

THE EVANGELICAL IDENTITY OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

THE SURVIVAL AND DECLINE
OF
THE EVANGELICAL IDENTITY OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA
1930-1971

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ABSTRACT

Relying on original research and breaking with the dominant interpretations offered so far by historians, this thesis argues that the United Church of Canada maintained an evangelical institutional identity between the 1930s and 1960s despite the fact that its leaders did not hold evangelical beliefs. For a variety of reasons, these leaders found it expedient to promote institutional practices of evangelism, moral reform, and Christian education that embodied evangelical characteristics and therefore projected an evangelical image of the church to its members and the public. At the same time, they personally rejected key evangelical beliefs, a fact that was reflected in the intentional omission of these beliefs from successive official theological statements of the church, although frankly non-evangelical sentiments were rarely found in such statements. This leadership paradigm, which coupled non-evangelical beliefs and evangelical institutional practices, endured into the 1960s.

The tensions inherent between the non-evangelical beliefs held by church leaders and their promotion of evangelical institutional practices made it increasingly difficult for leaders to maintain this paradigm from the 1950s onward. Finally, a series of long-term and short-term catalysts both inside and outside the denomination which converged in the mid-1960s caused church leaders to abandon the evangelical institutional practices of evangelism, moral reform and Christian education that had defined the church in preceding decades, and simultaneously to state openly their “liberal,” non-evangelical beliefs. The result of this major shift, and the ensuing public controversy, was the collapse of the old paradigm and the public redefinition of the United Church as an unambiguously non-evangelical institution. Based on new research into the institutional activities of the United Church after 1930, this conclusion challenges traditional interpretations that have either overlooked the continuing evangelical practices of Canada’s largest Protestant denomination or overestimated the extent of its commitment to evangelicalism in this period.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Descriptive Note	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Charts	vi
Introduction	1
1. Forming a Paradigm, 1930-1940	25
2. The Paradigm Endures, 1940-1963	57
3. The New Curriculum, 1952-1971	87
4. A New Gospel: Theological Upheaval and Redefinition, 1959-1968	151
5. The “New Evangelism” and the “New Morality,” 1962-1971	201
Conclusion	245
Bibliography	251

LIST OF CHARTS

Figure 3.1: United Church Sunday School Membership, 1926-1979_____132

INTRODUCTION

In 2007, a cover story in the *United Church Observer* remarked in passing that the United Church of Canada was “a theologically liberal church” in contrast to what it called “theologically conservative evangelical church[es].”¹ For most readers, it was probably not a startling observation. At the dawn of the third millennium, the United Church, Canada’s largest Protestant church for most of the twentieth century, was widely recognized as one of the most liberal denominations in the world and therefore on the opposite end of the Protestant spectrum from evangelical denominations.² Yet the Methodist and Presbyterian churches that had joined together with the much smaller Congregationalist churches to form the United Church in 1925 represented the two most prominent historical streams of evangelicalism in Canada. Indeed, the evangelical presence of these two churches in nineteenth-century Canada was the central factor in making what one historian has called Canada’s “evangelical century.”³ If the nineteenth-century Methodist and Presbyterian forebears of the United Church were evangelical, but the late twentieth-century United Church was not, at what time and by what process did this fundamental change take place? In short, when and how did the United Church cease to be an evangelical church? This is the central question of this study.

Historians have not been ignorant of the disappearance of evangelicalism from much of Canadian mainline Protestantism, of course. The strongly evangelical character of mid-nineteenth-century Canadian Methodism and Presbyterianism is not in dispute, and few would deny that the evangelical mantle in Canada in the late twentieth century had largely passed from the United Church to other groups like the Baptists and the Pentecostals. As a result, there is a general awareness that sometime between 1850 and 2000 there was an important realignment of mainline Canadian Protestantism away from evangelicalism. When it comes to determining how and when this realignment happened, however, historians have painted conflicting pictures.

On the one hand, there is a substantial body of literature that identifies a major turning point in Canadian mainline Protestantism sometime before 1930. An early study by D.C. Masters of Canada’s Protestant church colleges laid out themes that would be common in later works. According to Masters, late nineteenth-century intellectual leaders, such as Presbyterian George Munro Grant, believed that the modern challenges of higher criticism of the Bible, Darwinism, and philosophical idealism could be absorbed by the evangelical tradition, and so they tolerated the introduction of these ideas into the mainline church colleges. Although these colleges continued to adhere to a largely evangelical position in the 1870s and 1880s, the growing dominance of higher criticism between 1890 and 1910 led to a displacement of evangelicalism by modernist views. During the course of the twentieth century after the First World War, the Protestant church colleges were dominated by first liberal, then neo-orthodox, and finally “existentialist” philosophies, and evangelicalism was relegated to the periphery.⁴ Thus, evangelicalism had ceased to be the dominant force among the intellectual leaders of the Protestant churches roughly around the turn of the century.

