (and the doctrines and practices derived from it) among children and adults in the church in order to bring about the conversion of unconverted students.\(^{57}\) In his assessment of *The Word and the Way*, Flatt suggests that this book was the first public manifestation of elements that would later stir up fierce opposition to the New Curriculum as a whole: “For example, it clearly taught a modernist view of the Bible that saw it as a witness to revelation rather than revelation itself (including a direct denial of biblical infallibility), took a dismissive attitude toward the whole idea of propositional truth revealed by God, and argued that biblical miracles had naturalistic explanations.”\(^{58}\) According to the standard proposed by Flatt’s definition of evangelicalism Donald Mathers’ book fails to deliver on most fronts. That Flatt’s portrait of evangelicalism would have been descriptive of how the majority of United Church members viewed themselves, or evangelicalism, or their denomination in 1962 is another question entirely.\(^{59}\) Many in the United Church, for example, would have considered confirmation the equivalent to an evangelical “decision for Christ.” Moreover, if Mathers’ theologically cautions work were interrogated to determine whether the book upheld the historic doctrines of the church catholic, it would likely score quite well. Flatt argues that the impact of *The Word and the Way* was fairly limited within the United Church immediately following its introduction and that the “large majority of church members, exposed only to uninformative official publicity and unremarkable news reports, were entirely unaware of the strong modernist orientation and frankly non-evangelical teaching of the New Curriculum.”\(^{60}\) This observation may well be accurate as far as it goes. That the “large majority” of United Church members would have been particularly exercised about such a modernist orientation, had they known about it, is less clear. Indeed, one might well argue the opposite view, and certainly the view of the curriculum’s champions, that the curriculum well reflected the theological position of a mainline liberal/evangelical denomination at the beginning of the 1960s and further, that it reasonably reflected the urgent concern for effective Christian nurture that had arisen in the boom years following the war.\(^{61}\) It is likely, however, that the United Church’s sense of what it


\(^{58}\) Ibid., 101.

\(^{59}\) For example, J.R. Mutchmor, whose credentials as an evangelical are impeccable, was a supporter of the content and method of the New Curriculum. In his autobiography, he affirmed: “There is a wonderful evangelistic basis in the New Curriculum.” J.R. Mutchmor, *The Memoirs of James Ralph Mutchmor* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1965), 118. Flatt likely over-estimates the number of United Church members who viewed themselves as evangelicals fitting his definition—and even “a significant contingent” of “some evangelicals” may not be all that many (Flatt, *After Evangelicalism*, 111).

\(^{60}\) Flatt, *After Evangelicalism*, 102-103.

\(^{61}\) Fellows, “The New Curriculum of the United Church of Canada,” 245. Fellows also to addresses the curriculum’s handling of questions about the virgin birth of Christ, the miracles and the Resurrection. His view is that “although
might mean to be “evangelical” was in the process of shifting as the curriculum materials started to become available. For example, the E&SS proposed a programme that it called the “New Evangelism.” As Airhart notes, this programme was “an alternative to the ‘Billy Graham’ type of gatherings.” Proponents of the New Evangelism wanted to hear what “ordinary people” had to say about the questions of the day.62

Another difficulty in Flatt’s characterization of the New Curriculum’s theological content arises from his slippery grasp of what constituted “evangelicalism,” “neo-orthodoxy” and “liberalism” within a United Church context. He does not, for example, account for the very significant diversity in what might be manifested under the large umbrella of evangelicalism. Although it would likely be safe to say all evangelicals believe in biblical inspiration; many believe in inerrancy while others insist on infallibility. Flatt seems resolute in claiming only the latter as “evangelical.” There is a similar division between confessional evangelicals—some of whom place a high premium on a self-declared experience of conversion, and revivalist evangelicals—all of whom probably do. His tendency to lump neo-orthodoxy and liberal Protestantism together as conspiratorial enemies of evangelicalism (at least as he outlines the role of both in the development New Curriculum) is also perplexing. Liberal Protestantism embraces the methodologies of the Enlightenment, especially in biblical study and criticism and with an accompanying tendency try to explain the miraculous or to reject it altogether. It tends to be optimistic about the human race, often downplaying individual wrongdoing while the spectre of institutional sin looms large. Neo-orthodoxy arose in response to the perceived failure of liberalism in the early twentieth century and underscored both the Reformation emphasis on the sovereignty of God and the distance between the divine and human realms, a chasm that is graciously bridged by Christ the Word-made-flesh. In its emphasis on the pervasive reality of sin, it tends to be rather pessimistic than liberal theology about the human condition. The spectrum of belief within the United Church (among clergy and laity alike) included and includes all of these positions and more beside. It would certainly have done so as the New Curriculum

the answers tend to be conservative and traditional, the door is not closed to more radical interpretation” (ibid. 245). J.S. Thomson’s adult study God and His Purpose is, for example, orthodox in its understanding of the Christian faith. It also asks the question, “Has anybody been saved here recently?” Thomson indicates that this “is a question that may properly be asked in every church.” Thomson then speaks positively on the subject of experiences of conversion in a way that would likely resonate with most self-defined evangelicals—as Flatt himself acknowledges (see Flatt, After Evangelicalism, 115). See J.S. Thomson, God and His Purpose (Toronto: The United Church Publishing House, 1964), 180-182.

62Airhart, A Church with the Soul of a Nation, 237. Airhart notes that under Ray Hord’s leadership the E&SS perspective on what constituted “evangelism” continued to evolve.” In due course, “many of the activities associated with the original focus on evangelism were sidelined to make way for an added emphasis on social action” (ibid., 251-252).
was being prepared. Though several of the curriculum planners were what Flatt labels liberal Protestant modernists, not all were. This wide spectrum of belief within the United Church did, moreover, manifest itself in the curriculum materials as they gradually made their appearance through the 1960s. Flatt’s tendency to conflate the literal integrity of the biblical text with its narrative integrity is also troubling. In the 1950s and 60s many members of the United Church would probably have respected and upheld the Bible’s narrative integrity. This does not, however, make them literalists. Flatt is correct, however, in pointing out that the ferment of the sixties decade marked an end to the relative tolerance that had been extended from both ends of the theological spectrum in the United Church, a tolerance that Flatt calls “quiet modernism.” He is also right in observing the extent to which, what he calls the church’s “liberal governing elite,” naively underestimated the potential for opposition to the liberal/modernist orientation of the New Curriculum from within and outside the United Church. Of consequence, as Flatt notes, the year 1964 is crucial in the unfolding of the curriculum story.

The year began with the Observer continuing its role of garnering support within the denomination and whipping up enthusiasm for the arrival of the first materials aimed at church school children. A brief pep-article written by George Morrison, secretary of the Board of Finance, appeared in the April 1964 issue. It describes Morrison’s past experience when he was attending a church in Scarsdale, New York. At that time the United Presbyterian Church had been introducing its “Christian Faith and Life” curriculum. Morrison recalled that this curriculum required intensive teacher training; it also represented a substantial and unprecedented cost to churches. Nevertheless, the materials were excellent and they proved energizing to the laity: “after the fire was lit there was no holding its spread in the congregation.” The finest achievement of the curriculum was, according to Morrison, “the manner in which our minister’s preaching became teaching, and the whole ministry of the church found a common core and mission. That curriculum revitalized the whole congregation in four years!” A similarly rich experience would now be available to every congregation in the United Church through the New Curriculum venture. Morrison cautioned, however, that the enthusiasm

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63 For instance, J.S. Thomson’s adult study God and His Purpose is thoroughly orthodox in its understanding of the Christian faith. It also asks the question, “Has anybody been saved here recently?” Thomson indicates that this “is a question that may properly be asked in every church.” Thomson then speaks positively on the subject of experiences of conversion in a way that would likely resonate with most self-defined evangelicals—as Flatt himself acknowledges (After Evangelicalism, 115). See J.S. Thomson, God and His Purpose (Toronto: The United Church Publishing House, 1964), 180-182.

64 George M. Morrison, “Curricula,” UCO, April 1, 1964, 11.

65 Ibid.
of ministry personnel would not be sufficient to make the New Curriculum a success: “we require laymen in each congregation who are convinced that ‘just any material’ is not good enough for this task. We need laymen who are convinced that using ‘just any one’ to teach is not good enough. Priority endeavors in any area of life demand our best. Right now we need the best of men, women and materials.” Cutting to the chase, Morrison proclaimed that the New Curriculum, which will cost congregations “perhaps half as much again as they are now spending on lesson helps,” would encourage the United Church to a higher level of Christian stewardship: “congregations must challenge the best qualified persons to accept the challenge of the teaching task. These teachers must accept the training disciplines that go with teaching the New Curriculum … every teacher worth his salt verifies that in assuming the discipline of teaching, he, or she, is the biggest benefactor.”

In the May 15, 1964 issue, the Observer continued its boosterish coverage with a feature article by William Heine entitled “New Curriculum.” This article appeared following the shipping of sample kits to 2,000 United Church congregations. The article answered the question “what is the New Curriculum?” with a simple definition: “it’s an entirely new educational program for the United Church of Canada.” Quoted in the article, Peter Gordon White amplified this definition by suggesting that the curriculum was as an effort “to restate the whole concept of Christianity in modern terms using the best available educational techniques.” In contrast to the old Sunday school study texts and soft cover quarterlies “which told and retold a few familiar Bible stories and repeated some general religious truths,” the New Curriculum offers “hard cover books, to be used for a whole year, and kept in the bookcase for reference.” The books are intended to relate “the familiar Bible stories to today’s living in ways meaningful to adults and young people.” Embracing the “adults first” approach, the basic book in the first cycle is former Moderator J.S. Thomson’s God and His Purpose. This is followed by “a whole bundle of well-written, beautifully printed pieces that by their very appearance say,

66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
68 Flatt complains that only forty-eight congregations were involved in the testing, that these amounted to less than one per cent of the Sunday schools in the church and that the concentration of testing schools was in Ontario, principally in the Toronto area. He complains that the teachers involved tended to be young and better educated than the typical church member. See Flatt, After Evangelicalism, 101.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid., 14, 40. The cost of such a noble endeavour as the New Curriculum was, however, considerable. Heine notes that close to $500,000 had been spent by May 1964 on development costs. Another $500,000 would be spent in 1964 in printing costs for the Year One publications. It was anticipated that by the time the first three-year cycle was complete, almost $2,000,000 would be spent.
‘The church believes its message is important.’”72 Heine’s Observer article noted that another function of the curriculum will be to reconcile any dispute between the biblical witness and modernity. John B. Hardie’s book for 15-17 year olds, The Mighty Acts of God was, for example, “a serious study of the origins of the Bible and how the Word of God may be used to give guidelines in today’s rapidly-changing world.” The intermediate book, Frank H. Morgan’s God Speaks through People, “features such incidents as a down-to-earth explanation paralleling Genesis’ six-day creation and the findings of modern science, while helping that age group ‘to understand God’s world and God’s ways.’”73

When interviewed for Heine’s article, Peter Gordon White hinted that the reconciling of the Bible with the post-Enlightenment world was both challenging and potentially controversial. He described a conversation he held with a church member who, as a non-literalist, discovered that he had no appropriate vocabulary to defend the biblical account of creation. White recounted: “for a time, curriculum builders thought they had to go deep in faith, yet not disturb anyone … We soon gave up on that. The gospel is disturbing. It’s not our business to ‘protect’ United Church people against struggle with questions of faith. None of us has to protect God. The more disturbing the questions asked, the more likely is faith to be deep-rooted.”74

In turn, Heine asked, “how disturbing are these questions? What has been their reception in 5,000 congregations of the United Church of Canada?”75 Heine pointed to the positive reception within the denomination of Mathers’ The Word and the Way but also noted the fact that criticism of the testing materials tended to focus not on theological questions raised, but rather on the amount of preparation required of teacher-volunteers, the broad age range covered by individual books (“12 and 15 don’t have that much in common”) as well as the daunting amount of material to be covered in one lesson since “75 minutes is longer than most classes have.”76

Heine recounted that five men have guided the project from its inception: David Forsyth, Alvin Cooper, Frank Fidler, Peter White and Wilbur Howard. When interviewed this group of five summarized the process of the curriculum’s development that led to the expansion of its

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72 Ibid., 13.
73 Ibid. Flatt, arguing for the infallibility of the “literal” text, objects to some of the New Curriculum writers’ attempts to arrive at “reasonable” or “naturalistic” explanations, especially of biblical miracles. Ironically the curriculum authors’ explanations themselves represent literalism of a different sort. See Flatt, After Evangelicalism, 112.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid., 14.
mandate and to the increased number of years required for its development. The curriculum team had begun with the assumption that they would simply improve what was already in use and be finished in about three years. One of the gaps they unexpectedly encountered, however, was that the United Church required help to forge an identity for a second generation who did not have the resource of being nurtured in one of the founding denominations: “they soon found congregations saying, in effect, ‘We’re not Methodists, nor Congregationalists, not Presbyterians any more … what are we and what do we believe?’”  

Gradually, the United Church’s curriculum planners came to the realization that they “had to relate Christ and the Bible to men and women—and children—who live today, and that the first step in helping children to learn about Christ lies in helping adults to learn about Christ.”

The planning group reiterated the extreme care taken in preparation of the curriculum materials themselves. Aside from the staff writers and editors about sixty other writers (half of them clergy) prepared the manuscripts. “About 1,500 others read all or part of the material, checking for historical accuracy, theological concepts, and archaeological validity. Each manuscript passed through three dozen readers, educators, illustrators, biblical and theological scholars.” This scholarly care, along with the admittedly substantial cost, was risky but also necessary. In a precarious nuclear age, what is “at stake, possibly, is the future of the United Church of Canada. The New Curriculum is designed to bring to millions of present and future members new understanding about the Christian gospel.”

As a New Curriculum author and as a man who inhabited both the world of the church and of the academy, the United Church’s twenty-fourth Moderator, A.B.B. Moore, was well placed to offer insight into the care lavished on the preparation of the curriculum materials. A chapter on the early 1960s in his autobiography Here Where We Live (the chapter is titled: “Beginning the Turbulent Decade”) describes both his surprise and fear (“I was terrified”) at being chosen to write the adult book for the second year of the three-year cycle (Moore chose as his book’s title Jesus Christ and the Christian Life which was also the theme of this particular year in the cycle). His concerns were lessened once he realized that editor Peter Gordon White and his colleagues had generously considered the “care and nurture of novice authors.” As Moore described the process,

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77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid., 40.
a conference of editors and writers was called, during which we discussed the cycle of study. Preparatory and background books were recommended, and helpful hints to helpless writers were doled out. My first stage after reading some of the material, was to draw up an outline of the book I hoped to write. I chose chapters and prepared a brief of each one. I then consulted with my editor, Norman McNairn. He was always helpful and encouraging. Actually, I had a good start on my material, for I had been teaching the subject of the book for several years, to first year honours students. The book that I wrote emerged from those lectures.  

After the manuscript was completed in 1962, there were further hurdles before it was published in 1964 complete with its art work and study guide:

The manuscript was put in a form where re-writing and corrections could occur. I went over it with McNairn. Further revisions were made by the curriculum committee, some of which were not very pleasing to me. Then it was put in a paperbound book form, and sent out to readers across Canada to be tested. Comments were collected and forwarded to me. They were on the whole favourable, but the whole process was an ordeal.  

One aspect of the process that Moore clearly found pleasurable was the time that he spent discussing his book with church school leaders across the denomination: “For this was part of the grand strategy of those who planned and produced the new curriculum. Authors were made available to the people of the church, to their mutual benefit. Canadian theological and biblical scholarship was not just for ministry candidates, but for congregations and their lay leaders.” Writing from a perspective gained from the distance of two decades, Moore perspicaciously comments that the “grand strategy” that made such deep scholarship available to the laity of the United Church may actually have proved the New Curriculum’s undoing during the rapid culture shifts of the 1960s decade. Interestingly, in his assessment of the challenges faced by the curriculum Moore discounts the impact of the opposition of a vocal minority, “which the media played up, of course.” In his opinion, what is more significant is that “patterns of church life were changing rapidly. Regular attendance at Sunday worship and church school was coming

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82 Ibid., 101.
83 Ibid., 101-102.
down from its record-breaking highs in the fifties and sixties. With the dawning of the Age of Aquarius came the anti-intellectual, anti-institutional rejection of ‘schooling’ of any kind.”

Troubles with this “very vocal minority” began to plague the curriculum planners even before the launching of the first full curriculum year. These difficulties suggest that the planners were naïve about potential for a conservative response to liberal/modernist approaches to the Bible and to theology that they clearly thought were denominationally normative. By the summer of 1964, immediately before the full launch of the curriculum materials, the tone of the New Curriculum boosters suddenly changed from enthusiastic proselytizing to cautious defensiveness. One sign of trouble came from University of Toronto professor Marcus Long who, in a lecture at Beth Tzedec Synagogue that spring, had accused James Thomson’s book *God and His Purpose* of contributing to anti-Semitism in Canada. Another ill omen appeared not within United Church circles, but rather in the annual assembly of the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec. Among the Baptist denominations the BCOQ was the most likely to be in sync with the theological orientation of the United Church of Canada, and it consequently had a history of close cooperation with it. The BCOQ had, moreover, entered into a publication arrangement with the United Church whereby it would use the New Curriculum materials with appropriate modifications to accommodate theological differences between the denominations concerning the Sacrament of Baptism. During the assembly a delegate, H.W. Harmon, rose to say that she had obtained copies of some of the curriculum books and was appalled that the curriculum writers taught that the first chapters of Genesis were mythical, wrote that the biblical plague of the Egyptian firstborn might have been a children’s disease, and questioned the virgin birth. “Urging the assembly to have nothing to do with the New Curriculum, she reportedly told them to ‘Throw it away! Burn it!’”

Seemingly the core of the controversy was nestled in the eighth chapter of Donald Mathers’ *The Word and the Way*, a chapter entitled “The Bible and the Word of God.” Here the

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84 Ibid., 102.
86 Flatt observes that the Baptist Convention “was the most tolerant of modernism of the main Baptist groups in central Canada, due to its expulsion of its most resolutely anti-modernist elements in the 1920s and 1930s (elements which converged, a couple of decades later, to form the conservative Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches).” Flatt, *After Evangelicalism*, 116.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid., 117. The BCOQ did vote in June 1964 to end co-operation with the United church Department of Sunday School Publications, citing unhappiness with the New Curriculum as the reason. See “Up Front,” *UCO*, September 15, 1965, 7.
author comes down firmly on the side of the modern in any dispute between fundamentalism and modernism. Mathers begins the chapter by pointing out that Jesus himself wrote nothing: “The Word of God is not a book: it is God giving us himself. So our faith is in Christ, not in words. And the value of the Bible is that it bears witness to him.”\(^8^9\) The Word of God is not a precious substance to be drilled out of the unerring letter of the text. To explain this concept, Mathers uses the image of the telescope. The Bible is not itself revealed, but rather is the witness to revelation, the record of revelation and the testimony of the church. This is how God has revealed God’s self to God’s people, the prophets and the apostles but most of all in Jesus Christ.\(^9^0\) Mathers continues by explaining that many say the Bible is the word of God “because it is infallible; every word in it is unconditionally true. This is an ancient view and since it has caused great trouble in the church we need to look at it honestly and carefully.”\(^9^1\) Rejecting the notion that the Bible ought to be read as a repository of either historical or scientific fact, Mathers says that the argument for infallibility of the text does not add up to much unless the biblical interpreter can also claim to have an infallible interpretation of the infallible book: “The Roman Catholics quite rightly see that if you are to have a doctrine of infallibility you must go the whole way and have an infallible pope.”\(^9^2\) What is more important than a doctrine of infallibility is, according to Mathers, a true doctrine of inspiration: “I believe one reason why Jesus did not write a book is that he wishes to guard against the error of worshipping a book when we should be worshipping God.”\(^9^3\) These are incendiary words for those who regard the Bible as “God-breathed” and who resist the accusation of idolatry. Yet despite the urgent plea from Mrs. Harmon, the BCOQ narrowly voted to keep the curriculum arrangement—at least for the time being. However, the end of the convention did not mark the end of the protest and within weeks several BCOQ churches indicated that they would not be using the materials. “The BCOQ President had to issue an appeal to the whole denomination through *The Canadian Baptist* in an attempt to shore up unity in the wake of these developments.”\(^9^4\)

In the midst of fallout from the international sensation caused by the 1963 publication of *Honest to God*, the Canadian media smelled smoke.\(^9^5\) In early July Allen Spraggett, religion

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\(^8^9\) Mather, *The Word and the Way*, 89.

\(^9^0\) Ibid., 95.

\(^9^1\) Ibid., 97.

\(^9^2\) Ibid., 98.

\(^9^3\) Ibid. The New Curriculum was lauded by John Barker for giving permission to question the Bible, thereby eliminating the “Protestant Pope”. New Curriculum Consultation.

\(^9^4\) Ibid., 117.

\(^9^5\) For a list of examples, see Flatt, *After Evangelicalism*, 117n.
editor of the *Toronto Daily Star*, published a front-page article on the New Curriculum, “Virgin Birth, Goliath—Are They Just Myths?” along with a feature article entitled “New Child Text at Odds with the Bible.” Spraggett warned parents: “don’t be surprised if Johnny comes home from Sunday school some day soon and tells you that the whale didn’t swallow Jonah, that Moses didn’t cross the Red Sea, and that what the Bible says about the creation of the world is way off base.”96 In a defensive memo to the staff personnel of the Board of Publication and Board of Christian Education, Wilbur Howard responded to Spraggett’s article by observing that “the newspaper went right to the controversial matter with unerring instinct and skill and hung out the provocative items on headlines.”97 Howard suggested that “within the limitations of newspaper reporting, the newspapers have attempted to present some of the key New Curriculum facts with excitement and impact. Obviously very little space is given to a serious reflection in depth of the education and theological principles of the New Curriculum.”98 While the curriculum planning team had received some complaints resulting from Spraggett’s article, Howard declared:

> it is interesting that the initial hot line responses came from the very vocal minority who were shocked and dismayed. There are several thousand people across Canada who have either helped to plan the New Curriculum, or write it, or read it, or test it or order it for their local churches. It is to be hoped that very soon their voices also will be coming through loud and clear.99

By the end of the summer of 1964, and with the full introduction of the core curriculum now scheduled to begin in September, the controversy that had erupted outside the denomination seeped inside. Peter Gordon White recalls that a number of the United Church disaffected intended to scuttle the implementation of the curriculum at meeting of the 21st General Council that was held in St. John’s, Newfoundland in September—but they made a tactical error. Instead of confining their censure to White and his immediate circle, White refers to what he calls “groundswell rumours” on the floor of the court that attempted to call to reckoning *everyone*

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96 Allen Spraggett, “Virgin Birth, Goliath – Are They Just Myths?” *Toronto Daily Star*, 4 July, 1964. UCA, Board of Christian Education, the United Church of Canada, 273/6. It is interesting to note that the New Curriculum of the Anglican Church of Canada followed a startlingly similar trajectory, but it was never to the same degree the focus of media attention. See Alan L. Hayes, *Anglicans in Canada* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 159-160; 288-289.
97 Wilbur K. Howard. Memo: July 14, 1964 for staff personnel of Board of Publication and Board of Christian Education. UCA, Board of Christian Education, United Church of Canada, 83.051C 272-1.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
involved with the New Curriculum. This strategy went too far for the stomachs of most General Council delegates and of consequence there was no attempt to repudiate the curriculum during the proceedings. White did, however, address the court in the New Curriculum’s defence. In his speech, White recounted how for twelve years the United Church had been preparing a New Curriculum, while for a mere twelve weeks the project had been hot news in the national press:

Someone (not a United Church member) labelled Dr. Thomson’s book anti-Semitic. Someone (not a United Church member) found a four letter word that sounded anti-Bible. Someone (not a United Church member) demanded that all the books be burned. Without doubt, this was news. But was it good news, or bad? Thousands of people, in this church, in other churches, and outside all churches are genuinely concerned. Some are disturbed.

White was adamant that the perspective inside the denomination was a different one. The New Curriculum “has been a quiet, complex, and long-range project” involving the painstaking work of thousands of reputable people who have been rewarded with “orders for more materials than anyone anticipated.” White assured the council that an alternative, supportive view from “inside” the denomination had been made available by Norman Vale and Wilbur Howard to be “distributed to Presbytery Christian Education and Publication conveners for use with local papers.”

Interestingly, White also observed that a number of the newspaper columnists who criticized the United Church did so for not teaching Christianity the way the columnists themselves understood it: “Some said they themselves had long since given up the church. The New Curriculum was presumably a retroactive excuse. They wanted the church to remain as something they themselves could do without.”

Predictably, the newspapers also received and published letters from concerned readers. Peter Gordon White called most of the writers “sincere people” who “read their newspaper religiously and their Bible intermittently.” They responded in the way that they did because for them “the New Curriculum was not the church at work

100 Given the dozen years of the curriculum’s development this would have included a vast number of people, both lay and ordained; prominent among these would have been many professors in United Church theological colleges who had become involved with the project in response to earlier challenges to the curriculum’s content.
101 White and his immediate circle were, in fact, prepared to resign if the delegates attempted to repudiate the New Curriculum at the 21st General Council. Had the New Curriculum opponents not overplayed their hand, they might have succeeded in their attempt to undermine the curriculum planning team. New Curriculum Consultation.
102 Peter Gordon White, Address to the 21st General Council. UCA, Board of Christian Education, United Church of Canada, 83.051C Series VII: subseries 8-box 272-file 4, 103 Ibid.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid.
proclaiming the gospel of the Living God for men and women living in the twentieth century. It was a shattering of the vacuum tube in which some unexamined statements were kept immaculate.\textsuperscript{106}

While the other mainline Protestant denominations declined the media invitation to throw stones, the most vocal critics of the New Curriculum to emerge in the wake of the newspaper accounts came from theologically conservative churches. “Within days of the initial \textit{Star} article, the \textit{Vancouver Province} reported criticism of the New Curriculum from Nazarene, Alliance, Pentecostal, and Baptist pastors. By August, the curriculum was being criticized on the evangelical radio program \textit{Back to the Bible}.\textsuperscript{107} Before the end of the summer, W. Gordon Brown of the Central Baptist Seminary in Toronto had released a detailed booklet of criticism, H.C. Slade of Jarvis St. Baptist Church had preached against the curriculum, and in October a negative editorial appeared in \textit{The Evangelical Christian}.\textsuperscript{108} In his address to the General Council, White described how representatives of Pentecostal and Evangelical groups “issued statements endorsing the Bible, supporting God, and damning the United Church. Groups which had never seen United Church publications in the past solemnly declared that they would never look at them in the future … passionate appeals were issued to Baptists and United Church members to leave their church.”\textsuperscript{109} He further noted that recently “newspaper comment has begun to change. So has the mail.” He attributed the sea change to recent helpful preaching by United Church clergy on matters of faith and doctrine.

White concluded his address to the 21\textsuperscript{st} General Council with a summary of what the New Curriculum (and the controversy it generated) offered to the United Church of Canada. He reiterated that the demand for a new church school curriculum was not imposed by a hierarchy; it first arose from United Church congregations themselves and it developed over many years. At the 21\textsuperscript{st} General Council several opportunities were now presenting themselves in the light of the New Curriculum’s launch. First, there was an opportunity “to emphasize the high calling of the laity in the church.” This is the reason that the New Curriculum is addressed to adults who will

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{107} Flatt, \textit{After Evangelicalism}, 121.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid. Paul B. Smith and Daniel L. Edmunson of People’s Church in Toronto also published a pamphlet: \textit{What’s Wrong With the New Curriculum? Seven Accusations against the New Curriculum of the United Church of Canada} (Willowdale: The People’s Church, 1964). The main point of the pamphlet is that the curriculum undermined the authority of the Bible while professing not to do so and that this strategy was fundamentally dishonest.
\textsuperscript{109} White, Address to the 21\textsuperscript{st} General Council.
be the ones to share their faith with the young.\(^{110}\) Second, there was an opportunity for evangelism. The curriculum is an important part of the church’s proclamation of the Gospel, its most important primary work. The curriculum lifts up the substance of the Christian faith which “has lain buried in our Basis of Union” and it provides United Church people with a vocabulary for countering both “the skeptic who would dismiss Jesus Christ as having nothing to say today,” and for dialogue “with those fearful people who would shut off the Living Word in favour of words and formulas—idols no longer meaningful or relevant.”\(^{111}\) Third, there is an opportunity to provide a word of assurance to those flummoxed by the “clash of opinions.” White was firm: the New Curriculum is a faithful reflection of the Christian faith commonly held and set down in the 1925 Basis of Union. It has been “painstakingly prepared by laypeople, ministers, Bible scholars, and theologians” who are in accord with the 1940 Statement of Faith. Their efforts have “been submitted to the most critical and rigorous examination by a multitude of people, both lay and clergy, before a word of it was printed.”\(^{112}\) Fourth, by supporting the curriculum, the General Council has an opportunity “to answer a cry for help.” This cry comes from groups, like Bishop Robinson’s “questioners”—those who have rejected the cartoon image of God that they acquired from well-meaning Sunday school teachers and who now find themselves theologically at sea: “We have an opportunity to demonstrate that this mission-minded church is no less ready to respond here in Canada to the seemingly strong, outwardly skeptical, and spiritually dispossessed persons of our increasingly complex society.”\(^{113}\)

White’s eloquent remarks may have dampened the controversy, but they did not eliminate it. In October, E.E. Long, General Council Secretary sent a letter to all United Church ministers in Ontario (the area reached by Toronto newspapers) in which he expressed his concern about the harsh criticisms of the New Curriculum. His letter stressed the embrace of the curriculum by most United Church congregations and reasserted White’s contention that most of the criticism was coming from outside the United Church, especially those of an ultra-fundamentalist persuasion.\(^{114}\) Long’s letter received an extensive reply from James R. Holden, a United Church minister from Levack, Ontario. Holden told Long that he had no intention of reading Long’s “pastoral letter” to either of his congregations at Levack and Cartier:

\(^{110}\) Ibid.
\(^{111}\) Ibid.
\(^{112}\) Ibid.
\(^{113}\) Ibid.
Something serious is taking place within our church, and no amount of casuistry on the part of the Executive of General Council can hide the plain facts. Through the New Curriculum the extreme liberals have won a temporary victory—they have captured the teaching processes of our church. I challenge the claim you have made concerning all the books of the New Curriculum that “they are faithful to the Scriptures.” If they were faithful there would not be the uneasiness which exists among many fine, sincere Christians, an uneasiness which you attribute to a bad press.  

Holden acknowledged that the curriculum contained much to recommend it, including “some excellent teaching material” and aids to church school teachers, but mixed up within it, he claimed, were “elements of false doctrine.” Holden was convinced not only that the curriculum as a whole suffered from an overtly liberal agenda; he also feared that the irresponsible liberals (by failing to safeguard the supreme authority and infallibility of the Bible) rendered the United Church vulnerable to the siren call of that most dangerous seductress, the Church of Rome:

In many respects we have a great church. But just where is our church heading? If the leadership of the church is captured by extreme liberals are we not in danger of becoming a Unitarian outfit in fact, if not in name, blown about by every wind of doctrine, and swayed by every new theological fad? If, within The United Church of Canada, not a single presbytery protests the errors in the New Curriculum then it will be a sign of decadence. It is worthy of note that some of our far out liberals, who have greatly reduced the authority of the Holy Scriptures, are becoming warm in their admiration for the authority of the autocratic Roman pontiff. 

In November, Wilbur Howard sent a package of material favourable to the curriculum to all the conference and presbytery publication conveners; it contained a sermon by George Birtch entitled “The Fundamentalist’s Dilemma.” As Flatt observes, in addition to official and semi-official statements from church leaders, “many of the church’s ministers defended the New Curriculum less formally in sermons, radio broadcasts, articles, and letters to the newspapers … they asserted that the New Curriculum was not only true to the United Church’s Statement of

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116 Ibid. Hyperbole aside, it would be reasonable to suggest that the attitude of the New Curriculum toward biblical interpretation was not greatly dissimilar to the 1965 Dei Verbum document of the Second Vatican Council.
117 Flatt, After Evangelicalism, 126.
Faith, the Basis of Union, and even the Apostles’ Creed, but was in fact closer to the teachings of these standards than previous curricula.”  

These efforts to distinguish between a United Church approach to the Bible and “fundamentalism” were reinforced in the December 1964 issue of the Observer that featured a segment on “Curriculum and the Bible.” The Observer also addressed the issue of the fundamentalist backlash against the curriculum by providing articles by E. Gilmour Smith and J.A. Davidson jointly entitled: “Does the United Church Really Accept the Bible?” With thinly veiled outrage, Smith recalled that “for 12 years some of the ablest scholars and most dedicated Christians in the United Church have been preparing the New Curriculum.” He continued, “we have the utmost confidence in their loyalty to the Word of God. Our church rejoices that this wonderful course of studies is now launched. But we are perturbed by letters appearing in the press expressing harsh criticism and mistrust.”  

Smith observed that there were “two very different approaches to biblical interpretation. Fundamentalist churches insist that a Bible which is inspired from cover to cover, must be literally interpreted.”  

The “main-line” churches, on the other hand, believe that the Bible is primarily a religious book written to tell of God’s search for humankind and humankind’s search for God. “It is concerned with being a religious revelation. Definitely it is not a textbook of science or geology or medicine.”  

J.A. Davidson similarly observed that within Protestantism there is a struggle for dominance between two principal approaches to the Bible: “these two approaches can conveniently, if not with complete adequacy, be labelled ‘the conservative or literalist’ and ‘the liberal or critical’. If you like terms with more emotional bite you can use ‘fundamentalist’ and ‘modernist.’”  

According to Davidson, the struggle between these two distinctive ways of approaching the sacred book had “become shatteringly conspicuous in the storm which has blown up around the New Curriculum for Christian education of the United Church.” Davidson frankly admits that the New Curriculum is firmly under girded by modern biblical criticism, but he feels compelled to point out that the word “criticism” does not in any way imply fault-finding. “It is, rather, a matter of rigorous examination and positive appreciation.”  

In addressing conservative voices speaking out against the United Church theology of the Bible, Davidson rehearses the long history of the

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118 Ibid., 126-127. Flatt considers this stance to be inaccurate.
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid., 21.
123 Ibid.
liberal-critical approach, the roots of which he finds sunk deep into the denomination’s Methodist heritage. Moreover, he says that a non-fundamentalist approach is one of the markers distinguishing a denomination from a sect: “whatever else may be new about the New Curriculum, its biblical orientation is certainly not new. And it should be noted that the modern critical approach to the Bible is very strongly represented in all the great branches of Protestantism throughout the world.”

Despite Peter Gordon White’s hopes to the contrary, Allen Spraggett and *The Star* were not finished with the New Curriculum. Spraggett’s comments throughout 1964 arrived in the context of a ten article series that discussed the religious divisions that were increasingly manifest in the early years of the 1960s and had taken hold of popular culture in the controversy following the publication of *Honest to God*. As Flatt notes, the provocative nature of the series “fit generally with the characteristic frankness in discussing religious divisions of those years ... and it was more immediately conceived as an aid to readers who were trying to make sense of what different Christians believed in the midst of the debate triggered by the New Curriculum.”

In the Christmas 1964 issue of *The Star* (contemporaneous with the extensive *Time* magazine cover feature outlining the ferment in North Atlantic Christianity) Spraggett offered a festive bonbon in the form of an article entitled: “Church Riddle: Did Adam Have a Navel?” He names this question as a “hot issue” for a million Canadians and 20 million Americans. He mentions that “one of the strongest fundamentalist criticisms of the United Church’s new Sunday school curriculum is that it teaches evolution as the way in which God created the world.” The article suggests that the traditional churches have (apparently recently) stopped fighting Darwin and have decided instead to embrace him. “The United Church’s Sunday school curriculum is typical of this attitude, it calls the early chapters of Genesis ‘myth’ – that is, a figurative expression of spiritual truth but in no sense scientific fact.”

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124 Ibid., 40.
125 Ibid., 166.
126 Allen Spraggett, “Church Riddle: Did Adam Have a Navel?” *Toronto Daily Star*, Saturday, 12 December 1964. Interestingly, *The Moncton Transcript* published a much more nuanced article in its review of a talk given by Frank Archibald in St. John’s Church. Archibald acknowledged that the New Curriculum had met with opposition and that “a Toronto paper” had announced that the United Church “was corrupting the Bible, teaching that Jesus Christ is a fraud.” Dr. Archibald outlined his own liberal/orthodox position that the Bible is “to be thought of as the oyster shell that contains the pearl; the pearl being Christ.” In its effort to support the Curriculum, Peter White, and the Board of Christian Education, the E&SS reprinted the Moncton article its 1965 Annual Report, *Listen to the World*, 86.
127 Ibid.
The Observer responded to these difficulties in two-part series penned by editor-in-chief A.C. Forrest. The February 1965 issue offered “The Crisis and the New Curriculum” followed in March by “Why Does the New Curriculum Continue to Produce Such Controversy?” Noting that Peter Gordon White had recently been the object of highly personal attacks for his role in the curriculum’s development, Forrest points out that during the twelve years of “almost endless study and discussion over the curriculum,” a time during which thousands of lay people and most United Church scholars were actively involved, “no one had ever seriously brought up the so-called modernist-fundamentalist argument. It had been assumed that the best modern scholarship and the newest insights would be available to the text-writers.”

The United Church, according to Forrest, “escaped the fundamentalist witch-hunts” that had shaken the Protestant world in prior decades. The New Curriculum had changed that picture: “For eight months the Gospel Halls, Pentecostal Tabernacles and People’s Churches have been entertaining their evening congregations with descriptions of United Church apostasy.”

Ironically by February 1965, “with fundamentalist pulpits still rumbling,” instead of the anticipated sale of 300,000 units of the New Curriculum, 740,000 units had been ordered. Forrest suggests that the root cause of the curriculum controversy likely lay in an historic failure to transmit knowledge from the academy to the church: “Sunday school editors and Christian education experts are convinced now that there has been a serious breakdown in communications. Somehow the biblical knowledge and interpretation that has been possessed by the teachers in the theological schools has never got through to the children in the Sunday school.”

As a result, many young people went from the Christian education programmes of United Churches to universities “afraid that they would have to make a choice between scientific truth and religious faith.”

Despite the high sales volume of curriculum materials in the first years of publication, Forrest warned that the disturbing new question is whether the New Curriculum would continue to be accepted. White, however, flippantly suggested that what Canadians may be suffering from is crisis-envy:

> In Canada we have no state church to command the nation and no lively minority to question and disturb it. Here church and culture have been welded together. We’ve never seen churches empty as in Britain or our church leaders shot as in Europe. We don’t carry

129 Ibid.
131 Ibid.
religion into politics like the Africans. We’re not a shrinking minority, like Christians in India or Japan, under pressure of other living religions. We don’t have the conflict of interest of the Christian patriot in a communist country.\textsuperscript{132}

It is nevertheless clear that during the winter of 1965, both White and Forrest failed to comprehend the depth or complexity of the problems the New Curriculum was actually facing and which, despite its noblest efforts, it would prove helpless to address. In fact, the happy melding of church and culture that had thus far kept the Canadian churches from emptying in the manner of their European counterparts was in the process of being stressed to the point of fracture.

3 Needed for the Future: A More Streamlined Model

Peter Gordon White was prophetic when he expressed concern about whether, as the years passed, the New Curriculum would continue to be accepted. As we now know, it would not. By the mid-1970s the United Church found itself producing yet another Christian education curriculum, this one produced on a shoestring budget. When the \textit{Loaves and Fishes} curriculum made its quiet appearance on mimeographed pages, there was no rejoicing about the beauty and value of hard cover permanence that had accompanied the launch of its ambitious and elegant predecessor. \textit{Loaves and Fishes} would do—for the time being. In \textit{Brief Halt at Mile 50}, a small book published to celebrate the United Church’s golden anniversary in 1975, writer Grace Lane observed that, while it had been conceived and experienced gestation in the optimistic fifties, the New Curriculum suffered from being at long last born during the turbulent sixties. In her assessment of what had so quickly undermined a curriculum intended to have a measure of durability, Lane suggests that neither the fundamentalist attack, nor the difficulties teachers encountered with the amount of preparation the curriculum demanded, were as devastating for the New Curriculum materials as the sixties decade itself, and the profound cultural shifts that accompanied it:

\begin{quote}
The biggest hurdle was timing; they reached the church just as the flood of writing, highly critical of the church, was making headlines. Christians were deluged with the news that “God is dead”, that chastity and marital loyalty were outmoded and that congregations were nothing but middle class clubs. For those whose faith and ethics were well grounded and who really knew
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid.
the church and her vast involvement in the human condition, this was taken in stride, but on the less mature its effect was devastating. Sunday School and church attendance dropped drastically, and some of the younger ministers turned to specialties such as counselling or chaplaincies. Others dropped out altogether.\textsuperscript{133}

Lane alludes to the significant numerical decline in church school attendance that became shockingly apparent in the second half of the 1960s decade and sent the denomination into damage control mode as it became increasingly clear the United Church brand of faith was in danger of not being transmitted to the next generation. The New Curriculum barely made it into its second three-year cycle when the\textit{Observer} published an anxiety-ridden article by church school teacher Joanne Strong in which she lamented the precipitous state of United Church Sunday Schools across the nation. Strong asked:

Where is Sunday school going? If you tell it the way it is in some churches, it’s going down the drain. In the last three years alone, United Church Sunday school enrolment has dropped 25\%. Across Canada, at last count it was 529,000—lower than it was in 1926 at Church Union. Yet the number of children under 15 in Canada has grown by three and a half million since then. The same slide is reported by almost every denomination, all over North America. Canadian Anglicans, for instance, predict that if present trends continue, the church school will be wiped out in ten years. Presbyterians and Baptists report the same story.\textsuperscript{134}

Flatt makes much of the one year drop of 92,000 between 1964 and 1965, a statistically abnormal drop for which he solidly blames the New Curriculum\textsuperscript{135} (even though the drop could just as easily represent a decision by parents to embrace the anti-institutional spirit of books like\textit{Honest to God} by keeping their children out of the church school). In her own attempt to diagnose what ailed the church school, Strong observed that the middle class Protestant culture of the second half of the decade was not the optimistic one that had erected classrooms and recreation halls in United Churches during the postwar era. Even the nature of the Sabbath had altered markedly in the wake of the sports and entertainment opportunities enticingly available to the increasingly prosperous middle class that was the denomination’s primary constituency. Church leaders who had managed to resign themselves to the near impossibility of holding classes during the summer months found that they were now encountered the decimation

\textsuperscript{133} Grace Lane, \textit{A Brief Halt at Mile 50} (Toronto: The United Church Publishing House, 1974), 83.
\textsuperscript{134} Joanne Strong, “Rx for the Sunday School,” \textit{UCO}, August 1, 1968, 10.
\textsuperscript{135} Flatt, The ‘New Curriculum’ Controversy, 310-311.
wrought by skiing season during the crucial education months of December to April. According to Strong, some congregations moved their church school programmes away from Sundays to weekdays while others dropped them altogether. She notes that some religious educators were now categorizing the Sunday school as one method among many of providing Christian education. The educators admitted that they were actively searching for credible alternatives. “Many a lay volunteer fed up with the shortage of teachers, inconsistent attendance and apathetic pupils wish they’d find one.”

Strong was aware of the many voices both within and without the United Church that blamed the New Curriculum for the educational challenges now being faced across the country, but she was less willing than they to condemn it:

The United Church’s New Curriculum was supposed to spur on the Sunday school. Yet enrolment has gone steadily down ever since it was introduced. There may be a few who connect it directly with the decline. But most Sunday school personnel think it greatly improved the course of study. That it has not reversed the downward trend indicates the power of the forces that challenge the old Sunday school, and in fact all the old patterns of the church.

A more credible villain in the scenario of decline was the future shock birthed by the changed culture of Canada itself. The unofficial religion of the New Age would seemingly not be a new and improved brand of liberal Christianity; instead, as the decade wore on it was becoming more and more evident that Canadian culture was moving instead in the direction of secular humanism. The problem facing the United Church was not a simple problem with a simple solution. It wasn’t just that people were going away on weekends, says Strong, “there is also secularism”—people have other things to do on Sundays that are thought to be more congenial to family togetherness and conducive to “escaping the pressures of modern life.” The New Curriculum, she says, can hardly be held responsible for “galloping secularism, changed weekend patterns” and “a new mobility in which one in four families move every year cutting their ties with the community church”—but neither was the curriculum capable of solving any of

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137 Ibid. Strong is likely responding to an article by J. Berkley Reynolds in the February 1968 issue of the Observer that outlined the beginnings of the United Church Renewal Fellowship, an organization of conservatives within the denomination who demanded a return to “sound biblical theology” and emphasized the authority of The Basis of Union. The United Church Renewal Fellowship denounced the New Curriculum as “unacceptable.” According to Reynolds, the UCRF intended to produce its own literature as an alternative to the New Curriculum and the Observer both of which had been weighed in the balance and found wanting. See J. Berkley Reynolds, “The Hot New Fight … for the Good Old Faith,” UCO, February 1968, 12-13, 40.
138 Ibid.
these problems. And what would the future hold for a congregation that couldn’t transmit a faith that it didn’t have? Strong notes the greater success of “fundamentalist churches” in populating their church schools and she offers some potential salves to the ailing church schools. In addition to alternative times and varieties of church school she remarks on the potential for improvement inherent in an increased professionalization of church school teaching. There is hope: for as long as there are church people who care about their faith and about transmitting it, Sunday schools will survive: “But to evade the issue, to limp along and to wring one’s hands is courting disaster.”