Although they varied in which elements of modern thought they emphasized and which effects they traced, the same basic narrative underlay Richard Allen's examinations of the social gospel and social reform movements between 1890 and 1928, Brian McKillop's study of Victorian intellectuals, and John Webster Grant's survey of church history since confederation.⁵ Recently, Richard Allen has restated this view, arguing that liberal theology came to dominate the mainline Protestant theological establishment in Canada between the 1880s and the early twentieth century, replacing the older type of evangelical thought.⁶

This narrative has been forcefully combined with a theory of religious decline in works by Ramsay Cook and David Marshall.⁷ Cook and Marshall draw on the "secularization thesis," which posits a long-term decline of religion in modern societies as a result of "modernization."⁸ In James Turner's variation of this thesis, religious leaders cooperate with the process of secularization. According to Turner, by accommodating religion to "socioeconomic change, to new moral challenges, to novel problems of knowledge, [and] to the tightening standards of science, the defenders of God slowly strangled Him."⁹ By removing the transcendent qualities of God in an attempt to satisfy the claims of modernity, religious leaders made themselves redundant, Turner argues.

Cook and Marshall echo Turner's conclusions while upholding the basic elements of the narrative that had already been established in the Canadian historiography. Cook argues that the arrival of Darwinism and higher criticism led church leaders to replace theology with sociology and thereby "secularize" their own churches by the early decades of the twentieth century, abandoning evangelicalism along the way, although he restricts most of his analysis to a handful of selected figures.¹⁰ Marshall attempts to broaden this argument to the Protestant clergy as a whole. Taking the secularization thesis as a given,¹¹ Marshall sees the self-secularization of the clergy as a long and largely inevitable reaction to modernity spanning the period from the mid-nineteenth century to the 1930s. In this process, evangelicalism was replaced with a faith shorn of the supernatural. Apparent signs of resurgent evangelicalism in the 1930s were in fact the desperate last gasp of a doomed faith, and in themselves symptoms of the advanced state of secularization.¹² For both Cook and Marshall, therefore, mainline Protestantism had not only abandoned evangelicalism by the early twentieth century but this process was simultaneously a surrender to the inexorable march of secularism.

Other historians have also pointed to significant intellectual changes in pre-First World War Protestantism as a watershed for evangelicalism, but without accepting the secularization thesis. In her study of Methodist leader Nathanael Burwash, Marguerite Van Die shows that the prominent academic and university administrator accepted many of the conclusions of higher criticism in the 1880s and defended the right of other professors and ministers to do so, despite opposition from some leaders. As a result of the actions of Burwash and others, any brake on the acceptance of critical views of the Bible in the Methodist church was effectively lifted. Van Die argues that Burwash had an optimistic view of the

new learning and believed that evangelical Methodism and modernist views about the Bible and biology were compatible. Thus, he tried to accept these new views while maintaining belief in many aspects of the evangelical heritage. Ultimately, however, this strategy opened Methodist colleges and pulpits to younger, more radical leaders who were willing to sacrifice progressively greater portions of evangelicalism in favour of modernism and the social gospel, with the result that by his death in 1918 Burwash was increasingly uneasy about the changes taking place in Methodism. Van Die adds, however, that these changes did not indicate a slide into secularism, but rather a transition from one understanding of the Methodist heritage to another.¹³

Michael Gauvreau makes a similar argument but broadens it to include the intellectual leadership of the Methodist and Presbyterian churches as a whole. Gauvreau argues that the period between 1850 and 1900, far from being a time of decline for evangelicalism, was actually a time when evangelicalism demonstrated its flexibility and vitality by successfully absorbing select elements of modern thought (such as the broad outline of evolutionary theory) and rejecting others (such as radical German higher criticism). Leading Protestant clergymen believed they were able to absorb elements of evolutionary theory, for example, without giving up belief in “an inspired Bible, miracles, and a divine providence active in human culture and history,” although they did find that doing so bound them to a more circumscribed view of Biblical authority than that held by their forefathers.¹⁴ Nevertheless, these nineteenth-century clergymen-professors continued to reject the liberal theology of thinkers like Albrecht Ritschl and Adolf von Harnack which discarded the miracles and dogma of traditional Christianity in favour of a purely ethical religion. Nor did most of these leaders replace their emphasis on individual sin and salvation with a merely social gospel. Gauvreau therefore rejects the chronology proposed by Cook and Marshall that locates the decline of evangelicalism in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Instead, he argues that the evangelical theology of church professors foundered between 1905 and 1914 when they capitulated to German form-criticism and its radical denial of the reliability of Scripture. The strategy of Canadian Protestant theologians which had allowed them to compromise with some elements of modern thought in the nineteenth century therefore ended in their dismissal of belief in an authoritative Bible, the linchpin of evangelical theology, in the years before the First World War. Although some leaders were troubled by this development, the distraction of the church union debates and the reluctance of these leaders to denounce the new theology and lead an evangelical faction meant that Canadian Methodists and Presbyterians did not experience a fundamentalist-modernist controversy.¹⁵ While they are thus more optimistic than Cook and Marshall about the ability of evangelicalism to accommodate the challenge of liberalism in the late nineteenth century, and much less willing to accept the secularization thesis, Van Die and Gauvreau do agree that the evangelical consensus of the nineteenth century had been largely abandoned by Canada’s Protestant theological elites by 1930.¹⁶

Much of the research cited so far has focused on the theological thought of key intellectual leaders.¹⁷ Although she also bases her study primarily on the views of selected leaders, Phyllis Airhart has taken a different tack by examining Methodist attitudes towards evangelical revivalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She concludes that Canadian Methodism was profoundly changed in this period as it shifted away from its evangelical roots. By the turn of the century, Methodist leaders increasingly favoured a “new model of piety” which minimized the importance of revivalism and individual conversion while emphasizing the social gospel. By the time of church union in 1925, Methodist leaders associated revivalism with fundamentalism and had started their own denomination, and by extension the new United Church, on a separate path from fundamentalists and other evangelical Protestants.¹⁸