Two years later (1970) the Observer again tackled the vexatious issue of Christian Education with a statistic-packed feature article compiled by James Taylor, “What’s Happening to Our Sunday Schools?” The article offered the results of an Observer reader survey along with an analysis of their implications for the church. Taylor announced that faced with an obvious crisis, the Board of Christian Education was supporting the schools where they were strong, but where they were not it encouraged people to look for better methods of religious education. However, “the differing directions that these experiments in religious education take reveal the tensions tearing the church.” The results of the survey highlighted the extent of fragmentation within a denomination that viewed itself as “united”. The statistics displayed “striding differences between provinces, between ages, between metropolitan and rural areas, and between active and inactive church school families. The results also show widely divergent opinions concerning the merits of present Sunday schools, on what should be done to improve them, and even on what the purpose of a Sunday school is.”

The bleak statistics also revealed that the 1969 enrolment of teachers and pupils was 425,467—a little more than half of the enrolment eight years previously and the lowest since church union. Moreover, they showed that the rate of decline was steadily increasing (6% in 1966; 7% in 1967; 9% in 1968; 12% in 1969). The losses were unlikely to level off any time soon, since they were manifesting in the nursery and kindergarten departments and not among older children.

In addition to the complications arising from the end of the postwar baby boom, the survey also tackled the issue of the New Curriculum, its strengths and weaknesses. The survey revealed that “almost everyone who has taught the New Curriculum approves of it. On the other
hand, a majority of those who have never taught it (including 40 who don’t know if their church is still using it) oppose it.” The survey indicated an urban/rural divide in support for the curriculum with those in rural areas opposing its use 2 to 1. This was not, however, the only divide in attitudes toward Christian education within the denomination: “the principal support for a more overtly biblical curriculum comes from the over-50 age group … They chose the Bible as the best way to revive church schools. In contrast, the under-50’s (the bulk of parents and teachers today) preferred giving short term courses on specific subjects, trying days other than Sunday, studying contemporary concerns, and using only qualified teachers.” In addressing the curriculum materials themselves, Taylor noted that much of the dissent about their use was centred on the Bible. Further, there was a perception that the Board of Christian Education refused to listen to those inside the United Church whose views on biblical authority and interpretation might be labeled conservative. For its part, the board appeared to be equally exasperated. As a board member interviewed for the Observer article observed:

You could clean out the whole nest of us here, and bring in a ‘pure Bible’ group, and the church would still have a fight on its hands, because the new group would have to contend with the people—and we’re convinced it’s a majority—who don’t think that the old ways are still the best ways. I don’t believe that one curriculum can satisfy the church anymore. In a way, the New Curriculum was probably the last gasp of uniformity for a national church. Now we have pluralism— and we have to learn to live with it.

One of the chief difficulties, according to Taylor, was embedded in the definition of a trigger word: “myth.” For the highly educated members of the Board of Christian Education, a myth was “a story, often apparently historical, that contains some of the deepest truths of human nature and religious experience.” Owing to the narrowing of the word’s meaning in popular consciousness, however, “to most people, a myth is something untrue, and a Bible of myths is a blow at the foundations of their faith.” Taylor noted the wide disparity between the board’s perceptions (often viewed as scholarly or elitist) and the thinking of most United Church congregations. This disparity led both to the frequent charge that the New Curriculum is unbiblical and to the board’s counter charge that “it’s entirely biblical!” Taylor did, however,

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143 Ibid.
144 Ibid.
145 Ibid.
146 Ibid.
refute the accusation being leveled at the New Curriculum that it was chiefly responsible for the haemorrhaging of Sunday school students in the United Church:

Certainly the New Curriculum can’t be blamed entirely for the disaster in our Sunday schools. The plunge in attendance started in 1961, three years before the New Curriculum was introduced in a barrage of criticism—most of which, incidentally, came from other denominations. Besides, if the New Curriculum were the cause, other denominations wouldn’t have been affected. But the Anglican Church, for example, has dropped from 312,000 pupils in 1958 to 176,000 in 1968, and is even lower now … The Presbyterians went from 122,000 to 97,000 since 1961. Many Baptist congregations have reported serious drops; on the national level, their attendance figures are levelling off instead of continuing to increase, with more and more teenagers dropping out.\(^{147}\)

Taylor, like Joanne Strong, was willing to admit that the more conservative denominations were more successful in populating their Christian Education programmes, but he patronizingly maintained that these results were often attained by using “prizes and gimmicks to spur attendance.”\(^{148}\)

Another problem for the curriculum appeared to be that its noble ambition to achieve hard-backed permanence was probably flawed. Moreover, it increasingly seemed to lack the kind of flexibility necessary in a rapidly shifting technological culture. According to Taylor,

the New Curriculum may be pretty dull stuff, today. However imaginative it may have been originally, it has been far surpassed by trends in public education, TV, and audio-visual stimulation, and in general awareness and humanitarian concern. And most teachers seem to agree that it’s no longer adequate to grasp a child’s interest—but it can’t be blamed for all that has happened in Sunday Schools.\(^{149}\)

Taylor was impatient with nostalgia-bathed critics who were convinced that the resurrection of the Sunday schools might be achieved by returning them to the pedagogical principles and the curricula of yesteryear. He suggested that the statistics in the Observer survey needed to be viewed within the context of what had actually happened in the United Church since the Second World War. The numbers of candidates for the ministry, baptisms and enrolments in midweek

\(^{147}\) Ibid., 14.
\(^{148}\) Ibid.
\(^{149}\) Ibid.
activities had peaked fifteen years after the war (as they had done following World War I) and then moved downward. And, he pronounced, “if the Sunday schools of the 40’s and early 50’s failed then, there’s no point going back to that style now.”

Taylor observed that in the wake of the crisis, there was an uncomfortable silence in the upper echelons of the denomination: the United Church’s Board of Christian Education was now declining to answer such basic questions as what can we do? or how can we make God a living experience in Christian education? The personnel of the board appeared to be exhausted and there were no longer fiscal resources available to cope with the New Curriculum’s apparent failure to demonstrate staying power: “They state that, economically and realistically, they can no longer try to supply all the answers a church needs to induct its youth into religion.” The board suggested that in the New Age people must find their own answers – and then the board will help to find the appropriate resources to put such programmes into action. “After the present three-year cycle of the New Curriculum ends, in 1973, congregations will be on their own; C.E. has no plans to revise or replace the New Curriculum.”

Taylor’s article ends with excerpts from the opinions of those who sent notes and letters along with their Observer survey questionnaires. These responses provide another helpful evaluation from the time of the strengths and weaknesses of the New Curriculum. Predictably, several of the excerpts chosen by the editors focused on the charge that the New Curriculum was unfaithful to the Bible “as the inspired word of God” and proclaimed that it had “ruined” the Sunday school. Others, however, drew attention to the extreme demands that the curriculum makes on church school teachers who find themselves “very tired before the year is up.” One writer was positive about the materials themselves but noted that “with the old lessons you didn’t have to do too much preparation, but with the new ones, not so.” Another suggested that there was a “mass of fine material in the curriculum” but that it “scares” many teachers, assumes a familiarity and facility with the biblical text that “does not exist in our families” and quite simply “demands more effort” than volunteer teachers were prepared to give. Other writers observed that the curriculum “requires teacher-trained personnel” and that it seemed primarily to be designed for urban churches with greater access to resources:

My wife and I taught Sunday school for seven years and felt we were successful with the children. When the New Curriculum was

150 Ibid.
151 Ibid.
introduced, we were unable to find time to understand all the lessons, let alone put them across to the classes. Our feeling is that to understand the New Curriculum properly, one must have more than a Grade XII education. And in a village of 400, where do you find (such people)?\textsuperscript{152}

Significantly, some respondents focused more broadly on important shifts in Canadian culture that affected the New Curriculum’s reception and its effectiveness in the changed reality of the late 1960s. A working mother of four children admonished that she was “ruled by the clock six days a week” and refused to be on Sunday. Consequently her children were not encouraged to attend church school. Another letter writer offered to speak plainly (even at the risk of predicting stormy weather ahead): “this may hurt, but the truth is that with having to work about six and a half days a week I have more peace of mind without the church.”\textsuperscript{153}

In his 1966 review of the New Curriculum for the journal \textit{Religious Education} where he compared the process of birthing the New Curriculum to the much ballyhooed arrival of the Ford Edsel, Ronald Fellows foresaw a number of the issues that would eventually compromise the “relevance” of two million dollars and a dozen years of development. He quotes R.M. Freeman, a curriculum study guide author, who says that “genuine Bible study does not stop with knowledge of what is happening ‘away back when.’ We must go on to seek in the passage under study the Word of God for us now.”\textsuperscript{154} Fellows agrees this is a true statement, but he is unsure in the changed reality of the 1960s that ‘genuine Bible study’ is actually possible for the majority of people on the North American continent. “If you can find children, young people, and adults who are sold on the relevance of the Bible and are eager to learn what it has to say to them, you can help them to make the connection between Jesus Christ about whom they read and the Christian life today. But persons with those concerns are few and far between.”\textsuperscript{155} Further, the planners of the curriculum, according to Fellows, “have high hopes about the amount of intensive work their learners will do … Teachers don’t really get off very easily either … It can’t be said that the writers of the New Curriculum are aiming too low. I suspect they might be erring in the other direction.”\textsuperscript{156} Fellows’ most serious objection to the curriculum structure, however, centres not on whether the Bible is accorded sufficient reverence, but on the way that the materials approach the crucial intersection of Bible and student. It is, after all, the life of the student that the teacher

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., 16.
\textsuperscript{154} Fellows, “The ‘New Curriculum’ of the United Church of Canada,” 246.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid.
should wish to influence.\textsuperscript{157} Ironically, Fellows’ criticism suggests that the original three questions around which the curriculum workshop had originally hoped to frame the United Church’s materials (“Who am I?; Who is my neighbour?; Who is God?) might actually have provided better traction during the ferment of the 1960s than the neo-orthodox structure that emerged as a compromise after the exhaustive years of consultation with the wider church. Moreover, by freezing the curriculum content in handsome hardcover books, the curriculum planners guaranteed that even when the materials attempted to meld seamlessly with the life situation of the learner, obsolescence was built in.\textsuperscript{158} In other words, by the end of the long sixties the United Church seemed to be the proud owner of a stalling Edsel.

Flatt’s conclusions about the shortcomings of the curriculum are (not surprisingly) more scathing than those of Fellows. For Flatt the introduction of the New Curriculum represented “the most significant event in the long process of jettisoning the United Church’s evangelical past.”\textsuperscript{159} He characterizes the work of the curriculum planners as deliberately iconoclastic and a planned and deliberate “attack” on evangelicals by the church’s liberal ecumenist elite. Evangelicalism was thus, he claims, “evicted” from the denomination. In the concluding paragraph of his article on the New Curriculum controversy, however, Flatt brings his argument into a larger arena. He indicates that the change he perceives in the public identity of the United Church in the 1960s needs, in turn, to be considered in the light of “the wider religious crisis rocking mainline Protestant churches throughout the Western world.”\textsuperscript{160} He expresses “little doubt” that liberal orientation of the curriculum contributed to the decline of United Church Sunday school enrolment. Flatt indicates a correlation between such changes in the 1960s “and the numerical decline that has since afflicted not only the United Church but other mainline denominations in Canada—and thereby contributed to dechristianization more generally.”\textsuperscript{161} Such a view locates Flatt firmly in the camp that believes that had the United Church done a better job of managing the crisis engendered by 1960s ferment (presumably by firmly embracing revivalist evangelicalism) the denomination might have avoided the kind of decline that it has

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{158} For example, \textit{God is Always With Us}, Audrey McKim’s charming reading book for the primary child that had been readyed in time for the curriculum launch in 1964, offers a version of what seemed to constitute normative family life in early 1960s Canada. The illustrations of a “normal” United Church family and the role of females in it were becoming increasingly remote from lived reality especially as married women with children continued to enter the Canadian workforce in unprecedented numbers. See Audrey McKim, \textit{God is Always with Us: a Reading Book for the Primary Child, His Parents and His Teacher} (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1964).
\textsuperscript{159} Flatt, \textit{After Evangelicalism}, 140.
\textsuperscript{160} Flatt, “The ‘New Curriculum Controversy,’” 312-313.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 313.
continued to experience. There is scant evidence, however, that those children lost to United Church Sunday schools in the 1960s relocated in smaller evangelical churches and contributed significantly to their growth. More likely, they re-located to worship in hockey arenas or family rooms containing television sets. Peter Gordon White and his colleagues may well have imagined by 1964 that they were delivering a New Curriculum worthy of a New Church in a New Age. Flatt, on the other hand, implies that had the denomination managed the crisis differently (through an education programme that adhered to evangelical principles) it would have fared much better. The sad fact is that no church school curriculum, whether liberal or conservative in its theological content, would have prevented dechristianization from gaining ground in the 1960s and in the larger picture, an alleged eviction of evangelicalism from the United Church is less significant than the eviction of Christianity from the Canadian public square.
Chapter 3

Ut omnes unum sint

No faith, no church, no philosophy or ideology has among us such a strong and central position that it can claim to have a monopoly and give shape to the life of society as a whole. This pluralism, this diversity with regard to our convictions about the meaning of life, has come to stay ... Pluralism means that no church, no philosophy, can run the show. The church is thrown back on its true task. It can only live as a servant church. That does not mean a withdrawal from society, but it means a different form of presence in society.

W.A. Visser ‘t Hooft

By the 1960s a Christian ecumenical momentum that been building since the late nineteenth century seemed poised to make real progress. The United Church of Canada had itself been the product of ecumenical initiative and, of consequence, “the expectation of an ever-widening unity had helped to anchor its founding vision.” In 1960 the General Council, noting lacklustre progress in the years following the war, urged a re-energizing of ecumenical co-operation. As the decade advanced, bringing with it the heightened sense that there was a New Age dawning, Canadian churches that had previously been rivals discovered common ground in birthing a new church for this New Age. The titles of the E&SS annual reports of these years reflect ecumenical concerns: Close the Chasm, Breaking the Barriers, Listen to the World. It is no surprise, then, that in his first report as E&SS secretary Ray Hord articulated for United Church readers his sense of ecumenical urgency. Unity mattered not only to the church but to the planet: barriers of “pride, ignorance, prejudice, ideology, and poverty” must come down if there were ever to be either peace or justice on earth.

In his longing for unity Hord reflected the zeitgeist of the 1960s Christian family. Even the Roman Catholic pontiff addressed the pressing need for a coming together of the whole church, the “mystical flock.” Two international gatherings early in the 1960s reified this increasingly widespread desire to usher Christianity into a New Age of ecumenical co-operation, in part through a process of updating that Pope John XXIII called aggiornamento. Both of these

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1 The Listener, BBC, March 20, 1967.
2 Beardsall, “And Whether Pigs Have Wings,” 106.
3 J.R. Hord, “Introduction,” Breaking the Barriers, 1. In his R.P MacKay lectures Kenneth McMillan, a Presbyterian minister who was General Secretary of the Canadian Bible Society, makes a similar observation: “We are witnessing a turning point in humanity’s long search for unity. The urge towards unity is one of the positive aspects of the modern world.” McMillan, 16.
“ecumenical” landmark meetings occurred during a period when the liberal leadership of the United Church was emphasizing that its own gaze would need to be outward if the denomination were to pass the 1960s test of “relevance.” The Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches met over eighteen days in New Delhi during Advent, 1961. Another Advent gathering that was to have considerable significance for world Christianity was the Second Vatican Council which convened in Rome between 1962 and 1965. Although the WCC version of “una sancta ecclesia” was markedly different from the more rarefied dream of the Second Vatican Council, both assemblies influenced the theology and liturgy of the United Church of the early 1960s as it increasingly began to self-identify as a “liberal ecumenical” rather than a “liberal evangelical” denomination (especially as the meaning of the latter term narrowed). Both international meetings also influenced a re-invigorated attempt to concretize the spirit of ecumenism through union of the United and Anglican Churches in Canada, a negotiation that had been sputtering for two decades. The ecumenical spirit of the emerging 1960s New Age added new urgency to the union process as both denominations sought to honour the words of Christ’s priestly prayer “that all may be One.” By the end of the long sixties, however, this renewed ecumenical enthusiasm seemed to evaporate as it became apparent that the notion(s) of Christendom that both denominations imagined they were knitting together no longer existed. Paradoxically, in what might be called a post-denominational era, denominational identities that had earlier in the decade seemed to be stumbling blocks to the realization of a new church for the New Age re-emerged as important survival tools.

4 In the midst of the Second World War, the General Synod of the Church of England in Canada, alarmed by world divisions but also buoyed by the celebration of its 1943 jubilee year, had issued an invitation to representatives of any Christian communion that might share its hopes and aspirations for a united Christendom to join with it in “conversations.” The only denomination that offered itself as a potential suitor was the United Church of Canada.

5 Entering into what might be termed a post-denominational era, denominational identities that had earlier in the decade seemed to be stumbling blocks to the realization of a new church for the New Age re-emerged as important survival tools. As a result of the Anglican bishops’ 1975 rejection of the union plan, the United Church “was delivered at last from what had become a burdensome commitment and, better still, did not need to blame itself for what happened.”

1 A Letter from Christ to His World

While the Roman Catholics learned to speak joyfully of a potential re-unification of Christ’s body, the language of the World Council of Churches tended to be more cautious and pragmatic.
In its 1950 Toronto Statement\textsuperscript{7} the WCC took a \textit{via negativa} to clarify its own purpose and identity: “It is not a superchurch. It is not the world church. It is not the Una Sancta of which the Creeds speak. This misunderstanding arises again and again although it has been denied as clearly as possible in official pronouncements of the Council.”\textsuperscript{8} Membership in the WCC did not mean that the individual churches belonged to a body that could make decisions on their behalf; rather, “each church retains the constitutional right to ratify or to reject utterances or actions of the Council. The ‘authority’ of the Council consists only ‘in the weight which it carries with the churches by its own wisdom’ (William Temple).”\textsuperscript{9}

Even before Ray Hord succeeded J.R. Mutchmor as its secretary, the E&SS as a representative body had declared itself firmly committed both to the notion that ecumenism and evangelism were wedded and to the United Church’s enthusiastic participation in the work of the WCC. Included directly under the important subheading “Evangelism” in the board’s 1962 Annual Report and intended to underscore the connection between ecumenism and evangelism in the United Church was a “message” from the WCC Third Assembly: “We rejoice and thank God that we experience here a fellowship as deep as before and now wider.” New member churches were now coming into the ecumenical body in unprecedented numbers, including those in the Orthodox tradition of Eastern Christendom as well as denominations from Africa, Asia, Latin America and other parts of the world who increasingly warmed to the WCC vision of a “common calling to witness, service and unity.”\textsuperscript{10} Moreover, by the time of the New Delhi Assembly, the WCC reported that all over the world in this exciting 1960s decade, new possibilities of “life, freedom and prosperity” were “being actively, even passionately pursued.” The WCC warned that the down side of an increasingly technologically expert society was the ongoing threat of unprecedented destruction through war. The council was, however, prepared to take the more optimistic stance that humankind cannot be paralysed by these dark clouds.

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{10} World Council of Churches, “Message of the World Council of Churches,” \textit{Close the Chasm}, 109. Also of significance was a tightening of the WCC membership requirement that shows the influence of the Orthodox churches. The New Delhi Assembly affirmed belief in the Holy Trinity and the Scriptural teachings concerning Christ as a prerequisite for membership. Formerly the council was a self-described “fellowship of churches which accept our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour.” See “World Churches Council asserts Belief in Trinity,” \textit{Close the Chasm}, 110.
Therefore, “the momentum of change is not reduced.”\textsuperscript{11} According to the WCC, there is no greater service to humanity at this juncture than to make humanity aware of the living Christ and no more effective witness than a life offered in service: “We need to think out together in concrete terms the forms of Christian service for today and together act upon them.”\textsuperscript{12} Such thinking and acting together energized a renewed search for the fullness of Christian unity: “We need for this purpose every member of the Christian family, of Eastern and Western tradition, ancient churches and younger churches, men and women, young and old, of every race and every nation. Our brethren in Christ are given to us, not chosen by us.”\textsuperscript{13} Christian people are themselves, wherever they may be, a letter from Christ to His world.\textsuperscript{14}

Appropriately in such context, a progress report on Christian unity appeared as part of the important work of the Third Assembly and was reprinted by the E&SS in \textit{Close the Chasm}. This progress report, intended further to clarify the Toronto Statement, had been considered in two deliberative sessions of the full Assembly and amended in the light of the subsequent debate; the Assembly then voted to approve the content and to commend it to member churches for study and appropriate action. As \textit{Observer} editor A.C. Forrest summarized in his assessment of the Assembly’s work for the benefit of United Church readers: “You could be impatient, critical, frustrated at New Delhi. But you could not deny the hope that this might prove to be a high moment in the long life of a divided church.”\textsuperscript{15}

A second item devoted to the New Delhi Assembly in \textit{Close the Chasm} was a reprint from \textit{Christianity Today} offering: “Highlights of the WCC Assembly.” It noted, in addition to the admission of the Russian Orthodox Church to council membership, other items of significance that included the adoption of an appeal to world governments to deal with the dangerous climate of suspicion that could lead to catastrophic war. The Assembly also endorsed a report on Christian witness that urged the creation of “cells of Christian laymen and women in areas where the church has lost contact with the masses.”\textsuperscript{16} Emphasized through the use of bold and italic type in the Annual Report was news of the approval of \textit{“the first detailed plan for Christian unity ever acted on by a WCC assembly.”} Doubtless lending support for the United Church’s own union conversation with the Anglicans, the WCC plan called for “interlocking

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} A.C. Forrest, “The Significance of New Delhi,” \textit{UCO}, February 1, 1962, 10.
\textsuperscript{16} “Highlights of the WCC Assembly,” \textit{Close the Chasm}, 111.
communities of churches” that would recognize each other’s members and ministers and allow joint participation in communion.” A further unity report that the Assembly endorsed called for “removal of barriers which keep members of different churches from taking communion together.”17

The New Delhi Assembly’s “Call to Christian Unity” (December 4, 1961) was declared “a major step” forward from the Toronto Statement; it marked the first time that the World Council had traced the framework of its goal of Christian unity. Indicating that the proposal was both exciting and costly, the Assembly pointed out that the process “will involve nothing less than a death and rebirth of many forms of church life as we have known them.”18 The conditions and relationships attendant on the unity goal were set forth in a 9,000-word guide book that did not propose any single centralized ecclesiastical organization but instead envisaged unity as “a kind of merging of churches on local, national and international levels into interlocking communities acknowledging the validity of each other’s practices and working together.”19 While the Assembly frankly admitted that all churches were not yet of common mind on the means of achieving such a lofty goal, various steps were recommended for “ironing out such problems as mutual study, baptism, ordination, communion, and others that now cause roadblocks.”20

In hopeful language, the “Unity” section of the New Delhi Report affirmed that unity is both God’s will and gift to the church. Nevertheless, the WCC quickly acknowledged that while member churches were intent on furthering the cause of church unity, there was much disagreement on “the interpretation and means of achieving the goal.” Unity, says the Report, does not imply uniformity of organization, rite or expression.21 The report proclaimed that mission and service belong to the whole church which is called by God to go out into the world to witness and serve. If it is to be effective, a call to unity is an imperative: “the vision of one Church proclaiming one Gospel to the whole world becomes more vivid and the experience and expression of our given unity more real. There is an inescapable relation between the fulfilment

17 Ibid.
18 World Council of Churches, “A Call to Christian Unity,” Close the Chasm, 112.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., 113. The “Call to Christian Unity” was amplified by an excerpt from The Church Times, November 5, 1961, describing how thirty-two leading Anglican theologians had sent an “open letter” to the archbishops of Canterbury and York that affirmed the essential integrity of both episcopal and non-episcopal ordination and urged the removal of barriers to intercommunion between members of such Christian bodies. See “More Liberal Intercommunion Requested,” Close the Chasm, 113.
21 Ibid., 117.
of the Church’s missionary obligation and the recovery of her visible unity.”

Because the diverse understanding of the nature of ministry in the various Christian denominations is “one of the most serious barriers to unity” (as the Canadian union negotiators by now well-knew) the achievement “of a ministry accepted by all would largely resolve the issues involved in the mutual recognition of members.”

Meanwhile, the WCC noted a need for increased opportunities for growing together as local churches through common worship, Bible study groups, prayer cells, joint visitation and common witness. The report further observed that in addition to Asian and African Christians, the younger generation in particular was becoming increasingly intolerant of historic denominational divisions in the more fluid culture of the 1960s: “We must meet, in a responsible fashion, the rising tide of impatience amongst many young people, and indeed among many others, for more prompt and certain progress, toward mutual understanding in this most central and vital experience of Christian worship and witness.”

Breaking the Barriers, the E&SS Annual Report for 1964, continued the ecumenical theme announced in Ray Hord’s Secretary’s Report via the reprint of an article offering an evaluation of the current state of the ecumenical movement written by Eugene Caron Blake.

Blake begins his article by tracing the movement’s history which, he says, in its modern phase dates to the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference of 1910. The ecumenical movement has, however, been “increasing in geometrical progression” since then. Until 1962 it was possible to speak in “purely Protestant and Eastern Orthodox terms” but there is now an important new voice in ecumenicity: since the first vote of the Second Vatican Council it has become clear that the Roman Catholic Church “has been perhaps more deeply affected by the movement than the churches and churchmen who until a year ago thought they owned it.”

No denomination, says Blake, can afford to ignore the ecumenical movement and continue as if it were the only Christian church carrying out business as usual, “for God has put us in His world at a challenging time.” The ecumenical movement has “become a revolution in life and faith—a part of a world wide revolution not confined to religious matters.” The denomination that pretends that nothing

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22 Ibid., 121.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., 128.
25 Blake was Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, The United Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. He would later become the second General Secretary of the WCC.
has happened will be passed by and “will become a rigid relic quite irrelevant to God’s plan for His people.”

2 The Second Vatican Council

Perhaps the most significant manifestation of the shape-shifting ecumenical reality of the 1960s was the Second Vatican Council. Not only did the council have a profound influence over the future course of ecumenism, it also subtly affected churches like the United Church of Canada. The outcome of the council’s deliberations both challenged the denomination’s self-identity and influenced changes in denominational worship patterns as the United Church realized it needed its own aggiornamento in order both to provide “relevant” worship for Canadian Christians in the New Age and to move closer to the practices of Anglican brothers and sisters with whom union negotiations finally seemed to be bearing fruit.

The extraordinary nature of Vatican II set it apart from its predecessor councils in almost every way. Among the most impressive characteristics of this gathering were its massive proportions, its international breadth, and the scope and variety of the issues that it addressed. Pope John XXIII’s decision to admit non-Roman Catholic observers as part of the integral body was also unprecedented and it allowed deliberations to be widely reviewed both by scholars and representatives of non-Roman churches who did not necessarily share in many of the assumptions on which Roman Catholic doctrine and practice were based. The extension of the invitation to become official observers pre-disposed many Protestants, including leaders and members of the United Church, to view the proceedings in Rome with a beatitude that would have inspired incredulous wonder in the church members of previous generations, many of whom wore an implacable anti-Catholicism as a badge of purpose and identity. The world media also took an excited interest in the events of the council. By the time of Vatican II, radio and television allowed the transmission of news swiftly around the globe, while the very photogenic spectacle of the council made it newsworthy, quite apart from the doctrinal deliberations taking place. Further, the kindly, rotund Pope John XXIII, “the best pope Protestants ever had,” was himself a genial figure who shrewdly used the media to his advantage and who, of consequence,

27 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
achieved a kind of world celebrity status not previously enjoyed by any pontiff. *Time* magazine named John XXIII “man of the year” for 1962 and his visage was featured on the magazine’s cover. Perhaps more miraculously, given the rabidly anti-Roman rhetoric adduced by the United Church of Canada during its first decades, Pope John XXIII’s portrait appeared on the cover of the October 1962 issue of the *Observer*, which also featured within its pages a generous encomium by one of the Vatican II observers, the Auburn professor of systematic theology at Union Seminary, Robert McAfee Brown. Brown’s account of John XXIII is one of a series of articles in the *Observer* that reported the events of the Vatican Council and the council’s impact not only on Roman Catholics but also on the lives of Protestant neighbours. Such attention suggested, in turn, that the pope’s wish for the separated churches “that the council may be also to their advantage” was in the process of fulfillment.

Although Pope John XXIII’s noble dream of re-integrating those “separated brethren” into one holy, catholic and apostolic church proved optimistic, the opening of the Second Vatican Council seemed to be another indicator in the early 1960s that the coming New Age would be intentionally ecumenical in its outlook. Like Ray Hord and the United Church’s E&SS, John XXIII was convinced that the Roman Catholic Church needed to learn to “listen to the world” if it had any hope of living into its pastoral responsibilities. It is clear from a reading of the sixteen documents that form the Second Vatican Council’s legacy that many of those meeting day after day in nave of St. Peter’s were animated by the potentialities of a New Age, but they were also aware that they needed to discern ecclesial strategies to cope with rapidly shifting sands of technology and culture. If coverage in the *Observer* is any indication, the Second Vatican Council’s efforts at Roman Catholic renewal were viewed with favour by many Protestants. Moreover, Mark Noll in “What Happened to Christian Canada?” affirms that as critical as the proceedings of the Second Vatican Council were to Canada’s Roman Catholics, they may have been almost as important for its Protestants, and especially the United Church—though not always in an unambiguously positive way. Noll reiterates that a wealth of scholarship has documented how important a negative image of the Roman Catholic Church had been to Protestant identity from the eighteenth century onward: “To be an active Protestant in

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31 Robert McAfee Brown, “Pope John’s Vatican Council,” *UCO*, October 15, 1962, 15-17, 22. Brown’s article was originally published in *Presbyterian Life*.


many parts of the world was of course to believe and practice certain Protestant verities. But it was also to be self-consciously and very seriously anti-Roman Catholic.”

Drawing from this anti-Roman well, the United Church had articulated its firm anti-Catholic stance in works like the postwar booklet *What’s the Difference?* By the end of the 1960s, had that booklet been revised in the light of Vatican II’s sunny ways, it would have been much shorter.

The extent of anti-Roman Catholic sentiment in the United Church should not be underestimated. In his introduction to *The Diaries of Northrop Frye, 1942-1955*, Robert D. Denham reports that Frye, an ordained United Church minister, teacher and public intellectual, “remained within the orbit of liberal Protestantism, even though he had rather given up on most of its institutional forms.”

During his lifetime Frye grew disillusioned with churches, his own in particular; nevertheless, one way in which he was typical of many of the liberal Protestants who inhabited the United Church in the mid-twentieth century was his aggressively negative attitude toward the Roman Catholic Church. The Frye diaries, Denham observes, “like the rest of Frye’s work, contain a great deal of anti-Catholic sentiment.” His volume for 1949, for example, speaks of institutional Catholicism as anti-liberal and anti-democratic. Elsewhere he defines the Roman Church as Machiavellian in its militancy and says that “if, say, a daughter of mine turned Catholic, I’d feel more bitter than if she turned anything else.”

Denham points out that in one diary entry Frye reflects on why he is saddened when he hears that someone has converted to Roman Catholicism:

> It isn’t the fact that Catholic converts have to assent that they believe absurd doctrines that bothers me. It’s really, at bottom, resentment against Protestantism, especially this fatuous United Church, for being so miserably lacking in intellectual integrity. Protestantism is done for here, unless it listens to a few prophets. I don’t want a Church of any kind but if, say, a student of mine were quavering over conversion to Catholicism, I’d like to be able to point to something better than a committee of temperance cranks, which is about all the United Church is now.

Frye was not alone among English Protestant Canadian intellectuals in his view of the Roman Catholic Church as an obstructive institution opposed to the ideals of liberal democracy.

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35 Ibid.
37 Ibid., 91, 49.103.
38 Ibid., 49.27. Elsewhere Frye seems more enthusiastic about the United Church: “I rather like the United Church because it contains a sort of church-destroying principle within itself, having already destroyed three.” Ibid., 105, 49.133.
on which English Canadians intuitively assumed Canada was built. In his doctoral dissertation on the relationship of anti-Catholicism to English Canadian nationalism, Kevin Anderson observes that “anti-Catholicism was central to the discourses of mainstream intellectuals, politicians and civic organizations, such as Arthur Lower, C.E. Silcox and George Drew as well as the allegedly ecumenical Inter-Church Committee on Protestant-Roman Catholic Relations (ICC) and various Protestant federations.” Anti-Catholic sentiment was also evident among prominent leftist intellectuals and activists, such as Eugene Forsey, F.R. Scott and J.S. Woodsworth, “who held a caricatured perception of the Catholic Church as authoritarian, regressive and harmful to the Canadian body politic.” According to Anderson, “as these diverse intellectuals negotiated and indeed constructed Canada’s national identity during the first half of the twentieth century, the predominance of anti-Catholicism, which was consistently decried as anti-Canadian itself, demonstrates that the allegedly secular Canadian nationalism that emerged during this period was in fact deeply and specifically Protestant.”

Following the end of the Second World War (during which British imperialism, and hence anti-Catholicism, had “flared up in a time of national crisis”) those United Church worthies who had been lampooned by Frye as “temperance cranks” were galvanized by the growing power of the Roman Catholic Church, not only in Quebec (where it had enjoyed an historic hegemony), but also in the rest of Canada. Airhart observes that the history of United Church relations with the Roman Catholic Church is a complex one that tested the United Church’s own experience of dealing with diversity and reflected different English and French Canadian versions of Canada. Anglophones often imagined, as Robert Choquette notes, “a homogenous British English-speaking nation with allowance for a bilingual French-Quebec ‘reservation.’” The situation was not improved by colourful rhetoric on both sides of the linguistic and religious divide. While it was presumed by Anglo-Canadians that Protestantism

39 Kevin Anderson, “‘This Typical Old Canadian Form of Racial and Religious Hate’: Anti-Catholicism and English Canadian Nationalism 1905-1965.” (PhD diss., McMaster University, 2013), 2.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., 2-3.
42 Ibid., 15.
44 While Cardinal Villeneuve spoke in 1938 of limited toleration for Protestants preaching “corrosive doctrines” and spreading “poisoned seeds,” the United Church’s C.E. Silcox widely complained of the injustice of a Roman Catholic Canon Law requirement that marriages to “heretical Christians” not only required the presence of a Roman priest but were accompanied by the expectation that children born of such unions would be educated in the Roman Catholic faith. The historic acrimony was further complicated by the wartime conscription plebiscite and the
would continue to have minority status in Quebec, it was also expected that Protestantism would dominate the remainder of the country.

A fear of the demographic shift in the Roman Catholic Church’s favour outside Quebec and the perceived threat to religious freedom and the Protestant notion of Canadian identity that such a shift represented, led to the publication by the United Church in 1954 of *What’s the Difference?* The booklet appeared under the auspices of the church’s Commission on the Christian Faith with direction from the E&SS and the Board of Christian Education. The impetus for the questionary initially came from the Eleventh General Council of 1942 which gave instructions to the Commission on Christian Faith “to prepare in simple language suitable literature on such subjects as the teaching of Protestantism as contrasted with that of the Roman Catholic faith.”

Arthur Reynolds, minister of St. John’s United Church, Elmvale, Ontario “well-known for his skill as a writer,” was entrusted with bulk of the prose, though some of the “ground work” had actually been prepared by George Caird of the Faculty of Theology at McGill University.

*What’s the Difference?* summarizes United Church views of Roman Catholicism in the years immediately prior to the calling of the Second Vatican Council and it offers a template for assessing the denomination’s subsequent change in attitude. The language of Reynolds’ questionary as it compares Protestantism with Roman Catholicism decidedly contrasts “us” and “them,” or rather the doctrinal difference between “faithful” and “defective.” Like many such efforts at denominational propaganda, the booklet seems factually correct, but the essential superiority of Protestantism as a Christian witness is carefully asserted through the writer’s diction and penchant for damning with faint praise. Reynolds points out that nothing less than the truth is at stake in setting the faith of the United Church and the Church of Rome side by side. “Our faith either is, or is not, founded on truth. No doubt our possession of truth is partly a matter of degree; neither Protestantism nor Roman Catholicism is in actual possession of different assessments of the value of democracy. English Protestants, many of whom were deeply suspicious of hierarchies, upheld democracy as a treasured ideal, while many Roman Catholic Quebecers saw it as an anti-Christian practice that replaced the rule of Christ by the rule of the people. Thus Protestants contrasted their emphasis on individual freedom with the authoritarianism they associated with Roman Catholicism. See Airhart, *A Church with the Soul of a Nation*, 136.


46 “On our side, while we deplore many aspects of Roman Catholic faith and practice, we ought gratefully to acknowledge the piety, devotion and good works of our Roman Catholic brethren, *in so far as they are true to the Gospel.*” Ibid., 6. Italics added.
absolute truth. But where they contradict each other in a fundamental point, one of them must be wrong.”

Nowhere, perhaps, is the disagreement between the two major branches of Western Christianity more evident than in the use of the word “Catholic” (which Reynolds, the thorough Protestant, is careful to point out “does not occur in the Bible at all”). Tracing the history of the word from its use by St. Ignatius of Antioch in A.D. 100 through to the claim of the Bishop of Rome to supreme authority among the living disciples of Christ, Reynolds observes that the Roman Catholic Church inaccurately claims to be the Catholic Church, “and that is why the members of the Roman Church like to call themselves Catholics rather than Roman Catholics. They claim the exclusive right to call themselves Catholics, since an essential element in their definition of the Church is that the Church is the body of people who submit to the authority of the Pope, the bishop of Rome.”

Protestants, on the other hand, maintain that the word “catholic” designates the universal church in which all Christians believe and claim membership. It is not obedience to the pope that forms the church; instead the church is formed by the abiding presence “and the saving, renewing power of Jesus Christ that create and sustain the true Church, that is, the Catholic Church.”

It was in the midst of a divided and antagonistic Canadian Christian milieu that in January of 1959, John XXIII announced his intention to convene an “ecumenical” council of the Roman Catholic Church. It was clear from the outset that the unity of Christendom (or rather its absence) was at the forefront of the pontiff’s thought process and that initiating movement toward it would be high on this council’s agenda. According to Robert McAfee Brown the reaction of Protestants to the pope’s announcement was one of “open surprise” because Protestants had assumed that because the First Vatican Council (1869-70) had promulgated the dogma of the pope’s infallibility, no further council would ever be needed. Roman Catholic reaction was one of “veiled surprise” since it had usually been the papal custom to make important decisions after a wide consultation of bishops, theologians and trusted advisors. In this case the now famous call came on the initiative of the pope, alone. A further confusion for

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48 Ibid., 7.
49 Ibid. In what may be a Freudian typographic slip, the text of the booklet’s fourth printing (November 1954) reads: “They believe that it is the abiding pretence and the saving, renewing power of Jesus Christ that create and sustain the true Church.” Italics added.
51 Ibid., 7.
many Protestants was the designation “ecumenical council” since the term clearly had a quite different meaning for Roman Catholics (viz. the calling together of accredited representatives of the Roman Catholic Church: bishops, cardinals, patriarchs, abbots, and heads of religious orders throughout the world) from the broader meaning that it had acquired after its adoption by the WCC and other Protestant groups as a way of referring to all Christians throughout the inhabited world. A sense in which it was truly ecumenical, however, was in the pope’s dream that the “other sheep,” now separated from the sheepfold, might safely find their way home. As Brown summarizes: the Second Vatican Council was “‘ecumenically oriented’ in the sense that it looked to a future in which divided Christendom would be reunited.”

In the light of this glittering vision Pope John created the Secretariat for Christian Unity with the intention of providing a means both to interpret the council’s activities to those outside the Roman fold and “to deal with those matters within the Council that impinged on the relations of Catholics and non-Catholics.” Henceforth, it was proclaimed, such ecumenical consideration was to be a central concern of the Roman Catholic Church. Cardinal Bea, in Brown’s opinion “the best among the ecumenically minded Catholics,” was appointed head of the Secretariat. It was through the Secretariat for Christian Unity that invitations were accorded to non-Roman Catholic groups so that they might choose “observers” to send to the Second Vatican Council. Through the World Council of Churches, various confessional groups chose representatives. The observers, like Brown, were not allowed to participate directly in debate, “but they were admitted to all the sessions, given copies of all the sub secreto documents, asked to voice their reactions to the debates and the documents, and overwhelmingly made to feel that the Catholic Church really wanted to know what they felt.” In Brown’s judgment, “the importance of such a step in breaking down walls of division, misunderstanding, and insularity can scarcely be overestimated.”

In postwar Canada, it had seemed as if the Cold War between the West and the Soviet Union had its ecclesial counterpart in the relationship between Protestants and Roman Catholics. Pamphlets like What’s the Difference? were weapons of choice. Almost overnight, however, a popular Italian pontiff succeeded in achieving a miraculous thaw in the relationship between the

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52 Ibid, 7-8.
53 Ibid., 8.
54 Ibid., 9.
55 Ibid., 10.
56 Ibid.
United Church and its Roman Catholic neighbours. In November 1961, the Observer sought to explain the “new spirit in Catholic-Protestant relations” by enlisting the help of the dynamic and popular director of the new Centre of Ecumenical Studies in St. Michael’s College, Toronto (and soon to be member of the Secretariat for Christian Unity), Gregory Baum. Baum’s task was to interpret for United Church readers both the nature (and the limits) of the ecumenical initiatives now emerging from the Roman Catholic Church. In his article, Baum admits that the old approach of Roman Catholics to other Christians “was argumentative and apologetical.” He says: “We tried to present the teachings of the others in the most unfavorable light. We felt that we could not learn anything from the others.”

The new approach, asserts Baum, is to try to understand other Christians and instead of studying their doctrine only to disprove them, to seek understanding of their intentions. This will, he suggests, lead the Roman Church to be more appropriately self-aware: “we have the courage to criticize ourselves. We listen carefully to the objections of other churches and ask ourselves if there is not some truth in what they say.”

Baum stresses that the very fact that there is a “new atmosphere” manifests sure and certain proof that Roman Catholics can learn from Protestants. In answer to those critics who might point out that the “new atmosphere” has produced little in the way of tangible result in answering Christ’s prayer “that all may be one,” Baum articulates ways that Roman Catholics and Protestants have moved decidedly closer together. This has been achieved “not by a method of compromise and infidelity, but by a new emphasis on the biblical and liturgical elements in our Christian tradition.”

The next Observer article in a feature series focused on Protestant-Roman Catholic relations is Robert McAfee Brown’s 1962 cover story, “Pope John’s Vatican Council.” It is clear from the very presence of this article in the denominational magazine that the pope’s stock with United Church leaders had been steadily on the rise. Such admiration was, however, the result of more than his engaging personality and his posture of apparent openness. As appreciatively noted in the E&SS Annual Report, Pope John XXIII had also congratulated and pronounced his blessing on ventures that were very dear to the hearts of the United Church’s “temperance cranks.”

The main focus of Brown’s Observer cover story is what manner of reaching out of

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57 Gregory Baum, “Can Catholics Learn from Protestants?” UCO, November 1, 1961, 11.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid., 12.
60 An example would be papal affirmation of the work of the members of the Lacordaire and St. Joan of Arc Associations who support the work of “all those, both priests and laity, who expediently devote themselves to
the Roman Church to the “separated brethren” might reasonably be expected by Protestants. Brown predicts that the dogma of papal infallibility, which had been promulgated by the First Vatican Council (and is anathema to Protestants), will receive fuller formulation at this second council as one of the matters left unfinished when the first council was hastily adjourned in 1870. Brown also speculates that a formula devised by Prof. Hans Küng “who has written the most exciting Catholic book on the council” will be present in the minds of the delegates. Küng’s formula, “through the council, to reform, toward re-union,” indicates that the council will engage in numerous revisions some of which “will at least remove some of the sting of scandal and difficulty which non-Catholics feel toward the Catholic Church.”

Likely, says Brown (reflecting Küng), the very fact of the calling of the council represents its most important achievement for Protestants. The former attitude was at best a paternalistic welcoming back of dissidents, but this “passive waiting” has now changed. Many within the Roman Catholic fold now recognize that there were legitimate complaints against the church in the sixteenth century and that there is fault on both sides of the divide. By also claiming the cherished Protestant slogan “ecclesia semper reformanda” the Roman Catholic Church can enter into meaningful dialogue.