Eric Crouse has recently made a somewhat different, but largely compatible, argument in his study of “conservative evangelical” American revival preachers in Canada between 1884 and the First World War.¹⁹ Pointing to the continued popularity of these preachers and their message among Canadian Protestant people and clergy during this period, Crouse disagrees with Airhart’s contention that a non-revivalist model of piety had begun to displace revivalism at the turn of the century. Although he disagrees with Airhart’s chronology, however, Crouse similarly points to a shift in which mainline Protestant leaders withdrew their support for these American evangelists, in large part because the former disagreed with the evangelical orthodoxy of the latter. In Crouse’s view, this rejection of American evangelical revivalists signaled a permanent decline of support for evangelicalism from Canadian Protestant leaders.²⁰ Crouse’s argument, therefore, agrees with the contention of the other historians cited so far that evangelicalism had been largely rejected by the leaders of Canadian mainline Protestantism before 1930.

With such an impressive array of studies suggesting that evangelicalism was a dead letter by 1930, it would be easy to leave the matter there. The puzzle of mainline Canadian Protestantism, however, and the United Church in particular, is that historians have also uncovered prominent signs of evangelical faith at popular and official levels in the United Church and other mainline churches well into the 1950s. One of the earliest and most significant works to point this out is Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau’s study of the Protestant churches and social welfare efforts in Canada between 1900 and 1940, *A Full-Orbed Christianity*. Their main argument is that the major Protestant churches attained their greatest influence in Canadian society in these decades as they assumed leadership of a broad coalition for social reform – a direct refutation of the secularization thesis advanced by Marshall and others.²¹ More importantly for the present study, Christie and Gauvreau also address the place of evangelicalism in the United Church and its antecedents. According to their argument, evangelicalism in this tradition was a complementary balance between personal evangelism and social activism, between converting the individual and converting society. Although Protestant leaders emphasized the social activism aspect of

evangelicalism in the early decades of the twentieth century, once they had achieved many of their social objectives they returned to an emphasis on personal evangelism in the 1930s. Indeed, evangelical piety continued to shape popular religion and the beliefs of many church leaders throughout the period between 1900 and 1940. This, Christie and Gauvreau contend, rather than the secularization thesis, provides the best explanation of the United Church's renewed interest in revivalism in the 1930s. In sharp contrast to the foregoing interpretations, therefore, *A Full-Orbed Christianity* argues that evangelicalism continued to be the dominant type of faith in the United Church in the interwar and postwar years, and indeed until the late 1950s.²²

Developing a similar argument, David Plaxton has addressed himself directly to the question of evangelicalism in the United Church of Canada in the mid-twentieth century.²³ Like *A Full-Orbed Christianity*, Plaxton's essay identifies the linking of evangelism and social service as an important characteristic of evangelicalism in the United Church. Pointing to the revivalism of the 1930s, encouraged by church leaders, and the denomination's official support for and promotion of evangelistic campaigns in the 1940s and 1950s, Plaxton argues that the United Church was still an evangelical church in these decades. Although he notes subtle signs in the 1930s and 1940s that hinted at a drift away from evangelicalism, he argues that the final abandonment of evangelicalism by the United Church came in the 1960s. As evidence that the 1960s were the real period of evangelical decline, Plaxton cites a separation of evangelism and social action and the formation of an evangelical protest group, the United Church Renewal Fellowship, within the denomination.

Nancy Christie has subsequently tackled the question of the disappearance of evangelicalism in the United Church in works dealing with the period since the Second World War. Her essay on conservative critiques of the centralized state and mass society in the immediate postwar period, while focused on attempts by church figures and academics to define independent roles for the church and the university in the face of an expanding welfare state, also notes some opposition to evangelical popular religion from a few prominent social critics in the United Church. These figures, primarily lay academics such as Northrop Frye and Arthur Lower, saw revivalist evangelical religion as part of an emerging mass culture that pandered to the shallow emotional needs of lower-class and uneducated Canadians.²⁴ Though Christie does not argue that their elitist critique of society indicated a religious reorientation of the United Church away from evangelicalism, it does modify somewhat the picture of continuing evangelical dominance suggested by *Full-Orbed* by revealing elements of dissent from evangelicalism in the United Church in the late 1940s.

In another work, more directly related to the topic at hand, Christie dates the disappearance of evangelicalism in the United Church using the lens of gender and sexuality. In her provocative essay, Christie argues that United Church leaders in the 1950s accentuated the spiritual importance of sexual satisfaction for women within marriage as part of a strategy to stabilize the traditional family in

the midst of a changing socio-economic environment. This strategy, according to Christie, elevated sex as the centerpiece of religious experience, called into question prohibitions against premarital and extramarital sex, and in the end corroded the concept of absolute morality and human sinfulness. The ultimate result, Christie writes, was that by the mid-1960s “evangelicalism in mainline Protestantism foundered upon the rock of modern gender identities and human sexuality.”²⁵ Thus, while Christie’s argument is quite different from Plaxton’s, she agrees with him in identifying the 1960s as the endpoint of evangelicalism in the United Church.

Two recent studies of related topics lend credence to the revisionist timeline of United Church evangelicalism put forward by Christie, Gauvreau, and Plaxton. Kevin Kee’s study of revivalism in Canada supports the general idea of continuing sympathy for evangelicalism, since it underscores the United Church’s involvement with revivalists in Canada up to the 1950s. In keeping with the later chronology, Kee notes that this support for revivalism dried up in the 1960s.²⁶ Another recent work that identifies the 1960s as a decade of religious change in Canada is Gary Miedema’s fascinating examination of the role of public religion in the centennial celebrations of that decade. Although Miedema quite specifically discusses public religion rather than changes in the churches per se, his account of competing Christian pavilions at Expo ’67 reveals a rapidly widening gap between the official efforts of the mainline churches to embrace a pluralist vision of Canada (under the influence of new theological currents) and the differing vision of evangelicals who continued to see Canada as a Christian nation.²⁷

These arguments reinforce the identification of the 1960s as a parting of ways between mainline Protestantism, including the United Church, and evangelicalism. Similar arguments have also been made in other works dealing with Canadian Protestantism.²⁸ At the outset, therefore, this study is confronted with two broad theories about the disappearance of evangelicalism from the United Church and its antecedents, each seemingly opposed to the other. On the one hand, what for convenience can be called the “early change” interpretation argues that evangelicalism had been unseated from its position of dominance in the Methodist and Presbyterian churches and pushed to the periphery before 1930. As noted, there are major disagreements between the proponents of this interpretation, especially over the causes, role, and extent of secularization, and the exact timing of evangelical decline (anywhere between the 1860s and the 1920s). Nevertheless, they do agree that evangelicalism was no longer dominant in these churches by 1930. These studies tend to focus on views of prominent figures in the churches and emphasize the impact of theological changes.²⁹

On the other hand is the “late change” interpretation, which argues for the continuation of a strong evangelical tradition in the United Church until the 1960s. Although there are variations amongst the proponents of this interpretation as well, they agree in pointing to signs of evangelicalism in the United Church in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. These studies tend to place greater emphasis on continuing support for evangelism (or a combination of evangelism and social

activism) before and after the Second World War, and/or the religious upheavals of the 1960s, as evidence for their revised chronology. It seems, therefore, that this study is faced at the outset with conflicting evidence. Who is right? Before attempting to reconcile these conflicting interpretations, it will be necessary to lay a foundation of definitions and methodology.

To meaningfully answer a question about evangelical identity, a clear definition of evangelicalism is absolutely essential. Historians have not always recognized this point. Nevertheless, various explicit or implicit definitions of evangelicalism have been used by historians, two of which are examined here before proposing a third definition which is used in this study. First of all, historians of Canadian Protestantism have sometimes rightly pointed to the combination of an emphasis on personal evangelism and a willingness to promote social transformation as an important characteristic of the Canadian evangelical consensus in the mainline denominations in the late nineteenth century.³⁰ This observation helpfully distinguishes that consensus from later fundamentalist and other evangelical groups that eschewed social action, and from radical social gospellers who dropped the concept of evangelism in favour of social salvation. Even though Canadian historians have sometimes implicitly treated this combination of evangelism and social action as the preeminent, or even the only significant, characteristic of evangelicalism, however, it cannot serve this purpose.³¹ On the one hand, it excludes classical fundamentalists, who, as George Marsden has pointed out in his definitive study of the subject, were simply “militantly anti-modernist” evangelicals.³² On the other hand, the evangelism-social action measure is both too simple and not specific enough: too simple because it cannot in itself fully describe a complex religious phenomenon such as evangelicalism, and not specific enough because it cannot reliably distinguish evangelicalism from other forms of Christianity that also engage in evangelism and social action. Indeed, as this study will show, most of the United Church leaders who promoted a combination of evangelism and social action in the mid-twentieth century in fact held to underlying belief systems very different from evangelicalism. By itself, the evangelism-social action criterion is therefore not an adequate measure of evangelicalism.

A definition of evangelicalism more commonly used by many recent historians of the subject, including historians of Canadian religion, was formulated by British historian David Bebbington in his study of evangelicalism in modern Britain.³³ Bebbington’s definition is sometimes called the “Bebbington quadrilateral” because he identifies four characteristic emphases that collectively define evangelicalism: “*conversionism*, the belief that lives need to be changed; *activism*, the expression of the gospel in effort; *Biblicism*, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called *crucicentrism*, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.”³⁴ Several historians have found the Bebbington quadrilateral a useful shorthand definition of evangelicalism.³⁵

There is no question that these four emphases are indeed characteristic of evangelicalism. This study, however, does not use the Bebbington quadrilateral as

its definition of evangelicalism, because its terms are not specific enough to draw the kind of distinctions that are necessary for carefully distinguishing between evangelicalism and competing approaches to the Christian faith.³⁶ For example, many of the avowedly “liberal” leadership figures in the United Church in the 1960s would have agreed that lives needed to be changed (to encourage social action), that the gospel should be expressed in effort (such as the eradication of poverty), that the Bible had particular significance (as a profound but fallible book of metaphorical ethical lessons), and that Christ’s sacrifice was important (as a helpful example of self-sacrifice in serving society). Yet these liberals not only interpreted these four characteristics differently from evangelicals, they also differed radically from evangelicals in other, equally significant, matters (such as whether or not Jesus Christ was God, the nature of the afterlife, and so on). Similarly, many Catholics past and present would be loath to relinquish conversion, activism, a high view of the Bible, and a focus on the cross as the exclusive domain of evangelicals, yet they would have also disagreed with evangelicals over important matters like the nature of the sacraments, the relative authority of tradition and Scripture, and the government of the Church. In short, the Bebbington characteristics, in themselves, do not provide sufficient precision for distinguishing between evangelicalism and other Christian traditions.