The following month, the Observer continued its coverage with “A Protestant at Vatican II” written by editor A.C. Forrest. Noting the pope’s desire to work actively for the fulfillment of Christ’s prayer “that they all may be one,” Forrest remarks that there are encouraging signs emerging from the council’s deliberations. One of those is the clarification of the role of the laity in the life of the church: “Just as Protestantism has been rediscovering the laity and ‘the priesthood of all believers,’ so has Roman Catholicism.” In addition to taking the time to be well-informed about what is going on at the Second Vatican Council, Forrest indicates that Protestants have their own work to do, inspired by the work of a former rival: “taking at full value the concern of the Catholic Church for self-reformation, Protestants can look to the life of their own church groups and discover where the needs for Protestant self-reformation are most pressing.”

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63 Ibid.
To many in the United Church, it must have seemed as if the irresistible force of the Holy Spirit had finally shifted the immovable object. For the most part, the changes of the Second Vatican Council were welcomed as a genuine attempt to thaw the frosty relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant “separated brethren.” And yet, as Airhart, Noll and Anderson make clear, this softening did not happen without affecting the United Church’s sense of itself and the importance to Canada of its “friendly service” to the nation. In many ways, anti-Catholicism had been a significant aspect of the denomination’s identity. Its loss was consequently disorienting. Mark Noll writes that while some Canadian political leaders like Wilfrid Laurier had managed to finesse Catholic-Protestant suspicion in public life, the negative view held by Protestants did have its uses in supporting a Protestant, and an essentially British hegemony in English Canada. The point to be made for the 1960’s is that,

precisely when both Protestants and Roman Catholics were undergoing increasing strain for other reasons, the Second Vatican Council exerted a direct effect on Canada’s Roman Catholics, but also an indirect effect on Canada’s Protestants. At virtually a stroke, the Council and then the rapid decline of Christian practice greatly reduced Protestant reasons to fear a monolithic, archly traditional, ultramontane Roman Catholicism. Since that fear had long been a prop for serious Protestant adherence in Canada, the Canadian Roman Catholic reaction to the Second Vatican Council may have done almost as much damage to Canadian Protestants as it did to Canadian Roman Catholics.  

3 Vatican II and United Church Worship

Through his comment that in the light of the Second Vatican Council’s work “Protestants can look to the life of their own church groups and discover where the needs for Protestant self-reformation are most pressing,” A.C. Forrest proposed that there was, indeed, something of value that Protestants could learn from Catholics. The Second Vatican Council’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy sought “to impart an ever increasing vigor to the Christian life of the faithful.” The implementation of the principles of this document promulgated by John XXIII’s successor, Paul VI on 4 December, 1963, profoundly altered the character of Roman Catholic worship. What is less obvious (and hence more difficult to document) is that it also affected the traditions of many Protestant churches—including the United Church of Canada. According to Thomas

Long, the Vatican II reforms “cut through the old arguments and disputes of the Reformation and sought to penetrate to the core and essence of Christian worship. The reforms of Vatican II were seeking to produce worship that was genuinely biblical, centered in Christ, and fully congregational.” In turn, this seismic change in the liturgical life of the Roman Catholic Church also moved other Christians: “The post Vatican II Catholic reformed rites sparked a process of liturgical revision among Protestants or redirected efforts underway ... No one thought of liturgical revision without checking out what the Romans were up to or had already accomplished.

Any suggestion, however, that the Roman Church of the twentieth century was merely catching up with the Protestant Church of the Reformation demonstrates “a kind of Protestant triumphalism” that “obscures the realization that the Second Vatican Council’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy also provided an agenda for Protestant liturgical reformation.” As James White observes, Protestant reform, like its Roman counterpart, would henceforth move further in the direction of the five “r’s”: reformation, renewal, recovery, revitalizing, restructuring.

“Liturgical renewal is not just a changing of worship but is part of a reshaping of ... Christianity root and branch.” By the end of the 1960s, liturgical revisions that were the work of the United Church General Council’s Committee on Church Worship and Ritual (as well as its counterpart in the church’s Division of Mission, the Celebration Advisory Committee) clearly reflected the five “r” agenda that had been at the forefront of Vatican II deliberations.

From the mid-sixties onward the spirit of reform that had moved among the Cardinals gathered in Rome blew gently through congregations of Canada’s United Church. Its progress may be detected in such varied places as the masthead in Sunday bulletins, now announcing the “liturgical” date often alongside the more traditional United Church feasts of Rally Day, Dominion Day, C.G.I.T. and White Gift Sunday. A reforming spirit may also be discerned in the colourful banners hung in church buildings or in the colours of antependia, now chosen to relate to the changing church seasons and not merely to blend with the decor of the worship space. It is

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66 Thomas G. Long, Beyond the Worship Wars (Bethesda, The Alban Institute, 2001), 4.
68 Ibid., 33.
70 One must exercise caution since the United Church tradition of “ordered liberty” makes it impossible to generalize with certainty. There were nevertheless throughout the denomination’s history signs of ecumenical influence or at least openness to it. See William S. Kervin “Worship on the Way: The Dialectic of United Church worship,” in A History of the United Church of Canada, ed. Don Schweitzer, 185-201.
further found in the cadence of liturgical language which during the 1960s altered in a remarkably short period of time from faux Elizabethan to a more contemporary, and hence accessible and “relevant” speech idiom.\textsuperscript{71} It is detectable in the evolving discussions of Christian initiation, initiatives toward the increased frequency of communion, richer sacramental language and in mimeographed aids to worship planning that both encouraged the participation of the laity and eventually raised the profile of the Ecumenical Common Lectionary.\textsuperscript{72}

The spirit of Vatican II also, I would argue, affected the discussions surrounding updating of the 1932 \textit{Book of Common Order} that culminated in the publication, beginning in the late 1960s of such “official” United Church worship materials as the three service books (\textit{Service Book for the Use of Ministers, Service Book for the Use of the People, Service Book for Use in Church Courts}), \textit{The Hymn Book} (produced jointly with the Anglicans), as well as the development of more ephemeral published worship aids such as \textit{Getting It All Together} and its various successors. The effect of Vatican II on United Church worship would, perhaps, receive its fullest articulation in \textit{A Guide to Sunday Worship} (1988), whose authors observe that in the years following the Second Vatican Council (and influenced by it) there was “a large movement focused on worship reform” throughout the entire Western Christian tradition.\textsuperscript{73} Moreover, in \textit{The Language of Baptism}, his overview of authorized baptismal liturgies of the United Church, William Kervin observes that in 1981 Fred McNally (by then the denomination’s Special Assistant—Worship), offered a summary of what “directions for worship” should guide the United Church. These directions closely parallel many of the reforms articulated by Second Vatican Council’s \textit{Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy}.\textsuperscript{74}

The first major United Church worship resource to be published after the Second Vatican Council appeared in 1969 with the publication of \textit{Service Book for the Use of Ministers conducting Public Worship}, the first of the three books intended to replace \textit{The Book of Common Order}. Preparatory work had already begun in the late 1950s by the Committee on Church

\textsuperscript{71} It is worthy of note that English-speaking Protestants denounced the Roman Catholic Church’s use of Latin without recognizing that the sixteenth-century idiom of Cranmer and the authorized version of 1611 had become (and in some quarters remains) the sacralized language of English Protestantism.

\textsuperscript{72} John Ambrose in this “Word to Ministers about Involving Others in Planning and Leading Worship” (\textit{Getting It All Together}, Advent/Christmas, 1977) acknowledges the “earnest desire” expressed the statement of Vatican II that people be should led to a “full, conscious and active participation” in the liturgy as an inspiration for the evolution of this particular United Church worship aid.


\textsuperscript{74} See William S. Kervin, \textit{The Language of Baptism} (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2003), 171-172.
Worship and Ritual chaired by Richard H.N. Davidson.\textsuperscript{75} As the Committee on Church Worship and Ritual’s work of revision proceeded through the early 1960s, the committee’s concerns clearly reflect the similar effort of the Vatican Council to preserve the values of the past while providing light in a New Age. The Preface to the \textit{Service Book} quotes the prayer of the forebears of 1932 “that those who use this book may be enabled to enter more fully into the rich heritage of Christian Worship” but also states the goal that they will simultaneously “be stimulated to explore, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, new ways of worship.”\textsuperscript{76}

Davidson’s committee began its work in 1958. In 1960, the Committee on Church Worship and Ritual urged ministers of the denomination to submit any suggestions and prayers they deemed useful. Presbyteries were likewise asked to co-operate in a programme of experimentation where new orders might be tried, commented on, and rewritten.\textsuperscript{77} The General Council \textit{Record of Proceedings (ROP) for 1964} offers a synopsis of the committee’s modus operandi that conveys the complexity of the project and warns that “it has been, and will continue to be, a protracted and laborious process.”\textsuperscript{78} In 1966, the General Council received an update from the Committee on Church Worship and Ritual as well as the subcommittee on revision of the Hymnary.\textsuperscript{79} The report notes that the Committee found itself embarrassed by the continuing change in its own thinking during what was proving to be an unsettled and unsettling decade. It found “work, which it thought complete and acceptable several years ago must now be updated.”\textsuperscript{80} The report remarks (not without a hint of competitiveness) on the important influence of Vatican II reforms on the United Church:

> The Church finds itself caught up in a ferment of change in matter of worship, a ferment that has been increased by the revolution that

\textsuperscript{75} Davidson was the son of Richard Davidson who had been influential in the emergence of \textit{The Book of Common Order} (1932). Other members of the Committee on Church Worship and Ritual included G. Campbell Wadsworth, G.G.D. Kilpatrick, John Webster Grant, W. Morrison Kelly, Stanley Osborne, D.S. Henderson, R.G. Oliver, Ron Atkinson, and Harriet Christie.

\textsuperscript{76} Committee on Worship, United Church of Canada, \textit{Service Book for Use of the People} (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1969), Preface.


\textsuperscript{78} United Church of Canada, \textit{Record of Proceedings}, The Twenty-first General Council, 1964, 437 (hereafter \textit{ROP}). A further justification for liturgical revision was that the new book would “link us with other churches with which we may yet unite.” Ibid., 436.

\textsuperscript{79} The United Church entered into an agreement with the Anglican Church for a joint revision that proceeded under a committee of twelve that first met in 1965 (six UC, six Anglican). Many of the same influences that were shaping the \textit{Service Book} may be discerned in the preface to the 1971 Hymn Book. See Preface, \textit{The Hymn Book of the Anglican Church of Canada and the United Church of Canada}, 1971.

\textsuperscript{80} \textit{ROP}, 1966, 552.
has been taking place in the worship of the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Church is putting great emphasis on the reading of Scripture, and on the sermon; in the Mass hymns are sung by the people and the celebrant faces the congregation from behind the table; the Mass (with the exception of the Canon) is in the vernacular; and, where English is used, it is modern English. In the Protestant churches we find ourselves in the uncomfortable position of being challenged to be radical, lest we be left behind with our archaic forms while the Roman Church surges ahead with worship revitalized and in the modern idiom.\footnote{Ibid., 551.}

The 1966 \textit{ROP} similarly pointed toward the revolutionary work of the Second Vatican Council, noting that the “change of attitude of the Roman Church to other Christians has been increasingly evident over the past five years.” A report by C.M. Nicholson and General Secretary Ernest Long attributed this sea change to the 2,300 bishops who met together in Rome. The report notes that the Vatican Council has made and will continue to make a very profound impression and will exert great influence on Christians of all kinds. The wise course for United Church people to follow “would be to welcome with thanksgiving the new attitude of the Roman Church.”\footnote{Ibid., 538.} In this light, further dialogue and cooperation with the Roman Catholic Church was recommended.\footnote{Ibid., 538.}

Judging from the opening words of the report of the Committee on Church Worship and Ritual that appears in the 1968 \textit{ROP} (at this point the Service Book was complete), committee chair Richard Davidson and secretary Bruce Underhill found themselves exhausted by their decade-long task and in a defensive mode. The report complains that the work of their committee had been widely criticized within United Church circles for that least forgivable of United Church sins—elitism: “Your Committee, in its revision, has listened to the Church. It has listened carefully. None of these Orders is the product of an individual … Now you have the completed product. You will readily see that this enterprise is not the liturgical creation of a few specialists but, in a very real sense, \textit{the work of the whole Church.}”\footnote{ROP, 1968, 357.} The report also stressed that the Committee was fully aware of the wide diversity of liturgical practice and opinion in the United Church.\footnote{“There is a very vocal ‘left’ that demands radical change. There is a not-so-articulate ‘right’ that resists all but minor emendations of the text. Surprisingly, there is little evidence of any regional pattern in the comments received.” Ibid.} Davidson and Underhill provided assurance that the Committee on Church
Worship and Ritual was not harbouring a nefarious desire to “impose uniformity of worship upon The United Church of Canada.” Such a desire would, in any case, bear no fruit since “in this time of rapid change it is difficult to anticipate the worship of the church in the future.” In all likelihood “much of the worship of the future will be identified with revolution—a sharp break with the familiar. It will be experimental in nature and not intended for preservation.” Like its ecumenical forebears, the Committee was attentive to “the rich heritage of Christian tradition” as well as to its duty “to produce services appropriate for today.” Conscious of potential criticism that it might be imprudent to be producing a hardbound book of services when union with the Anglican Church was a possibility, the report noted that even if a union were consummated, the tradition of “congregational participation” embodied in the Minister’s and People’s books “is a tradition we will want to carry into the Church of the future. This new Service Book may well be one of our more precious gifts to church union.”

In the Introduction to the Service Book for the Use of the People, the Committee draws the attention of worshippers to the corporate nature of public worship. The presence of the laity is crucial since liturgy is the people’s work. Like those who proposed the Vatican II liturgical reforms, the compilers of the Service Books were anxious to devise services “to provide as much participation by the people as possible, not only through the singing of hymns and the reading of psalms but also through the prayers. Some of the prayers are to be said in unison and in others the opportunity is given for congregational response.” The potential for lay participation abounds in other ways. “For example, members of the congregation may read the scripture lessons and lead in prayer. Opportunity should be provided for members to request special thanksgivings and intercessions so that the prayers reflect the vital concerns of the people.”

The use in worship of archaic language that is remote from the experience of United Church worshippers is one of the matters highlighted in the introduction. The Committee states that, “related to the subject of worship being truly congregational is the difficult issue of the nature of the language to be used.” As Thomas and Bruce Harding observe, “for Roman Catholics the shift was from Latin to the vernacular, for Protestants from the language of the

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86 Ibid., 358.
87 Ibid., 357.
88 Ibid., 358.
89 Committee on Worship, Service Book for Use of the People, Introduction.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
King James Version and the Book of Common Prayer to contemporary, even colloquial English.” On the issue of which pronouns will be used when addressing the deity, the service books attempt to satisfy the tastes of the conservative and progressive worshipper alike. Consequently the form of address to God varies, sometimes appearing as “thou” and in other places as “you.” The turn toward accessibility of language does, however, mostly win out. As the 1968 report in the ROP notes, the Committee stressed that ultimately the issue is not simply a matter of updating Elizabethan English nor is it a question of how the deity is to be addressed: “The problem concerns the adequacy of biblical concepts to communicate to technological man. This is not just a liturgical problem. It is the problem of the whole church.”

Dealing with a different liturgical reality, The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy articulated a desire to redress the past imbalance of word and sacrament in Roman Catholic worship. In this work, its watchword was “recovery” and conscious to avoid any sense of novelty, the Constitution acknowledges its debt to the practice of the early church. A similar desire emerged in the work of the Committee on Church Worship and Ritual (though the United Church’s attempt to recover a better balance of word and table was, in reality, slow to infiltrate the United Church worship ethos, only emerging in the late 1970s and 1980s). Significantly, in place of the paragraph in the Service Book for Use of the People that emphasizes the corporate nature of public worship, the Committee inserted a section in the Service Book for the Use of Ministers Conducting Public Worship that draws the attention of celebrants to “three general concerns” that underlie the worship services provided, concerns and that have helped to shape them. The first of these concerns is for “Unity of Word and Sacrament.” The Committee noted that “implicit here is the acceptance of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper as the basic Christian service and as such normative for Christian worship.” Although no indication of frequency is provided, the book points out that the early church celebrated the supper weekly. It is for this reason that the first order for public worship (in a clear departure from the pattern of The Book of Common Order) is a communion service. The Committee further indicated that this concern shapes the orders for confirmation, marriage, “and to some extent” burial. The emphasis on the unity of word and sacrament also influenced the treatment of the sacrament of baptism which was given its own complete order “rather than an insert in an abbreviated order for Sunday

93 Thomas Harding and Bruce Harding, Patterns of Worship in The United Church of Canada 1925-1987 (Toronto: Evensong, 1996), 129.
94 ROP, 1968, 357.
95 Harding and Harding, Patterns of Worship, 161.
96 This segment re-appears under the heading “Worship as Social Action” in the ministers’ book.
worship.” In the opinion of the Committee on Worship, Baptism is more properly administered “after the word has been read and proclaimed.” The work of the Roman Catholic Church in seeking to recover the richness of earlier examples of the Eucharistic Prayer also influenced the work of the Committee on Church Worship and Ritual. Harding and Harding point out that “within the communion services themselves on offer in the Service Book, the penitential tone of The Book of Common Order is replaced by an emphasis instead on the element of thanksgiving for Christ’s resurrection and victory.”

Another consideration of the committee was to draw attention to “action” as an integral characteristic of worship: “Worship is something which is done; Christian worship is something which Christians do.” The primary actor is God who speaks and acts in word and sacrament. “It is his word which comes in scripture and sermon and which is made manifest in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s supper [sic]. To his word we respond. Our response should not be thought of only in terms of listening or watching. It involves action.” To emphasize this element of “action” the Committee on Church Worship and Ritual indicated that the services were composed “with a simple, ongoing movement” and effort was made to avoid unnecessary repetition or ornamentation. Accordingly, the second Order for the Celebration of the Lord’s Supper in the Service Book is a “vernacular” service composed by W. Morrison Kelly (then Professor of Public Worship at Emmanuel College) who readily acknowledged that his style “was drawn from the Roman Catholics.”

In its effort to raise the scriptural integrity of Roman Catholic worship, The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy had moved toward the use of a lectionary that was “more varied and suitable.” Such thinking was also evident in the Committee on Worship’s preparation of the service books. Although The Book of Common Order had provided a suggested one-year table of lessons, the new worship resources opted for a more capacious three-year cycle with each year divided into four liturgical seasons of Creation, Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. As William Kervin observes, the methodology behind the Service Book lectionary was primarily pedagogical and this fact may ultimately have undermined its success. The lessons were regarded as and opportunity and “the lectionary principle of lectio continua was totally abandoned in favor of a pedagogical agenda specific to The United Church of Canada. Furthermore, the catholicity of the

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97 Harding and Harding, Patterns of Worship, 161.
98 Committee on Worship, Service Book for the Use of Ministers Conducting Public Worship, Introduction.
99 Harding and Harding, Patterns of Worship, 143.
Christian calendar was also compromised and, with it, its paschal-based roots in the Christian cultus.”100 Significantly, in the same year that the Service Book was published, the Roman Catholic Ordo Lectionum Missae also appeared which formed the basis for the eventual emergence of an ecumenical “Common Lectionary.” Ultimately these external developments, though also rooted in Roman Catholic practice, “were to have a far greater influence on United Church worship and curricula than the uniquely United Church 1969 Table of Lessons.”101

A further way in which The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy contributed to (or at least participated in) the widespread liturgical experimentation of the New Age was in an (albeit reluctant) willingness to let the pipe organ to give way to a variety of musical expression that encouraged the use of “other instruments” in divine worship. The Constitution reminded the faithful that in artistic expression the church “has not adopted any particular style of art as her own” and that the diverse and multi-cultured “art of our own days” should have its place. The result was an explosion of new materials, many of which were quickly taken up for Protestant use. As Kervin notes, the effect of the sixties decade of ferment was much in evidence in the worship life of the United Church:

Several issues of the Observer featured a colorful procession of different kinds of “experimental” worship. An iconoclastic use of poetry, drama, dance, gesture, popular music, and secular symbols characterized the ethos of these events. “Immediacy,” “relevance,” “creativity,” and “celebration” were their bywords. Weeknight meetings and special “happenings” were particular opportunities for their expression. In many congregations the Gestetner machine was embraced as the technological key to liberating worship from the anachronistic constraints of the past. “Chats,” “dialogues,” “reflections,” and “multi-media presentations” replaced many Sunday sermons. “Folk music was invading the choir, psychiatry the pulpit, journalism the text.” The medium was meant to be the message in this McLuhanesque foray into “contemporary worship.”102

100 Kervin, The Language of Baptism, 191.
Despite the fact that it offered a tamer vision than the colourful worship experiments that became associated with the 1960s, Kervin suggests that the service books none the less represented a significant development in the ethos of United Church worship in the years following Vatican II: “no doubt a good deal of this evolution was influenced by the participatory richness of much of the experimental worship being explored at the time. It was theologically supported by the breakdown of the dichotomy between the sacred and the profane, and psychologically reinforced by similar attention to the unity of the mind and the body.” Further, the results achieved by the Committee on Church Worship and Ritual did enhance the ecclesiological dimensions of United Church worship: “More of the people were actively involved in more of the worship than ever before. Such developments can also be seen as providing the foundation on which continued evolution in the direction of greater consciousness of symbol and sacrament, gesture and movement were to build.”

4 Jilted at the Altar: The Proposed Union of the United and Anglican Churches

The long sixties provided the United Church of Canada with a challenging opportunity for practical ecumenism and to reify the Latin motto (ut omnes unum sint) that surrounded its iconic crest. The denomination considered itself not only “united” but also “uniting” and for this reason it had responded encouragingly to the 1943 invitation of The Church of England in Canada to enter with it into a period of prayer and discernment leading to a potential union. The talks with the Anglicans (which had been incremental) gained significant traction as the sixties decade dawned with its exciting promise of a New Age of more porous boundaries and heightened ecumenism. Despite enormous effort, however, the proposed marriage would fail. Although indifference in both denominations was certainly a major factor, so was the turbulence of the 1960s.

Although the formal beginning of the union talks between the Anglican and United Churches can be dated to the United Church’s positive response to the “cordial invitation” of 1943, the historical foundations for such inter-denominational “conference and prayer” are considerably older. The Edinburgh Conference of 1910 is popularly regarded as a hinge moment in the shaping of ecumenical Protestantism, but the roots of ecumenical co-operation reach back

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103 Ibid., 117.
104 Ibid.
into the preceding century. Historian John Kent sees the climax of the ecumenical movement of the early twentieth century in the formation in 1947 of the Church of South India. According to Kent what is especially significant about this union is that “for the moment it looked as though a way might have been found of uniting bodies which claimed to possess the ‘historic episcopate’ with bodies which lacked this distinctive ingredient.”

In his 1948 book *Christian Unity, The Anglican Position* (a revised version of his Olaus Petri Lectures given at Uppsala in 1946) Anglican ecumenist George Bell cited the World conferences held in 1937 (Faith and Order at Edinburgh and Life and Work at Oxford) as inspirational for ecumenical projects in the years that followed. These conferences impressed on leaders “the possibility of a Christian unity transcending barriers of race and nationality and bringing to the rescue of the kingdom of the world the saving energies of the Kingdom of God.” Energy in this direction increased during the Second World War, which many anxious Christian leaders interpreted as a war in defence of Christianity. Bell also, however, understood the ambiguous nature of the Anglican attitude to ecumenism that on the one hand, celebrated the evangelistic expansiveness of its foreign missions and on the other, “the tendency to insist on what was distinctive and exclusive in Anglo-Catholicism.”

At the beginning of the 1960s, a joint pastoral letter was promulgated by Hugh McLeod, the Moderator of the United Church and Howard H. Clark the Anglican Primate. The letter acknowledged that for seventeen years the Anglican and United Churches had been “in conversation together seeking to serve the unity of the Church” but that progress had been “slow and disappointing.” Disappointing indeed. A 1946 Plan for a Mutually Acceptable Ministry

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106 The church formed through the union of the South Indian province of the Methodist Church; the South India United Church; and the larger part of four dioceses of the Anglican Church of India, Burma and Ceylon. The South India United Church was itself the product of a 1906 union of Congregationalist, Presbyterian and Dutch Reformed missions joined in 1919 by the Malabar District of the Basel Mission, which in turn employed Lutheran and Reformed missionaries.

107 John Kent, *The Unacceptable Face: the Modern Church in the Eyes of the Historian* (London: SCM, 1987), 203. Perhaps ominously for the fate of the Anglican/United Church discussions, a sizeable group of Anglicans in the Anglo-Catholic missionary tradition refused to join the Church of South India while the Church of England did not see fit to extend full intercommunion to the new Indian denomination.


109 Ibid.

110 Ibid.

111 Ibid.

112 A Joint Pastoral Letter; The Anglican Church of Canada, General Council Committees Collection, Series 205, UCA, 82-206C, box1-file2.
that offered ministers of either church the opportunity of ordination by the other had been proposed but rejected. Then in 1949, a statement by the two Committees of Fifteen, set up by each of the churches, affirmed once more that the goal of the negotiations was to “bring our two churches into full and organic union.” Nevertheless, a memo to the United Church’s Commission on Reunion from General Council executive chairman Gordon Sisco and executive secretary W. Harold Young expressed scepticism: “Should the Synod reject it, or even merely vote to receive it, there would seem to us here to be little point in continuing our discussions, and we have so informed some of our friends privately.” The process continued with glacial haste and in 1958, *An Outline Scheme of Union* was produced by a Montreal Sub-Committee of the Joint Committee which was put forward as a working paper for further study. The scheme was shelved. At the same time a plan for practical cooperation between the two communions was developed but similarly rejected.

Coverage of this apparent roadblock appeared in both denominational magazines. On January 1, 1959, the *Canadian Churchman* published an editorial “Time Is Not Yet” for union which received an editorial reply in the February 1 issue of the *Observer.* On February 2, the United Church moderator, Angus McQueen, sent a response that was copied to the Acting Primate, Archbishop Philip Carrington. McQueen took exception to the *Churchman* editorial and to its observation that union had been “foisted” on the Presbyterians and Methodists. He reminded the Anglicans “that the conversations between our two Churches were not initiated by zealous and ambitious Unionists in our Communion but by your own Communion.”

The Anglican Committee on Reunion, in conference with the House of Bishops attempted to calm the waters by confessing an awareness of the “difficulties and disappointments” encountered during the course of union conversations and proclaiming: “we should continue conversations with the United Church in all sincerity and good faith … We deeply regret the impression that appears to have been given to the United Church that we have

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113 John Webster Grant says that it struck most members of both churches as merely a transparent device for conveying episcopal ordination to United Church ministers. See Grant, “Leading a Horse,” 166.
114 Gordon A. Sisco and W. Harold Young to the members of the Commission on Reunion, 1949, General Council Committees Collection, Series 205, UCA, 82-291C, box1-file1-7.
115 The Anglican Church of Canada; Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Canada; The United Church of Canada, *Plan of Union and By-Laws* (Toronto: 1972), 5.
116 The *Churchman* editorial had somewhat churlishly asked why the United Church was so anxious for progress when it’s own 1925 union was incomplete. It had eliminated the Methodists and frustrated the Presbyterians. The *Churchman* thought it more profitable to unite groups “with a common background and tradition, before looking for immediate response further afield.” See A.C. Forrest, “Time Is Not Yet”, *UCO*, February 1, 1959, 5.
not been serious in our efforts towards Reunion.”¹¹⁸ This Anglican olive branch resulted in the establishment of the League of Prayer for Christian Unity. A joint letter was sent from the leaders of the two communions asking church members to enter intentionally into prayer by joining the League. Second, the letter recommended the study of a small book that had been produced jointly by the two denominations that would eventually be called *Growth in Understanding*. “We need to know our two communions better, and to appreciate the elements in our history and in our understanding of the Christian Faith which keep us apart and yet which drive us, in Christ’s name, to come together.”¹¹⁹ *Growth in Understanding* was eventually published jointly by the two churches and it provided the basis for negotiations throughout the 1960s.¹²⁰ An accompanying letter from United Church General Council secretary Ernest Long suggested that the book’s use was to be commended in joint United Church-Anglican study groups “on a Presbytery, Diocesan or regional basis.”¹²¹ The hope was first, that “the results of such as study should increase immeasurably mutual understanding of each Church by the other, and the issues concerning Church Union” and second, that “engaging in such a study would also deepen the desire for union itself.”¹²²

The booklet is divided into two parts. The first section, in three chapters, provides a broad ecumenical context for the Canadian church union negotiations.¹²³ The second chapter discusses

¹¹⁸ Ibid.
¹²⁰ The Anglican Committee in consultation with the House of Bishops passed a resolution in February 1959 recommending that the study guide should include the Ceylon Scheme and North India Plan “and perhaps other similar proposals, together with the relevant resolutions and passages from The Lambeth Report. It should also contain other study materials, such as a statement of the Anglican and United Church positions on the nature of the Church, its ministry and sacraments.” The United Church Commission, for its part, recommended a wider ecumenical view: that in addition to these materials, “the reports issued by the Joint Committees of the Anglican Church and the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church of England” should also be included, “together with statements from our own reports here in Canada.” See *The Committee on Christian Unity and The Church Universal of The Anglican Church of Canada and The Commission on Union of The United Church of Canada, Growth in Understanding: A Study Guide on Church Union.* (Toronto: The Committee on Christian Unity and the Church Universal of the Anglican Church of Canada and The Commission on Church Union of the United Church of Canada, 1961), iii.
¹²¹ Ernest Long to members of the United Church of Canada, March 7, 1961, General Council Committees Collection, Series 205, UCA, 82-206C, box1-file 1-2.
¹²² Ibid.
¹²³ A “Suggested Contents” manuscript for the booklet indicates that the original intention was to move from the Canadian context to show how Canadian negotiations are reflected internationally. The final form reverses this scheme and moves from the general (international) to the particular (Canada) thus emphasizing the sense of a wider ecumenical drive for the reunion of separated Christendom. “Suggested Contents of Reunion Study Guide,” General Council Committees Collection, Series 205, *UCA*, 82-206C, box 1-file 1-2.
a number of international schemes of reunification. A third chapter outlines the origin and history of Canadian union negotiations, beginning with the “spirit of fellowship” that led to political union of the Canadas in 1867 and to a succession of unions within the various branches of Christianity from 1817 to 1925. It notes the importance for Anglicans of the Third Lambeth Conference in 1888 at which the Anglican Churches adopted the “Lambeth Quadrilateral” as the cornerstone of Anglican identity and the necessary basis for any reunion discussions. The booklet underscores that in reviewing the Anglican overtures toward Christian unity from the late nineteenth century onward, “it is important to keep in mind the basic aim of all Anglican approaches to the subject of unity. It is the ‘reunion of all Christendom’ which motivates that Church, a motive which is in harmony with our Lord’s expressed will and in keeping with the Pauline doctrine of the nature of the Church”—in other words a mystical vision that might prove difficult to ground in praxis. For its part, the United Church at the 1950 General Council took a step toward accommodating the fourth point of the Lambeth Quadrilateral by accepting the Episcopate “in some constitutional form.” At the same time it emphatically stressed another point for the benefit of Anglicans who might be inclined to view the United Church as defective in catholicity: “We cannot either now or at a later stage, accept any implication which casts doubt upon our heritage in the Holy Catholic Church, or upon the reality of our ministry as a true and effective ministry of the Word and Sacraments.” It is significant that as the talks continued, the United Church preferred “union committee,” while the Anglicans always retained the name “reunion committee.”

As the sixties decade advanced, a familiar concern added urgency to the union talks between Canada’s two largest non-Roman denominations. Observer editor A.C. Forrest announced an alarming statistical fact: Roman Catholics now equalled Protestants in number within Canada. He further indicated a disturbing possibility: “that the Immigration Department was showing favouritism to Roman Catholic Immigrants.” Nevertheless, in the same issue, Forrest also offered some “Blunt Talk” about the United/Anglican negotiations. Reviewing the

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124 Worthy of note are the different responses of the United Church of Canada and the Anglican Church to the union movement in South India. While the United Church had followed the South India union “with great interest and sympathy,” the Anglican attitude had been decidedly “more reserved.”
125 The booklet observed that the “fourth and highly critical point of the Quadrilateral” that insists on the continuance of the Episcopate “draws the Anglican Communion into close harmony and fellowship with the Orthodox and other Episcopal Churches, but occasions the most acute problems in all Reunion Conversations with the non-Episcopal Communions” Growth in Understanding, 36.
126 Ibid., 39.
127 Ibid., 43.
129 “Is Canada to Become Roman Catholic?” UCO, September 1, 1962, 8.
two decades of union conversations, Forrest reiterated that the legitimacy of the United Church orders of ministry should not be on the table: “the United Church assumed that the Anglicans were of the same mind as had been expressed by the Lambeth Appeal, by Bishop Bell of Chichester in ‘Documents of Christian Unity,’ and by William Temple and other ranking Anglicans that the ministry of the ‘free’ churches has been valid, a ‘real ministry within the Universal Church.’” Forrest indicated that the perceived reality was rather different. Some “dedicated” Anglicans were persuaded that it is God’s will that the churches of Christ should be one. There were, however, others “who believe just as sincerely that the Anglican Church is a true Church, that the United Church is not, and union is wrong. Some of these latter keep telling us that Anglicans mislead the United Church when they nurture pro-union hopes.” Forrest substantiated his view by including in the same Observer issue an article by a high-church Anglican priest, W.A. Collins, that ridiculed United Church claims to catholicity. Forrest continued with a forthright warning: “If there is any substantial support within the Anglican Church for the things Mr. Collins says, and the Anglican Church is as divided as it gives some of us the impression it is, that church is in no position to invite or hold conversations with any Protestant church.”

The booklet Growth in Understanding was intended to set the tone for the 1960s talks, underlining as it did so that there was much at stake. For example, missionaries working “in the predominantly non-Christian countries” had sent back the message that the churches, for all their platitudes about love for God and neighbour looked hypocritical in their own dividedness. As the booklet was being distributed, “Committees of Ten” were appointed from each denomination. According to John Webster Grant, there was considerable pressure on the “tens” quickly to show results. Further impetus came when the House of Bishops and the Executive Council of the Anglican Church met in Banff in 1963 and called upon the Committee on Church Unity and the Church Universal together with the Committee on Union of The United Church to prepare a Plan of Unity. Additionally, joint discussions carried out in the Diocese of Huron and

131 Ibid.
132 Ibid. Collins’ deliberately provocative article, “The Catholic Nature of Anglicanism,” (UCO, September 1, 1962) purports to set the facts straight about the true nature of Anglicanism—in part to educate those Anglicans who wrongly consider themselves to be Protestants. Protestants, he graciously concedes are not so much damned to Hell as “invincibly ignorant.” (40).
133 Growth in Understanding, 130.
London Conference resulted in a draft plan that was published in 1964.\(^{135}\) According to Grant, one of the decisive factors leading to a breakthrough was the dawning recognition among the committees “that their task was ‘to bring into being, not a merger of two existing ecclesiastical bodies, but rather a new embodiment of the One Church of God’ and their acceptance of the legitimacy of ambiguity on issues on which complete unanimity has never prevailed even within existing churches.”\(^{136}\)

By mid-decade, it was obvious that, at least for the time being, some version of the dream of a re-united Christendom was energizing both the Anglican and United Churches. On May 26, 1965, Ernest Long sent a letter to ministers of the United Church informing them that after many, many years of “conversations,” unanimous agreement had finally been reached by the Committees of Ten.\(^{137}\) Then on June 1, it was jointly announced that *The Principles of Union between The Anglican Church of Canada and The United Church of Canada* would be presented to the General Synod of the Anglican Church to be held in August 1965 and to the next meeting of the United Church General Council planned for Waterloo, Ontario, in September 1966. In the gushing words of Howard Clark, the Anglican Primate, the two churches were now officially “engaged to be married.”

This moment of euphoria was likely the high point of the 1960s union talks.\(^{138}\) Less caught up in the positive rhetoric surrounding publication of the *Principles* was an elder statesman of the United Church, retired secretary of the E&SS and recent Moderator J.R. Mutchmor. Mutchmor devoted a chapter of his 1965 autobiography to the subjects of Christian unity and church union. Mutchmor’s assessment of the state of the proposed union (and his barely concealed anti-Catholicism) provides a helpful insight into the thinking of some in the United Church who cherished and sought to protect the denomination’s evangelical identity that seemed to be endangered. After summarizing the growth of the ecumenical movement,\(^{139}\) Mutchmor addressed himself to the particular situation in Canada and the way that the desire for

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\(^{135}\) *The Principles of Union between the Anglican Church of Canada and the United Church of Canada* (Toronto, 1965), 5.

\(^{136}\) Grant, *Leading a Horse*, 168.

\(^{137}\) Ernest Long to members of the United Church of Canada, May 26, 1965, General Council Committees Collection, Series 205, UCA, 82-206C, box1-file 1-2.


Christian unity had early found expression in the birth of the United Church, whose leaders viewed the new denomination as both a “uniting and United Church.” Nevertheless, Mutchnor noted that the history of the conversation with the Anglicans had “not been spectacular.” Mutchnor also perspicaciously drew attention to a significant “new element” in mix, the “Peace on Earth” appeal of Pope John XXIII and the deliberations of the Second Vatican Council. He noted that Christian unity conferences have a way of breeding euphoria, but that ecumenists “in their enthusiasm, are often blind to human factors in the Body of Christ which make unanimity of thought and uniformity of church organization difficult of achievement.” Mutchnor’s conclusion was that in its anxiety to woo the Anglicans, the United Church should be careful not to surrender the precious democratic legacy of its reformed governance structure. Especially in the midst of an anti-authority decade, “ecclesiastical hierarchies are, or should be, on the way out.”

Mutchnor amplified his criticism of the union negotiations in an Observer article that also presented the words of other dissenting voices from within the United Church. While editor A.C. Forrest claimed to be a supporter of church union and expressed confidence in A.B.B. Moore and members of his committee, he thought it prudent to allow those “who don’t agree with us” the right to express their views and opinions. Mutchnor’s criticism of hierarchy as fundamentally undemocratic was echoed by other United Church representatives quoted. Jean Hutchinson, former Chair of the United Church Board of Women raised another unsettling matter for United Church members. Not only was she concerned that the role of laity in the new church might be reduced, she also pointed out that the role of women within it “is disturbingly indefinite … One would not have thought it possible that the question of ordination of women could be re-opened in this age!” Her comments were echoed by Mary Coburn, also of the Board of Women who was similarly concerned about the vulnerable position of ordained female United Church clergy within the emerging denomination. Donald Gillies of Toronto’s Bloor St. congregation was forthright about the wrong-headedness of creating a new and monolithic institution in an anti-establishment era: “Denominationalism is a dead issue in our age. Neither theological hair-splitting nor ecclesiological name-calling has any appeal to the 20th century man.

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140 Ibid., 204.
141 Ibid., 205.
142 Ibid.
143 “Union with the Anglicans? Here Come the Dissenters!” UCO, April 1, 1966, 19.
144 H.N. Hillier, Arthur Organ, Harold Boyd and George Goth.
145 Ibid., 21. The General Commission on Church Union voted on Nov. 30, 1970 in favour of ordaining women in the church that would emerge from the combined Anglican and United Church denominations.
Religion, if it is to mean anything at all to him, must relate to the business of living day to day.”

According to Gillies, the Principles represent more of a step backward than a way forward:

In an age when the “new” theologians are urging us to “travel light”, it is appalling to see a rebirth of archaic and essentially meaningless religious jargon. In an age when the concept of democracy is gradually replacing the various authoritarian hierarchies, it is frightening to see a revival of despotism. In an age which no longer recognizes the arbitrary division of life into sacred and secular compartments, it is unthinkable that the religious ‘caste’ system should be re-asserted, with its fine distinctions between priest and layman, church and world.

The product of the two denominational committees, *The Principles of Union between The Anglican Church of Canada and The United Church of Canada* is a document divided into two sections that reflect the complementary forms of “Faith and Order” and “Life and Work.” The first deals with doctrine (The Faith, The Church, The Sacraments, The Ministry) and the second with “the main principles that should govern the union of the two churches.”

In a segment titled the “Principles of Organizational Union,” the churches set out the general principles of their coming together. Both of them “humbly and thankfully” recognize each other as part of the church of God and acknowledge that “the perfecting of the whole body requires the heritage of each.” The document then sets out an Act of Union and Unification of Ministries and describes the structure of ministry in the new church, recognizing that there are different kinds of ministry, but also affirming the priesthood of all believers. Within the realm of the “special ministry of the Word and Sacraments, to which some are set apart by ordination” the document proposes a threefold ministry of bishops, presbyters and deacons. In addition, the doctrinal commission is asked to “give careful study to the office and role of Deacons, Deaconesses, Elders, Church-Wardens and Stewards.”

The new church will be under the supreme authority of “the Lord Jesus Christ and his Holy Spirit” which is expressed “above all in the Holy Scriptures, the primary witness to divine revelation, and in the Ecumenical standards of faith, through which the Catholic Church has safeguarded and interpreted the biblical witness.”

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146 Ibid.
147 Ibid.
149 Ibid. 12.
150 Ibid., 13.
151 Ibid., 14.
structured with four courts: a Parish Session, a Diocesan Synod, a Provincial (Regional) Assembly and a General Council.

*The Principles of Union* further recommend that a General Commission be established consisting of twenty persons from each church and that special commissions under the supervision of the General Commission be appointed to consider such outstanding matters as the name of the new church; the church and its membership; dioceses and parishes; the constitution; composition and duties of the various governmental bodies; a legal commission to deal with legislation and all legal matters; a doctrinal commission to deal with matters of faith and the church; and a liturgical commission “to deal with such matters as the Book of Common Prayer and the Book of Common Order, the Hymnary, the Acts of Union and Unification of Ministries and other such services.”

The contents of the *Principles* document were fully summarized in an exhaustive editorial feature in the *Observer* called “Towards Union” which affirmed that each denomination “has something distinctive to bring, not to a new church, but to a new expression of the One Church to which the people of both communions now belong.” A considerable portion of the January 1966 issue was also devoted to feature articles intended to rouse enthusiasm for the union process and help United Church members to get acquainted with their Anglican sisters and brothers. An article, titled “These Are the Anglicans,” presented a positive view of worldwide Anglicanism that emphasized its missional activities; another article, “My Anglican Communion,” attempted to dispel a number of the “myths” that United Church people were thought to hold about Anglicans and Anglicanism. It also forthrightly examined the various issues that divided the two churches. An article by Dorothy Dumbrille followed (“An Anglican’s 40 Years in a United Church”) in which Dumbrille spoke of her own discernment during decades of worshipping as an Anglican within a tradition that she initially found foreign and occasionally annoying.

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152 Ibid., 15.
154 “Anglicans are snobbish; Anglicans are faithful about going to church; They ought to get rid of their archaic church canons; There’s too much ceremony in their services; Anglicans are breaking out of their self-centred piety; They have dignity and solidity; Anglicans chain themselves to dogma.” Tom Jarvis, “My Anglican Communion,” *UCO*, January 15, 1966, 19.
155 Dorothy Dumbrille, “An Anglican’s 40 Years in a United Church,” *UCO*, January 15, 1966, 46. The E&SS took a more pragmatic approach to the union, noting that it opened the possibility of a “vastly more effective Christian witness” through the integration of resources, the elimination of duplication and the pooling of “best practice” wisdom. The board was concerned, however, that emphasis in the new church should rightly be on its mission, not
Canada and Its Future, the 1967 Annual Report of the E&SS, offered an encouraging Anglican viewpoint on union through the reprinting an article by George Luxton (Bishop of Huron) that had first appeared in the British Church Times. Luxton was certain that the coming together of the two churches would mean “a great upsurge of Christian faith and unity in our nation.” Luxton emphasized, however, that the Canadian situation must be viewed as only a small piece of the larger ecumenical task taking place around the world. None the less, he cautioned that a serious concern for Anglicans was the possibility that association with the unabashedly Protestant United Church might jeopardize the attainment of a yet more glorious reunion: “Our relationship with the Roman Catholics in Canada is full of hope and promise. We are confident that the union principles will hold us within or close to the Anglican Communion, and not increase appreciably our distance from Rome.”

Other voices in both the United and Anglican Churches were less sanguine about the wisdom of organic union during the 1960s. E.S. Reed, the Anglican Bishop of Ottawa, urged caution. God makes unity, says Reed, not humans. Prayers for Christian unity should, he suggested, “be prayers of thanks for what has already been accomplished in this field.” Meanwhile, within the United Church there was doubt about whether organic union made sense when humanity was on the verge of entering an entirely New Age that would require an altogether new kind of church. In a letter to The Globe and Mail, Rev. R.C. Wesley Cope of St. Andrew’s United Church, North Bay, cited three areas of concern for United Church members when considering a merger with the Anglicans: the unification of ministries, the place of historic creeds and the role of bishops. Cope pronounced that the latter two concerns fail the important 1960s “relevancy” test: “How can we interest young moderns in the church with fossilized expressions of faith that do not take into account the age in which we are living?”