In the hope of transcending the limitations of the evangelism-social action criterion and the Bebbington quadrilateral, this study adopts a new definition of evangelicalism that treats it as a particular way of understanding the world, or worldview – a sub-variety of the broader Christian worldview – which entails certain beliefs and is characterized by certain practices.³⁷ The evangelical variety of the Christian worldview, however, does not exist in a vacuum, but rather holds a specific place within the concrete history of the development of Christianity. For this reason its beliefs can be explained in terms of the theological content of three historical layers of Christianity.³⁸

The first and most fundamental layer consists of what C.S. Lewis called “mere” or “deep” Christianity: the foundational beliefs of Christianity that originated in the apostolic era, were fleshed out by the early church most notably in the ecumenical councils and the ancient creeds, and until the influence of secular rationalism in the eighteenth century were held in common by the three major branches of Christianity (Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Protestantism).³⁹ This layer includes many, if not most, of the most important evangelical beliefs. It commits evangelicals to a thoroughly theistic and supernaturalistic worldview that includes, for example, belief that the world was created by a truly, objectively existing personal God; that this God exists in three equal and eternal persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; that the Son is the historical person of Jesus Christ, who is at the same time fully God and fully man; that this Jesus is the Messiah promised to Israel; that he was born of a virgin, healed the sick, cast out demons, was crucified, died, and rose from the dead leaving an empty tomb; that his death and resurrection made possible forgiveness of sins and eternal life for his

followers; that the Bible was given by the inspiration of God who revealed these truths to his prophets and apostles, and so on.

The second layer of evangelical beliefs was championed by the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation against certain elements of medieval Western Christianity. Foremost among them are the formal principle of the Reformation, *sola Scriptura* (the belief that the Bible stood above tradition as the unique source of truth and authority by which all other sources must be judged) and the material principle, *sola fide* (the belief that justification, or right standing before God, came by grace through faith alone, apart from any earned merit on the part of the Christian). Connected with these beliefs was the Protestant rejection of certain aspects of Catholic church governance, including the authority of the Pope and the ecclesiastical hierarchy. This Protestant understanding represented a development of the Christian tradition in a particular direction, distinguishing it from Catholicism.

The third layer of evangelical beliefs has to do with the way that some Protestants, beginning with the Pietist movement in Germany and subsequently in early Methodism and the Great Awakening, built upon principles stemming from the Reformation. In the English-speaking world these Protestants commonly became known as evangelicals, and they embodied the evangelical emphases identified by Bebbington. They emphasized the necessity of an experience of individual conversion or acceptance of Christ, which they explicitly based on the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith.⁴⁰ Against the growing rationalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which elevated the conclusions of human reason over the authority of Scripture, evangelicals asserted the authority of the Bible over human reason (much as earlier Protestants had asserted its authority over human tradition).⁴¹ Just as the Protestant Reformation developed the Christian tradition in a particular direction, so the emergence of evangelicalism developed the Protestant tradition in a particular direction.

Taken together, these three layers of belief – “mere” Christianity, Protestantism, and evangelicalism – constitute the beliefs of the evangelical worldview as defined in this study. This definition is both theological, because it assigns particular theological content to evangelicalism, and historical, because it assigns evangelicalism a particular place within the historical development of Christianity.⁴² While it includes Bebbington’s characteristics (except activism, which is addressed below) this historical-theological definition cannot be stretched to include other groups such as Catholics or Protestant liberals under the evangelical umbrella, and it is therefore capable of drawing the distinctions necessary for this study.⁴³

As a definition of evangelicalism, however, this historical-theological outline of the evangelical worldview still lacks an important piece. As Bebbington’s identification of activism as one of the characteristics of evangelicalism suggests, evangelicals have been characterized not only by their worldview, but also by the practices that flow from that worldview. This study focuses on three corporate or institutional practices as characteristic of evangelical

churches in Canada in the nineteenth and twentieth century: evangelism, moral reform, and Christian education. By focusing on these three institutional practices, this study does not dismiss other practical expressions of evangelical faith in life and worship as unimportant. Rather, these three practices are especially useful as public indicators of the evangelical identity of the United Church as a whole.

Evangelism, the preeminent form of what Bebbington calls activism, seeks to secure the conversion of non-believers, and it therefore depends on the evangelical belief in conversion and associated doctrines.⁴⁴ In the Canadian context, evangelism has often included revivalism – the use of special speakers and large rallies to heighten spiritual devotion and call individuals to conversion.⁴⁵ A second important evangelical practice in Canadian history has been the promotion of moral reform, the attempt to change individual behaviour through persuasion and, sometimes, lobbying for legislation against particular “moral evils” such as sexual sins and substance abuse. Just as the evangelical practice of evangelism depends on the evangelical belief in conversion, the practice of moral reform rests on the evangelical belief in an absolute God-given morality as traditionally practiced by the church and ultimately derived from the moral standards of the Bible. The evangelical practice of Christian education, through Sunday school and other avenues, sought to promote knowledge of the Bible (and the doctrines and practices derived from it) among children and adults in the church, and to bring about the conversion of unconverted students. It was therefore connected to evangelical biblicism and conversionism. As will be seen throughout this study, the fortunes of these three institutional practices were closely linked with the survival and ultimate demise of the evangelical identity of the United Church.