157 Ibid.
158 Ibid.
The immediate response to the Principles was, according to John Webster Grant, overwhelmingly positive. They were accepted by both churches which proceeded to appoint a General Commission along with special commissions on doctrine, liturgy, constitution, and law as recommended by the Principles. In addition, a special commission on “The Church and the World” was authorized at the first meeting of the General Commission. Grant, who was intimately involved with the evolution of the process, recalls that for five years the committees “labored together assiduously and, except on rare occasions, amicably.” The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) accepted the invitation to join the process and by early 1970 it occupied a place at the negotiating table. Eventually a draft Plan of Union was prepared by working committees in advance of a joint meeting of the General Synod and General Council in 1971. It was published as a supplement in the church magazines in the winter of 1971, though two more years of study and revision would take place before the plan was approved by both parties in 1973.

Nevertheless, in the years between the hammering out of the Principles of Union and the announcement that a Plan of Union had evolved (and in the midst of a world in increasing and often violent turmoil) it had clearly been difficult for both denominations to sustain much in the way of pro-union momentum. In fact, as the churches attempted to move closer together the Observer records an increasing United Church prickliness on matters of denominational dissimilarity. An editorial in the February 1, 1964 issue took exception to the Anglican national paper the Canadian Churchman in its characterization of United Church worship (the magazine had used the word “nauseating” with reference to some United Church hymnody). A 1965 issue of the Observer included an editorial on the subject of bishops that resuscitated United Church fears of the imposition of an “unacceptable doctrine of the Episcopacy” and rejected once again any suggestion “that the ministry of the United Church up until now had been invalid or inferior.” The November issue in that same year recorded the results of a survey that

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161 Grant, “Leading a Horse,” 168.
162 Ibid.
163 Airhart, A Church with the Soul of a Nation, 276.
164 Perceptions of the United Church membership as somehow, like their Methodist forbears, “lower class” skulked beneath the surface in many Anglican responses to the union proposal. They were often expressed in distaste for United Church worship practices.
165 The United Church position was that in the new denomination the role of bishop would be re-imagined. According to Richard Davidson: “We’re just taking the name of bishop ... and pouring into the name and office what we want.” See Patricia Clarke, “Bishops,” in UCO, April 15, 1968, 19.
166 “Bishops Will Be Welcome but …,” UCO, August 1972, 10.
indicated most Anglican and United Church laity were more in favour of union between the churches than the clergy.

In 1967, United Church general secretary Ernest Long, rejecting a merely functional approach to union, spoke with the *Observer* about what he hoped would be the focus of discussion: “If we want union just for the sake of organization, because we can save effort, money and manpower, I’m not interested. Union ought to do these things, but they are not the reason for union. We need to be one because, divided, we cannot show by word or deed the full meaning of the Gospel, which is a gospel of reconciliation.”

A joint editorial by A.C. Forrest and *Churchman* editor Hugh McCullum appeared in the May 1, 1968 issue of the *Observer*. This issue also announced the target year of 1974 for consummation of the union of the churches but advised both caution and patience from both denominations. As target year approached, bi-monthly reports on church union began to appear in the *Observer*. One of these (April 1969) advised widespread study of the union proposal among the laity and offered a list of helpful resources. Less optimistically, however, it also presented opinions from representatives of each church. Gordon Baker (Anglican) observed a “growing nervousness among Anglicans at the local levels” as they listened to the declarations of national spokesmen that the Anglican and United Churches could expect union by 1974. For his part, Clifford Elliott, minister of Metropolitan United Church, Toronto, reminded readers to eschew the functional and concentrate on the spiritual depth to be found in the widely employed marriage metaphor: “The term marriage is often used of the union. Surely any proposal of marriage must begin with mutual love and trust between two partners—not with a discussion of the marriage vows.”

To help United Church members understand and sympathize more readily with the role of bishops, an encomium of Archbishop Ted Scott appeared in the February 1, 1969 issue of the *Observer*. In an article designed to appeal to a United Church audience, Scott advised that for union to succeed, no amount of top-down leadership will yield a happy result; it “has to come from the bottom.” Similarly he noted that some problems of the labour pains of union were

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rooted in the strong attachments that people have to buildings: “Before you can change this, you have to give them some other equally strong sense of identity.”

In June 1969, the “Church Union Report” in the two denominational magazines published a provisional statement called “A Declaration of Faith” prepared by the Doctrinal Commission and revised in the light of discussions with the General Commission on Church Union held in Halifax two months earlier. The September 1969 issue of the Observer featured a panel discussion between clergy and professors from both denominations examining in detail the Declaration of Faith. Richard Price, a recent United Church ordinand, found himself unimpressed. He advised that while Declaration would seem to serve an earlier age well enough, it was woefully inadequate for the needs of the New Age that was unfolding: “I just don’t find the statement something that will move people. And I want that to happen.”

In their July 1970 issues, the Churchman and the Observer jointly polled the membership of both denominations on the subject of union and discerned that “the concerns of a sizable proportion of Anglicans who have expressed a reluctance could postpone an early marriage.” What most surprised the pollsters was that young Anglicans were the strongest opponents of union, while young United Church people were the strongest advocates. Moreover, “half the United Church and 55 percent of the Anglicans declared that impetus for church union was coming from national church offices.” The subject of how members of the two denominations viewed one another was similarly problematic: “Anglicans think of those in the United Church as

172 Ibid., 15.
175 “How You React to Church Union: A Survey Full of Surprises,” UCO, November 1970. According to the poll results, fifty-one per cent of the United Church and twenty-nine per cent of the Anglicans were “eager” for union; six percent of the United Church and thirty-one percent of the Anglicans threatened to leave rather than join together; United Church clergy lagged behind the laity in their enthusiasm for union; Anglican clergy were less in favour of union than most of their people, but more in favour than young Anglicans; two-thirds of United Church people thirty and under were “eager” for union. Significantly, however, forty five percent of Anglicans thirty years of age and under said they would leave the church first. Although analysis of the statistics acknowledged that response to polls tended to be made by the disaffected, the article bleakly predicted that union could cost the Anglicans thirty percent of their members, more than a third of their clergy and nearly half of their young people. The analysis concluded both that “there is a sizable anti-union sentiment in the Anglican Church, that it is far stronger than the anti-union sentiment in the United Church,” and that “the General Commission on Church Union still has a big educational job to do.” (18).
176 Ibid.
having a ‘shallow faith’ and being ‘liberal’; United Church members think of Anglicans as ‘ritualistic’ and ‘conservative.’”

The November 1970 issue of the Observer featured an article by Patricia Clarke introducing the Rev. Robert B. Craig and Canon Ralph Latimer who had been given the task of travelling across the country to “sell” the union process. As Clarke describes it, Craig and Latimer “like a pair of King Canutes” confronted “a tide of myth, misinformation and prejudice” which they beat back “with the facts.” According to the two clergy, when church members were presented with said facts their fears tended to dissipate. Nevertheless, Latimer noted that the big stumbling block for lay people “is the plain ordinary absorption of their own little bailiwick. They’ll sing for union, they’ll pray for union—just don’t ask them to unite with anyone.” Answering the question of why the denominations are planning an organic union, Craig and Latimer declared: “Anything less than organic union is picnic union ... As long as we are separate and competitive, we make a mockery of our belief in one Lord, one faith, one baptism. The world sees our divisions, hears our claim of ‘oneness’ and replies ‘Who do you think you’re kidding?’”

As the 1960s gave way to the 1970s, the union movement continued to sputter and what little enthusiasm remained came from the United Church alone. The draft Plan of Union was published in the February 1971 issues of the two denominational magazines. Ominously, at a synod meeting in Halifax in 1971 that same month there was excitement for co-operation with the Roman Catholics—but almost no Anglican enthusiasm for the draft Plan of Union with the United Church of Canada. By 1972 an editorial in the Observer pointed to the possibility that church union could be scuttled as much from anti-union sentiment in the United Church as the now painfully obvious foot-dragging in the Anglican camp: “It has always been obvious that the United-Anglican Church Union plans could fail. It has been assumed in the United Church that if they did, it would be the fault of the Anglicans. But United Church inertia, and United Church

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177 Ibid. In the United Church context, support for union could come from mysterious places. The United Church Renewal Fellowship was not opposed to union per se because, by adding in the numbers of Anglican evangelicals, it anticipated that the power base of evangelicals would be extended within the new denomination. According to J. Berkley Reynolds, as with most evangelical groups, the UCRF felt “no pull in the direction of the liturgical and the sacramental. Its emphasis is on proclamation in order to convert. But the Fellowship would prefer Anglican liturgies to United Church liberalism.” See J. Berkley Reynolds, “The Hot New Fight for the Good Old Faith,” 15.
178 Patricia Clarke, “Craig and Latimer: Church Union’s Travelling Salesmen,” UCO, November, 1970, 22.
179 Ibid.
wet blanketing could also contribute.”181 The editorial cited a “recent anti-union action of London Conference” and suggested that “the thing to do now is to get on with it—fast. The vast majority of church people are followers, not leaders. They will go with the crowd whichever way it goes. Those who are committed and who have responsibility for leadership should remember they have the mandate of both churches to lead as fast as they can.”182

In November 1971, the United Church moderator, A.B.B. Moore, confirmed that the Anglicans “were beginning to put the brakes on” as the Plan of Union took definite shape and began to require specific commitments.183 The Primate, Archbishop Scott met with Moore out of concern for “the mood of his church.” According to Scott, the Anglicans now wanted to retreat away from a functional emphasis on structure to the more esoteric realm of “process” and “movement.” Although the Primate spoke positively about local denominational co-operation Moore heard “a backing off from any final commitment to a specific united church.”184 The most important decision made at the Windsor meeting was a request to the churches that they now accept each other’s clergy as well as a suggestion that the two churches undertake services of inter-communion. While Moore left the meeting in an upbeat mood, he noted that the work accomplished at the Windsor meeting was either not adequately conveyed to the churches “or not accepted.”185

Moderator Moore was succeeded by N. Bruce McLeod. In his letter, accompanying the official launch of the Plan of Union, the new moderator reflected this sense that there had been a significant change in wind direction (and a decrease in wind speed) since 1965. Leading with a negative observation he asked:

So how is the interest in Church union in your community? In mine, I have to say, it has not been too great. We have not kept up with what the Commissions have been doing. We have been building broader inter-Church relations than just those between Anglicans, United’s and Disciples. But. Enclosed with this letter is a document which I believe will reawaken interest and rekindle enthusiasm. “Plan of Union” is the culmination of eight years of work by 200 people from all three Churches. You will find “Plan of Union” is readable. The opening section makes clear the intention to go beyond a merger of existing bodies to “a new

181 “Church Union Could Fall Apart,” UCO, August, 1972, 10.
182 Ibid.
183 Moore. Here, Where We Live, 207.
184 Ibid.
185 Ibid., 210.
manifestation of the Church”. The envisaged unity is not uniformity, but an effort to respond together to God’s single love for his world.”

McLeod’s observation that some people lacked enthusiasm for the union process was an understatement. A Toronto Star article announced the arrival of the union plan but included a quotation from L.S. Garnsworthy (Anglican Bishop of Toronto) who predicted that union “hasn’t got a snowball’s chance in Hades.” Asked to respond to the bishop’s negativity, McLeod opined that people across Canada were “ready to move away from ‘narrow denominational families into a broader unity.’” A Globe and Mail article announcing the plan noted that most of the United Church seemed willing to have union move along, while more and more Anglicans wanted it to slow down. The writer also cited the opinions of a spokesperson for the Council of Faith, a small, ultra-traditional Anglican organization that was vigourously protesting against church union. The council declared itself terrified that “union with a non-liturgical, non-mystical, non-traditional church like The United Church of Canada would endanger relationships with the Roman Catholic Church.”

A February 1973 Observer editorial observed that while those involved were enthusiastic, “those not involved seem bored.”

In his autobiography, A.B.B. Moore noted that his formal connection to the church union negotiations ended when the Plan of Union was presented to the National Executives of the United and Anglican churches and the Disciples of Christ. Moore and former Primate, Archbishop Clark, spoke, the heads of the three churches presided and received the plan but, as Moore describes it, he had a sense of foreboding: “There the excitement seemed to end. I had a feeling that the meeting rather petered out with little indication of any sensitivity to the work, even agony that had gone into the production of this Plan.”

When the Plan of Union was published, four pages of the April 1973 issue of the Observer were devoted to introduction and summary (the massive work of writing and redrafting

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187 “Bishop Says Church Union Hasn’t ‘a Snowball’s Chance,’” The Toronto Star, February 8, 1973. Ex-moderator A.B.B. Moore was present and heard Garnsworthy’s remark. In the context of the Anglican Church’s stated commitment to the union process, he was unimpressed with the bishop’s belligerent attitude. “Many years of study, discussion and decision were lightly dismissed by those who, through their Synod’s action, had committed themselves to the achievement of union.” Moore, Here Where We Live, 228.
188 Ibid.
191 Moore, Here Where We Live, 227.
the plan had been accomplished by John Webster Grant. The explanatory note that introduced the *Plan of Union*’s vision of the new church (now to be called “The Church of Christ in Canada”\(^{192}\) rather than “The Church in Canada”) proclaimed that the plan “records fundamental agreements about the faith and order of the Church of Christ in Canada, registers basic commitments for its life and work, and provides appropriate structures for carrying out its mission. It embodies and expands earlier agreements contained in the *Principles of Union*.”\(^{193}\) The *Plan* affirms that it is conceived primarily as an instrument of union. “It is intended neither to replace the rich heritage of faith and practice of the uniting churches nor to provide for all situations that may arise in the life of the Church of Christ in Canada.”\(^{194}\) Speaking later of the development of the *Plan of Union*, John Webster Grant judged that many of the expectations for the process were “unrealistic.” Nevertheless, the commissions had reached remarkable consensus on a wide range of issues including several expected to be stumbling blocks: divorce, the use of wine in communion, composed prayers and (by the time the plan was issued) the admission of women to all of the church’s offices. Some disagreements fell predictably along denominational lines (especially the role of the laity in ordination); others did not.

In December 1974, the *Observer* featured an article by the *Canadian Churchman*s Hugh McCullum (“Why Anglicans Are Cooling on Union”) to explain why, despite the “overwhelming approval” by the United Church’s 1974 Guelph General Council, the outcome was likely to be very different in an Anglican vote. According to McCullum there were three distinct views on the union question within the Anglican Church. There was a “vocal and adamant minority” opposed to union. The conservative group, the Council for the Faith, included “low” church evangelicals and “high” church Anglo Catholics. Ranged against them were the pro-unionists that included “‘liberals’ and progressives with the ecumenical outlook of the 50’s and 60’s.”\(^{195}\) The largest and most important group, however, was “the mass of Canadian Anglicans, numbering some 1,500,000” who were more worried about what would happen to the prayer book service, the traditions and Aunt Martha’s memorial window, or how many candles would remain on the altars of the new manifestation of the church.\(^{196}\) McCullum assessed the

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\(^{192}\) Interestingly, the name “the Church of Christ in Canada” appears in the doctrine section of the Preamble to the United Church’s *Basis of Union*: “We, the representatives of the Presbyterian, the Methodist, and the Congregational branches of the Church of Christ in Canada, do hereby set forth the substance of the Christian faith, as commonly held among us” (Italics added).

\(^{193}\) *Plan of Union*, 6.

\(^{194}\) Ibid., 9.


\(^{196}\) Ibid.
strength of the anti-union movement within the Anglican Church, and announced that the achievement of the seventy-five per cent majority necessary to commend the church for voting in 1976 was extremely unlikely.

After years of diligent work from hundreds in both churches, the Plan of Union was indeed “destined for speedy oblivion.” In February 1974, John Hunter writing for the Observer surmised that church union may have been right for its time, but that the times themselves had changed. Hunter noted that there had been a “rising surge of ecumenism” symbolized by the WCC and the proposed union of two of Canada’s large Protestant churches. However, when the space age dawned and humanity reached out to the unknown, it paradoxically found that it needed to identify with the well-known. “Ecumenism is going out of style. The trend to church union has slowed almost to a stop, if not gone into reverse.” Hunter observed that the situation was similar in other countries where union plans were cooling. In Britain, the Anglicans “wooed the Methodists for years” but when a plan of union was devised and a vote taken, the Anglicans failed to give it the required majority. Further, he noted that in a time when church membership was dropping, the church school had shrunk and the majority of congregations was increasingly aged, the situation was “a far cry from the exhilaration of 1925.”

In August 1974 an Observer editorial asked forthrightly: “Church Union Has Had It?” It was certainly not a good omen that the Churchman had won an international award from the Associated Press for an editorial in which editor Hugh McCullum announced that “the Superchurch is dead.” A.C. Forrest took exception to the use of the term “Superchurch” for the proposed union, but he reluctantly agreed with McCullum’s assessment that organic union was the wrong strategy for the present context. Not only were the Anglican bishops likely to reject it, within the United Church there is no sense of unanimity: “Let’s face it. The United Church is theoretically in favour of union, but for too many it is not now, and not with the Anglicans, especially if they don’t want us.”

The Plan of Union was laid to rest in June 1975. The Anglican General Synod responded to the bishops’ disapproval not only by declaring the plan to be unacceptable but also by

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197 Grant, “Leading a Horse to Water,” 172.
199 “Church Union Has Had It?,” UCO, August 1974, 10. In the same Observer issue, Alan Reynolds characterized the United Church attitude as “drifting.” According to Reynolds, it was not the official United Church attitude that is the problem. See Alan Reynolds, “Church Union,” UCO, August 1974, 39.
pointedly withdrawing its commitment from all but the ‘Principles of Faith and Order’ in the original *Principles of Union*. In what by then must have been an all too familiar pattern for United Church leaders, the synod nevertheless reaffirmed its “commitment to the achievement of union” but cast doubts upon the existing negotiations.\footnote{Grant “Leading a Horse”, 165, 172. Union negotiations with the Disciples of Christ would continue until 1985 when they also ended unsuccessfully.} Within a year the United Church offered the Anglicans a moratorium on union negotiations and the offer was gratefully accepted. By 1977 the two denominations agreed to an amicable parting of the ways but declared a face-saving intention to maintain co-operation safely within denominational boundaries.\footnote{“When a ‘moratorium on negotiations toward church union’ was found to be mutually acceptable to both our communions in November 1975, we entered a new phase in this relationship. The Committee on Union and Joint Mission was terminated. While many areas of cooperation continued in a positive manner, we were officially in a strange form of limbo until February, 1977, when a decision was made to relate to each other through our existing systems, i.e., our two Inter-Church Relations Committees. It is hoped that this method may assist us to keep in touch and be alert to the climate in our separate churches.” *ROP*, 1977, 637-638. In 1978 the two churches began a five-year discussion of the mutual recognition of ministries.}

While the end of a thirty-two year conversation was undoubtedly received with relief by many, for others it brought bitter disappointment. The August 1975 issue of the *Observer* offered a short article in its “news” segment (“Union with Anglicans Now Off”) in which General Secretary Donald Ray categorically rejected continuing with the fruitless “playing word games about ‘unity’ and ‘union.’”\footnote{“Union with Anglicans Now Off,” *UCO*, August, 1975, 27.} A.C. Forrest’s editorial “Now It’s Final” reported the demise of *The Plan of Union* but “respectfully” suggested that Canadian Anglicans have “a lot of work to do before they can realistically invite any communion to consider organic union.”\footnote{Ibid.}

Nevertheless, Forrest paid homage to the mentality of the early 1960s by continuing to cheer for ecumenical initiatives: “There must be no letdown in our efforts to co-operate with other communions—all communions—and as much as possible on their terms.”\footnote{“Now It’s Final,” *UCO*, August 1975, 9.}

In “Leading a Horse to Water,” John Webster Grant (who was not only a leader in the union negotiation process but had major responsibility in the drafting of the *Plan of Union*) reflected on the protracted courtship and reflected on why, at the end of a period of heightened ecumenical commitment throughout Christianity, the United Church in 1975 found itself “left standing at the altar.” Among his insights, Grant lifted up the *zeitgeist* of the 1960’s which, he assessed, had actually “put a damper on union by deflecting enthusiasm” in other directions. Serious opposition in the later stages came, he noted, “mainly from people who sensed in union a
threat of unwelcome innovation. Some of these were Anglo-Catholics, some conservative evangelicals, some liberals of an older vintage.”

Grant also described how the window that had been suddenly flung open by the meeting of the Second Vatican Council raised for the Anglicans the seductive possibility of a more congenial marital partner. The formation of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission offered them “developments more in harmony with their natural inclinations.” Further, Grant pointed out that during the early 1970’s the Anglican Church was exhausted from a decade spent wrestling with a number of vexatious and controversial issues (the ordination of women, involvement in political causes). It had no remaining energy for the myriad problems attendant on merging with the United Church.

More complex are the reasons that had kept the denominations apart for generations and that had defeated previous attempts at getting substantive union talks going. While the hammering out of the 1966 *Principles of Union* had demonstrated that “on the level of explicit theology there were no insuperable barriers,” Grant indicates that there were, in fact, “deep-seated differences in mentality” that would ultimately prove overwhelming:

> Even in the Canadian setting there were times when debates recalled traditional confrontations between establishment and dissent. More fundamentally, Anglican commissioners tended to discuss the church in organic terms while those of the other denominations found contractual or instrumental descriptions more congenial. Such differences could not be resolved by problem-solving methods, for essentially they constituted not problems but different modes of conception. While closer acquaintance gave rise to new understandings, therefore, it also exposed unexpected threats to identities that had been largely taken for granted.

The Anglican Church’s atavistic sense of itself as a national church and the dream of the reunion of the Church Catholic, the Kingdom of Christ on earth, may be one of those submerged identities that had received insufficient attention in the rush to establish commonalities between the two denominations and to forge a new church that transcended the constituent parts. The United Church, for its part, carried in its institutional DNA the process that had led to its own birth as the result of a denominational merger—“a mission to create a Christian Canada” and to establish, as writers of The Basis of Union expressed it, “a Church which may fitingly be described as national”—an ethnic Canadian (and Protestant) church. The name that was chosen

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206 Ibid.
207 Ibid.
for the denomination that came into being in 1925 conveyed what supporters of church union had “believed to be its promise: a commitment to the wider unity of Christianity and a unique role in Canada.”

Grant saw the collapse of the union negotiations as a “virtual detachment of the United Church from the coherent vision that had inspired its foundation.” It also seemed to signify the vanishing of the 1960s ecumenical dream. All roads were now open, “and the United Church could find its own way without too much concern for what the rest of the church might think.” Even membership in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the World Methodist Council, which had been previously prized, “now seemed almost superfluous or even inappropriate.”

Perhaps of ultimate significance, Grant also located in the 1960s a marked departure from the dream of a re-united Christendom in the light of the dawning sense that Christendom itself was a vanishing reality. In a Canada where secularism was clearly in the ascendant, pluralism and diversity came to have far greater appeal than unity despite a warm ecumenical climate. Moreover, the problematic word for both denominations in the high priestly prayer from John’s gospel was perhaps not “unum” but “omnes.”

Precisely who in Canada were the “all” that would be made one?

Writing on the subject of ecumenism in Religion in Secular Society, Bryan Wilson asserts that the churches’ self-focused concern with ecumenism marked a turning inward to avoid a much more urgent problem: “An outside observer might have thought that the problem of secularization could much more suitably have been chosen as the special problem of contemporary Christianity.” Wilson holds the clergy primarily responsible for what he considers an incomprehensible evasion: “In the last two decades ecumenicalism has become the dominant clerical cause.” It might also be argued, however, that ecumenical enthusiasm was a way to address the demands of writers like Pierre Berton for the churches to manifest a more generous and inclusive faith. In an article prepared for the Observer during Canada’s centennial year, General Secretary Ernest Long wrote positively about the United Church’s long history of enthusiasm for the ecumenical movement which had unfortunately during the 1960s experienced some “unexpected turns” which presented it with “unexpected problems.” Nevertheless, Long remained an ecumenical enthusiast, since among its other strengths ecumenism afforded the

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208 Airhart, A Church with the Soul of a Nation, 5.
209 Grant, “What’s Past Is Prologue,” 139.
210 Interestingly, Pope John Paul II’s 1995 encyclical on ecumenism used the Vulgate translation: ut unum sint.
211 Wilson, Religion in Secular Society, 125.
212 Ibid.
opportunity for “rubbing elbows with Christians of every confession and tradition all over the world—and not least with our neighbors at home.” A sad new trend, which would only gain strength as the millennium approached, was the vanishing likelihood that these imagined “neighbours at home” would be church-going Christians of any denominational stripe.

\[214\] Ibid.
Chapter 4
Feast or Famine: The United Church and Sex in the Age of Aquarius

I liked it when my father talked in old-fashioned picture-language of the Devil in order to convey the strength of the Dark, that psychic reality which I had recognised at such an early age. But then my father stopped talking about the reality of the Dark and began talking of the unreality of the sexual rules. It turned out that almost anything was an abuse of sex. In fact in a world which was overflowing with sexual possibilities—and which was soon to explode into a sexual supermarket—he insisted that for the unmarried only deprivation was on offer. With a marriage certificate tucked under one’s pillow one could have sex twenty-five hours a day and God would never bat an eyelid (provided that the sex was what my father called ‘wholesome’; I never failed to be amazed by his use of archaic language). But for the Christian it was either feast or famine where sex was concerned. No wonder the unchurched masses thought Christianity was peculiar on the subject.¹

Susan Howatch, Mystical Paths

In A Secular Age, philosopher and historian Charles Taylor observed that the generations formed in the cultural revolution of the 1960s were “in some respects deeply alienated from a strong traditional model of Christian faith in the West.”² Much of this alienation centred on sex and sexuality. According to Taylor, during this decade not only were more people swept into a stance in opposition to much of the churches’ teaching, the new sexual mores were even more strongly at odds with it:

There was a tripartite connection which seemed to many absolutely unquestionable in the past: between Christian faith and an ethic of discipline and self-control, even of abnegation, on the one hand; and between this ethic and civilizational order on the other. But … this second link has come to seem less and less credible to more and more people. The pursuit of happiness has come to seem not only not to need a restrictive sexual ethic and the disciplines of deferred gratification, but actually to demand their transgression in the name of self-fulfillment.³

² Taylor, A Secular Age, 495.
³ Ibid., 493.
Taylor indicates two ways in which “expressivism and the conjoined sexual revolution …
alienated many people from churches” and caused them to reject an earlier ethic of discipline
and self-control. Not only did they find themselves profoundly at odds with the sexual stance the
churches were proffering, their sense of following their own path was offended by what they
experienced as the ‘authoritarian’ approach of churches, “laying down the law, and not waiting
for a reply.” According to Taylor, as the twentieth century proceeded, an increasing emphasis
on individual responsibility and freedom initiated a reaction against the notion of clerical control;
moreover, an attempt to rehabilitate the body and the life of feeling led, in turn, to a reaction
against sexual repression.

Within the United Church and other mainline Protestant denominations in North America
a tension emerged during the 1960s between a sexual ethic based on revealed law (considered
sacrosanct by religious conservatives) and what came to be called “the New Morality.” The New
Morality called for a more flexible approach to ethical issues (including issues of sex and
gender). It paid more attention to context and less to the enforcement of divinely ordained
behavioural rules through shaming and social sanctions. However, given the speed of the
changes, even liberal voices within the leadership of the United Church who sought to uphold
sex as part of the goodness of creation, and who were inclined to submit church teachings to the
important 1960s test of “relevance,” found it difficult to come to terms with an apparent rejection
of the church’s traditional views by young people who found them uncongenial. The coping
strategy of United Church leaders when perplexed by issues of sexuality was often to substitute
one discourse for another: while still promoting sexual continence and attempting to preserve (in
some form) the sanctity of the postwar Christian family home, they exchanged supposedly
timeless scriptural verities for the opinions of “experts.” They grasped at modernity by moving
beyond the Bible to seek “scientific” confirmation for what was in reality an atavistic
conservatism. Rather than quoting from scripture or accessing inherited tradition, they buttressed
their views on matters sexual with the authority of physicians, psychologists and social
scientists.  

4 Ibid.  
5 Ibid.  
6 During the 1960s United Church leaders used a similar strategy to deal with another fraught moral topic: the
increasing, and increasingly unashamed, consumption by Canadians (including United Church members) of
“beverage alcohol.”
The tension arising from the juxtaposition of these two very different approaches to sexual morality within the churches is evident in the highly charged reaction to a hymn published in the joint United Church/Anglican *Hymn Book* of 1971. In the Preface, the Hymn Book committee articulated its goals: the aim of the committee was to provide a resource for worship in the two denominations that included not only a “comprehensive selection of hymns from the best of inherited hymnody” but also “a book of contemporary hymns expressive of the church’s mission in, and to, the world of our times.”  

Enthusiastic to meet the all-important 1960s test of “relevance,” the hymn book committee included a hymn by writer Derwyn Dixon Jones called, “Now Thank We All for Bodies Strong.” The first verse of Jones’ hymn text offers a resoundingly positive view of sexuality including a frank celebration of the human body, including its various appetites:

Now thank we God for bodies strong,  
vitality and zest,  
for strength to meet the day’s demands,  
the urge to give our best,  
for all our body’s appetites which can fulfillment find  
and for the sacrament of sex that recreates our kind.

When *The Hymn Book* entered into regular use, many members in both denominations were scandalized by hymn #202—not for artistic reasons (which would have been understandable), but because the hymn seemed to promote the abandonment of traditional Christian sexual morality: it manifested a conscious “letting down of the guard” under apparent pressure from what was increasingly being called a “sexual revolution.” In a letter to the editor of the *Observer*, one writer asked: “How could we sing such pieces as ‘thank God for all our body’s appetites’, etc., when the lust of the appetites today are so prevalent and demoralizing?” Another predicted that the moral breakdown implied by the inclusion of such material into a Christian hymnal would soon result in the new book being thrown away “and fewer people going to church.”

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7 “The Preface,” *Hymn Book of the Anglican Church of Canada and the United Church of Canada* (Toronto: The Anglican Church of Canada and the United Church of Canada, 1971). While there was some contemporary hymn content, the balance fell decidedly on the side of traditional hymnody.

Notwithstanding these negative responses, there is nothing theologically unconventional about Jones’ text.\footnote{The view that procreative sex is normative is highly traditional. A description of sex in sacramental terms was also nothing new. The report of the Commission on Christian Marriage and Divorce, \textit{Toward a Christian Understanding of Sex, Love, Marriage} (Toronto: Board of Christian Education of the United Church of Canada, 1960) used identical language (8), though the emphasis was on discipline and control (5, 13). John A.T. Robinson also took up the metaphor in 1960 during his testimony for the defence during the prosecution of Penguin Books for obscenity. Robinson remarked that sex was an act of holy communion (which was widely misinterpreted as Holy Communion—much to the chagrin of the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher).} What made the lyric so uncomfortable for many United Church members was that it appeared following a decade during which these mainline Canadian denominations, like other churches in the West, found their teachings on a range of issues being widely challenged by young people who regarded the church and its teachings as “irrelevant” to daily life. Often they simply stopped going to church altogether. As historian Callum Brown observes, “in no period of history did the relationship of Christianity to issues of sex, sexual orientation and sexual equality become of such importance as in the 1960s.”\footnote{Callum G. Brown, \textit{Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain} (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2006), 240.} To these issues must be added what Arthur Marwick in \textit{The Sixties} observes as the emergence during the decade of a freedom and a “permissiveness” which he defines as “a general sexual liberation, entailing striking changes in public and private morals and (what I am particularly keen to stress) a new frankness, openness, and indeed honesty in personal relations and modes of expression.”\footnote{Marwick, \textit{The Sixties}, 18.} \footnote{Taylor, \textit{A Secular Age}, 495.}

It was likely this very frankness, openness and honesty about sex rather than any argument with the theological content of “Now Thank We God for Bodies Strong” that motivated those who wrote letters of protest to the editor of the \textit{Observer}. One writer’s use of the word “demoralizing” is certainly an apt one, though perhaps in an augmented sense. Those formed in the cultural revolution of the 1960s did, indeed, find themselves de-moralized—“deeply alienated from a strong traditional model of Christian faith in the West.”\footnote{Taylor, \textit{A Secular Age}, 495.}

In his examination of the relationship of the churches to the youth and counter-culture of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Bruce Douville asserts that his subject is an important one “because it raises the perennial question of whether the church is primarily a ‘priestly (legitimating)’ institution or a ‘prophetic (critical)’ one. In other words, does the church function as the religious arm of the dominant social, political and cultural system, or does it oppose—
even subvert—that dominant system?”\textsuperscript{13} The United Church of Canada in the 1960s wanted to do both. Arguably, however, the United Church found itself caught off guard and unable to respond quickly, flexibly or tolerantly to all of these apparently sudden cultural transformations. That the churches were severely challenged when the issue was sex is, I would suggest, another small but important piece to the complex puzzle of why mainline churches in the North Atlantic world entered into such significant decline, not only in attendance, but in power and cultural influence during and after the decade of ferment.\textsuperscript{14} As many United Church leaders sought to move the denomination’s role in Canadian society from “priestly” to “prophetic,” they were personally challenged by what appeared to be a youthful abandonment of the traditional idea that the sacrament of sex is only to be celebrated within the context of heterosexual marriage. On the one hand, leaders attempted to sustain values that had served the church well thus far (a position that public intellectuals like Pierre Berton weighed in the balance and found wanting). On the other hand, as various church reports and several articles that appeared in the Observer over the decade attest, there were also compassionate attempts to understand the nature of this cultural sea change in sexual matters and to make some sort of appropriate and timely ecclesial response. To the chagrin of conservative voices, the Observer and the publications of the E&SS during the 1960s manifest (particularly on the subject of pre-marital sex) if not a lessening of concern for continence, at least a softening of the hard line that had characterized the church’s discourse from the postwar era to the mid 60s.

I have organized my discussion of the United Church’s response to the “sex problem” primarily around the notion of the strengthening youth culture of the 1960s and the youthful rejection of both the cult of virginity and the traditional Christian stance that “the sacrament of sex” and “holy matrimony” were necessarily co-inherent. The 1960s marked a rejection of the sexual disciplines which had been considered such a necessary and important part of “the good Christian life as understood … in the nineteenth century Evangelical revivals in English-speaking countries.”\textsuperscript{15} Related to this issue is a more complex one: the gradual breakdown in North America of a patriarchal view of the “roles” appropriate to males and females within the


\textsuperscript{14} Although Americans also speak of decline, the experience of the American churches is different; the Canadian mainline churches’ pattern is (at least statistically) closer to that of Britain and Europe. I am inclined to follow Michael Adams argument in Fire and Ice that Canadians and Americans are culturally divergent and becoming more so, in part because Canada unlike the U.S. never saw fit to renounce its European heritage. Significantly, Adams’ broader observations arise primarily out of his study of Canadian attitudes toward sexuality (Sex in the Snow). See Michael Adams, Fire and Ice (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2003), 9.

\textsuperscript{15} Taylor, A Secular Age, 495.
structure of the Christian home. Early in the decade several of these tensions erupted with a vengeance in the Southwestern Ontario city of Chatham where the conservatism of a United Church congregation’s “old guard” collided with the renovating agenda of a minister considered by the standards of the time to be a radical, most particularly in matters sexual. The notorious “Horsburgh case” shocked United Church members across Canada, divided judicatories, and ruined the career and health of one of the denomination’s most charismatic clergy. In the transcripts of this court case, media coverage of the arrest and trial, and in the book that contains Horsburgh’s spirited self-defense, it is obvious that a high state of middle class anxiety during the sixties around issues of sexuality and the youth culture as well as denominational divisions between “liberal” and “conservative,” “prophetic” and “priestly” coalesced in a particularly ugly way, exposing the unattractive underbelly not only of the city of Chatham, but also of the United Church of Canada.

That the patriarchy was also under increasing stress as the decade progressed is implicit in the growing strength, during the 1960s, of two “liberation” movements: the feminist and homosexual, both of which would mature, further radically confront the status quo, and challenge the attitudes of Canadian churches in subsequent decades. Finally, all of these issues and movements were the focus of a guide to sexuality devised by the Sex and Morality Committee of the E&SS. This booklet went through a lengthy process of earnest preparation and a publication date was joyfully announced. Nevertheless the guide, along with the committee that had prepared it, had mysteriously disappeared from the United Church’s radar by 1970.

1 In Intercourse at Hearth or Board16

The sexual ethic that the United Church of Canada carried with it into the 1960s was, to a significant extent, a legacy of its British evangelical roots. A good number of nineteenth-century Protestants were convinced that many social problems originated with male of the species. Men were prone to destructive urges that needed to be disciplined and tamed for the sake of civilized order and sex was no exception. Among Christians, however, there were different concepts of what it might mean to exercise discipline and restraint in sexual matters. While certain medieval Catholic teachings looked askance at sexual pleasure even among married couples happily

procreating, Reformed thinkers attempted to rehabilitate married love as a blessing in its own right.

The British evangelical discourse in which the United Church bathed prior to the 1960s decade “was predicated on an idea of women as wanting a stable family life, which was constantly endangered by male temptation, to drink, gambling, infidelity.” 17 The conversion experience, particularly for males, became a way of turning away from the life of depravity and disorder. Callum Brown observes that the idea of the private conversion and the individual’s struggle with sin and personal relationship with God had been central to medieval and early modern Christianity, but by the eighteenth century it was no longer mediated by established churches within the framework of obedience to the state. 18 Since it provided a route to salvation it was not so much a theological system as a way of life. Brown notes that from 1796 to 1914, Britain was immersed in a proselytism that focused the individual “on personal salvation and ideals of moral behaviour and manifestations of outward piety.” 19 After the beginning of the nineteenth century it was, he says, “puritanised by evangelicalism,” 20 a process that affected all classes of society. The process reached its zenith in the early 1830s with the advent of the temperance movement and it continued in the heightened sensitivity among the social elites of the landed classes, patricians and middle classes to the adverse social consequences of industrial and town growth that had resulted from the industrial revolution and the accompanying rapid urbanization. Significantly, Evangelicalism also became an enforcer of domestic ideology for an evolving, though troubled, masculinity of the artisan chapel-goer, and a community venue for the exploration of women’s roles, ideals and protests. “Faith was being privatized as an individual choice, but one which had the potential to privilege female piety and institute anxiety about masculinity.” 21

Throughout the North Atlantic world in the 1940s and 1950s there was a revival of the evangelical ideal of domestic piety centred on the notion of the virtuous woman, the devoted wife and mother. “Traditional values of family, home and piety were suddenly back on the agenda between the end of the war and 1960.” 22 The churches benefited and enjoyed a sustained period of growth. Concurrently, the family home once again found itself enjoying a high point in

19 Ibid., 39.
20 Ibid., 40.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid., 172.
its sanctification. One of the most complete statements of the Protestant (and neo-orthodox) view of the sacredness of sex within its proper context of complementarity is located in a segment of Karl Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* where he discusses “Man and Woman.” According to Barth, human beings are designed by God to be covenant partners; they can exist “as man” only within these covenant relationships of man-woman pairs:

> That God created man as male and female, and therefore as His image and the likeness of the covenant of grace, of the relationship between Himself and His people, between Christ and His community, is something which can never lead to a neutral It, nor found a purely external, incidental and transient sexuality, but rather an inward, essential and lasting order of being as He and She, valid for all time and also for eternity.

Barth also maintains that the divine command requires that all things be avoided “which necessarily entails effeminacy in the male or mannishness in the female” since these undermine genuine humanity. Especially symptomatic of the “flight from God” implied by failure to recognize the divinely ordained necessity for complementarity is “the malady called homosexuality. This is the physical, psychological and social sickness, the phenomenon of perversion, decadence and decay, which can emerge when man refuses to admit the validity of the divine command in the sense we are considering it.”

Nancy Christie in “Sacred Sex: The United Church and the Privatization of the Family in Postwar Canada” proposes that the reason for a resurgence of emphasis within the postwar church on the notion of the complementarity of men and women (thought of as crucial to sustaining evangelical faith) was that it dovetailed with discourse in the wider culture that sought to re-assert social stability after the traumatic years of the Second World War. “Although the notions that the family was merely a microcosm of society and that home and nation were interdependent were not new ideas, the public insistence that domestic values determined social stability and economic progress reached a fever pitch in the first few years after the war.”

Christie also points out that since the late nineteenth century there had been an emphasis in the United Church’s founding denominations, and then in the United Church itself, on Christian nurture where the primary relationship of faith was seen to be between God and God’s children.

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24 Ibid., 213.
“In this traditional conceptualization of the Christian home, the family cleaved to the central figure of the moral mother, whose primary role was to use her maternal instincts to promote Christian values throughout society. In turn, the sexual needs of both men and women were considered to be antithetical to the development of spirituality and thus destructive to the kingdom.”

Following the war, however, Christie suggests that these views underwent a subtle but significant shift that re-conceptualized the purpose of marriage in terms of sexual satisfaction. She further argues that married women had begun to enter the workforce in such large numbers by the end of the 1950s that church leaders were concerned that their resulting economic independence from men might result in an upsurge of divorce petitions. “Women’s economic independence could be circumscribed, they believed, if their sexual freedom could be enhanced within the family.” At stake was the future of the patriarchal family, which had been guaranteed by the pre-eminent status of the male within the family unit. Although Christie rightly notes that the trend for married women to work outside the home was beginning in the 1950s, the full impact of such a change would not really be felt until the 1960s. Early in the decade, E&SS secretary J. R. Mutchmor admonished that working women undermined the spiritual and emotional health of the Christian home. In a segment of his autobiography, Mutchmor highlights the gospel accounts of Jesus’ desire to protect children. He uses this narrative as the starting point for his plea that, for the sake of their physical, psychological and spiritual health, young children should not be separated from their mothers. He notes “how often this teaching came to mind in Toronto in recent years as I saw little children being put away in indiscriminate places by mothers swept into gainful employment.”

Mutchmor’s public statements about this “threat” were taken up by the media and he recalls in his autobiography how he was criticized by professors, sociologists and social workers who called him “primitive.” As it happened, his viewpoint was also challenged in a report made to the General Council meeting held in London in 1962 (Report of the Commission on the Gainful Employment of Married Women), the meeting where he was elected moderator. According to Mutchmor, “this report on women, including mothers of young children, seemed to me to be unduly slanted in

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26 Ibid., 358.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., 361.
30 The report noted that according to the 1961 census, twenty percent of married women were now working outside the home and fifty percent of working women were married.
favour of the demands of a woman as woman. The claims of little children, of gainfully employed mothers, to love, care and protection were not properly considered.”

In an attempt to stem the tide and to support of the secretary’s point of view, concern for the damage to families caused by working mothers became a prominent theme in the E&SS reports of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Darkness or Dawn (the 1958 Annual Report), in addition to manifesting concern about the possibility of impending nuclear annihilation and attempting to answer the question “Should Christians Drink?” (apparently not), reprinted an essay by Dudley Ward, “The Church and the Industrial Order,” that had originated with the American Methodist Board of Social and Economic Relations. Ward observes the increasing participation of North American women “in gainful employment.” He suggests that this “completely new pattern” became acceptable during the Second World War and it “has continued since.” Because of the pervasiveness of this practice, the report suggests that the church must, with speed and precision, exercise its new responsibility “to re-examine the effects upon the home, which is the basic institution of society.”

For his part, J.R. Mutchmor observed a “polarization” affecting the quality of Canadian family life. On the positive side, there is evidence of “a love of children, record high birth rate and top level healthy family formations.” On the negative side, however, the rate of juvenile delinquency seemed to be mounting and the age of “those who break the moral code to be much lower.” Mutchmor continued by noting that more teen-age girls are entering into the denomination’s homes for unmarried mothers while there is mounting evidence of “weak and broken homes.” Alarmingly, ever-alert United Church ministers also reported “more sexual promiscuity.” According to Mutchmor, there were now more “irregular unions” occurring not only among the very young but also “in the 30 to 50 year group and often in the ‘good’ sections of society.” As the handmaids of sexual promiscuity, Mutchmor pointed toward drunkenness and alcoholism rates that were on the rise, accompanied by “a new tide of filth in the form of sex exciting novels and 50 cent picture magazines of a revolting kind.”

A shift away from such jeremiads on the subject of public morality is perceptible in Breaking the Barriers, the first E&SS Annual Report published with Ray Hord as secretary.

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31 Ibid., 126.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
Significantly, the Annual Report contains the reprint of an article from *The British Weekly* that points out the necessity for “Mission, Not Morals.” The writer of this article observes that Christianity is facing a crucial dilemma: while the church continues to uphold a sexual ethic based on chastity, the culture seems to be moving in a different direction, and that direction is away from any kind of faith in the church’s authority on matters of personal, and most especially on matters sexual. The writer suggests that the Christian ethic makes no sense and has no point apart from belief in Jesus Christ. “Departure from our uncertainty about the validity and relevancy of Christian ethical standards in the life of the nation is the inevitable consequence of extended non-acceptance of the Christian Gospel.” The real need, therefore, is for mission rather than morals. The article criticizes the tendency to demand “certain moral standards” as “the be-all and end-all of religion.” The essence of religion is not to be found in negative rules but a positive conception of a way of life. When it embraces negativity, it has “substituted legalism for Life and an arid ‘puritanism’ for the gaiety of Christian living.” Charity and chastity are not mutually exclusive. The real need is for the proclamation of the whole Gospel in mission rather than declamation of part of the Christian ethic as morals.

2 From Pulpit to Prison to Pop Record: The Horsburgh Scandal

Perhaps the most notorious example of the United Church attempting (and failing) to adapt to rapidly shifting moral/sexual attitudes of the early 1960s resides in a scandal that took place in the Southwestern Ontario city of Chatham. On Monday, June 29, 1964, the Rev. Russell D. Horsburgh was arrested in his office at Park St. United Church and charged with contributing to the delinquency of juveniles. These juveniles were teens who were under (or perhaps more accurately not under) his supervision while they participated in various youth programmes that he had instituted within the Park Street facility. At the core of the scandal was a widely disseminated suggestion that some teens were using a remote part of the church building for intercourse and that they did so with Horsburgh’s encouragement (and voyeuristic participation). The resulting trial and media frenzy took place over a number of months in the autumn of 1964. After several weeks of often contradictory testimony, Horsburgh was found guilty on five of eight counts. He was sentenced and served 107 days in prison as his lawyers sought leave to

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36 Ibid.
37 Ibid., 111.
38 Ibid.
appeal. Three years later the Supreme Court of Canada ordered a new trial. Three of the now five charges against him were withdrawn and he was finally acquitted on the others. By this point, however, Horsburgh, who had reluctantly resigned from the order of ministry of the United Church (much to the relief of many of his colleagues in Kent Presbytery and London Conference) was a broken man\(^{39}\) who spent the short time remaining to him attempting to rehabilitate his shattered reputation. While working as a parking lot attendant, he sought to be re-instated as a minister in good standing of the United Church, a re-instatement that was finally granted in January 1971, very shortly before his death from bone cancer.

The Rev. George Goth, in his introduction to Betty Jane Wylie’s play *The Horsburgh Scandal*, remarks that this was “the tragic drama of the sixties. It couldn’t have happened at any other time.”\(^{40}\) There are many aspects to the Horsburgh scandal that make it worthy of attention and study. In many ways the events that played out at Park Street appear to be a fairly typical church conflict resulting from the kind of “bad fit” that occurs when a pastoral search committee recommends to a congregation the kind of minister that it is convinced the congregation ought to want. For his part, Russell Horsburgh is something of an enigma. He was clearly big-hearted and (to some) charismatic. Nevertheless, he was also egotistical, a seeker of publicity who was utterly convinced of the rightness of his approach (and the Satanic affiliation of anyone who blocked him).

According to Wylie, “saint or sinner, the ambiguity was there right from the beginning.” As George Goth hints, however, what is perhaps most interesting is the way that the Horsburgh scandal brought into focus many of the themes percolating in any examination of the United Church in the 1960s, but especially the problem of sex. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, many people in Chatham still remember Horsburgh as “ahead of his time.”\(^{41}\) Horsburgh himself undoubtedly thought of himself as a prophet at the edge of the dawning of a New Age.

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\(^{39}\) During the period when Horsburgh was being examined for re-instatement into the United Church ministry, he complained of a severe pain in his thigh. A psychiatrist testified before a London Conference committee that such a pain manifested Horsburgh’s guilt—clearly he was a man experiencing “guilt pain.” Not long afterward, Horsburgh snapped his femur while getting out of a car. He was then diagnosed with the bone cancer that would shortly take his life. As Betty Jane Wylie summarizes, Horsburgh was “truly, a broken man.” Betty Jane Wylie, *The Horsburgh Scandal* (Windsor, ON: Black Moss Press, 1981), 17. Fittingly for a person who interpreted his suffering as a kind of martyrdom, Russell Horsburgh’s ashes are situated in a crawl space under the communion table of Zion United Church, Hamilton.


\(^{41}\) Conversation with the Rev. Dr. Michael Brooks of Port Nelson United Church, Burlington ON who was the minister of St. Andrew’s United Church, Chatham, at the time of its amalgamation with the congregation of Park Street (2006).
His story points out the peril that endangers those who take up leadership of a congregation and immediately attempt to bring about Rex Dolan’s “big change” through the force of their own personality. This effort is especially problematic when they are blind to the nature and strength of the forces that oppose them. In particular, the events in Chatham bring into focus the intense anxiety of many in a parental generation who were faced with the incomprehensible behaviour of young people who appeared suddenly to have rejected the traditional virtues of discipline and restraint in the exploration of their sexuality and their sexual relationships. Within the context of the United Church, the events reveal the tension that can result when a “prophetic” style of ministry that “listens to the world” and is focused on issues of social action, inclusion and justice comes into conflict with the expectations of a congregational power bloc more concerned with maintaining the status quo and the adequate “priestly” care of insiders. Racism, homophobia, and fear of teen-age sexuality were also part of the mixture in the fateful year 1964 as Russell Horsburgh sat, silent and grim-faced, facing his accusers in a packed courtroom.\(^{42}\) He fared little better when it came to the behaviour of many in the church that had nurtured him. Official structures and procedures were tested and found inadequate or unwieldy, in a manner that would not bode well for the denomination’s ability to navigate the 1960s cultural storms and to remain undamaged by them.

In addition to Betty Wylie’s book, the first section of which offers a portrait of Horsburgh “the man”, there are two major sources for information concerning the events in Chatham and their aftermath. First, there is Ronald Smeaton’s spirited defense of his ministry colleague and friend in *The Horsburgh Affair: Disciple or Deviate?* (published in 1966, prior to the Supreme Court of Canada’s overturning of the Chatham court’s conviction). Second, there is Russell Horsburgh’s own exculpatory narrative (*From Pulpit to Prison*).

In *From Pulpit to Prison* Horsburgh, reflecting back on the events at Park Street United Church, says that were he capable of time travel, he would want to return to 1960 and do things differently. With hard-won wisdom he admits that the “besetting sin of many would-be reformers is their impatience with people who stand by the ‘old ways’.” Those, he says, who set out to change the fundamental patterns of human behaviour, especially in a church setting, “had better

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\(^{42}\) A further source of information is a blog by Canadian novelist Margaret Gunning who experienced Horsburgh as a Sunday school child at Park Street. Gunning’s assessment is that he was a sociopath. See http://margaretgunning.blogspot.ca/2011/09/rev-russell-horsburgh-what-i-didnt-know.html (accessed August 21, 2016).
face the fact that it is going to take a long time.”43 Neither human character nor institutions are capable of changing either “rapidly or much.” Looking back on his experience in Chatham later in the decade, a chastened Horsburgh noted that “when a minister arrives in a situation that personally enrages his scale of values, he is tempted to clean house with a fast broom.”44 Such clean sweeping, however, antagonizes those who are heavily invested in what might be obscuring the floor.

Horsburgh is more forthrightly a champion of transformative change in the 1960s church when he is quoted on the subject by Smeaton in *The Horsburgh Affair*: “one of the greatest challenges facing the church today is the willingness and ability to change to meet new conditions, new thought patterns and new questions. We live in a day of revolutions and the church must adapt herself to keep abreast of the times if she is to save herself and have a voice in shaping the future.”45 Horsburgh advocates freeing religion “from the chains of tradition that keep it fastened to concepts and practices of a day that is dead.” He passionately seeks for a ministry that will affect a more radical religion, “a religion as modern as the twentieth century, both in theory and practice, without which I believe there is nothing.”46

At Park Street Horsburgh had imagined himself to be a new broom called to sweep all stagnant tradition away. Smeaton describes him as a “gadfly” and suggests that this is especially evident in Horsburgh’s concern for the welfare of young people. He was notorious in Chatham for his insistence on standing by youth in trouble with the law. Often Horsburgh would attend their court appearances as a pastoral presence, which Smeaton suggests did not endear him to the Chatham crown attorneys, and may have accounted for some of their subsequent prosecuting zeal. Among the other facets of Horsburgh’s radical ministry at Park Street that Smeaton says “repelled the old guard” were: his Sunday evening lecture-sermon series, his “reception of negroes” as church members (in a city that was largely racially segregated), his “familiarity” with young people outside the congregation, and his introduction of the Youth Anonymous programme to the Christian Education work of the congregation. Reflecting the 1960s confidence in psychology as a useful panacea, Youth Anonymous was an organization founded

43 Horsburgh, *From Pulpit to Prison*, 132.
44 Ibid.
46 Ibid., 47.
on the model of Alcoholics Anonymous where delinquent youth met together in pseudo-therapy sessions. At Park Street they met with Russell Horsburgh as their (untrained) facilitator.\footnote{It is interesting to observe that Horsburgh’s attitudes to “delinquent” youth and efforts to include such youth within the scope of the mission of the Park Street United Church are quite similar to the strategies outlined and advocated by Stewart Crysdale in his article “The Church and Inner-City Youth” included in Close the Chasm,173.}

It was, however, the Sunday Evening lecture series in Park Street United that provoked significant controversy and drove a deep wedge into the pastoral relationship. When Horsburgh arrived in Chatham, he made the decision to replace the Sunday evening service which, like other manifestations of the traditional Sunday evening worship across the 1960s United Church, had been waning in attendance and energy. The lecture-sermon series covered a number of topics and entertained several distinguished guests. Among them were prominent Rabbi Abraham Feinberg, a Roman Catholic priest (whose presence reflected the growing entente cordial between the United Church and the Roman Catholics), African-American contralto Marian Anderson and the flamboyant American organist Virgil Fox. The subject of teen sexuality, however, proved to be Horsburgh’s undoing. In his book, Ronald Smeaton insists that Horsburgh’s conduct (rumoured to be “deviant”) was at all times “quite exemplary.” Much of the responsibility for the tragedy rests with “older folk who could not adjust to a new age.”\footnote{Smeaton, The Horsburgh Affair, 131.} The nature of some of the town gossip surrounding the Park Street minister is evident in Smeaton’s anxiety to establish that “nothing either ulterior or abnormal was found about the minister’s genuine concern for teen-age sexual morality, since it was never unduly magnified in relation to all other aspects of morality and the Christian life.”\footnote{Ibid., 57.} The most notorious of the Sunday night lecture series was called “The Modern Crisis in Sex Morality.” It consisted of a series of lectures, films and panel discussions presented at Park Street United Church from October 20 to December 8, 1963. The provocative lecture titles in the series were: “What is this thing called love?”; “How to be date bait”; “Going steady—right or wrong?”; “Can we lift sex out of the gutter?”; “How to live with parents”; “Is it wrong to neck or pet?”; “Teenage smoking and drinking” and “Rocks on which marriages are wrecked.” Horsburgh gave five of the eight lectures, the Rev. Terry Storey (an Honours graduate in psychology) offered one, and the United Church’s Dr. E. Crossley Hunter gave the final lecture on marriage.\footnote{Wylie, The Horsburgh Scandal, 33.}
Betty Jane Wylie read several of Horsburgh’s sermons on sex and found them to be fairly tame. His main concern, she notes, was to provide young people with information and to mitigate the “lack of knowledge, the half-truths and old wives’ tales surrounding the forbidden subject.” As Wylie observes, it was Horsburgh who proved to be naïve. The young people whose ignorance concerned him knew far more than he did “and were less reticent than he suspected.”

In the Foreword to *From Pulpit to Prison*, Rabbi Feinberg offers perhaps the most incisive evaluation of Russell Horsburgh and the scandal at Park Street. According to Feinberg, Horsburgh, “that eager stalwart of open windows and the open mind” had no sooner arrived than “without time to establish roots, make friends, marshal allies” he plunged into the subject of sex, “the most provocative and perilous of all arenas of public discourse.” Sex had been barred from the schools, “and was likely taboo as a subject of discourse for most of the Park Street congregants.” Feinberg says that the “naiveté” that Russell Horsburgh demonstrated was “the inner lash that drove him from pulpit to prison.” According to Feinberg, Horsburgh badly misjudged his situation when, as a minister of the United Church and ostensibly a paragon of propriety, he dared to “hew out untried paths in the dark jungle of sex-behavior over which the Sunday-School text-books have tacked the label ‘Morality.’” In any listing for Divine favour, “the preservation of ‘virtue,’ otherwise known as sexual purity” continues in to retain top priority status in all faiths, but especially Christianity. An otherwise terrible person who manages to remain sexually continent is still considered by the church to be “a likely candidate for salvation.” On the other hand, the private sex-life of the clergy can become a matter of congregational concern “potentially so obsessive that it can pre-empt and poison” that person’s total relationship to a church community. Feinberg observes: “Once Russell Horsburgh’s ‘morals’ began to be talked about, his usefulness as a minister began to end, and, one after another, doors opened in the service of God and man—however fruitfully and sacrificially he had labored to open them—began to close.” In his exuberance to be a prophet of change, Horsburgh seemed naively unaware of the duty of stewardship to which many in the Park Street congregation believed he was called namely:

> responsibility for the preservation, intact, of a code of chastity increasingly dubbed irrelevant, abnormal, and psychologically harmful, dismissed with hardly a shrug by an alarming proportion

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51 Ibid., 34.
52 Ibid.
53 Horsburgh, *From Pulpit to Prison*, Foreword.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
of the young, undermined by much that passes for entertainment and culture in our permissive, sex-ridden age, and deprived of its supernatural authority by the breakdown of belief in divinely-ordained law.\footnote{56}

For Rabbi Feinberg most of the problems that arose in the “Horsburgh Affair” were grounded in the nature of Christianity itself and especially a sexualized understanding of the doctrine of “original sin” upheld by more fundamentalist Christians but supposedly not by liberal ones. Moreover, according to Feinberg, “the lurking guilt-complex of Christians deeply conditioned by vestigial Puritan fear of sex has been aggravated by the New Testament admonition against sinning with the eye or the mind.”\footnote{57} Most significant, however, is that the events in Chatham had highlighted “one of the numerous urgent dilemmas youth is creating for organized religious authority today: the sex revolution.”\footnote{58}

For its part, the United Church of Canada does not come off particularly well in its treatment of Russell Horsburgh. His post-acquittal efforts to be reinstated were vigorously resisted. The \textit{Observer} was largely silent on the matter, though Horsburgh’s difficulties somewhat improbably became the basis for a discussion of the percolating issue of church union. In an editorial entitled “The Chatham Case”, editor A.C. Forrest pointed out that the vulnerability of clergy needed to be better understood and that the United Church should do a better job of providing appropriate safeguards for ministers who have “many privileges and few protections.” In the editorial Forrest seems anxious to evade the more salient issues of the case, which “got out of hand for many reasons we need not remember now.”\footnote{59} The important lesson supplied by the events in Chatham arises from question of whether an episcopal structure might provide better support for ministry personnel who find themselves in trouble (Forrest himself claims to be agnostic on the subject of episcopacy):

\begin{quote}
If there had been a bishop on hand to whom concerned persons who were critical of Mr. Horsburgh’s work could have gone, the problem might have been ended then. Mr. Horsburgh’s considerable talents might have been wisely directed, and he could today be functioning happily and effectively in his pulpit and in his youth work, in Chatham or somewhere else. But somehow most
\end{quote}

\footnote{56} Ibid. \footnote{57} Ibid. \footnote{58} Ibid. \footnote{59} A.C. Forrest, “Chatham Case,” \textit{UCO}, February 15, 1968, 11.
sessions and presbyteries can’t do what a bishop with some authority apparently can do.\textsuperscript{60}

It seems unlikely, however, that Russell Horsburgh would have supported Forrest’s contention that such was the wisdom the United Church needed to glean from the “Chatham Case.”

3 The New Morality

Historian Hugh McLeod, in his assessment of the 1960s, points out that while the churches retained, or attempted to retain, a major voice in public debate, “their ability to regulate individual behaviour in what was increasingly seen as the private sphere was diminishing fast.”\textsuperscript{61} Certainly the churches were “unable to enforce sanctions against a populace moving towards liberal sexual views. Indeed many argued that, if the church was to maintain its adherents, it would have to adopt more modern values.”\textsuperscript{62} One of the most important frontal assaults on the traditional view of the church’s supposedly God-breathed moral authority occurs in a controversial chapter entitled “The New Morality” in John Robinson’s \textit{Honest to God}. Here Robinson opines that the Protestant supranaturalist ethic of marriage based on the absolute command or law of God, or upon the teaching of Christ interpreted in the same legalistic manner, is doomed. 1960s women and men are therefore right to resist it: “The fact that the old landmarks are disappearing is not something simply to be deplored. If we have the courage, it is something to be welcomed – as a challenge to Christian ethics to shake itself loose from the supports of supranaturalistic legalism on which it has been content to rest too much.”\textsuperscript{63}

One of the major criticisms the Canadian church’s views of sexuality in the 1960s is to be found in Pierre Berton’s \textit{The Comfortable Pew}. Berton demonstrates his reading of Robinson on this matter as he had on many others. Berton identifies the inability of the mainline churches to respond rationally and appropriately to the issue of human sexuality as proof of what he terms the churches’ “abdication of leadership.” Berton suggests that the majority of people are bored

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{61} McLeod, \textit{The Religious Crisis}, 166.
\item \textsuperscript{63} Robinson, \textit{Honest to God}, 117. Robinson and Berton were both liberals, but not radicals, and neither seemed to grasp the full extent of the sexual revolution then under way. One of the best critiques of the limits Robinson’s thinking when it is applied to actual living comes from the mouth of the fictional Bishop Ashworth in \textit{Scandalous Risks}, a novel by Susan Howatch in which Robinson’s \textit{Honest to God} plays a crucial role (the action is set in 1963 and 1988—the year of \textit{Honest to God}’s publication and the year of its twenty-fifth anniversary). See Susan Howatch, \textit{Scandalous Risks} (London: Harper, 1990), 422-423.
\end{itemize}
with the church because it does not excite their imaginations or consciences (the “relevance” test). It has failed in this undertaking “because it has had very little to say to them in terms of the twentieth century world in which they live.” According to Berton, the hierarchy of the church, or a powerful section of it, wants to avoid any kind of frank discussion of sexuality. He offers as his primary exhibit an article that he had written for *Maclean’s* magazine in May, 1963 entitled “It’s Time We Stopped Hoaxing the Kids about Sex.” Berton had hoped that this piece would be the first of several on the subject of the sexual revolution. The article was attacked by anxiety-ridden church leaders who suggested that Berton was advocating premarital sexual intercourse among teenagers. Some critics, he notes “used phrases like ‘unlimited’ or ‘unbridled’ premarital sex to describe my attitude. Of course, I advocated nothing of the sort. What I actually said was that society was going to have to accept the fact that premarital sex was not *always* a bad thing, and that while virginity and continence were proper for some, they were not *necessarily* okay for all.” Not only was his argument belittled, Berton states that he was also labeled by his Christian attackers as a “libertine with a licentious morality, a sexual pervert, a slug, a dirty evil old man, a pornographer.” A number of official church groups including the Qu’Appelle Anglican Women’s Auxiliary, the Catholic Women’s League of Canada, the Knights of Columbus and the Dioceses of Huron and Algoma and the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec condemned him outright and pressured *Maclean’s* (successfully) for his firing.

What operates beneath the surface of such attacks, Berton contends, is that whatever it may say to the contrary (at least when the subject is married heterosexual couples), the Christian church continues to believe that the celibate state is the finest state to which Christians are called. This implied connection between celibacy and salvation has been extremely harmful: “Many of our sexual problems today—including the present morbid interest in the subject that allows it to be exploited commercially—spring directly from the repression of sex by a Church that considered the body essentially wicked …” The difficulty for Christianity is not so much that all churches continue to preach an anti-sex theology or even that they continue to insist on a connection between original sin and concupiscence; the problem is that the “average man”

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65 Ibid., 55. It is interesting that discussion during this period always concerned “pre-marital sex” when a more accurate descriptor might be *non*-marital sex.
66 Berton points to E&SS secretary Ray Hord as a more measured voice. Hord had praised Berton on the day of his dismissal from *Maclean’s* and labeled Berton’s attackers “business interests and moral prudes.” Berton also compliments both *The United Church Observer* and a liberal Roman Catholic Publication, the *Muenster Prairie Messenger* for publishing reasoned responses to his *Maclean’s* article.
67 Ibid., 62.
continues to regard an anti-sex stance as official church dogma precisely because “the churches themselves have been remarkably wary of suggesting otherwise.”68 Further, Berton is highly critical of the church’s consistently negative stance on homosexuality which he considers ironic and sad in the light of Jesus’ healing ministry to outcasts. Accepting the predominant psychological/psychiatric view of the sixties that viewed homosexuality as a form of mental illness rather than a “sin,” Berton suggested that homosexuals are the lepers of the modern era. What made the Church culpable was that it regarded homosexuality as a sin and took an active part in persecution of homosexual persons—thereby abdicating responsibility for acting redemptively.69

The most important issue for Berton is, however, centred on the purpose of sex itself. In his opinion, the church, in continuing to regard sex as a regrettable aspect of God’s design for replenishing the human population is in danger of rendering itself “obsolete” in the New Age. He asks: “Is the chief purpose of the sexual act always to perpetuate the species, or is it possible that in the human kind it is an end in itself and (quite apart from procreation) the consummation of love?”70

4 Jumping the Gun

As the 1960s decade moved forward there is evidence both in the annual reports of the E&SS and in the pages of the Observer, that the United Church was becoming increasingly aware that “the New Morality” was more than a passing fad. The board’s Sessional Committee on Moral Issues, chaired by B.K. Cronk offered a “Statement on the New Morality” in the centre spread of Listen to the World, the 1965 Annual Report. The Sessional Committee observed that the phrase “the new morality” appears in at least three rather different senses. First, “it may designate a popular and ill-defined conception that we are living in a new age, that old dogmas and restraints have been discarded, that a new freedom or permissiveness now obtains, that practices previously considered immoral are now regarded as moral; it usually has a sexual connotation.”71 The second sense of the phrase “was used by the Pope in 1956 to designate the theory of existentialist, situational or contextual ethics.” Ethics, in this view, are not necessarily governed by timeless, changeless principles that are unaffected by historical reality. Each situation is

68 Ibid.
69 Ibid., 93.
70 Ibid., 66.
unique and should be judged accordingly. The third sense is John Robinson’s. According to
Robinson, the dialectic of “old” and “new” are two perennial polarities in Christian ethics that
are antithetical but complementary. “Robinson points out three sets of these polarities: fixity and
freedom, law and love, authority and experience. He maintains that there is a constant though
variable tension between these poles.”

While traditional morality stressed fixity, law and
authority, “the new morality” emphasizes freedom, love and experience. Both are valid but the
tendency is for the two camps to react with alarm and to cease to communicate with each other.
Robinson attempts to interpret between the two; he calls for “openness” between the contending
parties. The Committee notes that while it does have some sympathy with popular distrust of
dogma and traditional restraint, such distrust is essentially negative and rebellious and offers no
positive guiding agenda. The existential interpretation has merit because it is in harmony with
the Hebrew conception of life revealed in the Bible. The Committee recommends that
Robinson’s interpretation of ethics “also deserves careful thought” because it is nuanced and
balanced. Most significantly, the committee requests the preparation by the E&SS, as soon as
possible, of a study booklet on sexual morality in order to offer appropriate United Church
guidelines for ethical decisions based on Christian principles.

Nancy Christie argues that by 1960 “moral relativism had become the watchword of the
new theology of the United Church. Driven by the increasing emphasis that Protestantism placed
upon ‘the freedom of the individual,’ church leaders in turn dropped the tradition moral sanctions
against divorce.” In addition to locating this process somewhat early, Christie over-generalizes.
While many United Church leaders may have unclenched on the issue of divorce (at least
allowing divorced persons to remarry with some dignity), there was clearly a limit to their
capacity to accommodate moral relativism. Such a limit was very quickly reached when it came
to the avenues of sexual expression deemed appropriate to unmarried heterosexual young people.
Here the leaders of the United Church continued to be decidedly conservative. Writing in the
summer of 1963, for example, Kenneth Bagnell offered Observer readers one of the articles that
Pierre Berton commended as a “measured response” to Berton’s own controversial article on
teenage sexuality. In it, Bagnell acknowledged that Berton was correct in pointing out the
difficulty placed on young people by the prevalence of sexual stimulation within a culture that

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72 Ibid.
73 Ibid. Robinson spoke further about the need for a nuanced view of Christian morality in a 1964 Observer
divorce and asked for an alternative to an Act of Parliament as the means of granting divorce petitions.
simultaneously advocated postponement of marriage. Nevertheless, using the favoured metaphor of disease, Bagnell suggested that Berton’s column “if seriously diagnosed, offers a superficial cure.” By indicating that heterosexual pre-marital sexual expression is “not so bad anyway,” Berton is conceding “defeat” rather than contributing to a cure for “the cancer of eroticism.” Bagnell addressed himself to the question of whether premarital sex is ever “right.” Essentially, he affirms the traditional view of the inherited evangelical discourse, but updates it for a modern audience by seasoning it with appropriate references to another safe refuge: hygiene and scientific authority. Bagnell further notes that “social workers” warn of the scourge of venereal disease that has been “steadily rising since 1956” and that is affecting not only the fringes of society but also “some of its stable families.” His other warning, supported by “some people in social work” is that the “real cancer of teenage promiscuity” destroys the all-important potential for a future happy marriage. The article concludes with Bagnell pointing out that while there is evidence of a pendulum swing toward more liberalized sexual attitudes, there is every reason to keep the faith that it will swing back. The United Church “continues to regard continence before marriage and fidelity in marriage as the Christian ideal” (though it no longer condemns those who fail to live up to this standard). Moreover, the church regards sex as part of mature love and therefore “it feels it belongs in the home where love has deepened.”

Many young people in the 1960s were, however, unprepared to follow Bagnell’s map. The growing sexual freedom of the age did, however, begin to result in an intense level of stress, especially for girls. As Doug Owram observes:

> Everybody from Freud to Kinsey had been raising the stakes for women. The ‘well-adjusted’ woman enjoyed sex. The modern woman knew how to give pleasure. Hollywood and magazines emphasized sexual attractiveness to a degree unparalleled in history … Sex was now sufficiently open and important in the public mind that society placed a premium upon successful sexual relations. Yet old taboos lingered and contradictions abounded between marriage expectations, personal fears, and social restrictions.

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76 Ibid.
77 Ibid., 13.
78 The E&SS annual reports are quick to proclaim what they consider another important contributing factor to the rising incidence of venereal disease: the increased consumption of beverage alcohol.
79 Ibid., 26.
80 Owram, *Born at the Right Time*, 257.
Ambiguous feelings about what was expected of her in a world where the cult of virginity was clearly at war with a society in rapid transition were likely behind the inquiry by a young woman named “Jean” who wrote to her minister, the United Church’s N. Bruce McLeod, for advice on sexual matters. During the 1960s decade McLeod’s consistently liberal, prophetic voice became increasingly prominent in denominational debates. Nevertheless McLeod continued to advise young people against being persuaded either by cultural change or their hormones to “jump the gun” where pre-marital sex was concerned. A sermon preached at Westdale United Church (a congregation located near McMaster University) titled: “Letter to a Twenty-Year Old Girl” is McLeod’s public response to the troubled “Jean.” Jean’s difficulty is that she found herself “getting carried away” with her boyfriend, Tom. In his response to her letter to him, McLeod affirms Jean’s sexual attraction toward Tom. He tells her that the way she feels is “right” and that she should accept such feelings because God does: “He made you that way. Whatever the stresses in your particular situation, never should you do anything other than rejoice in this drive He has given you.”

However, McLeod indicates to Jean that the lesson of Ecclesiastes 3 (“there is a time”) is a valuable one in her circumstance. McLeod says, the time “for full and free expression of your physical love is not now. Nor has this anything to do with the fear of pregnancy, which of course can largely be overcome.” The problem for Jean and for young women like her is that society “as it is presently constituted” still takes a dim view of what she is contemplating and as a consequence of societal disapproval she is likely to experience feelings of pleasure-limiting guilt. In words of which Karl Barth would have approved, McLeod states that the primary reason for avoiding a sexual relationship outside marriage “has most to do with the nature of the physical act of love itself which, far from being the mere satisfaction of a physical desire, is the ultimate expression of two people’s complete, for always, commitment to each other. And this commitment apart from marriage is just not complete.”

By 1966, the United Church resigned itself to the reality that the hoped-for swing of the pendulum back to something closer to the postwar cultural norm that saw “love and marriage going together like a horse and carriage” was not happening. Increasingly, there was a fear that Canadian culture was rapidly transforming on sexual matters and that the church might not have sufficiently accommodated the more positive aspects of “the New Morality.” Recognizing that it

82 Ibid.
was now dealing with what Taylor would later characterize as a “widespread popular culture in which individual self-realization and sexual fulfillment are interwoven,” the denomination attempted to reassert the importance of communal over individual values. Accordingly, the 1966 E&SS Annual Report offered a brief piece from *The British Weekly* on the subject of the new morality. The writer helpfully distinguishes between two versions of the concept. One is “the ‘new morality’ of ‘Penthouse’ and its friends” the primary aim of which is “to give respectability to fornication.” This is part of “the so-called ‘sexual revolution’” being exported to the globe by the United States under the championship of “pseudo-intellectual pressure groups.” The second version of “the new morality” is Robinson’s and what is problematic is that the phrase is being used in a way that implies that the two senses are identical. This conflation is “diabolically unfair” to the Bishop of Woolwich. What “South Bank religion” actually sought was to create a morality that was “more Christian, and therefore more positive and creative than a lot of what has been accepted as Christian morality in recent times. They may be wrong in what they are saying, but at least they are trying to say something that is both constructive and relevant.” The basis of this second conception of the new morality is the application of the Christian law of love to problems as they arise. Such judging is “situational” rather than “prescriptional.” The ecclesial tendency toward legalism, however, “has distorted the essential nature of Christian morality, and brought violent rejection of it.”

In June 1966, the *Observer* reprinted an article “Facing the Sexual Crisis” by American ethicist Harvey Seifert of the Claremont School of Theology. Despite its supposed “scientific” basis, Seifert was firmly in the “priestly” rather than “prophetic” camp. According to Seifert, “it is hard to say which is the more astounding—the rapid change in popular sex standards or the weak futility of the Christian church’s response.” Despite the necessity in “complicated matters like sex” to make individual choices in specific circumstances Seifert criticized the tendency of the “new morality” to embrace situational ethics and to make “rules out of so-called exceptions.” In response, the church “can and must provide dependable directions for such decisions, drawing on the positive guidance available in basic Christian teachings.” Seifert acknowledges that one reason for the church’s “awkward silence today” is that Christianity has

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84 “The New Morality,” in *Dead or Alive*, 198.
85 Ibid., 197.
86 Ibid., 198.
87 Harvey Seifert, “Facing the Sexual Crisis”, *UCO*, June 1, 1966, 24.
88 Seifert argues here against Robinson’s positive embrace of a liberal ethic.
often depreciated sexuality and viewed it negatively. But the highest teachings of scripture, he suggests, “see sexuality as a good gift of God’s creation”—but not as humanity’s highest goal, which would certainly be idolatrous.  

Seifert identifies the easy acceptance of pre-marital and extra-marital intercourse and the urging of a “looser” sexual pattern (where intercourse no longer takes place in the context of love) as prominent characteristics of those who advocate the new morality. Christians, on the other hand, emphasize “higher values” within a sex-saturated and chaotic culture. “When one prefers sex to prayer or to his vocational contribution to mankind, he is living a disordered life. And the person who places the purely physical aspect of sex above its social and spiritual values is one kind of pervert.” Ultimately, however, it is the 1960s sex-drenched culture that invites this kind of “apostasy against God.” Both the sexual repression of times past and the “explosion” of sexual feelings in the present era are problematic. When sex is too highly rated it can lead to disillusionment, boredom and unhappiness which are the inevitable consequences of “an abundance of shallow sex.” The Hollywood path of sequential polygamy is also no better than “a procession of failures.” The best experience of sex is still to be found, Seifert insists, within the context of a multi-dimensional committed relationship: “This intimate meeting of whole persons is most fully possible only within permanent monogamous marriage.”


Despite the advice of Seifert and others to hold the moral fort, the implications of a situational, rather than a revealed or fixed approach to sexual ethics, caused the United Church considerable anxiety as the 1960s decade advanced. In November 1966, in response to requests from groups and courts across the Church, the Sub-Executive of the E&SS “appointed and authorized a committee to discuss the new morality as it pertains to the sexual revolution.” The Committee on Sex and Morality, a nineteen member committee (mostly male) was set up with representatives from across the denomination with the majority trained in either Christian ethics

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90 Ibid.
91 Ibid., 25.
92 Ibid.
93 The Cutting Edge (E&SS Annual Report, 1966), 318.
Chief among the committee’s goals was the production and publication of a booklet on sex and morality that would provide material for consideration and guidance for discussion throughout the church. The aim of the booklet would be to help men and women to understand their own sexuality; to help them comprehend the moral dilemmas of adults and youth in Canada; and to provide criteria for mature and meaningful relationships and for methods of responsible decision-making. It would be aimed at “mature adults” (35-45 years) with at least high school literacy. The results were then to be published by the E&SS in consultation with the Division of Congregational Life and Work with the hope that the booklet might eventually also have a wider audience in the North American Conferences on Family Life. Individual committee members were assigned chapters of the new guide book and on completion of their work they were to forward it to editor Don Gillies. By August 1968, however, Arch McCurdy expressed frustration that, though the committee had met regularly, not enough material had yet been forwarded to the editor. Gillies, for his part, was having difficulty re-writing what he had received so that it reflected a consensus of opinion within the group, yet remained fair to the points of view of those who were contributing chapters. These obstacles appear to have been overcome by the time the Committee met for three days at Cedar Glen (January 27-29, 1969). By that point, the booklet had evolved to include eleven chapters on various pertinent subjects with introductory and concluding material. On March 27, 1969, McCurdy sent a memo to the members of the Committee asking them to review chapters 2-11 of the Sex and Morality booklet which had been finalized by the editor. In the words of a considerably relieved McCurdy: “If you

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94 The members of the Committee included the Revs. G.L. Toombs, Arch McCurdy, Kenneth Hallen, Howie Mills, Mervyn Dickinson, Ray Hord, Alan T. Davies, T.R. Anderson, Don Gillies, Dr. Stanley Lang, Dr. Frank Fidler (Board of Christian Education), B.J. Klassen, Wilma Bell, Jean Parker (Board of Colleges and Secondary Schools), Nancy Hannum.  
95 In the Reports of Sessional Committees included in Dead or Alive (1966), the E&SS declared its intention to proceed with a booklet on morality “without delay,” xi.  
96 Foreword: “I Prefer The Beatles” by Nancy Hannum with a brief introduction by Don Gillies. A formal introduction by Arch McCurdy; Chapter 1, “The Sexual Revolution” by Arch McCurdy combining material by Merv Dickinson and Ken Allen; Chapter 2, “Sex and Sexuality” to be rewritten by Howie Mills; Chapter 3, “A Man and a Woman” to be written by Howie Mills (but if he deems it advisable, combining chapters 2 & 3); Chapter 4, “The Development of Sexuality” to be rewritten by Ken Allen; Chapter 5, “Marriage” rewritten by Howie Mills; Chapter 6, “Sexual Intercourse Outside of Marriage” to be written by Gordon Toombs incorporating existing material on pre-marital and extra-marital sex; Chapter 7, “Sex and Later Life” by Frank Fidler; Chapter 8, “Masturbation” to be re-written by Ken Allen; Chapter 9, “The Single Adult” (male and female) to be written by Jean Parker; Chapter 10, “Homosexuality” by Mervyn Dickinson; Chapter 11, “Ethical Decision-Making; Epilogue by Mervyn Dickinson.” UCA, United Church of Canada Board of Colleges and Secondary Schools Division of Ministry, Personnel, Education, 83.005 114-3.
will pardon the expression, this has been a long gestation period and it is time for this baby to be born.”  

Despite the enthusiastic announcement in the E&SS Annual Report for 1969 that manuscripts would be completed in late spring and that the 100-page booklet would be available for distribution throughout the denomination in June of that year, the Committee’s baby was destined for a still-birth. What happened that caused such a widely advertised project to drop silently from denominational sight? Evidently the first stumbling block to publication of the sex guide was the sudden death of Ray Hord on March 1, 1968. His successor as E&SS secretary was the Rev. W. Clarke MacDonald, a man far more cautious in his views than his outspoken predecessor. The second problem was the highly controversial nature of some material in the document itself and its implication that to be “relevant” to the culture in which it was located, the church needed a rigorous updating of its approach to sexual ethics. In the opinion of Arch McCurdy, even had the E&SS approved the guide, the General Council would not have.

In its draft form the manuscript of the United Church sex booklet supports McCurdy’s conclusions. The distance traveled between Toward a Christian Understanding of Sex, Love and Marriage (the 1960 report of the Commission on Christian Marriage and Divorce) and the booklet proposed by the Committee on Sex and Morality is considerable. Famously, in December 1967, a young and charismatic Pierre Trudeau, the acting Federal Justice Minister, introduced an Omnibus bill in the House of Commons that called for substantial changes in the criminal code. In addition to liberalizing abortion legislation, Trudeau made an appeal for the decriminalization of homosexual acts performed in public and quipped: “there’s no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation.” The youthful Nancy Hannum makes a similar point in the manuscript version of the intended “Foreword” to the Sex and Morality Committee’s booklet. She complains that a committee largely consisting of middle-aged male clergy (of however impeccable liberal/progressive credentials) was not well-positioned to peer into the keyholes of United Church bedrooms and to offer sex advice, particularly to the younger generation. Such a quaint notion of clerical authority is the relic of a bygone era. According to Hannum:

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97 Memo: Rev. Arch McCurdy to members of the Sex and Morality Committee. UCA, United Church of Canada Board of Colleges and Secondary Schools Division of Ministry, Personnel, Education, 83.005 114-3.
99 Arch McCurdy in conversation with the Rev. Loraine MacKenzie Shepherd, Westworth United Church, Winnipeg, MB.
100 To the credit of her committee colleagues the clear intention was to include Hannum’s work despite her forthright opinion that the new booklet would be irrelevant to the generation she represented.
Sex isn’t an ethical question. We can not stand around judging whether or not people love each other enough to be making love. To do so is to proclaim a very narrow view of people and, in fact, to be ‘hung-up on sex.’ If kids are hung-up about ‘sexual morality’ it is partly because the older people, to whom they look for help, moralize and write books about ‘sexual morality.’ My concern about this committee is partly its makeup—mostly professional people on a theoretically representative committee. As it turns out, I’m representing the ‘under 30’s’ laymen, single persons and females! So maybe the idea of a representative committee should be scrapped. People might be interested in the views of theologians, psychiatrists, family counsellors, etc.—but a committee? I doubt it!¹⁰¹

Hannum was nevertheless convinced that what the committee was attempting reached down uncomfortably into the fabric of North American society. In this New Age, however, a church committee simply could not do justice to so vital a subject: “I’m serious when I say I’d rather listen to the Beatles because I think it is the artists and poets who are best expressing this ‘turning-over’ of some of our deepest social values.”¹⁰² According to Hannum, sexual feelings and relationships are the most personal reflection of society’s larger values and structures. A number of changes in cultural values had contributed to the sexual revolution: developments such as the privatization of sex, the humanistic revolt against bureaucracy and productivity, the expansion of human consciousness, the new freedom of women, and changes in the purpose of sexuality caused by the Pill. Changes in sexual mores were, however, “only the top of the iceberg which we call the ‘new morality.’”¹⁰³ Hannum suggests that the basic definitions of family love are being seriously challenged, mostly “by children who are not loving back by fulfilling the dreams and adopting the values of their parents.”¹⁰⁴ The tendency of an older generation, when institutions are questioned or in trouble is “to fall back on the traditional rule book rather than listening to the people asking the questions.”¹⁰⁵ Because the current revolution “is about love in all its manifestations,” Hannum saw the proposed United Church Sex and Morality booklet “not only as a poetic injustice but as a misinterpretation of the role of a national church committee.”¹⁰⁶ What was under scrutiny was an “old morality” where “society and particular the church had certain very rigid rules about how to love, and judge people—

¹⁰¹ Nancy Hannum, “Thoughts Regarding a United Church of Canada National Sub-Committee Book on Sex and Morality for Distravght Mature Adults or I Prefer the Beatles.” UCA, United Church of Canada Board of Colleges and Secondary Schools Division of Ministry, Personnel, Education, 83.005, 8.
¹⁰² Ibid.
¹⁰³ Ibid., 1.
¹⁰⁴ Ibid.
¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 2.
¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 9.
especially pertaining to sex.”

The Sex and Morality Committee, largely staffed by members of a parental generation, was, Hannum insisted, in serious danger of falling into an old trap “if what we’re trying to do is set newer and more subtle or ‘situations’ rules.” Hannum also questioned why the guide was being written and who it was intended to serve. “Certainly the people involved in this new thing don’t need a committee to tell them what is happening.” Even if the booklet were directed at “distraught mature adults” Hannum doubted its efficacy:

Will this book sanction the ‘new morality’ in hopes that people will now become more open because the church has issued a new guide-book? Is this book meant to break through the communications barriers between people and in families? If people can talk to each other they’ll know what is going on. If they can’t, they need more than a book to help them.

Other chapters of the Sex and Morality Committee’s sex guide are, in their own ways, as challenging and controversial as Hannum’s bold Foreword. In the first chapter, “The Sexual Revolution,” Mervyn Dickinson defined revolution as “a radical and rapid change, generated by enormous and insistent pressures, and experienced by the social order as a time of crisis.” He declares: “We are in the midst of revolution now ... It is a revolution in sexual morality. As such, it is part of a larger social revolution, the chief mark of which is a change or reassessment of values on many levels.” Dickinson indicated that modes of sexual expression that a generation prior “regarded as gross evils are now accepted as quite normal.” Prudishness which was “until recently was considered to be a quality of excellence” is now considered “together with ‘clean mindedness’ and excessive modesty, as a learned repression” and as “a hindrance to the best way of living.” Dickinson believed that the time was coming “when all forms of sexual activity between consenting adults will be considered normal.”

On reflection, Dickinson observes, there were many implications to this sexual revolution. First, it needs to be considered as part of “the total cultural revolution in which we are involved.” A crisis in the sexual sphere is an indication of fundamental crisis in the culture as

107 Ibid.
108 Ibid.
109 Ibid.
111 Ibid.
112 Ibid.
113 Ibid.
114 Ibid.
Like Nancy Hannum, Dickinson indicates that sexuality was “being unravelled from our public, institutional life and is becoming an area of personal or private activity.” It also represented a vehicle of revolt against an excessively bureaucratic society, a means of “getting even with the establishment.” From the point of view of psychoanalytic theory, the sexual revolution might be understood as a protest against the “anal” of a production-oriented culture as well as a dynamic expansion of human consciousness. The sexual revolution further marks the increasing social and economic freedom of women. A woman could now afford to be selective in what she considered to be an appropriate sexual partner, “and premarital intercourse is sought by many as one basis for this decision making. Indeed, it may be that women are playing the major role in leading the sexual revolution.” Finally, the sexual revolution reflects a major change in societal thinking about the purpose of sexuality, which has now moved from the sphere of procreation to recreation.

In his own analysis of the response of the church to the sexual revolution, Arch McCurdy observes that this cultural shift “caught it unprepared and unequipped either to minimize the dangers or to enhance the possibilities inherent in this revolution.” Nevertheless, McCurdy was convinced that the church has a valuable contribution to make, though it needed to abandon the notion of eternal law and return again to the resources of the Christian faith to be found in history and scripture and in the resource of Christ, the *imago dei*: “Only when we understand who we are as persons, made in the Divine Image, can the Church offer a constructive word to our troubled situation.”