In addition to evangelicalism, this study uses a number of terms to specifically identify different modern approaches to Christianity. In the usage of this study, *liberalism* is defined first and foremost by its response to the challenges to historic Christian beliefs from secular thought in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁴⁶ Out of an acceptance of modern secular thought, a desire to preserve Christianity in the face of modern challenges, or both, liberals sought to remove or reinterpret elements of Christian belief that clashed with modern naturalistic rationalism. This basic approach yielded many wide-ranging results. Liberals readily accepted “higher criticism” of the Bible, which questioned the factual claims of the biblical text in the light of naturalistic presuppositions, and either dropped miraculous elements of Christian belief (such as the virgin birth) or redefined them in symbolic terms (as was often the case with the resurrection of Jesus). In addition, liberalism emphasized the ethical imperatives rather than the truth claims of Christianity, and the immanence of God in the world. It was known for its optimistic view of human progress and culture, which during its first peak in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century drew much from the novel popularity of evolutionary theory.⁴⁷ In Canadian mainline Protestantism, the first period of liberal dominance was

roughly between 1900 and 1930, after which time liberalism was muted by neo-orthodox influences, only to reemerge largely intact in the 1960s.⁴⁸

The third approach to Christianity important to this study is *neo-orthodoxy*. Neo-orthodoxy (sometimes known as crisis theology or dialectical theology) is usually understood as a reaction against liberal optimism fueled by the crises of two world wars, the Great Depression, and the rise of totalitarian states. Its most prominent international figure was the Swiss theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968) who vehemently rejected the liberal identification of the Kingdom of God with the achievements of human culture and asserted the “wholly Otherness” of God.⁴⁹ In Canada, the influence of neo-orthodoxy was strongest between 1930 and 1960, although its influence was not as strong in the United Church as it was, for example, among Canadian Presbyterians.⁵⁰ Neo-orthodox thinkers resurrected Protestantism’s emphasis on the Bible, theology, and the transcendence of God, and consequently often sounded close to the Protestant orthodoxy of an earlier era. Nevertheless, many neo-orthodox thinkers, and certainly most thinkers influenced by neo-orthodoxy in the United Church, continued to accept many of the basic presuppositions of liberalism, especially about the Bible.⁵¹ Thus, while those influenced by neo-orthodoxy were often closer in emphasis to evangelicalism than classical liberals were, in most cases they were still separated from evangelicalism by some fairly basic beliefs.⁵²

For analytical clarity, this study uses the term *modernism* specifically to denote these basic assumptions common to both those leaders in the United Church who were influenced by liberalism and many of those who were influenced by neo-orthodoxy. The use of “modernism” to describe this phenomenon is intended to highlight its fundamental characteristic, which was its intentional revision of certain traditional elements of Christianity in response to the challenges of “modern” secular thought.⁵³ Specifically, during periods both of liberal ascendancy and of neo-orthodox influence many United Church leaders continued to regard the high evangelical view of the Bible and the miraculous historical claims of traditional Christianity as beliefs rendered unacceptable by “modern” thought. Put another way, the changed theological climate engendered by neo-orthodoxy from the 1930s did not remove these elements of the earlier liberalism. Whatever their other differences, thinkers in the United Church between 1930 and 1970 were generally united against evangelicalism in regarding a higher-critical view of the Bible as normative and expressing various degrees of skepticism towards literal interpretations of such ancient (and allegedly outmoded) beliefs as the virgin birth and the second coming of Christ. The relationship between modernism (thusly defined) and evangelicalism in the United Church is one of the themes developed in this study. For now, it is important to note that modernists often differed most clearly from evangelicals not in their institutional practices, nor with respect to evangelical emphases of conversion or activism, but rather in terms of the most ancient and fundamental layer of Christian belief.⁵⁴

Having thus defined the key terms of this study, a word about its method of approach to the subject is in order. The aim of this study is to determine when and how the United Church as an institution lost its evangelical identity. In keeping with the definition of evangelicalism given above, this task entails looking for the presence or absence of both evangelical beliefs and evangelical practices at the institutional level. In order to assess the direction of the whole church as an institution, this study focuses its attention on the official statements and actions of the national governing bodies of the denomination. This includes not only the work of the General Council, the highest representative governing body of the United Church, and its influential executive, but also the work of the official boards and committees of the church such as the Board of Evangelism and Social Service, the Commission/Committee on Christian Faith, and the Board of Christian Education. This is therefore a study of the United Church as a whole institution rather than of one of its organizational subdivisions.⁵⁵ At times, this study delves into the relevant views of leaders who shaped the decisions of these bodies behind the scenes, but unlike many historical works (useful as these often are) it is not primarily organized around the views of selected individuals.⁵⁶ At the same time, it takes the ideas held by church leaders (a term used in this study to refer to officials, theologians, and prominent ministers) seriously, which means it takes domestic and international currents in theology (broadly defined) seriously. As will be seen throughout this study, the basic religious convictions held by church leaders, more than any other factor, determined the direction of the United Church between 1930 and 1970.