B.J. Klassen, in her draft chapter “Femaleness in Human Community,” also underscores the importance of women’s voices in articulating the sexual revolution. “Such writers as Betty Friedan and Simone de Beauvoir have blasted fresh winds concerning the emancipation of

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115 Ibid., 2.
116 Ibid., 4.
117 Ibid., 5.
118 Ibid. Howie Mills in his draft chapter “Toward an Understanding of the Nature of Sexuality” makes a similar point. Mills observes that more than one writer had interpreted the “Death of God” theology as “the product of a protective withdrawal by a largely female-dominated society from the threats of a male-produced technical culture.”
119 Arch McCurdy, “The Sexual Revolution: The Church’s Concern and Anxiety.”
120 Ibid., 3.
women.”¹²¹ She notes, however, that women in this decade of change now face a paradoxical situation. On the one hand there were greater advantages, opportunities and freedom. Nevertheless, women were also more conscious of problems and more perplexed about their identities than ever before: “She may deny man; she may rush into marriage before waiting for sufficient maturity, identity and career development, or she may devote all energies for developing a career and allow no time for love and marriage and family.”¹²² Moreover, “fulfilled femaleness in today’s community” required both an affirmation of one’s sexuality and femininity. “Her domain is not just her home but rather she finds ways for creative expression beyond the home in work, or other services and so competes with the outside world.”¹²³

Material on the subject of marriage was supplied by Howie Mills and on sexual intercourse outside of marriage by Alan Davies. The “Marriage” chapter makes the point that the major Protestant denominations revised their positions on divorce and remarriage in the period following the Second World War, but failed to undertake a parallel review of the institution of marriage itself which has received little attention since the Reformation when the question had been centred on whether or not it was a sacrament. “Generally speaking” the chapter suggests, “the only thing that is likely to hold marriages together today is the quality of the relationship between the partners involved.”¹²⁴ Christians and Christian churches therefore need to acknowledge and come to terms with the present realities concerning marriage and divorce. “They must recognize the futility of clinging to traditional formulations and out dated value systems. These are not likely either to encourage stable marriages or to prevent marriage breakdown.”¹²⁵ Since, in the society of the 1960s, it is virtually impossible to enforce sexual fidelity by means of external pressures, “where it is held in high regard, it must depend for its support on the mutual love and commitment of persons involved ... where it is not valued, there is little that can be done, short of psychological domination or physical restraint, to enforce it.”¹²⁶ This view was reinforced by Alan Davies who noted that the first rule for a “relevant” Christian ethic must be what he calls “understanding.” As in the case of homosexuality, outright moral

¹²¹ B.J. Klassen, “Femaleness in Human Community.” UCA, United Church of Canada Board of Colleges and Secondary Schools Division of Ministry, Personnel, Education, 83.005, 1.
¹²² Ibid., 3.
¹²³ Ibid.
¹²⁴ Ibid., 4.
¹²⁵ Howie Mills, “Marriage.” UCA, United Church of Canada Board of Colleges and Secondary Schools Division of Ministry, Personnel, Education, 83.005, 5.
¹²⁶ Ibid., 10.
condemnation “that takes no account of human factors makes not only understanding but sympathy and healing virtually impossible.”

Not surprisingly, given the Committee’s progressive views, Kenneth Allen’s chapter on sex education presents a positive view of sex education in the schools as essential to the nurture of healthy human beings. It also indicates that before “wholesome” (altered in the manuscript from “effective”) sex education can begin, “it is important for parents to examine their own attitude to themselves as sexual beings. Fears, inhibitions and anxiety which are felt by the parent, can not help but be reflected in the teaching he offers his child.”

Not every contributor to the Sex and Morality Committee’s proposed guide found the sexual revolution easy territory to navigate. Jean Parker discovered herself overwhelmed by the assigned task of examining the situation of the single men and declared herself to be incapable of writing it. The job of writing about sex and the single woman did not prove to be much easier. Parker noted that she had “struggled and experimented with different ‘solutions’ to the sexual problems of the single woman for years” and but had arrived with difficulty at “the only honest conclusion I can express.” Parker also found herself unmoved by what she understood of the sexual revolution then underway: “I know it sounds horribly conservative and conventional; I have fought against arriving at this conclusion; but out of my own experience and that of others with whom I have talked, I am convinced that for the majority of women ‘acceptance and redirection of the sex drive’ is the most satisfying answer.” Especially for single women over thirty years of age, Parker found herself in agreement with Dr. Marion Hilliard (“the beloved woman doctor of recent decades”) who advised a single patient inquiring how to cope with her sex urges to “take a hot bath and plan a trip.” Parker observes that women need love, but love with a degree of security. There is none to be found in extra-marital sex, the cry of joy at the

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127 Alan T. Davies, “Extra-Marital Sex.” UCA, United Church of Canada Board of Colleges and Secondary Schools Division of Ministry, Personnel, Education, 83.005, 2-3. An unattributed piece of material went even further: “In many situations, sexual infidelity can do no greater harm than (and, in some cases, might be preferable to) the withdrawal of affection, the absence of communication or the lack of mutual trust which characterize the relationship.” See “Marital Fidelity.” UCA, United Church of Canada Board of Colleges and Secondary Schools Division of Ministry, Personnel, Education, 83.005, 1.

128 Kenneth R. Allen, “Sex Education.” UCA, United Church of Canada Board of Colleges and Secondary Schools Division of Ministry, Personnel, Education, 83.005, 2. Another topic where the booklet observed that sound information was essential (and lacking) was masturbation. See “Masturbation.” UCA, United Church of Canada Board of Colleges and Secondary Schools Division of Ministry, Personnel, Education, 83.005, 1.


130 Ibid., 3.
point of orgasm in masturbation is really a cry of loneliness and “for the majority of women, the avenue of lesbianism is unattractive, even repulsive.” 131 Thus, concluded Parker, “the single or unattached women must, in most cases, be content with substitutes for genital sex like those advocated by Hilliard. 132

The proposed final chapter of the Committee’s unpublished booklet is called “Ethical Decision Making: How Do We Decide?” It is here that influence of the “new morality” is solidly in evidence in the proffered map for appropriate and faithful sex-decision-making. The chapter opens by affirming that sexual behaviour involves a range of personal relationships, not merely the activities involved with genital sex. Of consequence, the procedure for making ethical decisions involves both psychological process and ethical evaluation:

Healthy decision-making is not the same as rigid obedience to a set of regulations which are applied in all situations. Such a procedure removes from us much of the freedom and responsibility of choice involved in mature decision-making. There are important grounds, from a Christian perspective, for rejecting any sort of moral legalism. For no set of rules can provide enough “answers” to cover all situations. In many circumstances, several rules may apply at once so that the question emerges, “which one should receive priority and under what conditions? Volumes of rules on the application of rules have not solved our problems in the past. Nor are they likely to in the future. 133

Moral codes alone do not enable us to do what we know we ought to do. Nevertheless, the conscience needs to be scrutinized and corrected in the light of a faith commitment. This raises the question: Where are the goals and values which we believe should guide our decision-making to be found? For the Christian, they arise “from an understanding of the whole drama of God’s dealings with nature and with man, as that drama has been perceived and recorded in the bible and the tradition of the church.” 134 The focal point of this drama is the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, and more particularly the Sermon on the Mount.

The chapter notes that another dimension of the perspective that a Christian brings to the problem of defining responsible sexual behaviour “is a positive affirmation of genital sex.” The

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131 Ibid., 3.
132 Ibid.
133 “Ethical Decision Making: How Do We Decide?” UCA, United Church of Canada Board of Colleges and Secondary Schools Division of Ministry, Personnel, Education, 83.005, 1-2. Boorman, Anderson, Toombs and Thompson appear to have contributed material to the chapter.
134 Ibid., 6.
Christian will see sexuality, “in all its fullness, as a part of God’s creation.” This is a different view from those “who exalt sex as an awesome force beyond our control or who worship coitus as a mystical experience that, in itself, creates love and happiness.” On the other hand, “we must regard with suspicion the viewpoint of those who would eliminate sexual activity altogether for the sake of ‘unifying the soul’ from bodily corruptions.” In a similar fashion, “we must challenge those who would define sex as a mechanical act unrelated to the rest of the personality.” Historically, the church viewed sex “with suspicion if not with distaste” but this is an anti-biblical attitude since the Bible affirms the positive significance of human bodily nature; “it asserts that Jesus was fully a man, and rejoices in the many dimensions of human sexuality.” The Christian is enjoined to do no harm, since sexual activity can easily become a means of dominating another or as an escape: “When distorted by man’s self-seeking sex becomes exploitive and destructive.”

The chapter ends by offering guidelines for sexual/ethical decisions. One consideration is that sexual activity can affect others who may not be directly involved in actions undertaken: “The stability of the family and the provision of a healthy environment for children is another example of a prime moral consideration that must be weighted in ethical decision-making. The well-being of the whole community depends upon such considerations.” Guidelines should also be reformulated from time to time, “especially when a particular regulation may no longer protect the values which it was originally designed to preserve.” The church community does, however, have an important role to play in assisting its members in determining responsible ethical behaviour. While the institutional church has not always been a safe community for individuals to test the consistency of their behaviour with the Christian perspective, “yet, there are smaller groupings within the church that do provide such a forum, and these should be encouraged and utilized.” Ultimately, however, the chapter ends by bringing the basis for ethical sexual decision-making back to familiar church territory. Sexual intercourse is only meaningful in the context of a committed, permanent, faithful relationship. This guideline may

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135 Ibid., 8.  
136 Ibid., 8-9.  
137 Ibid., 9.  
138 Ibid.  
139 Ibid., 10.  
140 Ibid., 11.
need to be set aside or altered in a particular situation, but any overriding “should not be done lightly or thoughtlessly.”

6 The Promiscuous Girl and Her Friends

According to Callum Brown, in the cultural revolution of the 1960s, British women secularized the construction of their identities and the churches started to lose them. This “discursive death of pious femininity” was spotted by perspicacious leaders of the Church of Scotland at the end of the 1960s decade. The denomination’s Moral Welfare Committee, like its counterpart the United Church’s E&SS, began in the late 1960s to abandon its traditional promotion of temperance and offered a range of responses to the liberalization of society. In its report of 1970, the Moral Welfare Committee addressed itself to slippage on the sexual morality front. It identified “the promiscuous girl” as “the real problem here.” As Callum Brown observes, what the committee was in fact discovering was that “a generation of young women were turning their back on the discourse of pious femininity.” Vanishing was any notion of separate male and female spheres. More significantly the notion of the nuclear family as the cornerstone of Western civilization was being questioned.

By the end of the 1960s decade, therefore, the United Church of Canada found itself responding to two other equally increasingly vocal and problematic types: homosexuals and feminists. In the opening pages of his volume of essays on The New Sexuality, Herbert Otto describes the new sexuality of the 1960s as an emergent and dynamic force that is an outgrowth of humanity’s quest for self-understanding. “We are living”, says Otto “in an age of change and flux. Everything is open. All habitual attitudes are being investigated. Labels are being examined … Everything seems to be more permissible. Everything is on trial, and what is emerging is the desire for every man and woman to see himself whole and free, accepting himself as the unique individual he is.” Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon in their essay, “The New Sexuality and the Homosexual,” underscore the increased tension between individual and societal expectations. Nowhere was this clearer, they suggest, than in the Kinsey reports at the end of the 1940s which compared the paradoxical and hypocritical sexual attitudes and mores of the American people.

141 Ibid. The use of the language of the marriage service is artful.
142 Brown, The Death of Christian Britain, 192.
143 Ibid., 179-180.
144 Ibid., 180.
with their actual sexual behaviour. “The degree of sexual inhibition of an individual appeared to be dependent upon his or her ability to cope with, or rationalize, the fear and guilt imposed by society’s codes in relationship to one’s personal development or self-knowledge and sexual identity.” They chart the growth of homophile organizations during the 1950s that helped gays and lesbians to overcome society-imposed guilt and fear and to view themselves as whole persons of which homosexuality is but a single facet. What happened during the sexual revolution of the 1960s, they suggest, was that the same questions were raised among heterosexuals:

**Emerging sexual life-styles indicate definite trends toward acceptance of ambosexuality, or regard for personhood rather than fixed masculine and feminine roles, of morality in reference to sexuality only in terms of personal harm to parties involved … of the reaffirmation of love and the regenerative force of its sexual expression, of the validity of the subjective experience upon which personal growth is dependent, of concern for the dehumanizing effect of institutional precepts that are inapplicable to human experience.**

Indeed, Martin and Lyon suggest that the homosexual movement and the women’s liberation movement cannot be considered separately because both movements protest against “a sexist society characterized by rigid sex roles and dominated by male supremacy.” The blame for this sexist society can be laid, they suggest, squarely at the feet of the Judaic-Christian tradition, which “is clearly anti-sexual, not just anti-homosexual.” The tradition reinforces arbitrary and culturally conditioned sexual roles and life patterns that are “ill-defined” and “ill-fitting” to heterosexuals and homosexuals alike. Martin and Lyon observe that laws requiring marriage partners to be of different genders are being protested by gay and lesbian couples who are filing applications for marriage licenses and requesting and receiving religious rites consecrated by “a few concerned and courageous clergymen.” This trend has been serious enough, they note, to warrant a protest from the Vatican.

The United Church’s official position on homosexuality at the beginning of the 1960s is well documented in *Toward a Christian Understanding of Sex, Love, Marriage*, the report of the Commission on Christian Marriage and Divorce approved by the 19th General Council held in

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147 Ibid., 203.
148 Ibid., 203-204.
149 Ibid., 206.
Edmonton in 1960. The report acknowledges that, while the majority of the population is heterosexual (which is to be considered “natural” because it carries out a fundamental purpose of sexuality, namely, reproduction), “certain forces, usually environmental in origin, may determine a deviation from normal sexual feelings. People so affected have ‘learned’ to respond with sexual feelings towards members of their own sex, without or with a corresponding response to the opposite sex. Such individuals are ‘homosexual’ or ‘bisexual’ in orientation.” The report notes that in the search for the cause of such “unnatural” responses, physiological, psychological and social factors must be considered, though physiological disturbances as the primary determinant of homosexual orientation are rare. More likely, “a young child may have such experiences with regard to either of his parents that it is impossible for him to want to emulate the parent of the same sex or love the parent of the opposite sex.” The “social” influences that are in play refer to the influences on one person by another during adolescence and subsequently. These influences require particular protecting vigilance: “If a boy is sexually stimulated and satisfied by the activities of other males during that time in his life when he is easily influenced, and if this occurs several times, conditioning takes place and his eventual sexual relationships will be affected thereby. Girls may have the same experience.” Because the prevailing sentiment toward those known to have, or suspected of having homosexual feelings, is “dislike amounting at times to contempt,” the report suggests that many popular misconceptions arise “from overemotional reactions to this problem.” For example, the attribution to homosexual persons of excessive promiscuity or a tendency to criminal behaviour is not borne out by “clinical and statistical evidence.” Toward a Christian Understanding further claims that Christian ethics “distinguishes between homosexual feelings and their expression in overt acts of homosexual conduct. Such conduct is a serious problem in four ways:

It violates the will of God as an offense against the proper expression of sexuality in monogamous marriage; by misuse of natural functions homosexual activity is a sin against the self; since it involves at least one other person of the same sex, with our without his consent, homosexual activity is unedifying and destructive of “neighbour love”; it tends to undermine the

150 Commission on Christian Marriage and Divorce, Toward Christian Understanding, 15.
151 Ibid.
152 Ibid.
153 Ibid.
foundations of stable society based upon heterosexual marriage and family responsibility.\textsuperscript{154}

The attitude of the Christian toward people “who are carrying the burden of deviant feelings,” says the report, should be one of respect, sympathy, forbearance, charity and a serious attempt to understand and to be helpful. Of particular use may be “referral to a source of treatment.” This is likely to prove valuable to the “afflicted” person by raising his self-esteem and enhancing his ability to “exercise the necessary controls.” While homosexuality must never be used as an excuse for immoral acts, “our attitude toward persons so afflicted must be fair, untinged with prejudice and always charitable—in short, Christian.”\textsuperscript{155}

The “affliction” also attracted the notice of the United Church’s E&SS. The 1964 Annual Report reprinted excerpts of an article by Dr. Tibor Chikes, Professor of Pastoral Care at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. (‘Christian Attitudes toward Homosexuality). Chikes’ article upholds the view of \textit{Toward a Christian Understanding} by observing that the nature of the discourse is shifting, though not in a particularly inclusionary direction. In most recent scientific writing, says Chiles, homosexuality is recognized as a disease. “It is not a way of life, nor merely a personal choice of different sexual expression. It is a neurotic illness of the whole personality which causes considerable difficulties within the self, with society, and with the law.”\textsuperscript{156} Although “a small but vociferous minority of practicing homosexuals” use the media “to claim normalcy” and to “demand an all permissive attitude which accepts this sex deviation as merely a sex variant no more disturbing than left-handedness or red hair,”\textsuperscript{157} such efforts do more harm than good both by adding “to the general confusion” and stifling the Christian obligation to provide help to “the often lonely and usually bitter homosexual.”\textsuperscript{158}

In a 1965 \textit{Observer} article, “The Church and the Homosexual,” Mervyn Dickinson attempts to moderate the United Church’s fundamentally negative view. He asserts that the church, ignoring Jesus’ healing ministry to those on the margins or society, treats homosexuals as latter day lepers; it has, as a whole proved less than gracious. The church “has almost totally shut them out. And thousands of homosexuals feel it bitterly. Pierre Berton is right.”\textsuperscript{159}

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 16.
\textsuperscript{156} Tibor Chikes, “Christian Attitudes toward Homosexuality” in \textit{Breaking the Barriers} (E&SS Annual Report, 1964), 143.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{159} Mervyn Dickinson, “The Church and the Homosexual,” \textit{UCO}, November 15, 1965, 22.
Dickinson was director of counseling services for three Toronto churches and he had already achieved a certain degree of notoriety when he was quoted in the *Toronto Daily Star* to the effect that some premarital relationships may be more constructive and holier in the sight of God than destructive sexual relationships taking place within marriage and that in certain cases an extramarital affair could be a beautiful and constructive relationship. In his own examination of same-gender relationships, Dickinson suggests that “the church’s entire thinking on sexuality (and not just homosexuality) requires careful reconsideration.” He then outlines his version of the origins of homosexual behaviour, an account that leans much more heavily on social factors than on psychological disturbance: “For the most part we have shaped and supported the highly repressive sexual ethic of western culture, which, in the opinion of many responsible social scientists, is a chief factor contributing to the development of homosexuality.” He quotes Dr. Stephen Neiger, a specialist in sexology at the Toronto Psychiatric Hospital who says that by telling little boys what they should not be doing with little girls, some boys actually grow up not being able to function comfortably with the opposite sex. Taking an important step beyond Tibor Chikes, Dickinson outlines what he believes the church should be doing to address the homosexual issue: “Even as we encourage and support every possible treatment for homosexuality,” we need to recognize that some do not want to be cured, others cannot afford or even find treatment, and that the ability to “cure” the disease with present knowledge is questionable. Since many persons with homosexual propensities are likely to remain so, “the church would do better to stop moralizing and start helping them find fulfillment and satisfaction as they are.” This could begin with welcoming them into church communities. Dickinson asserts that while “homosexual relationships tend to be less enduring and more promiscuous than heterosexual ones, it is also that that some homosexual relationships are expressions of a deep commitment and abiding love.” Though such “marriages” cannot be the fullest expressions of God’s will, they may be the best expressions of God’s will of which the partners are capable. In such cases, “the church could well give its blessing.” Finally, the churches of Canada should follow the lead of the churches of Holland and bring pressure on the government to change “cruel and prejudicial legislation which is currently aimed at homosexuals. Legislation which
punishes consenting adults for engaging privately in any sexual behavior has no place in a civilized nation in the mid-twentieth century.”\textsuperscript{165}

If stereotypical gender roles and the well-defined spheres of men and women were being challenged by those gays and lesbians who might choose not to be re-programmed with psychiatric help, by the end of the 1960s the church’s view of gender roles was coming under fire from several directions. Early in the decade, the \textit{Observer} published a series of two articles that upheld a patriarchal view of the nuclear family liberally peppered with references to the notion of “complementarity.” Shadowing Karl Barth, Earl Lautenschlager reminds \textit{Observer} readers that according to the Bible, God created male and female to complement one another. “Man is incomplete without woman and woman is incomplete without man. Together they constitute the perfect partnership for mutual good.”\textsuperscript{166} The prime purpose of marriage is twofold: the expression of mutual love and helpfulness, and the perpetuation of the race. No one, says Lautenschlager, “has any right to be married unless he or she desires offspring from the union.”\textsuperscript{167} The assignment of roles within the household reveals the different spheres of men and women. The husband “is the head of the family … but the wife is the heart of the family, and both are the hands. The husband is the head of the house in the sense that he is the world.”\textsuperscript{168} The female partner is free to express her opinion and have it considered but “when a decision has to be voiced to the outside world, the man is the spokesman. In the parliament which is the family, the man or the woman may be the prime minister but the male should always be the speaker.”\textsuperscript{169} The “order” of things demands such an arrangement, while disobedience can result in “the tyrannical man and the subservient woman, who later becomes a rebellious woman.”\textsuperscript{170} Echoing Barth, Lautenschlager identifies such rebelliousness as the core of disorder within society: “In the act of sexual intercourse both the man and the woman accept the sex that they were given. This is especially important today because both sexes are unconsciously rebelling against the sex

\textsuperscript{165} Ibid. Dickinson was also assigned the responsibility for writing the “Homosexuality” chapter of the Sex and Morality Committee’s sex guide. His chapter reiterates his \textit{Observer} article. See Mervyn Dickinson, “Homosexuality.” UCA, United Church of Canada Board of Colleges and Secondary Schools Division of Ministry, Personnel, Education, 83.005, 7.


\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., 26.


\textsuperscript{169} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{170} Ibid.
they were given. Women hanker to be men, and men, less consciously, hanker to be women. When women become masculine and men feminine, marriage goes on the rocks.”

Those reading Lautenschlager’s words in a later generation will find them disturbing. Nevertheless, his ideas are the legacy of a society that Doug Owram calls “one of the most domestic in Canadian history” where the cult of marriage, family and children were central to Canadian values. At the dawn of the 1960s decade, most women were married before the age of twenty-two. Moreover, because of the strength of the cult of virginity, marriage was, “the only socially acceptable gateway to sexual activity. It was also a prelude to children, usually more or less immediately.” Further, these aspects “were glorified by a popular culture that exalted the family (and hence marriage) as the central institution of society and clearly differentiated the roles for men and women within the family.” Since the cult of domesticity was considered orthodox, there was little room for alternative approaches. Owram argues, “Those women who did not fit into the proper role were either persecuted outright or banished to the edges of society. If working women were criticized, divorcees were subject to condemnation, and spinsters pitied. Lesbians didn’t exist at all in the minds of the respectable middle class, except as the stuff of sensationalist fiction.”

Owram says that what happened next was complex, with interpretation focusing on two issues. First, writings in the 1960s and early 1970s emphasized a “sexual revolution.” This revolution “encompassed many changes in social and sexual behaviour but centred on the collapse of social authority surrounding premarital chastity for women. Subsequently the revolution led to the critique of other taboos, including, most significantly, those involving same-sex relationships.” Second, the rise of feminism, labeled in the 1960s as “women’s liberation,” changed the patterns of the domestic world. This upsurge of protest “upset many of the assumptions of postwar society and challenged thousands of implicit and explicit beliefs about the nature of the two sexes.” Owram observes that both the sexual revolution and the assertion of equal rights by women “were generationally based events: The children renounced the world

171 Ibid.
172 Owram, Born at the Right Time, 249.
173 Ibid.
174 Ibid.
175 Ibid., 253.
176 Ibid., 249.
177 Ibid., 250.
of their parents. Female baby-boomers, in particular, did not accept the constraints placed upon them by 1950s assumptions of domesticity and sexual conduct.”

By the end of the sixties, this rejection of constraint by female baby boomers intensified. The Royal Commission on the Status of Women, which had been appointed in 1967, issued a report that many found alarming. As Doug Owram summarizes: “By the time the Commission reported in 1970, its attack on the ‘exaggerated view of the child-rearing functions’ of women and the cult of motherhood made it clear that the 1950s were gone.” In the 1971 annual report (ironically titled *Man Fully Alive*), the E&SS reprinted an article by Jean Sharp called “The Feminist Push.” In the article, Sharp asserted that the report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women which had appeared in 1970, though helpful, did not go far enough. It was “criticized by many women as being outdated, its recommendations already put in the shade by the current feminist crusade.” The same E&SS Annual Report contains a summary of “Women’s Liberation Philosophy” by Hilda Kerns. In addition to demands for legalized abortion, equal pay for equal work and access to day care, Kerns noted that women complain about being sexually objectified: “They detest males who whistle or ogle them because to them this strengthens the picture of woman as sex object. They resent advertisers who push the little woman elbow-deep in suds because this promotes the idea of woman, the domestic slave.” To resolve these issues will necessitate changing “deeply-entrenched attitudes about the role of women not only on the part of men but on the part of women as well.”

A similar note was sounded in an *Observer* article by Barbara Bagnell, who drew attention to the rapidly altering role of women in Canadian culture. Bagnell contrasted the earlier concept of the devoted wife and mother with the image of the liberated woman in her description of a woman named Joan Johnson. Johnson, says Bagnell, “looks as though she would be completely happy surrounded by lace and fine china, or basking in the warmth of a hearth fire.” She is, however, “an ardent feminist. She’s one of those women who demands the right to decide for herself what she will or will not do, and what she will or will not be. She refuses to let society make her choices for her.” Bagnell points out that although the women’s liberation movement is “primarily a secular revolution” it is a particularly challenging one for the church because Joan

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178 Ibid., 250-251.
179 Ibid., 277.
Johnson and many other feminists were “rejecting the church.” The church, in the view of feminists, is one of the last bastions of male superiority, often supported with recourse to quotation from the apostle Paul about the need for women to keep silent and to be prevented from occupying positions of authority.

Bagnell indicates several reasons why women in the 1960s are dissatisfied. First, there was increasing affluence, which gave “more girls an education, only for them to find very real job discrimination on the basis of sex.” The nuclear family, moreover, “deprives the mother-at-home of adult company, supportive relatives, and a use for her education.” And of crucial importance: The pill has placed the means of reliable contraception in the hands of women for the first time.  

7 The Sacrament of Sex

When congregations of the United Church and Anglican Church first rose to their feet to sing “Now Thanks We God for Bodies Strong” from their brand new red hymn books and to celebrate “the sacrament of sex” by raising their voices in song, they did so with the unsettling conviction that with lightening speed they had been ushered into a new and perhaps treacherous age. Even the reassuring comfort of the hymn’s attractive folk tune couldn’t obscure the view, especially for the older generation of churchgoer, of a changed and foreign moral landscape. From their squeamishness about the Horsburgh case (and foot dragging about his re-instatement) to the quiet disappearance of the report of the Sex and Morality Committee, United Church leaders demonstrated little ability to comprehend, let alone manage, the alarming speed of change in the discourse on sexuality. Although he cautions against the notion that rejection of the churches’ teachings on sex were a major source of alienation from them at the end of the sixties decade, historian Hugh McLeod emphasizes that there were sections of society, including most obviously the counter-culture, “where new and unconventional approaches to sex were one important aspect of a wider programme of alternative values and lifestyles, in terms of which all ‘respectable’ institutions such as the churches seemed alien.” In an article on changes in the cultural discourse of sexuality that was reprinted in the 1970 report of the E&SS, writer Michael Orr proclaimed that within Canadian culture moral yardsticks were being broken. “The judgment of the individual is the new criterion.” Orr goes on to suggest, however, that what he calls “an

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183 Ibid.
184 McLeod, The Religious Crisis, 187.
obsession with sex” actually covers up a fear of death; and it is not necessarily physical, but spiritual death which we dread: “People use sex as a means to escape crushing anxiety, the pressures of our atomic environment and the clammy hand of loneliness … The sexual revolution? A new generation of human beings trying to understand the roots of meaning and fulfillment in a frightened age.”

Charles Taylor makes a similar observation from the vantage point of a later generation. People who have experienced profound upheaval nevertheless continue to seek forms “which can allow for long-term loving relations between equal partners.” In many cases these partners will “also want to become parents, and bring up their children in love and security.” The problem for the churches is, says Taylor, that the moral codes of the past will no longer work for the post-1960s generations. However baffled the leadership of United Church of Canada was by the rapidity of societal change in the 1960s, particularly in the arena of sexual discourse, the annual reports of the E&SS, the Observer, and the Sex and Morality Committee’s draft booklet demonstrate that in at least some quarters of the church there was the glimmer of realization that, as the suffragan Bishop of Woolwich proclaimed early in the troubled decade, the pilgrim way forward would not be one of reaffirming old time religion or dogmatic moralism, whether sexual or otherwise. As Nancy Hannum’s contribution to the Sex and Morality guideline made clear, the church’s claim to a divine warrant would not suffice in the decade’s anti-authoritarian universe, especially for the newly empowered younger generation. Despite good intentions, embarking on a new path was more easily discussed than accomplished by members of the United Church of Canada and other mainline Canadian denominations during the sexual revolution of the 1960s. Many United Church leaders were willing to support a few liberal changes, but in the end they were challenged to understand, let alone support a sexual revolution. The Sex and Morality report, despite its attempt to be “relevant,” often fell back on traditional understandings. However, as Doug Owram observes, when the church did try to hold the line, it found itself largely ignored. Western culture, which for centuries had listened to Christianity for moral guidance, had simply ceased to care what the churches thought.

186 Taylor, A Secular Age, 502.
187 Ibid., 502-503.
188 Kevin Flatt dissents from my view that “liberal” United Church leaders were inconsistent in their liberalism. See Flatt, After Evangelicalism, 222.
189 Owram, Born at the Right Time, 260.
Owram asks the necessary question of the 1960s sexual revolution (as of all revolutions): What triggered the final collapse of the old regime? He suggests that part of the answer was that sexual morality may indeed have been the foremost example of modern situational ethics:

Sexual activity, as such, was no longer what was condemned. Instead, society judged when sex was appropriate and when it was not. Such a shifting scale of conduct implied an external social constraint rather than an internal moral one. What was safe? What was acceptable? No one was asking now what was wrong (though terms of right and wrong were often invoked). By the 1960s, situational ethics among youth seems to have centred on three major concerns: fear of disease, fear of pregnancy, and fear of criticism. Anything that diminished these fears implied a redefinition of appropriate sexual morality. This is precisely what occurred through the 1960s.190

Owram continues with a useful metaphor of François Ricard that captures the mood of the times. Rock music, said Ricard, was a religion for the baby boom. Like the revival meetings of yesteryear, rock concerts became the temples “in which people gave witness of their faith and participated in the emotional uplift of a communal spiritual event. The faithful gathered to see and be seen and, most of all, enjoy ‘their affiliation with something larger and more powerful than themselves.’”191 The United Church could not compete. It emerged from the decade perplexed by the fact that despite its best efforts to affirm the sacrament of sex (experienced within the chaste arena of heterosexual marriage) and even to sing about it from vibrant new red hymn books, it no longer had oversight of the sacramental liturgy. Despite the denomination’s best efforts to adapt, the religious alienation of the next generation had begun in earnest.

190 Ibid., 263.
191 Ibid., 282. See also François Ricard, The Lyric Generation: The Life and Times of the Baby Boomers (Toronto: Stoddart, 1994), 134.
Chapter 5
Learning to Live with Uncertainty:
United Church Mission in the New Age

There are some areas in which we must learn to live with uncertainty, believing that answers will emerge as we undertake the responsibilities we can recognize. Not only must we accept uncertainty now, we must learn to pursue mission with minds always open to modify policies in the light of new knowledge as it emerges. Mission in the modern world must be, in a remarkable way, a combination of dedication and flexibility.¹


In *The Sixties*, Arthur Marwick underscores that it is important not to exaggerate the extent of 1960s change or its novelty. Not everything was entirely new; “what was new was that so many things happened at once.”² In this new climate of rapid change and confusion, United Church leaders recognized that the church of the New Age would need to be sufficiently flexible to cope with an era of uncertainty in a changing world. Many of that leadership’s younger voices urged the renunciation of any kind of monolithic institutional identity. Christendom was beginning to be a memory and smug self-satisfaction was not a faithful response to a world in need. Now was the time for Christians of all stripes to unstop their ears and listen to that world. As Phyllis Airhart points out, E&SS secretary, Ray Hord, made it clear that the United Church of the sixties, if it were to have a future, would need to be “relevant”³ especially as it sought to promote justice and resist evil (as the United Church’s 1968 New Creed would express it). While his predecessor, J.R. Mutchmor had fought moral battles against the traditional United Church bugbears of alcohol and gambling (criticizing the world but rarely the church), Hord started to make headlines for tackling controversial political issues which he considered to be an important part of the church’s caring mission. As he listened to the world, he realized that the world had much to say, and that some of its speech would unnerve entrenched interests outside, but also inside the denomination. Moreover, it would not be enough merely to listen to the world—God was also calling the church of the 1960s to respond to the world’s brokenness, and to respond compassionately and with a measure of unity that would assist in shifting (as the WCC framed it)

¹ *ROP* 1966, Waterloo, ON, GC 22, 433.
³ Airhart, *A Church with the Soul of a Nation*, 227.
“from international disorder toward a greater measure of world community.”4 But if, like the man from Macedonia in the Apostle Paul’s missionary vision, the world was saying “come and help us,”5 what form should that help take? What was the United Church’s mission in this New Age?

The church as “servant of the world” was a recurring trope of the 1960s and it led the United Church to search ecumenically for “best practice” wisdom. The WCC meeting in Evanston, Illinois had proclaimed as early as 1954 that God’s mission was to the world and that the church itself had no mission apart from the world. As a consequence of such thinking, the WCC officially merged with the International Missionary Council at the Assembly in New Delhi in 1961. Airhart notes that five years later the United Church’s Commission on World Mission would declare this merger to have been a turning point in the denomination’s own rising consciousness of its mission of servanthood: “The merger accentuated the double meaning of world mission: it was global in outreach, and it focused on the world rather than on the institutional church.”6 What was now being widely challenged by ecumenism’s left wing was the “middle axioms” approach to dealing with social issues. Previously, it had been the aim “to agree on a range of options for translating Christian principles into policy, in order to broaden consensus. When the WCC’s first World Conference on Church and Society met in 1966, however, it discarded the flexibility of “middle axioms,” replacing them with clear-cut positions taken on a range of controversial issues including political ones.7

Unwittingly, this new approach to mission (which was taken up with enthusiasm by denominational leaders) helped further to unhinge the concept of liberal evangelicalism that had defined the United Church for decades. The 1960s reconfiguration divided the theological camps between those who might be called liberal/ecumenical and those holding more conservative views. These now appropriated the word “evangelical”—but with a narrowed meaning.8 According to Airhart, “the growing polarization of ecumenical and evangelical Protestants was evident at the first World Congress on Evangelism that met in Berlin in the fall of 1966.”9 This Congress was co-sponsored by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and Christianity

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6 Airhart, *A Church with the Soul of a Nation*, 228.
7 Ibid., 228-229.
8 Ibid., 229.
9 Ibid.
Today and it claimed (in defiance of the WCC) to be the true “spiritual successor” to the first ecumenical conference in Edinburgh, 1910. Nevertheless, as the extensive 1966 report of the Commission on World Mission presented to the United Church’s General Council makes clear, while there was essential agreement within the denomination that the church’s mission was really God’s mission, the root question remained: precisely what was that mission? For liberal ecumenists who shaped the United Church’s mission policies in the 1960s, the church’s approach had to come to terms with both the contemporary world’s secularism and its pluralism. It also needed to address the fraught legacy of the church’s historic co-operation in its missionary activities with various forms of Western imperialism that had masqueraded under the guise of soul-saving. Pious platitudes about the Third World that ignored the forces of social revolution in favour of some other-worldly reward betrayed the substance of the Gospel’s essential call to justice. The church should not shrink from wading into the arena of politics. Further, as it became clearer through the 1960s that “mainline” Christianity in the North Atlantic world was in decline, the younger churches, planted as part of an earlier missionary enterprise overseas, began to regard Canada and even the Canadian church as a fertile mission field for their own mission efforts. In all, the United Church became acutely aware that its former approach to mission was in serious need of an overhaul if it were to meet the all-important test of “relevance” in the 1960s New Age.

Other world events of the 1960s galvanized two of the denomination’s most influential liberal ecumenists and led to a more extensive fracturing of the United Church’s self-identity as a liberal and evangelical denomination. Ray Hord was convinced that the church was called to be prophetically critical of the American escalation of the War in Vietnam. Of consequence, he urged United Church support for U.S. draft dodgers who had fled an “unjust” war and who sought asylum in Canada. It was clear enough to Hord where the churches and Canada ought to stand on this issue. Nevertheless, the draft dodgers were categorized as criminals by patriotic Americans. Significantly, they were considered so by many Canadians as well, including voices within the Government of Canada and the United Church who were clearly outraged by Hord’s actions. Some church members even threatened to withdraw financial support from the Missionary and Maintenance fund and demanded Ray Hord’s removal from leadership of the E&SS. In a similar vein the 1967 Six Day War in the Middle East, from which the Israelis emerged victorious, led to yet another re-drawing of national boundaries that displaced and

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10 Ibid. 239.
demoralized Palestinian Arabs. Their augmented suffering deeply affected Observer editor-in-chief A.C. Forrest. Although Forrest claimed not to “side with” the Palestinians and carefully sought to distinguish between the “Jews” and the “Zionists” who shaped Israel’s state policies, his writing both in the Observer and in his book The Unholy Land, like Hord’s on the subject of the draft dodgers, proved highly controversial. His conclusions would, however, influence the policies of the United Church’s liberal ecumenical leadership in the ensuing decades. Though Forrest always insisted that his criticisms of the Israelis were consistent with those of ecumenical partners within the WCC and other liberal ecumenical bodies, his steadfast criticism of Israel seriously damaged relations between the United Church and the Jewish community in Canada. It also pointed toward diminished unity within a “united” church as the philosophical, political and theological distance widened between many liberal ecumenist leaders and others less persuaded than Forrest that the ultimate solution to conflict in the Middle East ought to be the evolution of a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural democratic secular state in Palestine/Israel rather than the maintenance of a “Jewish homeland.”

The conservative wing of the United Church, meanwhile, was troubled that the historic linking of evangelism and social service seemed to be coming apart in the midst of the ferment of the 1960s; it feared that the evangelistic mission of the church was being reduced to social and political action alone. As Airhart points out, while Newfoundland Conference evangelist Norman Wesley Oake reminded readers of the United Church Renewal Fellowship’s magazine Small Voice that those who claimed evangelism was unconcerned with social problems obviously misunderstood the history of revivalism, he was nevertheless also highly troubled by what appeared to be severing of the historic link between evangelism and social concern within the United Church: “Confusion reigns as to what the mission really is.”

1 Uncertainty and Even Bewilderment: Discerning God’s Mission in the New Age

One of the important templates for understanding the liberal ecumenical approach to mission in the 1960s appeared in the May 1964 issue of the Union Seminary Quarterly Review. In his article “Christian Participation in the Revolution” Paul Abrecht, WCC Executive Secretary of the Department of Church and Society, asked two important questions: “What are the lessons of rapid social change for the missionary movement?” and “What is the Christian interpretation of

today’s revolutionary change which challenges the world-wide missionary movement?” Abrecht states that the missionary movement, as it was lived in the past, had been shattered by the impact of revolutionary social change in Africa, Asia and Latin America. He further notes that in the aftermath of the revolution in China, Western churches had folded their tents and moved on to what they imagined was more fertile ground for their missionary efforts—only to find that further revolution undermined such work, work that continued to be threatened by the power of “dynamic nationalism and secularism.” According to Abrecht, the *leitmotif* of nineteenth century Christian thought about mission had been a kind of spiritual imperialism that extended the domain of Western Christendom and brought with it Western culture and Western patterns of political and economic life:

A large segment of the missionary movement, working in great areas of Africa and Latin America, was dominated by a theological outlook which refused to consider the social consequences of missions; and because of this theological perspective it more readily identified the preaching of the gospel with the introduction of a Western understanding of society. Theological fundamentalism was linked with sociological fundamentalism.

Ironically this was itself a revolutionary process since it broke the power of ancient societies and created great tensions between old and new social groups with ambiguous results. In the present era, he observed, “the Christendom conception of society has been radically challenged and has lost its evangelistic power. It is clear that the possibility of building something called a Christian society in these lands is now quite remote.” The fact of the matter, according to Abrecht, is that missions had helped to produce revolution but failed to show the relevance of Christian faith to it. Further, they had introduced a technological urban culture to Africa and Asia but had not connected it with a Christian way of living. Abrecht asks: “was it not irresponsible for the Church to help create a revolution and not take that revolution seriously?”

Crisis does, however, give birth to opportunity. According to Abrecht, the church should revolutionize its own missionary activity by challenging any connection between the church and

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13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., 193
15 Ibid., 194.
16 Ibid., 193.
the racist, imperialist culture of the West. “The major question for the church today is whether it can find ways of recovering its relation to the dynamic social movements in Africa and Asia which the Gospel has, in such large measure, inspired. This requires a new and critical look at the nature and scope of the world social revolution and the role of the church in it.” 

The judgment of rapid social change upon the Christian enterprise “is also a judgment on our complacency.” Abrecht further queries: was the missionary movement aware that it was creating a social revolution among the peoples it sought to convert? Some missionaries may have sought to develop a conception of change appropriate to their mission fields. “Nevertheless,” he writes, “the lack of a theologically developed ethics of change is one of the astonishing features of the history of Western missions.”

Abrecht identifies both fundamentalist Christianity and “Christendom” as culprits in the refusal to consider the social consequences of the missionary enterprise. He suggests, moreover, that bringing about a change in the concept of mission might prove difficult because the Western churches were too much influenced by conservative political and social thinking. It would also be difficult for them to accept the fact that they might need to learn from young churches that had even lately been on the receiving end of the Western missionary enterprise. Abrecht advises that the Western church should be prepared to deepen its commitment to and understanding of the Gospel as a judgment on all societies and cultures—its own included. The missionary movement would need to transform itself in order to overcome the imperialist spiritual pride of the West.

On a more optimistic note, Abrecht indicates that an honest attempt to hone a Christian conception of society free of imperialist conservatism could ultimately be greatly beneficial to the West and would contribute to the renewal both of the missionary movement and the churches themselves: “Whereas Christian missions formerly represented the liberating spirit generating revolutionary change, today social movements of various types seem to be far ahead of the church in giving expression to the revolutionary types of men.” The imperative for the church should be to find ways of recovering its relationship to the sorts of dynamic social movements

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17 Ibid., 194.
18 Ibid., 193.
19 Ibid., 193. The emphasis is Abrecht’s.
20 Ibid., 196.
21 Ibid., 194.
which the Gospel itself has inspired. “This requires a new and critical look at the nature and scope of the world social revolution and the role of the Church in it.”

Ray Hord’s report in *The Cutting Edge* echoes Abrecht’s concerns about the state of the world and the need for the church to respond appropriately. He notes that “this is an age of accelerating change and violence when old stabilities are breaking up and all institutions are threatened. And it’s later than we think.”

Even before Ray Hord was appointed E&SS Secretary and refocused the powerful board’s approach to evangelism in an outward rather than inward direction, leaders in the United Church realized that the denomination of the 1960s needed radically to reconsider its historic approach to the church’s mission both at home and abroad. The Twentieth General Council meeting held in London, Ontario, in September 1962 adopted a number of recommendations leading toward a reconsideration of the denomination’s approach to missions. Chief among these was that “an independent and fundamental study of how The United Church of Canada can best share in the World Mission of the Church” should be conducted forthwith. The study was entrusted to a specially appointed Commission on World Mission. The Commission consisted of seven members who had been missionaries as well as others who brought varied overseas experience to the table. Over the next four years, the Commission examined a broad spectrum of contemporary mission literature, including reports of numerous conferences. In addition, it received submissions from individuals and from church courts. Comments were also solicited from overseas leaders.

The Commission offered its extensive report to the 1966 General Council held in Waterloo, Ontario (a full text appears in the ROP). According to the report, in its examination of the mission enterprise that the United Church should undertake in a New Age, the Commission decided to return to basics. This would require re-examination of the biblical, theological and historical basis of mission as well as the particular role of the United Church and its antecedent churches. While over the course of time the basic motivation and purpose of Christian mission remain constant, “the manner of their fulfilment has been affected tremendously by the peculiar circumstances of each era.”

The Commission notes that by the mid-twentieth century a number of urgent problems had emerged in the arena of World Mission. First, newly planted churches were not well-integrated into the outward thrust of the mission (they behaved as fruits of

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22 Ibid.
24 *ROP* 1966, 302.
25 Ibid., 311.
missionary work rather than as cells of continuing witness). Second, Christian converts were not made aware of the life of the whole church; instead, they understood their status as that of clients of a mission rather than as members of a whole world-wide fellowship. Third, the missionary set-up made the disunity of the church more evident than its unity.

The Commission states, with regret, that the association of Christian mission with Western political imperialism, while perhaps unplanned, was probably inevitable.\textsuperscript{26} Several features of missionary action had, in the past, reflected the habits and assumptions of the colonial era. The Commission points out that missionaries had a tendency to assume, rather than claim, the prerogatives of leadership in all phases of their work; wherever they went, they had the aura of the West upon them. Moreover, evangelism and material help seemed to move hand in hand. Another problem was that Western missionary leadership tended to be self-perpetuating because the missionaries failed to train indigenous leaders. The proliferation of mission institutions furnished and staffed on a scale that none of the younger churches could afford had become a formidable obstacle to any reconfiguration or withdrawal.\textsuperscript{27}

Like Paul Abrecht, the Commission was aware that the revolutionary changes taking place during the twentieth century had challenged traditional approaches to mission. The Commission was unequivocal that the waging of two world wars had symbolized the spiritual and moral bankruptcy of the “Christian” West. Further, the world had undergone tremendous change in a very short time. Revolutionary political movements (often with roots in Christian concepts of the value of individuals and peoples as children of God) had changed the landscape, while new political attitudes themselves reflected “tremendous economic and social changes associated with scientific and technological developments.”\textsuperscript{28} Science and technology had rapidly introduced an urban and mobile culture into societies that were historically rural, static and family centred. Studies by the WCC declared that “the seven revolutions of Western man’s last three hundred years in part of Africa have been telescoped into a generation.”\textsuperscript{29}

According to the Commission, a new kind of world was emerging as a result of increased travel which carried with it the opportunity for mutual enrichment but also the danger of a “superficial homogenization of values.” The Commission further notes that Westerners “do not

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 312.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 313.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 318.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
easily accept the one-world idea; their heritage is one of domination, and new forms of Western domination continue to appear through the exercise of economic power and through foreign investments in lands where colonial power has been supplanted by ineffectual forms of self-government.”

Nevertheless, what is emerging in this revolutionary New Age is a single civilization. This single civilization is, the Commission’s report observes, “increasingly secular, partly because man has become the master of so much of the world through science and technology that God seems to be an unnecessary concept, and partly because people of strong religious convictions seem to be able to live with their fellow men only by avoiding religious controversy and proselytization.” Worryingly, the Commission underscores that the “new world coming to birth” is also one in which the proportion of Christians appears to be in steady decline. In short, “religious changes in the twentieth century are no less revolutionary than those in the social, political and economic order, and the mission of the church must take into account the fact that the whole religious history of mankind is entering a new phase.”

In addition to a maturing of the “younger” churches that have resulted in drastic shifts in mission strategy and the role of the missionary, the relationships of the United Church “with the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches” have, in recent years, “been transformed almost as radically as those with the newer indigenous churches.”

After it carefully laid the groundwork, the Commission articulated what it considered the missionary task of the church in the second half of the twentieth century: the basis for the work of mission is the assumption that the church “ought to be involved in what is happening.” Its mission “to penetrate, transform and redeem” is to be a mission to six continents, not merely to two, “because it is a mission from God to men, not a mission from Christian men to non-Christian men.” In a nation like Canada, where faithful adherence to Christian ideals could no longer be assumed, “it is a mission to the people of Canada as to the people of the Congo. It is as much a mission to the nominal Christians of North America as it is to the nominal animists of Central Africa.” The Gospel, the Commissioners proclaim, must become indigenous to every culture it meets; “it must wear the dress of every people to whom it speaks, speak as they speak,

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30 Ibid., 322.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., 339.
34 Ibid., 342.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
sit where they sit, and look through their eyes.”

Further, the church must recognize “that its mission is to witness in a religiously plural world.” The dynamic changes in many faiths seem to indicate that “the religious history of mankind as a whole is entering on a new phase … Thus the Christian must find his place in a bewilderingly complex group of revitalized faiths; the old simple dichotomy of Christian and non-Christian is no longer adequate.”

The Commission also emphasizes the need for the “younger churches” overseas to achieve self-confidence. To insure this maturing, they must be visibly treated by the Western churches with respect, allowing repeated opportunities for self-determination. The Commission was convinced that this new stage of mission inevitably meant a new role for the United Church, though it also made the pastoral observation that the speed of this transition “is giving rise to considerable uncertainty and even bewilderment among its members.”

The findings of this 1966 report were intended to address this anxiety and to answer those questions deemed to be urgently requiring the church’s attention. Further, having noted that mission and the desire to communicate with humankind is at the heart of the United Church’s mission history, the Commission emphasizes that the changes of the last half-century are so great that they not only “compel a revaluation of world mission policy,” they also require that such revaluation should be constant and ongoing. The denomination’s new theology of mission similarly must “grow out of an experience in a situation that is constantly changing.”

In a parallel to the government’s gradual takeover of responsibility for social welfare in Canada, the report’s “Findings” also underline the participation of both governments and voluntary agencies in what had traditionally been the work of the world mission of the United Church: “We rejoice in this development, while recognizing that it makes some new demands on the church.”

The Commission recognizes that United Church’s investment in ecumenism has also altered the landscape of international missionary activity. The earlier relationship between an administrative board of the home church and the mission council on a mission field has been replaced by an ecumenical relationship between an autonomous church in Canada and other autonomous churches overseas. The involvement of the United Church in ecumenical agencies has not, however, occurred without an increase in the complexity of relationships between all of

37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., 343.
39 Ibid., 354.
40 Ibid., 421.
41 Ibid., 424.
42 Ibid., 428.
these various agencies. The Board of World Mission welcomed ecumenical relations not only with indigenous churches but also with Christian councils in countries where missionaries were sent as well as with other denominations with which the United Church co-operated in special projects.\(^{43}\) Indeed, ecumenical partnership has “become characteristic of world mission to such an extent that we have to rethink the very language we use in describing the missionary effort.”\(^{44}\) A further cost of the trend toward multilateral relations with younger churches through ecumenical councils is the weakening of the bond of personal interest and involvement that were encouraged under the old system where “mission areas” were allocated to particular churches.

The Report is also clear that the emerging world requires a new kind of missionary. It observes that while the basic motivation and purpose of Christian mission is unchanged, this new era will require a new set of skills from those volunteering for service. More than ever before, Christian mission “demands a person who combines deep concern with person-to-person relationships with sensitivity to the implications or rapid social change.”\(^{45}\) Echoing the voices of others in the denomination who warned of waning interest in the church’s work among young people, the report also notes as a particular area of concern the “serious breakdown in communicating to young people the needs and opportunities for work overseas.”\(^{46}\)

The problem is not limited to the young, however. When educating the home church in the tasks of world mission a similar difficulty emerged. The Commission is alarmed that many members of the church seem now “far more interested in specific projects and in specific people than in general policies.”\(^{47}\) Moreover, interest in non-church projects like CUSO and Cross Roads Africa often go hand in hand with “a deeply felt although poorly articulated suspicion of the church’s missionary programme overseas because it appears to them as a pressure technique designed to extract a number of people from their own cultural communities and transplant them into another.”\(^{48}\) As a consequence of such a perception, many church people choose to involve themselves in “non-church programmes designed to meet the needs of undernourished, underprivileged and undervalued people”\(^{49}\) rather than in the formal missionary programme of the church. “In all this there is an obvious misunderstanding of the real nature of the church’s

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 428–429.
\(^{44}\) Ibid., 429.
\(^{45}\) Ibid.
\(^{46}\) Ibid., 431.
\(^{47}\) Ibid., 432.
\(^{48}\) Ibid.
\(^{49}\) Ibid.
mission and a good deal of theological confusion.” In sum, the Report articulates that education for mission means imparting to church members a fuller understanding of the meaning of mission:

It involves establishing a whole new point of view, with implications reaching into every aspect of the church’s life. It involves displacing the concept of mission as being from Canada to other lands, or from Christian Canadians to non-Christian foreigners, by the more basic concept of mission as being from God to man, in which the church is privileged to play a significant part without pride in its own efforts of condescension towards others.

The Commission’s Report concludes with a number of recommendations both on the nature of God’s mission to the world and the continuing task of the church. It suggests that the United Church should engage “unreservedly in mission, rededicating its total effort and resources to sharing with all people the love of God in Christ Jesus.” The scope of such mission will embrace every sector and aspect of human life and, while it is to be a mission to six continents, the United Church should give its participation in overseas responsibilities a very high priority. In order to transcend human divisions, however, the United Church itself must repent its past behaviour. It should “acknowledge its share of guilt, determine to cleanse itself with God’s help from all arrogance, whether racial, cultural or ecclesiastical; and continue by every means open to it to oppose racial intolerance and other forms of national or social prejudice.”

Moreover, in moving toward full partnership with other churches (including the younger churches overseas), the United Church should give expression not only to the need for having “Canadian Christians witnessing to the culture-transcending character of the church in other parts of the world,” but ought also to welcome the witnessing of Asian and African Christians to the Canadian Church. This will help to acknowledge the reality of one world Christian fellowship. As a part of the necessity for flexibility, and as a recognition that a divided church cannot fulfill God’s mission, the report recommended upholding the principle of unity in mission both by “abandoning all thought of denominational advantage” and by working with other communions and interdenominational organizations in Canada and overseas.

50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid., 433.
53 Ibid., 434.
54 Ibid., 435.
55 Ibid.
To affirm this process the United Church must immediately set about “seeking the ecumenical orientation of ordinands for the ministry by all available means.”

Finally, to achieve these goals “in this time of rapid change” the Commission advised the need for the whole organization of the United Church of Canada “including the structure of its boards and departments” to be under constant review. Missionary work should be organized “in terms of the kind of work done rather than in terms of the area to be served.” And because it found the fiscal support for world mission woefully inadequate (less than one cent per member per day), the report recommended a stewardship challenge with emphasis on both monetary and human resources: “A new vision of mission confronts the church. It has yet to be fully understood. The whole church must educate itself to its call to mission—to prayer, to understanding, to service, to stewardship, and to joyous sacrifice.”

One of the two signatories of the Commission’s report was Emmanuel College Professor C. Douglas Jay, who served as secretary. Jay reiterated and amplified many of the Commissions findings when he gave the R.P. MacKay Memorial Lectures in 1966-67. A central theme in Jay’s lecture series was recognition that the United Church’s mission enterprise was being simultaneously challenged by both secularism and pluralism. Jay opened his first lecture by reminding the audience that the church had now entered into a new and profoundly altered historical situation that called for radical changes in the structure and pattern of God’s and the church’s mission to the world. The changes were threefold. First, “the political domination of the world by Western white peoples has come to an end.” The great period of missionary expansion in the previous 200 years had coincided with the colonial expansion of the North Atlantic world replete with its racist attitudes. “The rest of the world no longer feels itself obliged to accept Western culture as that which has the right or power to dominate the cultures of Asia and Africa.” Second, Jay cites a new and single world culture or world civilization that had its characteristic expression in rapidly growing urban centres. The common substance of this culture is Western science and technology with its driving belief “that the conditions of human

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56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid, 437.
61 Ibid.
life can and ought to be changed, through rational planning.” Significantly, this world civilization “is predominantly secular, but its development and its spread are not religiously neutral events.” Third, in the 1960s the Christian church has a presence in all parts of the inhabited globe, though not necessarily as a majority.

Referencing the recent Gifford Lectures of C.F. von Weizacker, Jay finds it paradoxical and disturbing that the secularized, modern civilization of the West seems in the mid-twentieth century to be “subduing the non-Christian world” far more efficiently than the previous missionary enterprise of the churches. Moreover, he points out that in addressing the task of mission in the 1960s “we are confronted not only with the fact of an increasingly widespread secular civilization, but with the fact that we are living in the ecumenical era.” Just as the churches of the world were in the process of discovering each other, Christians were also re-thinking the nature of their involvement with the world. The result would be a new understanding of the unity of mission: “that there is one Christian mission in which all Christians and all churches are involved, that the Church itself is inherently and not optionally missionary, that there is no real boundary line between missions and ecclesiology.” Home missions had previously been considered in terms of “revival”—the bringing back of lost sheep to the church’s fold, while foreign missions had concerned themselves with converting the “pagan world.” Such attitudes made it easy “for individual churches or denominations to conduct their separate missions with a view to a kind of colonial self-extension rather than the fulfilment of the one mission of Christ in the world.” In the new order of things, ecumenical thinking stressed that the task of mission is the task of evangelism of One Church in what is rapidly becoming One World. “In this task the boundary runs not between home and foreign, between Christian and non-Christian lands but between church and world, everywhere.”

In his lecture series, Jay also examines the meaning of “secularization” for the church’s mission. He notes that the literature of the “New Theology” of the sixties includes a number of books with the word “secular” in their titles. He concludes that the inspiration for many of these works was Bonhoeffer’s *Letters and Papers from Prison* which conceives of a world from which God is being increasingly evacuated from the public sphere and where humanity itself has “come

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62 Ibid., 2.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid., 3.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid., 4.
of age.” Jay suggests, however, that prior to the Second World War secularization was thought to be a chief opponent of the mission of the church. None the less, for many Christians Bonhoeffer’s thought seems to point toward an understanding of secularization as liberation from what was ultimately a false conception of God. Such liberation also extends to mission. Provocatively, Jay asks whether “in the independent countries abroad, as in Asia and Africa, there is today any place for Western missions?” He also inquires whether the time indeed might have come to withdraw altogether and to let the non-Western churches get on with their work. 68

According to Jay, having considered carefully such penetrating questions, the United Church’s Commission on World Mission discerned that the time had not come to withdraw. There were two reasons. The first was the relative weakness of the non-Western churches and the size of the evangelistic task. More important, however, “is our consideration of the ecumenical and supra-national nature of the world church, which it becomes more and more important to demonstrate as nationalism increases, especially in Asia and Africa.” 69 Jay cautions, however, that in the spread of “Western civilization” the spirit of Christianity had spread with it so that even though the period of Western domination may be ending, the impact of Western civilization and Christianity with it is still being felt.

Jay’s second lecture develops this point more fully, observing that Christianity had contributed “not only to the development of empirical science but to philosophies of history as mutually irreconcilable as those of Comte, Hegel, Marx and Nietzsche,” philosophies which were all “secularized products of Christian civilization.” 70 The expansionary movement of Western missions had, however, clearly ended (he notes, for example that by the mid-sixties the number of United Church missionaries had declined from 600 in 1925 to 250). Indeed the churches of “the old Christendom” may well have reached the point where they would “need the help of Christians who have learned to confess Christ in the midst of the worlds of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam.” 71 For their part though, the Western churches have a particular responsibility to give leadership to the churches of Asia and Africa which “have had comparatively less experience in meeting the spiritual effects of secularization. Our willingness

68 Ibid.
69 Ibid., 11.
70 Ibid., 16.
71 Ibid., 12.
to act responsibly in this area is perhaps the clearest demonstration possible that the Christian Church is realistically concerned about the rest of the world.”

More positively, in his third lecture Jay maintains that while some critics would argue that Christian missions were tools of the political and cultural expansion of the West, it is apparent from the record that the opposite is also true: the “Christian missions have often been in collision with Western colonialism, and have contributed significantly to revolutionary, liberating movements, to the humanizing of the secularizing process.”

Pointing to the situation in Africa, Jay notes that one of the consequences of secularization on that continent has been that, with the exception of teacher training, in almost every area control was taken out of the church’s hands. “Christians have not been excluded – they have merely been put on an equal footing with non-Christians.” This “non-privileged situation” again calls for a missionary concept of Christian serving presence rather than power, a presence that may be manifest in a number of ways including advocacy for human rights and dignity. “The glory of God may be more transparent through … good works than in many of the words of formal Christian preaching.”

Jay is persuaded that the “ecumenical” Christian denominations not only have an important role to play in the international realm, but contribute valuable skills to negotiating what might belong to the “universal, trans-national, trans-cultural gospel” in a way that communicates it not as something belonging to an individual missionary, nation or culture, “but as truth and value given by God and the gift of God to all men everywhere.” In this capacity the ecumenical churches have an advantage over the “increasingly high percentage” of missionaries abroad who are “Protestant ‘evangelicals.’” Jay is convinced that missionary preaching “of the pietist type, aimed at individual conversions, promising an inner peace without reference to the social context of life” was no match for the reality of secularism. He suggests that the “missionary avante garde, at least of those branches of the church within the general framework of the WCC,” had all eschewed “pietist individualism,” “orthodox otherworldliness,” and even “humanitarian liberalism.” Rather, the very secularism that many decry was providing its own hope for the world: “In the providence of God, our science and technology have given the

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72 Ibid., 19.
73 Ibid., 24.
74 Ibid., 27.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid., 30.
‘meek’ a new hope of peace. This hope is not the doing of the church, but the consequence of man’s new situation to which the Gospel has contributed.”

Finally, Jay points out that although the juxtaposition of reports on church union and church mission on the recent United Church General Council agenda was likely accidental, it was nevertheless telling. Church union came first, then the report on World Mission in which “the issue bearing of the division and unity of the churches was among the key issues raised.” For Jay, the scandal of Christian division needed first to be overcome and the costs borne “if we are serious about presenting the claims of Christ to be the one Saviour of the world in the context of the one-world civilization which is coming to be.”

Jay’s conviction that missionary enterprise of the United Church was entering a new phase is echoed in the October 15, 1966 issue of the Observer. The issue features an editorial by A.C. Forrest that affirms just how radical and important the report of the Commission on World Mission to the General Council had been. Despite an attempt by Donald Fleming, the Commission chair, to assure the denomination that any proposed changes were not particularly novel (he advised that any departure from “traditional evangelical emphasis” would never bear his name), Forrest is adamant that a “basic change” has unmistakably taken place in the United Church’s concept of mission. According to Forrest,

the operative words now are: ecumenical co-operation, ecumenical orientation, partnership, emergency relief, technical assistance, flexibility, dialogue. There is emphasis on witness, sacrifice, and total mission. There is little or no emphasis on proclamation, winning, persuading, converting, making disciples of all nations, or ‘winning the world for Christ in this generation.’

Forrest notes that the new vision of mission confronting the church is not yet fully understood by the majority of United Church members. Notwithstanding Fleming’s assurances, Forrest concludes that “it would have been helpful if there could have been a clear-cut admission of the serious and radical departure from what many of our people still consider ‘missions’.” He goes on to point out that if the implications of the report were ever fully internalized they would dwarf the efforts of the great Methodist ecumenist John R. Mott: “If we in the church ever come to

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77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid., 33.
81 Ibid.
understand the full implications of modern mission, and if those implications possess us, we are going to find our Christian faith a revolutionary thing and witnessing to it a costly task. When that happens the world will be turned upside down again.”

The difficulty for the laity in fully comprehending the radical nature of the United Church’s shift in its mission policy is borne out in Joanne Strong’s description in the Observer of what she calls a “gold-plated mission festival” held in late 1966 at Rosedale United Church, Toronto. Most of her article describes a fairly conventional (though clearly fun) “family mission festival, a pageant of Brazil.” Featured at the festival, however, were two lectures, one by the Hon. Mitchell Sharp and the other by former moderator, E.M. Howse. Strong notes that “Dr. Howse brought us up to date on the twentieth century mission approach—not preaching, but serving and how that works out in practice.” Strong then asks a telling question: “Was I the only one so far behind in understanding what mission was up to? It was all news to me—and I suspect to many others.”

2 Good Morning, Vietnam

In its September 1, 1967 issue, the Observer presented a portrait of the outspoken prophet and secretary of the United Church’s E&SS, Ray Hord. The cover showed a photograph of Hord with the caption: “how he disturbs the peace.” Inside, Kenneth Bagnell’s feature article, “The View from the Firing Line” includes the sub-heading: “after four years at his job, Ray Hord is the United Church’s most controversial spokesman.” In his article, Bagnell recalls a sermon given by Hord in a Lexington, Massachusetts Methodist church where Hord excoriated the Americans by warning “that their nation is internationally immoral.” Hord had apparently proclaimed that the United States was “led by men whose lust for power is reminiscent of Friedrich Nietzsche, the philosopher who inspired Hitler. It supports … corrupt dictators who are rightist or even fascist, men such as Syngman Rhee, Chiang Kai-shek and Rafael Trujillo.” According to Bagnell, it was on the subject of the intensifying Vietnam War that Hord reached his full prophetic stride: “Stop trying to slaughter the poor people of Viet Nam … help them. They want

82 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
freedom; that’s what they are fighting for.” Bagnell reports that with Hord’s hard left line issuing regularly from the United Church headquarters in Toronto two things tend to happen: “(a) The left wing of the church, plus the so-called New Left young people, plus a sizable portion of intelligent and progressive Canadians, begin to cheer. (b) Some senior executives of the United Church headquarters clear their throats for action.”

The latter response was most especially in view when Hord spoke at a Toronto meeting of the Ontario Welfare Council and commented on the extent of American influence on Canadian foreign policy by describing then Canadian Prime Minister Lester Pearson as “a puppy dog on LBJ’s leash.” This characterization did not sit well in the General Council offices and in short order the United Church officially apologized for “the unworthy and unjustified phrase concerning the Prime Minister.” Some, like the Rev. Nelson Mercer of Central United Church in Calgary were convinced, however, that the General Council Office had gone too far in offering Pearson an apology on behalf of the whole church. Mercer observed that the leadership of the General Council did not represent the opinions of all, especially those who thought that “Ray Hord must be allowed to have his say.” According to Bagnell, there was a clear difference of opinion between Hord and Moderator Wilfred C. Lockhart who, while supposedly maintaining a cordial relationship with the E&SS, differed “rather deeply with its tactic of public utterance.” According to Bagnell, Lockhart felt that Hord tended “to formulate policy in the headlines” and then influenced the church in that direction: “Properly … it should be the other way around, persuade the church first, then the world.” Bagnell’s article observes that Hord and his E&SS colleagues have been making headlines with generally liberal positions on Vietnam, abortion, divorce, reform, medicare and other social issues. In so doing, “they’ve tried to re-interpret and revitalize the meaning of the word evangelism which they conceive, not as Billy Graham conceives it, but as an attempt to first of all listen to the world and then meet it with varying approaches, not primarily revivalism.” Bagnell notes that while many of the old guard disapprove of Hord’s outspokenness, he has a considerable following among “countless numbers of the young who sense that in the United Church headquarters is a man who, weighing caution

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87 Ibid., 13.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid., 15.
in one hand and courage in the other, has opted for courage.” The controversy within the leadership of the United Church over the Vietnam issue reflects a similar lack of consensus within Canadian society as a whole. On the one hand, during the years leading up to Expo 67 and the Centennial celebrations there was an increasing pride in a national identity that was distinct from the United States. The perception that despite sharing a continent Canadian and American interests were not necessarily identical gave Canadians permission to be highly critical of American foreign policy especially when justification for ramping up the violent conflict in Asia seemed to many (especially young) Canadians to be flimsy at best. Others in Canada affirmed a need for the strong arm of the United States to police the world in the interest of upholding democratic values. Those who evaded the draft were traitors to the country that had nurtured them. Would such a contagion spread to the young people of Canada resulting in a similar animus for betrayal? There were, moreover, economic considerations. Canada and Canadian manufacturers (not only American branch plants) were significantly profiting from the war effort. To protest the war was potentially to undermine solid employment opportunity.

In the month following Bagnell’s Observer portrait the selection of letters to the editor in response to it reflect the Observer’s usual careful balance of encomium and consternation. Those who supported Hord lauded his efforts to widen the purview of church leaders beyond the walls of their offices or sanctuaries. Baptist minister and professor the Rev. Leslie Tarr, for example, approved of Hord’s “impassioned outbursts” against dictators who are rightist or fascist, but observed a certain tendency to gloss over the similar behaviour of leftists. Kenneth Benson, responding on behalf of the United Empire Loyalist association, was livid at Hord’s “shocking misconduct and stupidity,” a quality revealed “when Hord had the temerity to state at a beatnik love-in in Vancouver, that: ‘the ideals of American draft-dodgers are far loftier than those of the United Empire Loyalists about whom we are always bragging.’” Skipping over the intriguing question of what a senior official of the United Church might have been doing at a beatnik love-in, Benson went on to demand that the Observer should “rebuke Hord and correct his disloyal and unpatriotic statements in a special editorial.” To do less would require others to uphold the honour of Canada: “Why,” asks Benson, “should the United Church reject the Anglo-Saxon

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93 Ibid., 40. It was most particularly on the subject of Vietnam that Hord and the GC executive, especially Moderator Lockhart, did not see eye to eye. That said, it was Hord whose views seemed most in step with the United Church’s ecumenical partners as is evident from the records of the WCC’s World Conference on Church and Society held in Geneva during July 1966. See World Council of Churches, World Conference on Church and Society Geneva, July 12-26, 1966, The Official Report (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1967), 6.
94 Leslie K. Tarr, Letter to the Editor, UCO, October 1, 1967, 2.
95 Kenneth A. Benson, Letter to the Editor, UCO, October 1, 1967.
heritage of the Faith, and import the theological nonsense of the decadent European theologians such as Tillich?"96

By the end of the month Hord was once again on the firing line—this time because the E&SS had voted to offer $1000 in practical and financial support to American draft dodgers on the night before the GC executive was to meet to discuss the matter.97 The aid offer was subsequently revoked by the executive, who also called for investigation into how the E&SS made decisions. The story of the E&SS offer was, however, reported in the Globe & Mail on September 26, 1967. This development induced Norman Vale (on behalf of the General Council office) to issue a press statement indicating that “The United Church does not consider it the province of Canadian citizens to proffer incitement or encouragement for young Americans to break the laws of their own country. The Executive of General Council, therefore, instructs that no funds under its administration, or the Boards of the church, be provided for this purpose.”98

The controversy induced a flurry of letter-writing from individuals and from presbyteries to Hord and to Moderator Lockhart, many in favour of the E&SS proposal to assist draft dodgers and others vigorously objecting to it. Of those opposed, several cited the scandal of an apparent attempt by the United Church to undermine the sovereignty of Canada’s closest ally (and the only nation capable of stemming the tide of atheistic communism). Hord was accused of “encouraging treason of another country’s citizens.”99 Some letters were accompanied by a threat to boycott donations to the M&M fund or the United Church itself unless Hord were somehow reined in. John Townson of Scarborough found himself exasperated. He suggested that he would “personally support any Government body who might decide that the Church properties should be properly taxed like any other citizen. The Church is meddling with the liquor laws and now this meddling with American draft dodgers is … the last straw.”100 Several voices asked for assurance that the actions of the E&SS did not “have the endorsement of The United Church of Canada as a whole.”101 Others were concerned that the draft dodgers were undesirable types—

96 Ibid.
99 Douglas Orchard to J.R. Hord, October 10, 1967. UCA, Board of Evangelism and Social Service, Records of the Office of the Secretary, 83.052C 43-1.
100 John Townson to J.R. Hord, September 27, 1967. UCA, Board of Evangelism and Social Service, Records of the Office of the Secretary, 83.052C 43-1.
101 George D. Watt to J.R. Hord, September 27, 1967. UCA, Board of Evangelism and Social Service, Records of the Office of the Secretary, 83.052C 43-1.
“bums” who would become financially dependent on the citizens of Canada. The splendidly named Mrs. B.E. Conquergood wrote to Hord disclosing from the outset that she was uninterested in debating either the Vietnam War or the methods of warfare employed. For Mrs. Conquergood the real issue was a war for the moral integrity of the younger generation: “I believe this policy of a board of the United Church advances a doctrine that encourages deterioration of the qualities of character necessary to responsible citizens of a democracy and members of the Christian church.” She further asked, “Have you discussed the behaviour of these young men with any responsible young people in Canada (not the coffee-house, demonstrator type, but the reliable young people the church expects to be its backbone in the future)?”

K.L. Thompson of Central United Church, Weston, wrote to Moderator Lockhart expressing his frustration with the direction of Hord’s leadership of the E&SS: “I had sincerely hoped that when Dr. Mutchmore [sic] retired from the position as Secretary of the United Church’s Board of Evangelism and Social Service that we would have a little less controversy emanating from our Senior officials in the Church, but it would appear that the Rev. Mr. Hord is trying to add muchmore than Dr. Muchmor.”

In contrast, Rex Dolan, then Minister at Knox United Church, Saskatoon, wrote a solid letter of support to Hord on October 24, 1967 to let him know that increasing numbers of younger clergy were lining up behind the prophetic agenda of the E&SS. Noting that the mid-sixties is “a difficult time for those who lead,” Dolan pointed out that there was a generational problem emerging between younger clergy and the (senior) hierarchy of the United Church. “It will be hard for you to remain ‘open’ to Dr. Lochart [sic] and others like him—but this will be part of our task—to let this spirit of freedom and charity seep through at every point. Suffice it to say—that in the parishes things are happening.”

Nevertheless, this necessary process promised to be a slow one. Dolan continued: “unfortunately the new (?) thinking is just hitting the pew—that’s what’s really happening. You should have heard the reaction of the UCW at Knox to an address I was invited to give them on The New Morality. For some women the ideas even upset their stomachs—and they have no desire to turn to the New Testament where they might see that

102 B.E. Conquergood to J.R. Hord, September 27, 1967. UCA, Board of Evangelism and Social Service, Records of the Office of the Secretary, 83.052C 43-1.
they should have been nauseated all along.”

Bev Johnston of Grace Church, Saskatoon echoed Dolan’s concern about the tactics of the General Council executive and sympathized with Hord’s dilemma. Johnston stated, however, that he had every confidence in Hord’s leadership. “The role of the prophet is never popular—neither is it always prophetic … but nonetheless there must be freedom to exhort, to act, as well as to encourage the conscience of people to respond to human need wherever it is found.”

Johnston, like Dolan, was upset with the intransigence of the old guard in the GC offices. Johnston complained:

We have our own kind of frustration at the grass roots. We are never informed about issues, or actions until many days have passed – and the news media have succeeded in giving us a partial picture. We wish there was a more satisfactory way of informing us about what is going on in Head Office, and about the thinking behind the various decisions made. To live by innuendo and gossip is not too helpful.

Following the contest in the autumn of 1967 between Hord and the General Council Executive over the issue of support for American draft dodgers, the Observer commissioned a poll of church members. The intent of the poll was to test the amount of support within the denomination for Hord’s position. The sub-heading to “How You Vote on Viet Nam” disclosed the poll’s conservative findings: “About 2,400 Observer answered a poll on Viet Nam. The majority don’t want the United Church to help draft dodgers.” The poll did, however, disclose varying degrees of significant difference between the views of the denominational elite and those of the average churchgoer. In its analysis of the poll results, the Observer pointed out that while the United Church’s General Council had taken an explicit stand on one of the questions, calling for an end to the bombing of North Viet Nam, lay voters were more divided with only a slight margin opposing bombing. Clergy, on the other hand, voted more than two to one against bombing. There were also marked regional differences. British Columbia and Saskatchewan favoured a halt to the bombing, while Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario refused to call for it. The Observer also noted that both those indicating support for the war effort and those opposed to it presumed to be defending Christianity (supporters claimed that this was a “holy war” because

105 Ibid.
106 Beverley Johnston to J.R. Hord, October 19, 1967. UCA, Board of Evangelism & Social Service, Records of the Office of the Secretary, Box 83.052C 43-2.
107 Ibid.
109 This result is anticipated by the nature of the letters that Hord received in the wake of the controversy over the $1000. Letters of support for Hord came largely from British Columbia and Saskatchewan. Significant complaint, however, arose in Ontario, especially from people in the Toronto suburbs.
Communism was limiting the spread of the Word). It was the question of helping draft dodgers, however, that brought the most intense reactions. Many claimed that they had stopped financially supporting the United Church because of the issue: “As long as the Rev. Ray Hord has any say in headquarters, I am sending no more money.”

A survey of the correspondence addressed to Hord opposing his views on supporting American draft dodgers is similar in tone. To explain the cancellation of his contribution to the M&M Fund in the amount of $2.00 per week, Chester F. Prevey of Ottawa wrote:

I certainly respect your views as I stated in my previous letter and agree that you are entitled to have any views you with. However, I will reiterate, for the sake of emphasis, that I do not think as a Chairman of one of the United Church Boards that you have any right to express these views as official or semi-official views of the United Church, or one of the Boards of the United Church without this first being cleared by the General Council. You may speak for a large number of members of the United Church—You do not speak for many other members of the United Church.

Writing in reply to the Rev. J.J.M. Lambert of Whitmore Park United Church, Regina, Saskatchewan (who had been similarly troubled by the E&SS offer of aid to draft dodgers), Hord opined that the foreign policy of the Government of Canada was increasingly congruent with views expressed by the E&SS:

In this connection, you will note that our Government through the Honourable Paul Martin is now calling upon the United States to stop the bombing of North Vietnam, which is what we have been asking them to do for a couple of years now. Furthermore, Senator Keith Davey has written to the Moderator and Dr. Long expressing his alarm that our Board has been reprimanded by the Executive of General Council and that an investigation is to be carried out by a Committee. Furthermore, Senator Davey is arranging for me to have luncheon with the Prime Minister since they do not wish to see the Church withdraw from public discussion and debate.

110 “How You Vote on Viet Nam,” 16. Concerning the statement “Canadian churchmen are justified in extending support to refugees from the U.S. Selective Service,” 279 people in the category “Lay under 35” signified agreement, while 253 disagreed. In the category “Lay over 35” 719 respondents agreed, while 950 disagreed. Ibid., 18.

111 Chester F. Prevey to J.R. Hord, November 2, 1967. UCA, Board of Evangelism and Social Service, Records of the Office of the Secretary, 83.052C 43-1

To Lieutenant W.G. Rivers, who had written expressing his astonishment that the “Evangelical side of my own United Church of Canada” should financially support an organization interfering in the sovereign affairs of a foreign country, Hord replied: “I note that you are opposed to American interference in Canadian affairs. A large part of the world believes that the United States is interfering illegally and unjustly in the affairs of the people of Vietnam.” Hord further declared that a “basic lesson which I have learned from the recent controversy is that even though Church members hold widely differing views on a particular subject, we should respect one another and still maintain the basic Christian fellowship.”

The most significant threat appeared to be to the health of the Missionary and Maintenance fund. In a letter to Hord, the secretary of the Regina Presbytery, Rev. Donald W. Laing wrote that in spite of his feeling of personal indebtedness and his thankfulness for the stand that Hord had taken “on so many of the issues in the Church in the World today,” Laing was concerned for the health of the M&M fund in the wake of Hord’s outspokenness on Vietnam:

I have had several threatening ‘phone-calls, calls for clarification, as well as strong resistance from the Session of our Church to this whole matter. The biggest threat is for people to stop giving to the Missionary and Maintenance Fund in favour of giving to other secular relief agencies. The question is not whether or not we should help the Draft-Resistors, but where our priorities in the M&M funds lie.

Despite the controversy within the United Church that surrounded his support of the U.S. draft dodgers, as the decade progressed it was increasingly Hord and not the General Council Executive who seemed, in the eyes of the world, to be on the side of the angels (or at least of many ecumenical partners) in calling for an end to American aggression in Indochina. In a June 1967 Observer article, Ben Smillie advocated the church sponsorship of a hospital ship (“a pirate ship of good will”) to be sent to Vietnam to minister to those who have been wounded in both sides of the conflict. Church support is necessary because of the intransigence of the Canadian department of External Affairs (whose slowness to act Smillie attributes to Canada’s lack of diplomatic independence from the United States). In his article, Smillie pointed out that two

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114 Donald W. Laing to J.R. Hord, October 6, 1967. UCA, Board of Evangelism and Social Service, Records of the Office of the Secretary, 83.052C 43-1.
years earlier, the National Council of Churches of the United States, “which in many ways has had a stronger prophetic voice that its Canadian counterpart” advised that the love imperative of the New Testament should be paramount in maintaining a spiritual and ethical sensitivity in the midst of war.\textsuperscript{115}

Summarizing his difficult year in the E&SS 1967 annual report \textit{Canada and Its Future}, Hord pointed toward a newspaper report that twenty-three demonstrators had delayed mass in St. Patrick’s Cathedral, New York City, to protest Cardinal Francis Spellman’s description of American forces in Vietnam as “soldiers of Jesus Christ.” A few days later, seventy-five lay Roman Catholics and four Jesuit priests conducted a silent lunch-hour demonstration in front of the Cardinal’s residence. Hord quoted a Roman Catholic policeman who observed: “My God, if anyone would have told me five years ago that there would be Catholic pickets outside the Chancery, I’d have laughed. In don’t know; I guess the world’s changed.” Responded Hord: that is “the understatement of the year.”\textsuperscript{116}

\textit{Voices and Visions}, a coffee table history of the United Church prepared for its 65\textsuperscript{th} anniversary in 1990, offers a succinct summary of the controversy over support for the Vietnam draft dodgers. The book concludes that “regardless of his tactics, J.R. Hord’s views were certainly prophetic. He both believed and argued that the Vietnam War was unjust and ill-conceived, and that American draft dodgers were absolutely right in refusing to participate in it.”\textsuperscript{117} The church’s mission was to speak out against oppressors, even when they were neighbours. Despite the howls of protest and calls for his resignation that followed upon his calls for the denomination to be united in its opposition to the war, within two years the United Church did authorize $5,000 to assist draft dodgers. The \textit{Observer}, meanwhile, published a highly sympathetic opinion piece by Virginia Cunningham whose son was one of the American draft-dodgers who had sought refuge in Canada.\textsuperscript{118} The role of television in turning North Americans against the war is a contested subject; nevertheless during the 1960s the raw suffering of the Vietnamese civilian population was beamed nightly into suburban living rooms. Within five years the Canadian government had passed a resolution highly critical of American involvement in Vietnam.“\textsuperscript{119} Sadly Ray Hord (who died suddenly of a heart attack in 1968)

\textsuperscript{117} Forrest, “The Story and the Stories,” 44.
\textsuperscript{119} Forrest, “The Story and the Stories,” 44.
would not live to see either the dramatic end of the Vietnam War, nor that on this issue his
prophetic witness was so resoundingly vindicated in the eyes of most of his fellow Canadians—
and the world to which he had listened with such integrity.

3 The Unholy Land

A second cataclysmic event of the 1960s decade that tested the United Church’s ability to listen
to the world and to act justly as the world’s servant was a startlingly brief war in the Middle East.
The Six Day War (or, as Arabs prefer, the June 1967 War) was a defining moment in the history
of a troubled region. Events that followed in the succeeding decades: notably the War of
Attrition, the Yom Kippur War, the Munich Massacre, Black September, the Lebanon War, the
controversy over Jewish settlements and the future of Jerusalem, the Camp David and Oslo
Accords, the Intifada were all rooted in the events of June 1967. As Michael Oren in his book Six
Days of War summarizes: “Seldom has the world’s attention been gripped, and remained seized,
by a single event and its ramifications. In a very real sense, for statesmen and diplomats and
soldiers, the war has never ended. For historians, it has only just begun.”

The War had its origins in the maelstrom of Middle East politics that must include the
decline of the influence of imperial Britain and France, the rise of the imperial spheres of the
United States and Soviet Union, the wedding of Zionism with its modern nationalist notions to
the Jewish people’s mystical, millennial attachment to the land, the Eretz Yisrael, as well as a
competing dream for the creation of a single, independent Arab state extending from the Taurus
Mountains in the north and the Atlas in the west, from the Persian Gulf to the tip of the Arabian
peninsula—a new Arab nation that would certainly encompass all of Palestine. The result of
the 132 hours of war with Israel in 1967 was that the Egyptians lost between 10,000 and 15,000
military personnel, among them 1,500 officers and forty pilots; thousands were wounded and an
additional 5,000 Egyptians were listed as missing. Seven hundred Jordanian solders died and
over 6,000 were injured or missing. Syria’s losses were estimated at 450 dead with roughly four
times that number wounded. Israel admitted to 679 dead and 2,563 wounded, although the
number of dead was later reassessed at around 800. In addition to the differing casualty rates, the
numbers for prisoners of war were more lopsided in Israel’s favour. In material terms, the gap
was even wider. All but 15 percent of Egypt’s military hardware was destroyed while vast stores

\[\text{\textsuperscript{120}}\text{Michael B. Oren, Six Days of War (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002), xiii.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{121}}\text{Ibid., 2-4.}\]
of weaponry and vehicles became enemy war booty. The other Arab losses were similar in scale. Civilian casualties were low since much of the fighting had taken place away from major population centres. Nevertheless, large numbers of non-combatants were subjected to acute suffering. Between 175,000 (Israeli estimates) and 250,000 (Jordanian estimates) Palestinians fled the West Bank for Jordan. Many were second-time refugees. According to Oren, “while Israel did little to precipitate this flight, neither did it do anything to stop it, or, indeed, to encourage the refugees to return. Similarly, on the Golan, the exodus of the civilian population was neither impelled nor inhibited by Israel.”

The crux of the refugee problem was that Israel insisted that the refugee crisis needed to be solved within the framework of a comprehensive peace treaty. The Arab states uniformly rejected this demand and insisted on unconditional repatriation and compensation for refugees. The persecution of Jews in Arab countries subsequently began in earnest and attempts by the UN and Red Cross to intercede were consistently rebuffed. The 1.2 million Palestinians who found themselves under Israeli rule at the time were largely spared systematic persecution. Oren observes that Israel did, however, deviate from what he characterizes as its “tolerant” policy in the Old City of Jerusalem when the Mughrabi neighbourhood was bulldozed to create a prayer plaza in front of the Western Wall. The most controversial Israeli decision, however, was the destruction of three villages—Yalu, Beit Nuba, and Imwas. “The Israelis accused the three of abetting the siege of Jerusalem in 1948 and billeting Egyptian commandos in their ... attack on Lod, but even then several troops refused to carry out the demolition order. Ultimately, it was executed, and the Arab inhabitants, though offered compensation, were not allowed to return.”

All of these issues were, however, dwarfed by the war’s territorial outcome. Israel had conquered 42,000 square miles and was now three and a half times its original size. According to Oren: “Exceedingly vulnerable before the war, its major cities all within range of Arab guns, the Jewish state now threatened Damascus, Cairo, and Amman. Its historic capital, Jerusalem, was united. Though ties had been severed with the Soviet Union and permanent strains left in its relations with France ... Israel had earned the solid respect of the United States.”

Although attitudes toward Israel within the United Church were (and are) as diverse as members of the denomination itself, the church’s leadership had long attempted to walk a fine

122 Ibid., 306.
123 Ibid., 307.
124 Ibid.
line between support for the notion of a Jewish homeland and sympathy for displaced Palestinians. Following the Second World War, C.E. Silcox had been vocally critical of the United Nations proposal to found a Jewish state. He countered arguments on behalf of Israel by emphasizing that the disputed land had been peopled before the arrival of Abraham and his descendents. The proposal he favoured was for a bi-national state. As Airhart notes, however, once the state of Israel was an established fact, the United Church’s Committee on the Church and International Affairs accepted its existence but continued to urge justice for displaced Arabs, especially when their plight seemed to be ignored by the mainstream media. The founding of Israel as a Jewish state appeared to have provided a salve for Western consciences at the cost of justice for the displaced Palestinians.\footnote{See Airhart, \textit{A Church with the Soul of a Nation}, 149-150.} Prior to the 1967 war the United Church’s official policies tended to distinguish carefully between the cause of Jews (for whom the church had sympathy) and Zionism (for which it had none). According to Airhart, typically the church leadership took a position similar to other leaders who were prominent in ecumenical circles.\footnote{Ibid., 363n.} The 1967 War, however, tipped the balance in favour of the Palestinian cause, a change that would affect United Church official policy and, somewhat to the church’s naïve and injured surprise, sour the denomination’s relationship with Jews at home and abroad for the next half century.

At the epicentre of this policy shift was \textit{Observer} editor A.C. Forrest, who in the wake of the 1967 War, wrote a series of articles for the \textit{Observer} and a consortium of other Protestant denominational magazines that were severely critical of Israel and Israeli government policy—policy which he labelled “Zionist.” Forrest was no stranger to the Middle East prior to the war, but he returned there in July 1967. He went back for ten months between September 1968 and June 1969, and then for a month in May of 1970.\footnote{A.C. Forrest, \textit{The Unholy Land} (Toronto: McLelland & Stewart, 1971), vii.} In his \textit{Observer} articles and later in his controversial book \textit{The Unholy Land}, Forrest spoke movingly of the plight of the Palestinian Arabs and at the same time he was highly critical of the policies of the State of Israel which he unequivocally declared expansionist and racist. In his passion for making the United Church and other Canadians aware of the desperate plight of the Palestinians, Forrest considered himself to be embodying the denomination’s new understanding of mission summed up in the New Creed’s forceful reminder that when we are called to be the church, we are also called to “to seek justice and resist evil.” Douglas Jay, in outlining the intimate connection between world mission and
world civilization, underscored the church’s responsibility for communicating the universal truth of the gospel especially as such communication required speaking truth to power. As Jay had observed in his MacKay lectures, the end of Christendom was being accompanied by a necessary disentangling of Christianity from intimate relations with the principalities and powers of the world, especially colonial powers. In Forrest’s view, Israeli government’s treatment of the displaced Palestinians was increasingly revealing not only its racist tendencies but also its deep entanglement with the agenda of a great colonial power, the United States of America. In Forrest’s understanding, the United Church’s mission in the 1960s included a duty of care to give voice to the voiceless. Such was the church’s solemn responsibility even if, as John Mott had declared, witnessing to the revolutionary aspects of the Christian faith proved to be costly. As Forrest became more and more vocal on behalf of the Palestinians, those costs mounted.