Alongside this primary focus on the actual direction of the church institution, this study pays close attention to the ways in which the public identity of the United Church was defined by official and unofficial voices. The statements and actions of the boards and officials of the church played an important role here. Somewhat less officially, the pronouncements of individual theologians and prominent ministers, and the editorials and articles of the *United Church Observer*, the denominational magazine, helped define the identity of the United Church. At times – especially during the numerous controversies of the 1960s – various unofficial voices also helped define the United Church in the eyes of its people and the public, including the ordinary people (some members of the United Church and some not) who wrote letters to the *Observer* and the secular press, the secular press itself, and sometimes even the leaders of other churches. All of these voices, and the views of the United Church they reflect, will be heard in various parts of this study.

It is now possible to return to the central question of this study and the puzzling picture painted by historical works to date, which tend either to postulate an early decline of evangelicalism in the antecedents of the United Church before 1930, or its continued dominance until the 1960s. By revisiting the central period of contention, this study argues that after a lengthy period in which United Church leaders loudly promoted evangelical institutional practices while quietly disavowing evangelical beliefs (roughly from 1932 to 1963), the evangelical

identity of the United Church was systematically dismantled from within by its leaders in a relatively short time between 1963 and 1971.⁵⁷ The first part of this study explains the formation and continuation of a paradigm by United Church leaders in which they privately held decidedly non-evangelical beliefs while heavily promoting evangelical institutional practices of evangelism, moral reform, and Christian education. Chapter one revisits the supposed revival of evangelicalism of the 1930s, and argues that there was indeed a surge of evangelism in the United Church in this decade, driven by various factors including the crises of the Depression, the threat of totalitarianism, and most importantly, a new theological climate engendered by neo-orthodoxy. The surge in evangelism was accompanied by the continuation of evangelical practices of moral reform and Christian education, but did not indicate any continuation or resurgence of evangelical belief among church leaders; in fact, at the end of the decade, these leaders produced a Statement of Faith that embodied a “quiet” modernism by moving the official beliefs of the church further from evangelicalism without openly advocating modernist theology. Chapter two demonstrates the continuation of this paradigm in the 1940s and 1950s, and the increasing internal tensions generated by the combination of non-evangelical beliefs and evangelical institutional practices.

The second part of the study details the dismantling of this paradigm in the 1960s by leaders who prominently advocated non-evangelical beliefs while abandoning evangelical institutional practices, and the resulting public redefinition of the United Church as a non-evangelical denomination. Chapter three examines the most prominent aspect of this process, the development and introduction of the New Curriculum for Christian education, which replaced the evangelicalism of previous curricula with modernist theology, alienating many evangelicals in the church and generating the largest controversy of the turbulent decade. Chapter four examines more generally the theological upheavals in the United Church in the 1960s, some of which developed over the long term and some of which were derived from the international theological “ferment” of the time, and the resulting displacement of quiet modernism by a frank liberalism. Finally, chapter five describes the abandonment of the evangelical institutional practices of evangelism and moral reform in favour of a “new evangelism” and a “new morality,” and the formation of an evangelical minority organization within the United Church, the United Church Renewal Fellowship.

In addition to making sense of the complex history of evangelicalism in the United Church, this understanding accounts for the differences between the two historiographical interpretations mentioned above. Generally speaking, because the “early change” interpretation focuses on the inroads of liberal *beliefs* among preachers and ministers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, it concludes that evangelicalism was a spent force in mainline Canadian Protestantism by the time the United Church was formed. On the other hand, because the “late change” interpretation focuses on the evangelical *practices* promoted by the United Church in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, it concludes that

evangelicalism continued to be the mainstay of the denomination through those decades. According to the new understanding advanced by this study, both interpretations are partially correct: the “early change” interpretation in identifying the early abandonment of evangelical beliefs by church leaders, and the “late change” interpretation in identifying the long persistence of evangelical practices in the United Church. At the same time, both interpretations overstate their case: the “early change” interpretation by discounting the continuing resilience of evangelical practices at an official level, and the “late change” interpretation by underestimating the extent to which church leaders had rejected evangelical beliefs. It is the hope of this study that a new interpretation that combines the valid insights of both approaches can provide a fuller understanding of the odd survival and sudden death of evangelicalism in the United Church, and prepare the way for further research into the role of Protestantism in Canadian society.

Finally, this study places religious change, and not a dubious narrative of reaction to secularization, where it belongs – at the heart of the story of the United Church of Canada. Too often, historians of Canadian religion have viewed the transformations of Protestantism since the nineteenth century through the limited framework of a secularization narrative, whether they aim to confirm or disprove it.⁵⁸ In doing so, they have wittingly or unwittingly perpetuated the dominance of this narrative, which observers like Jeffrey Cox and Christian Smith have unmasked as a master narrative derived as much from an Enlightenment worldview as from historical reality.⁵⁹ This preoccupation has heretofore obscured the central fact of mainline Protestant change in Canada since the nineteenth century: the displacement of evangelicalism from the major denominations by modernist leaders.