In response to the end of the June war, the Observer devoted much of its October 1, 1967 issue to the crisis in the Middle East and to Forrest’s “on the ground” reporting concerning the plight of the Arab refugees following the formal cessation of hostilities. The focus of these featured articles was on the victims of the conflict, especially the Palestinian refugees. The article also argued for a co-ordinated Christian ecumenical involvement (“Why Should the Church Be There?”). The issue prominently featured an editorial by Forrest that denounced Israel’s behaviour in the wake of the June conflict. The editorial is titled “Injustice” and in a subheading it proclaims that “in her present policies Israel stands condemned before the world.”

Quoting from an official statement of the Central Committee of the WCC, Forrest was unequivocal: “no nation should be allowed to keep or annex territory of another by armed force. This applies to the present situation.” There will be no reconciliation or significant development in the Middle East unless a proper and permanent solution can be found to the Palestinian refugee problem “both old and new.” The editorial proposed that in this view, the witness of the United Church of Canada aligned not only with the WCC but also with the General Assembly of the United Nations and the National Council of Churches in the United States. Forrest insisted that Israel was clearly prepared to flout not only the ecumenical church bodies but also “the UN and world opinion on anything that she feels is not in her national interest.”

Furthermore, in Forrest’s opinion, Israel was sans doubt expansionist. Not only had

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129 Ibid.
130 Ibid.
131 Ibid.
the nation kept the territory acquired in 1948 and 1956, Israel had also “extended her borders far beyond the partition boundary set by the UN when Israel was created 20 years ago.”

Forrest states that he is puzzled that despite what he called inexcusably expansionist behaviour, the stance of most of the West and the Western churches remains pro-Israel. He speculates that the reasons for such a pro-Israeli stance are complex but a contributing factor is certainly the imbalance of news reporting (Israel is good at public relations; the Arab nations are bad at it). As well, the past Arab denial of visas to American Jews had hurt the image of Arabs in the West. Further, much Arab propaganda admittedly seemed “hate-filled.” Forrest, however, declared that bellicose views are voiced only by extremists; on the other hand “moderate Arabs” advise that such threats as driving Israel into the sea are, in fact, not to be taken “literally or seriously.”

Forrest concludes that there are, however, some deeper reasons why Christians tend to be pro-Israeli and to ignore the sense of injustice felt deeply by Arabs. “It was anti-Semitism in so-called Christian countries that made Israel necessary. And Israel is western, a little enclave of western culture in a Middle East world. Westerners like it. Arabs deeply resent it as a new form of colonialism.” According to Forrest, fear of being branded anti-Semitic had made Christian churches weak-kneed and hesitant to condemn the “intolerable racist policies followed by Israel.” Forrest considers it manifestly unjust that following the June conflict, Arabs who were out of the country, who were frightened or intimidated, or “who fled after napalm bombs had fallen on their homes or after their villages had been razed” were not permitted to return to their homes, while at the same time any Jew in any part of the world was permitted to go to Israel and to be instantly rewarded with citizenship: “In Israel only Jews are made to feel like first-class citizens.” Forrest notes that the official magazine of the United Church of Canada makes serious charges against Israel only with deep regret and “only after the Observer editor visited the Middle East—both sides—for the fourth time and talked to responsible Israeli authorities about Israeli plans.” It is not the waging of the war per se that requires such harsh criticism of the Israelis, says Forrest, but rather the nineteen-year record of Israel’s inhumanity to Palestinian refugees. “Any action or policy that denies them their basic right, or obstructs, hinders or delays

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132 Ibid.
133 Ibid.
134 Ibid.
135 Ibid.
136 Ibid.
137 Ibid.
[their] return is criminal.”\textsuperscript{138} Forrest’s editorial further urged that the time was ripe for the Canadian government to join its voice to those of the United Nations, the Red Cross and the WCC in demanding the Palestinian refugees be allowed the right of return. “Loud demands alone will not move Israel.” Rather, such demands should be followed by all necessary actions. “Israel, who refuses to be generous, should be pressured to be just.”\textsuperscript{139}

Reaction to the October 1967 \textit{Observer} coverage of the Palestinian refugee issue was swift. It also astounded Forrest. He had expected his credentials as a fair-minded journalist would insulate him: “I wasn’t worried. I had heard of others who criticized Israel being labelled anti-Semitic. But I didn’t think anyone would try to pin that on the \textit{Observer} or its editor. The \textit{Observer} has a long solid record on race and minority issues, and had never been called a race bigot.”\textsuperscript{140} He soon discovered how wrong he was. Gershon Avner, the Israeli ambassador fired off an accusatory letter to the editor, stating that “The Rev. A.C. Forrest has been an inveterate opponent of the State of Israel since before its establishment and since it came into being in 1948. He has said and written that he has always been opposed to the establishment and existence of Israel.”\textsuperscript{141} Avner also asked a question of the denomination as a whole: “is the United Church of Canada as such, prepared to have its publication turned, through its editor, into being an adjunct of the Arab League Propaganda Office in Ottawa?”\textsuperscript{142} In defence of Israeli policies of self-preservation, Avner indicates that had the Arab states not resisted the 1947 Partition decision and had they not chosen repeatedly to go to war to undo it, the refugee problem would have been resolved and the Palestinian Arabs would have constituted the fourteenth Arab State on the map of the world. However, “so long as Arab policy remains the eventual destruction of Israel, the refugees will go on suffering.”\textsuperscript{143} The crux of the problem, according to Avner, is the inability of people like A.C. Forrest to comprehend the nuances of “what is at best a highly complicated problem of very many contradictory aspects, each of which has to be very carefully weighed.”\textsuperscript{144}

As a parallel letter in the same \textit{Observer} issue attests, Forrest was unable to catch a break from either side. He found himself also condemned by Mrs. F.H. Heiss, a reader from Rockford, 

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{140} A.C. Forrest, “What Happened When I Criticized Israel,” \textit{UCO}, April 1, 1968, 27.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid.
illinois who accused him not of anti-Israeli but rather of “anti Arab” bias because he had suggested that in its treatment of refugees, Israel had demonstrated some benevolence and because he had observed that refugees in Gaza might find themselves better off under Israel than Egypt. Mrs. Heiss also rejected any notion that the Bible could claim status in resolving issues of geographic entitlement: “I should say that I consider no army, nor any religious movement that trains an army to kill, anything but a fraud. In no sense do I consider the Bible a title deed to a piece of land.”

In an effort to provide proof of journalistic balance, the November 1967 issue of the Observer offered the opportunity for Jewish response to Forrest’s controversial October editorial. In his article, “Israel Wants Justice Too,” Rabbi Gunter Plaut of Toronto’s Holy Blossom Temple acknowledges the difference between criticism of Israel and anti-Semitism but takes Forrest to task for what he, like Ambassador Avner, considers a decidedly pro-Arab bias: “Did the report on the Middle East in the October 1 issue look at all the observable facts or do the articles represent a highly selective mass of materials? Does the editor present the material in context and with its background, or does he isolate it and therefore put it out of focus? It is my opinion that on both points the editor scores negatively.”

Plaut (who self-identified as “an impassioned and convinced World Federalist”) addresses Forrest and the WCC viewpoint that Forrest claims to uphold. He notes that from the Israeli side, any “right of return” of Palestinian Arabs needed to be accompanied by guarantees that include recognition of the existence of the State of Israel under the control of Jews. “Israelis also want to live like normal people and do not want to exist in a state of continued belligerency and under the threat of extinction or continued terror at night. The action that is criminal is the unrelenting refusal of the Arabs to enter any peace negotiations.”

Plaut rejects as patronizing Forrest’s assertion that many Jews were “conscientious and fairminded” when their judgment is not “distorted by Zionist propaganda.”

He points out that any charge of racism or “apartheid” against Jews raises the memory of the callous and amoral behaviour of Western countries during the Second World War “when six million desperate human beings begged to be saved from the gas ovens and found the doors of the affluent and so-called ‘Christian’ countries either closed to them, or opened only a small crack to admit but a trickle of the condemned.”

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147 Ibid.
148 Ibid. 22.
149 Ibid., 23.
would have been much more sympathetic had Israel lost the war and if most of her people had been driven into the sea, as Arab leaders had widely bragged that they would be. Ultimately, he asserts, “demands will be made of Israel that are made of no other nation in the world. But then, perhaps, this is part of that burden which the people of Israel have always been asked to bear throughout the ages.”

In an April 1968 article, “What Happened When I Criticized Israel,” Forrest offers a glimpse of the life he had begun to lead following the publication of the infamous October 1967 Observer issue: “for nearly six months I have been subjected to a nasty campaign of name-calling.” Though he disagreed with its content, Forrest acknowledges that Rabbi Plaut’s published reply was “a reasonable treatment of a controversial issue in The Observer tradition.” On the other hand, Forrest’s opinion is that Ambassador Avner went too far. In “What Happened,” Forrest further reports that he is now being stalked by “hostile looking individuals” who appear at churches and meetings where he is speaking. And another Toronto rabbi, Emil Fackenheim, has demanded his removal from a Teach-In panel at the University of Toronto.

The voices of condemnation did not, however, come exclusively from outside the United Church. Some within it also criticized his stance on Israel and his questioning of the efficacy of a Jewish national state. A minister’s wife who remained unnamed by Forrest (“for she must be embarrassed by now”) wrote an extensive statement indicating her dismay that Canadian forces in the UN contingent at Gaza were forced to return to Canada “at the whim of a dictator.” This statement was, despite Forrest’s contention that it was false, widely disseminated. David Demson, “a youngish American on the staff of Emmanuel College” (and who, Forrest points out, was also a neighbour of Emil Fackenheim) avoided charging Forrest directly with anti-Semitism, but accused him of using anti-Semitic sources. Demson also asserted (wrongly, in Forrest’s opinion) that in the past the Observer had opposed Jews on issues such as religious education in the schools and hate literature laws. According to Forrest, “that’s the way it is now for Demson

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150 Ibid., 40.
152 Ibid.
153 Fackenheim was also a Professor in the University of Toronto Department of Philosophy. In the light of the Holocaust, Fackenheim argued that one more law should be added to the traditional 613 mitzvot (commandments): “Thou shalt not hand Hitler posthumous victories. To despair of the God of Israel is to continue Hitler’s work for him.” Fackenheim believed that people of Jewish heritage have an obligation to observe their faith and thus frustrate Hitler’s goal of eliminating Judaism from the face of the earth.
and Fackenheim—you mustn’t oppose Jewish people even on public issues.”

Because of the number of abusive and crank telephone calls, Forrest (along with another completely innocent and unrelated A.C. Forrest living in Toronto) found it necessary to de-list from the telephone directory. In summary, Forrest’s article declared that his was “a normal experience endured by all sorts of non-professional people who dared to say anything about the Middle East that criticized or even implied a criticism of Israel.”

Forrest did not back down, however. An Observer editorial from the January 1, 1969 issue is addressed: “Dear Jews.” It noted that the position of the United Church on the Arab-Israel conflict (and especially the coverage of that conflict in the denominational magazine) “have to our sorrow if not our surprise earned for the United Church the hatred of many Canadian Jewish leaders and their people.” Nevertheless, the editorial, while lauding Jews for their heritage, culture and moral probity, re-asserts the denomination’s official position that the foreign policies of Israel needed to be as open to scrutiny as those of any other nation. According to the editorial, the United Church’s General Council has stated since 1948 that Israel should be recognized by her Arab neighbours and permitted to live in peace. Indeed, the Observer did not condemn Israel for the 1967 war, calling it instead “a necessary defensive action against continued military threats.” It did, however, “condemn, and continues to condemn, her flouting of United Nations resolutions, and of common humanity, in her treatment of the Arab people.”

Indeed, repeats Forrest, the consistent position of the United Church is that of ecumenical Christians as well as political and humanitarian agencies around the world: “Since the 1967 war, the United Nations, the World Council of Churches, the Red Cross, the U.S. Council of Churches and the United Church’s General Council all have declared that Israel should withdraw from the territories she then occupied by force and permit the displaced persons to return.”

Forrest’s Observer article, “The Middle East: It’s Bad and It’s Getting Worse and Here’s Why It Matters So Much,” appeared in February 1969. It states that because the Middle East is the most threatening, explosive and strategic area of the world, Christians in the West need to pay close attention. In addition to the threat to world peace, the suffering of the Palestinian refugees and other displaced persons should be cause enough for concern. Less studied and

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155 Forrest, The Unholy Land, 45.
157 Ibid.
158 Ibid.
understood, however, is “the challenge of the idea of a ‘Jewish State’ with its religious and racial overtones, set down in the midst of an increasingly hostile Arab (and largely Moslem) world and how this threatens the Israeli people and decent relations among Christians, Jews and Moslems everywhere.” Once again, Forrest excoriated Israel for its flouting of the Geneva Conventions. He re-asserted his opinion that the Middle East tragedy arose out of Western guilt and a desire to assuage Christian consciences for the outrage of the Holocaust. Further, Forrest warned that because Arabs believe the West is siding with Israel against them, they are increasingly turning to another superpower—the communist U.S.S.R.

Nevertheless, Forrest believed that the world’s churches still had a vital role to play in bringing peace and justice in the Middle East. The churches should, in addition to continuing to provide refugee aid, institute a solid study program, “for in the West for a long time we have been the objects of propaganda and the recipients of imbalanced news about the Middle East.” He also advises that the churches “should face clearly and study carefully the issues involved in Mr. Dayan’s statement, ‘We want a Jewish state.’” Forrest affirms that Christians should also stop being troubled by Zionist charges that those who criticize Israel are anti-Semitic. The Zionists make such charges because they know that “there is no epithet a liberal Christian hates more than that symbol of bigotry.”

Much of the material from Forrest’s Observer articles on the Middle East appeared with supplementary chapters in his controversial 1972 book The Unholy Land. In book’s introduction, Forrest suggests that prior to his experiences of the “Unholy Land” in the aftermath of the 1967 war he had been, like most “well-intentioned church-going, newspaper-reading Westerners,” mildly anti-Arab and “certainly, like almost everyone else … pro-Israeli.” He re-asserts his position that the Palestinians are not (as Israel suggests) mere innocent victims who fled their homes in a panic and who must not be allowed back because they now threaten the security of Israel. On the contrary, “many of them were ruthlessly driven out as part of an Israeli master-

160 Ibid.
161 In 1970 the United Church’s Toronto Conference sent three of its ecumenically-minded members on a fact-finding tour of the Middle East: the moderator, Dr. Robert McLure, soon-to-be moderator N. Bruce McLeod and Donald Stirling, the chair of the Conference International Affairs Committee. The three reports were published in the December issue of the Observer. See Robert McLure, N.B. McLeod, Donald V. Stirling, “Last Summer,” UCO, December 1970, 30.
162 Ibid.
163 Ibid.
164 Forrest, The Unholy Land, x.
plan to rid Palestine of its citizens in order to build a ‘Jewish’ state.’’ Moreover, the Arabs who remain in Israel have been exploited and repressed by Israeli Jews. “Israel consistently violates the Fourth Geneva Convention in her treatment of civilians and flouts the unanimous decisions of the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council. Israel is now a racist and aggressive state.” Like other liberal ecumenical Christians, and despite his careful distinction between anti-Zionism and anti-Judaism, Forrest’s articles and his book reveal considerable ambiguity about the moral efficacy of Western support of a “Jewish” state in Palestine. He is profoundly troubled that this nation has been purchased at what he considers such an unjust cost to the Palestinian Arabs.

In the book’s coverage of the turmoil in the Middle East at the end of the 1960s, Forrest notes two disturbing equivalencies that will become embedded in the pro-Arab rhetoric of ecumenical United Church leaders for the next 50 years. The first draws attention to the similarity of Israel’s behaviour and that of apartheid South Africa. Forrest claims that he had twice been in South Africa within a few days of being in Israel: “I know no two countries in the world with so much in common, unless it is Rhodesia and Israel. But the Israelis make the South African whites look like babes in the wood when it come[s] to practising apartheid and keeping another race in its place and misleading the world about it.”

Observing that the idea of a Jewish homeland came to fruition in part because of Western guilt surrounding the events of the Holocaust, Forrest finds it highly ironic that the behaviour of Zionists in many ways mirrors that of twentieth-century fascist Europeans: “I do not like to refer in any way to Israeli treatment of the Arabs as ‘Nazi,’ but the parallels are so numerous and so similar that Arabs speak of Nazi tactics and practices frequently.” He further notes instances of the Israeli deportation of civilian populations which is in contravention of UN Article Forty-nine. “These prohibitions were most definitely designed to make illegal the well-known Nazi practices of removing the ‘inferior’ civilian population of an occupied territory to make room for the ‘superior’ German population.”

In spite of Forrest’s firm conviction that his views on Israel and the plight of the Palestinian refugees were congruent not only with the leadership of the United Church but with the United Nations and ecumenical Christians throughout the world, The Unholy Land proved to

165 Ibid., xi.
166 Ibid., 121.
167 Ibid., 151.
168 Ibid., 154.
be a controversial work both in and out of church circles. The greatest publicity the book received came late in the winter of 1971 after it was quietly removed from the shelves of the large Canadian bookstore chain, Coles Books. When questioned by news reporters, owner Jack Cole attempted to counter any implication of censorship by offering the excuse that *The Unholy Land* was withdrawn simply because it was a poor seller. Forrest, however, found such an explanation risible. Interviewed for “Pressure from Where?” a report on the Coles action that appeared in *The St. Catharines Standard*, Forrest said that he had “a pretty good idea” why the book was withdrawn from sale. He further suggested that Coles had been “pressed by the Zionist community to take my out of stock.”

While unsympathetic with political censorship, the article in the *Standard* did not view the book’s actual contents with any particular favour:

“Considering that Dr. Forrest spent considerable time in the Middle East, and bearing in mind that he is, after all, a man of the cloth, the book is downright astounding in its bias—or in the author’s naivety … for Dr. Forrest built the case for the Arabs, and against the Israelis, by jotting down what was obviously wholly unsubstantiated idle gossip.” However, the book’s shortcomings were hardly sufficient reason to deny Forrest the right to sell it: “Whether he is right or wrong—and we believe he is very much wrong—Dr. Forrest is entitled to his views and to express them in any manner he chooses.”

Several other Canadian newspapers repeated the story of the suppression of *The Unholy Land*, thereby providing the book with some welcome free advertising. Buoyed by the newspaper articles, by mid May 1971, *The Unholy Land* came to occupy the #5 position on *The Toronto Star* best-seller list for non-fiction. Its “bestseller” status also helped Forrest, after much searching, to find an American publisher (the firm Devin-Adair). *The Unholy Land* was selected for Devin-Adair’s “Veritas Book Club” which featured it in a May 1972 newsletter press release advertising the arrival of a “controversial Canadian bestseller.” The newsletter addressed cryptic questions to book club members: “Has Israel become our de facto 51st State? Will she be our next Vietnam? Or will she prove ultimately to be our Achilles heel?” And if such queries were not sufficiently discomfiting to patriotic Americans, the newsletter asked club members to consider three further questions that were calculated to exacerbate latent cold war anxiety: “How

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169 In her review of the book for *The Winnipeg Free Press*, for example, Marion Lepkin took issue with Forrest’s copious quoting of Arab sources to support “his curiously naïve and simplistic view.” UCA 86.104C-17.
171 Ibid.
172 Ibid.
173 Release to the Veritas Book Club, May 1972. UCA, Alfred Clinton Forrest personal papers, 86.104C-17.
should Americans think about this expansionist religious homeland which offers automatic citizenship to all Jews everywhere? Is she really a ‘bastion of democracy,’ as well as our eyes and ears to the Communist world? In a showdown with Russia, will she be on our side?“174

The book was, however, well received by many Palestinian Arabs who in the person of Al Forrest at long last seemed to have found a champion in the West. In a letter reprinted in the 1972-73 Division of Mission in Canada Resource Book You Have A Right to Be Here..., A. Hadawi, a Palestinian Christian, wrote to the editor of The Star in May 1972 to complain about that newspaper’s attempt to discredit the Observer editor. Hadawi was responding to a series of articles appearing in The Star during the spring of 1972 that criticized Forrest. They were written by Fr. Gregory Baum, Rabbi Emil Fackenheim and the Rev. G. Ross.175 Hadawi claimed that what he called the “myopic humanitarianism as expressed by Dr. Forrest’s attackers”176 was rooted in the attempt by Christians and Jews to achieve a better understanding with one another, particularly as Christians came to terms with their responsibility for the Holocaust. Hadawi says that the Holocaust forms an emotional smokescreen that is thrown up “to thwart any mention of the atrocities committed by the Israeli government in their efforts to solidify their illegal gains in Palestine.”177 According to Hadawi, “the Zionists and their apologists never miss an opportunity to drag in and prostitute the memory of all those innocent and unfortunate people who died at the hands of that most infamous of all men, Adolf Hitler.”178 Hadawi continued his defence of Forrest by suggesting that while Baum, Ross, and Fackenheim improperly model the tolerance, love, and understanding that are at the heart of Judeo-Christian religion, the opposite is true of Dr. Forrest. While Hadawi pointed out that he had not always agreed with Forrest on Middle East policies, “in this world of ours with its conscience jaded and atrophied by so much killing and glaring instances of man’s inhumanity to man, it is refreshing to see such a man who cares enough about people to stand resolute against such smear tactics.”179

The Unholy Land received little favour, however, among many conservative North American Christians, particularly those invested in a literalist interpretation of the Genesis

174 Ibid.
175 Gregory Baum’s article appeared on April 17, Fackenheim’s on May 4, and the Rev. G Ross’s on May 11.
176 A. Hadawi, “Palestinian Challenges Critics of A.C. Forrest,” in You Have a Right to Be Here... (Division of Mission in Canada Annual Report, 1972-1973), 148.
177 Ibid.
178 Ibid.
179 Ibid., 149.
covenant stories and in the role that Israel was to play in the Second Coming of Christ. Moreover, two scholarly voices that were also highly critical of *The Unholy Land* were those of Baum and William LaSor, Professor of Old Testament at Fuller. In the July 1972 issue of *The Christian Century*, Baum offers an unflattering portrait of historical Christian prejudices in a number of arenas including Christianity’s often unexamined supercessionist attitude toward Jews. He suggests that churches had finally discovered this self-deceiving anti-Jewish hidden power game operating in their symbols and they were now trying to reform. Baum indicates that, while it is certainly possible to criticize the actions of the state of Israel (after all, there are those inside Israel who do so), Christians who do so must nevertheless be conscious both of the real threat to Israel’s survival and the longstanding Christian prejudice that manifests in a “death wish toward ‘the blind, stiff-necked people of Israel.’” Christians must not approach the complexities of the political situation in Israel without wrestling with their own ideological past: “The man who insists he is “only” anti-Zionist and not anti-Jewish will eventually reveal the ideological origin of his attitude.”

In a review of Forrest’s *The Unholy Land* in the conservative Christian magazine *Eternity*, LaSor lauded the book’s effort to lift up the egregious state of the Palestinian refugee camps, a process with which, he says, no humanitarian of any description could quarrel. Nevertheless, LaSor continues by pointing out that “the author scarcely mentions that there has been a stubborn refusal to solve the refugee problem by Arabs.” LaSor counters any suggestion that he is merely ideologically pro-Israel by offering his own credentials as an observer (these include ten months spent on the Arab side and a month or more on the Israeli side). He also takes issue with what he considers “injustices in Forrest’s presentation” and (like Baum) with Forrest’s apparent easy ability to distinguish between Jews and Zionists—a distinction, according to LaSor, that the Arab Legion marching on Jerusalem in 1967 never bothered to make. He also dismisses Forrest’s contention that Arab talk of pushing Israel into the

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180 Forrest corresponded in 1972 with Larry G. Gibb, a self identified “born again, spirit filled, Bible Believing Christian,” who considered Forrest’s analysis of the Palestinian problem to be uniformed by “the inspired Word of God.” Forrest replied that when writing the book, he had indeed studied Genesis 15 and 17 which were cited by Gibb as evidence of Israel’s ownership of the disputed lands but had drawn very different conclusions. He had included them in a 38-page chapter that had been excised by his editor because for the vast majority of the book’s readers the prophetic question was irrelevant. UCA, Alfred Clinton Forrest personal papers, 86.104C-17.

181 In a letter to his American publisher, Devin Garrity, Forrest complained that he was attacked in a United Church pulpit by Father Gregory Baum. He then added: “who is of Jewish background.” UCA, Alfred Clinton Forrest personal papers, 86.104C-17.

182 Ibid.

sea was mere empty rhetoric and deeply regretted by “responsible” Arabs. According to LaSor, this threat was made “repeatedly, and by Arabs of all stations in life.” He heard this slogan “scores of times if not hundreds from officials, from military personnel, even from Arab Christians. Glib denials simply won’t wash.” What bothers LaSor most, however, is Forrest’s attitude toward those who disagreed with him:

His position, in brief, is that of the U.N. commissions and the World Council of Churches, both of which he cites repeatedly. All who agree with this position are ‘enlightened’ (p. 164) or ‘informed” (p. 165). Jews of the New Left are ‘right’ and ‘among the ablest people of Israel,’ although’ they apparently have little political influence’ (p. 177). Those who disagree are accused by innuendo, of having gotten ‘free trips to Israel’ (p1 165). Shades of McCarthyism! Guilt by association! Is this ‘personal journalism at its best’ – as the publishers call it? In my opinion, this kind of journalism adds fuel to the fire, but produces very little light on the subject.

It is in the concluding chapter of The Unholy Land that A.C. Forrest answers the fundamental question for the church’s mission, “is there anything we can do?” by offering a potential course of action for the Christian churches in this new age as they live into the role of world-servant. Forrest reiterates that the people in the nations of the West continue to “have a bad conscience” over the state of the Middle East because it was “the anti-Semitism of the Christian world” that made it necessary for Jews to demand a homeland. However, it was “our anti-Arabism that permitted us to provide such a home at the expense of an innocent people” and this will not do. Most dangerous, says Forrest, is the possibility that the Holy Land might become “America’s next Vietnam” and bring about a confrontation between the two major superpowers that could quickly escalate to involve the entire world. As a liberal ecumenist, Forrest offers three suggestions that he says are congruent with the position of the WCC: “We must press for a just settlement; we must contribute more generously to the support of the refugees and other displaced persons; we must inform ourselves of the complex Arab-Israeli problem.”

Forrest concludes his book by amplifying his previous statements about what the church’s mission to the wider world should be in its Middle Eastern manifestation: the church

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184 Ibid.
185 Ibid.
186 Forrest, The Unholy Land, 164.
187 Ibid.
must avoid the demented fantasies of conservative Evangelicals who use obscure passages of the Bible’s final book to link the creation of the Israeli state to the ushering in of the Last Judgement and the Reign of Christ. Instead, the Christian church must demand justice now for the displaced Palestinian Arabs. In a comment that would significantly influence the official policy of the United Church (not only in the long sixties, but thereafter) Forrest summarizes:

The Jewish dream of a Jewish state at the moment of its apparent fulfilment has become a nightmare. Contrary to the highest ethical concepts of Judaism, Israeli Jews now practise racial discrimination. If they insist on maintaining the kind of Jewish state they have been building, they will have to continue to practise racism and apartheid. Such policies and practices nurture the seeds of anti-Semitism in the Middle East and abroad, and make a just peace impossible. I have confidence that world Jewry will eventually rid itself of Zionist fanaticism and racism. But that time is not yet. Perhaps it is wise for outsiders not to insist on any specific plan of settlement. We should insist that the unanimous decisions of the UN be enforced and the Geneva Conventions be kept. And we must urge our governments to press the UN to give top priority to the search for a just peace in the Middle East… Responsible government action will only follow pressure from informed public opinion. That is why the top priority for concerned people is to get the truth about the Middle East out to the world.188

4 An Ox Cart on the Trans-Canada Highway

In “The Trembling of the Ark of the Lord,” his contribution to the E&SS centennial year Annual Report, associate E&SS secretary Arch McCurdy is critical of those who are inclined to view the organized church as the Ark of the Lord. Such people are, of consequence, afraid to touch it, to change its structure, role or function for fear of incurring the wrath of God. In the 1960s this particular ark is being buffeted on every side by the forces of change. In its resistance to these forces, however, the church likely appears to outsiders as “an ox-cart in the midst of the high-speed traffic of the trans-Canada highway.”189 Nevertheless, McCurdy notes that there are ways in which, even with the fast-moving world rushing around it, the United Church’s ox cart is a more streamlined and up-to-date model than it has been in the past. The denomination has revised its sense of mission as it continues to seek new forms of involvement in the affairs of a broken world. And although it is with some difficulty learning to live with uncertainty, the core

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188 Ibid., 172-173.
of this mission remains steadfast: to proclaim the good news of God’s love and presence, to uphold truth, “to seek justice and resist evil.”

As both Ray Hord and Al Forrest could attest, however, discerning how live out such a mission in a global context during the ferment of the 1960s was extraordinarily complex and fraught with danger. The consequences of their attempts to put compassionate theory into practice had proved costly for both men. Nevertheless, its new approach to mission would stand the United Church in good stead in the years following the longs sixties, as it listened to the world and worked with ecumenical partners to attempt to realize the prophet Isaiah’s vision of a peaceable kingdom where lion and lamb lie down together. The stakes were high, for, in the words of the denomination’s first female moderator, Lois Wilson, “the kind of love that is needed to make the vision a reality has tough sinews. It roots up and pulls down, builds and plants. It is full of tenderness. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. It wipes away tears from all eyes.”

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Conclusion

When Christians despair of the upheavals and re-formations that have been the history of our faith—when the faithful resist, as so many do just now, the presence of another time of reconfiguration with its inevitable pain—we all would do well to remember that, not only are we in the hinge of a five-hundred-year period, but we are also the direct product of one. We need, as well, to gauge our pain against the patterns and gains of each of the previous hinge times through which we have already passed. It is especially important to remember that no standing form of organized Christian faith has ever been destroyed by one of our semi-millennial eruptions. Instead, each simply has lost hegemony or pride of place to the new and not-yet-organized form that was birthing.

Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence*

Featured in the opening pages of the forty-fifth Annual Report of the E&SS (1970) is a cartoon that depicts two drenched shepherds, their crooks in hand, standing stoically in the midst of a downpour. The “cool shades” sported by one of them indicate that these are contemporary shepherds, not biblical ones. The caption reads: “I must confess some small satisfaction in knowing that the unjust are also getting soaked to the bone.” From the perspective of the United Church, the 1960s proved to be a very tough slog for the just. At its beginning, the decade had seemed to hold much promise (despite the unsettling cold war threat). New church plants

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continued to be built in burgeoning suburbs while more established buildings sprouted multi-purpose gymnasiums to contain the energies of maturing baby boomers. The denomination also seemed secure in its continuing power and influence in the public square, despite the worrisome challenge to English Canada’s Protestant hegemony manifested by the population’s steadily rising percentage of Roman Catholics.

Such security was not to last. Within a short space of time the “ferment” of the 1960s began to shake the foundations of the United Church. Theologians like Robinson, Pike, Cox and a succession of other voices in the North Atlantic world proclaimed that there was a New Age struggling to be born, an age that would need to be equipped with a “new theology” that would be both congenial and “relevant” to the people of God in a transformed world. Popular culture nodded its agreement with the enumeration of the institutional church’s sins, while the churches themselves not only withstood, but invited critical scrutiny—and published the results in best-selling paperbacks. Although it prided itself on a high degree of flexibility (especially in matters doctrinal) there was an admixture of concern and enthusiasm in the United Church of Canada as it responded to the challenge offered by a God who had relocated from a heavenly realm to become instead the Ground of all Being and whose arena of concern was no longer other worlds but rather the wounded integrity of the earth. Through management and reformist zeal, the liberal leadership of the United Church attempted to prepare congregations for the New Age’s “big change” and for the emergence of a relevant institution that imitated the ways of “the man who lived for others,” a church whose vigilant gaze remained ever-outward.

The optimism with which the decade had begun evaporated by the second half of the decade and as it became increasingly evident that the vaunted New Age was every bit as turbulent and violent as the old one had been. And worryingly, some of the tools and strategies that the United Church hoped would carry it boldly forward into “the big change” were proving both problematic and ineffective in the midst of something that looked increasingly more like revolution than reform. The New Curriculum, the denomination’s long-delayed and expensive education project designed to equip the saints of the New Age had proved unexpectedly controversial. Despite the quality of its writers and the diversity of its content the curriculum had, with the help of bemused Canadian journalists, become an icon of apostasy in the minds of many conservatives both inside and outside the denomination. At the same time that it was magisterial, the curriculum was also expensive and cumbersome. It made considerable demands on weary volunteer teachers who were often ill-equipped to meet its considerable requirements.
The curriculum planners had also miscalculated the number of books that would be needed over its various cycles as student numbers began to drop and fiscally anxious congregations economized by hoarding the materials for re-use. The church’s made-in-Canada curriculum also dealt a fatal wound to the Ryerson Press (which was sold to the American publisher McGraw-Hill in 1970). While it would be unjust to blame the New Curriculum for the decline in Sunday school attendance (such a downward trend was also evident in other denominations equipped with more conventional educational materials), it didn’t help.³ Meanwhile, perceptive United Church leaders like N. Bruce McLeod pointed toward another undeniably troubling fact: the now powerful and influential 1960s youth culture (50% of the Canadian population was under 25) appeared at best indifferent to what the United Church had on offer.⁴ These factors were an unsettling harbinger of a crisis looming on the horizon: the catastrophic failure of the denomination to hold its younger generations.

Further, 1960s youth were becoming indifferent to more than the church’s educational and social offerings. On the subject of sexual morality, the traditional Christian ethic which had limited sexual expression to married heterosexual couples was increasingly (and more significantly guiltlessly) ignored—to the consternation even of some of the denomination’s most liberal voices. As Nancy Hannum’s preface to the proposed E&SS Sex and Morality pamphlet so succinctly articulates, the church’s institutional authority, even when represented by middle-aged males with impeccable liberal credentials, had moved well past its sell-by date in the opinion of newly empowered Canadian youth for whom rock concerts substituted for revivals as a locus of what passed for religious experience.

At its optimistic dawning, the New Age had also seemed to presage the tearing down of irrelevant denominational barriers and to raise hope that a longed-for re-unification of Christ’s church on earth might at long last be realized. Of consequence, Canada’s mainline churches (including even the Roman Catholics) engaged in heightened ecumenical co-operation. Despite concerns over the vanishing Protestant hegemony in English Canada, the United Church regarded the Second Vatican Council with favour and began to concentrate more on discovering what it had in common with Roman Catholics than in examining “what’s the difference?” The church’s liberal leadership embraced “ecumenical” as a defining trait of the denomination’s

⁴ N. Bruce McLeod, “Why Won’t They Go to Church,” UCO, November 1, 1969.
identity in the New Age (quietly setting aside “evangelical”). Emblematic of its ecumenical identity, the United Church entered with renewed enthusiasm into re-energized union conversations with the Anglicans, which by late in the 1960s evolved into a plan to reify the ecumenical spirit of the age by merging to form the Church of Christ in Canada. Even ecumenical enthusiasm, however, was destined to falter under the decade’s unique stresses. By the opening of the 1970s there seemed to be few enthusiasts for the union plan in the pews of either denomination. In 1975 the plan was euthanized by the Anglican House of Bishops with little public mourning. On balance, the United Church rank and file had seemed more positive about the proposed marriage than their Anglican counterparts, but that wasn’t saying much. It would be denominational difference and not the elusive dream of church unity that would define the way forward to the millennium for both Canadian churches.

As the long sixties advanced, the one incontrovertible reality of the vaunted New Age was its disorienting uncertainty, uncertainty that seemed to resist efforts at crisis management—the United Church was not so much acting as being acted upon. Realizing that the world had indeed considerably altered, the denomination re-formulated its approach to mission in an attempt to live into changed circumstances at home and abroad. Although it repudiated colonialism and embraced the role of servant, the path to world servanthood was far from smooth. Efforts of church leaders to speak with a prophetic voice on major world issues (even though they spoke in concert with pronouncements of the WCC) once more proved controversial and divisive both outside and inside the denomination. Ray Hord’s denunciation of the war in Vietnam and Al Forrest’s excoriation of the State of Israel (accompanied by his unambiguous support for the plight of displaced Palestinians) both demonstrate that while the United Church’s New Creed spoke eloquently of seeking justice and resisting evil, the achievement of consensus about what constituted just action in the vexed and complex politics of the 1960s world was an impossible dream. Both matters further indicated that the United Church was less than united.

The delicate balance of liberalism and evangelicalism that had defined the United Church’s self-identity over its first decades fractured irreparably in 1960s ferment. Such cleavage is evidenced by the rise of organized conservative groups like the United Church Renewal Fellowship (UCRF). The UCRF opposed many of the ecumenical initiatives of the church’s liberal leadership and criticized what it viewed as an obsession with political and social matters that distracted from the denomination’s primary mission: to save souls. The UCRF loathed the New Curriculum, found the revised approach to mission unsettling, disapproved of
what it regarded as an excessive meddling in politics, and looked with horror at the sexual depravity signalled by the so-called “new morality.” Conservatives blamed modernist ideas like “religionless Christianity,” the “new theology” and “situational ethics” for declining numbers and for the shrinking of the United Church’s sphere of influence. But like the church’s liberal leadership, conservatives misidentified the nature of the “big change” underway in the world of the 1960s. Incontrovertibly, the “big change” happening in Canada was that the country was dechristianizing.

As John Webster Grant aptly observed, “so long as Christendom existed, and so long as Canada was demonstrably part of it, Canadian church history flowed with a certain inevitability.”5 According to Grant, the assumption that Christianity provided the recognized values of Western society had actually been in question since the eighteenth century. Decline was masked by a nineteenth-century resurgence of faith, a resurgence, wrote Grant, that largely coincided with the years in which Canada’s major Christian denominations came to self-awareness. Nevertheless, the realization that Christendom was dead—even in Canada “dawned with surprising suddenness in the 1960s.”6 By the time of Canada’s Centennial year, perceptive leaders of the United Church were already aware that the country was rapidly secularizing. This observation was a central focus of Canada and Its Future, the E&SS Annual Report for 1967. In it, the leadership of the E&SS attempted, amidst the centennial hoopla, to peer into a glass darkly to describe the United Church of a generation hence. As they gazed forward, however, the E&SS found little cause for celebration.

Within the pages of this annual report, theologian John Douglas Hall explored the matter of the secularizing or de-Christianizing process that he noted was without doubt underway in Canada. He identified two primary, but inadequate, Christian responses to this crisis. First, Hall noted that there were conservative voices who demanded that “the Church must do everything in its power to hold back this tide.”7 On the other side were liberal thinkers like Harvey Cox “who wax eloquent about the possibilities—the wonderful, liberating possibilities brought about by the process of secularization.” Hall warned, however, that there was a problem with premature exuberance at any sense of a humanity that had ‘come of age’ and was “no longer tied to the

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6 Ibid., 216.
The defect of such an overly optimistic view is that such optimism is “not quite warranted by history, especially modern history with its death camps, its Hiroshima and its Viet Nam.” Quoting a statement from the WCC’s 1963 missionary conference in Mexico, Hall suggested that a more balanced approach to the inevitability of secularization would be to eschew both extremes. In an observation that now seems uncomfortably prescient, Hall declared that secularization should not be judged simply by the criterion of what it does to the church. While secularization might open the possibility of new freedom, it could just as easily result in a new kind of enslavement for humanity: “We have no doubt that it is creating a world in which it is easy to forget God, to give up all traditional religious practices, and at the same time lose all sense of meaning and purpose in life.”

The important task of the church of the future, according to Hall, would not be to issue warnings or to offer the gospel as an antidote to disillusionment, but rather to be a bridge over troubled waters. Hall’s advised that Christians should start from the recognition that “Christianity exists … as a diaspora.” The idea of the church as a pilgrim people existing in the midst of the world and for the world “depends, to a great extent, on a vital experience of the breakdown of Christendom.”

Hall concluded his essay with a warning: the shock was coming, and of consequence “undoubtedly, to be responsible theologically in the Canadian situation means to seek for meaningful ways of being the Church in this age of secularization … Surely our best energies ought now to be devoted to planning for that time, which is already dawning.”

With the advantage of five decades of historical distance it would be easy, as some have done, to blame the leadership of the United Church in the long sixties for the denomination’s present diminished state. To do so, however, would be unjust. In her summary of the effect and legacy of the 1960s decade on the United Church, Phyllis Airhart observes that “proponents of a more this-worldly Christianity saw preoccupation with membership and buildings as symptomatic of the malaise of religion” while the more radical among them “dared to loosen ties to the salvation establishment of the institutional church, and echoed Bonhoeffer in calling for a religionless Christianity.” Nevertheless she notes, “thousands of United Church congregations across Canada still believed themselves ‘called to be the Church,’ as the New Creed put it, “to

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8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., 109-110.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., 111. The bold and italic script is supplied by the E&SS editors.
12 Airhart, A Church with the Soul of a Nation, 299.
celebrate God’s presence.”\textsuperscript{13} As Grant effectively describes the church’s debacle, “official attempts to modernize the church and unofficial protests against ecclesiastical establishments did not come about merely because in few readily identifiable areas the church has failed to keep up with changes in society. They reflected the disappearance of Christendom as a universally intelligible frame of reference.” The old vocabulary became obsolete “not because it contained an excessive number of archaisms but because for many Canadians the world in which it had been understood no longer existed.”\textsuperscript{14} What was appearing in its place was something closer to the borderless global village of Lennon’s “Imagine”—from which religion is happily evacuated. No amount of good or appropriate management would have stemmed this tide.

Voices from John Robinson in the 1960s to Hugh McLeod in the 2000s have likened the decisive religious change that arose out of the decade of ferment to “a rupture as profound as that brought about by the Reformation.”\textsuperscript{15} In his assessment of what has transpired in the North Atlantic world since the 1960s, Callum Brown asserts that “given the scale of the religious changes evident in some nations since the 1960s, there is no reason to be shy of describing what has occurred as a secular revolution.” In addition to the disintegration of many laws of civil and criminal codes based on religion, Brown notes “the abandonment of churchgoing by most of the populations of these nations, the failure of inter-generational handing down of religious faith and identity and the slower but still remarkably swift disappearance of religious beliefs – starting with specifically Christian beliefs and spreading inexorably later in the twentieth century to generic ‘religious’ beliefs in God and the afterlife.”\textsuperscript{16} Citing Canada and Scotland as the places where such changes have been most remarkable, Brown observes a variety of outcomes including the contraction of denominations, the closure of church buildings, the growing influence of conservative churches within the remnant religious population, “and the rather swift emergence of a vast constituency of no religionists.”\textsuperscript{17} He provides the numbers. According to Brown, the people of no religion accounted for less than 2 per cent of the population of most Western nations in 1960. Later in the decade the numbers start to rise and they have continued.

\textsuperscript{13} Grant, \textit{The Church in the Canadian Era}, 216.\textsuperscript{.}
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} McLeod, \textit{The Religious Crisis of the 1960s}, 1.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
to do so ever since. In Canada the people of no religion accounted for .5 per cent in 1961 rising to 4.3 per cent in 1971 and 23.9 per cent by 2011.18

In 1967, on behalf of the E&SS, Ray Hord asked an urgent question that might well be asked of any Canadian church in the current era of vanishing numbers and sapped energy (including, I would argue, the evangelicals and Pentecostals whose perception of immunity is likely deceptive19). Observing in the midst of Canada’s centennial year that the good ship United Church had been torpedoed by the 1960s and that it had begun taking on water, Hord inquired: “What can be done to save it?” The same question continues to be asked fifty years later as the dechristianization of Canada accelerates and the United Church once again attempts institutional re-structuring as a life-preserving strategy. In *Christianity after Religion*, Diana Butler Bass affirms that we are living in a time of “momentous historical change that is both exhilarating and frightening. Christianity itself is becoming something different from what it was.”20 Bass rejects the suggestion that this change represents some kind of Christian apocalypse. Instead, she concurs with historian William McLoughlin’s view that the church is experiencing some kind of “awakening” that began around 1960 and that continues into the present.21 According to Bass, this is the most significant change in the Christian faith since the Protestant Reformation. Awakenings, however, do not merely occur—they take work. During such a period of immense change she suggests that some things will cease to function, to make sense, to offer comfort, or to provide guidance. Institutions will struggle to survive and religions will lose their power to inspire, “but that only means we have work to do here and now—to find new paths of meaning, new ways to connect with God and neighbor, to form new communities, and to organize ways of making the world a better place. These are hard times, not the end times.”22 For the United Church of Canada and other denominations of the North Atlantic world, the pattern set by the long sixties continues in our era. This pattern requires struggling with diminished and diminishing resources and a good deal of streamlining in order to continue to do what the church is called to do: to celebrate God’s presence, to live with respect in a wounded Creation, to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil, to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen. It will be

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far from easy and the song of faith that it “cannot keep from singing” will undoubtedly be both a holy—and a broken hallelujah.
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