In contrast, this thesis puts aside the dominant secularization narrative (without dismissing the secularization question’s importance in its own right) and shifts the focus to the story of evangelical marginalization – a story which is more pertinent to understanding the character of the mainline churches in the twentieth century and explaining the religious changes of the 1960s in particular. It is worth noting that the story of evangelical marginalization is not in itself a story of secularization. Evangelicalism was replaced in the first instance by various forms of religious modernism, not naked secularism. This is not a story of secularization, but a story of competing *religious* worldviews. Consequently, this study takes seriously the religious-cultural, and ultimately, theological changes within the church itself. In emphasizing this story, this study contributes to a growing Canadian and international literature that draws attention to the tremendous importance of the religious upheavals of the 1960s, and their religious roots, for understanding not only modern Christianity, but modern Western societies in general.⁶⁰ Seen in this light, the eviction of the evangelical worldview from the United Church of Canada in the 1960s forms a crucial part of the transformation of the central cultural role of mainline Protestantism in English

Canada, and therefore, a crucial part of the dramatic changes in Canadian society since the Second World War.

¹ Mike Milne, “Inside Big Willow,” *United Church Observer*, January 2007.

² This study uses the terms “evangelical” and “liberal,” as well as “modernist” and “neo-orthodox,” with specific meanings defined below. The gulf between the United Church and “conservative” churches at the end of the twentieth century is empirically substantiated in great detail in George A. Rawlyk, *Is Jesus Your Personal Saviour? In Search of Canadian Evangelicalism in the 1990s* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), chapter 3.

³ Michael Gauvreau, *The Evangelical Century: College and Creed in English Canada from the Great Revival to the Great Depression* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991).

⁴ D.C. Masters, *Protestant Church Colleges in Canada: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966), 89-92, 98, 133-140, 173-183, 210.

⁵ Richard Allen, “The Social Gospel and the Reform Tradition in Canada, 1890-1928,” *Canadian Historical Review* 49, no. 4 (1968): 381-399; Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914-28* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973); A.B. McKillop, *A Disciplined Intelligence: Critical Inquiry and Canadian Thought in the Victorian Era* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1979); John Webster Grant, *The Church in the Canadian Era*, 2nd ed. (Burlington, Ontario: Welch Publishing, 1988), first edition published 1972 by McGraw-Hill Ryerson.

⁶ Richard Allen, *The View from Murney Tower: Salem Bland, the Late Victorian Controversies, and the Search for a New Christianity*, bk. 1, *Salem Bland: A Canadian Odyssey* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), xxvi-xxvii. Here Allen specifically disagrees with his reading of Michael Gauvreau’s contention in *The Evangelical Century* that the influence of liberal theology was limited until the period before the First World War (see the discussion of Gauvreau’s argument in that work below).

⁷ Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985); David Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith: Canadian Protestant Clergy and the Crisis of Belief, 1850-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

⁸ For a brief overview of the traditional secularization thesis, see Roy Wallis and Steve Bruce, “Secularization: The Orthodox Model,” in *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis*, ed. Steve Bruce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). While this thesis was once the dominant view among sociologists and many historians, it has been successfully challenged in recent decades by empirical and theoretical critiques. Three works that stand out in this regard are Christian Smith, “Introduction: Rethinking the Secularization of American Public Life,” in *The Secular Revolution: Power, Interests and Conflict in the Secularization of American Public Life*, ed. Christian Smith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003);

Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992); and Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

⁹ James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), xiii.

¹⁰ Cook, *Regenerators*, 4, chapter 2.

¹¹ For example, see Marshall, *Secularizing*, 6-7, 18, conclusion.

¹² This is how Marshall interprets the United Church's flirtation with the revivalist Oxford Group in the 1930s. Marshall, *Secularizing*, 213-227.

¹³ Marguerite Van Die, *An Evangelical Mind: Nathanael Burwash and the Methodist Tradition in Canada, 1839-1918* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), 91-92, 102-113, 181-188, 193-195.

¹⁴ Gauvreau, *The Evangelical Century*, 6-7, 126-127.

¹⁵ Gauvreau, *The Evangelical Century*, 203-213, chapter 6, 268-270.

¹⁶ Hubert Krygsman, in his doctoral dissertation on mainline Protestant thought in Canada, also agrees with this general assessment. He notes that a group of "progressive evangelicals" who accepted liberal views of the Bible while seeking to maintain elements of evangelical piety were the dominant force among mainline Protestant thinkers by 1920. Krygsman, "Freedom and Grace: Mainline Protestant Thought in Canada, 1900-1960," (PhD diss., Carleton University, Ottawa, 1997), chapter 1, 66-68, 183-184.

¹⁷ The clearest exceptions are Allen's above cited works on the social reform movement.

¹⁸ Phyllis Airhart, *Serving the Present Age: Revivalism, Progressivism, and the Methodist Tradition in Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992).

¹⁹ Eric Crouse, *Revival in the City: The Impact of American Evangelists in Canada, 1884-1914* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005). Crouse distinguishes "conservative" evangelicalism by its opposition to "Darwinism, higher criticism, and socialism" and its eschewal of "far-reaching social-reform ideals" (p.4).

²⁰ Crouse, *Revival*, 124, 155-156, 160-161. In line with David Marshall, Crouse interprets this decline of evangelical orthodoxy among Protestant leaders as their response to secularization.

²¹ Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada, 1900-1940* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), xi-xii.

²² Christie and Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity*, 248-249, 245, 227-234, 250. Ian McKay Manson, "'Fighting the Good Fight': Salvation, Social Reform, and Service in the United Church of Canada's Board of Evangelism and Social Service, 1925-1945," (ThD diss., Victoria University and the University of Toronto, 1999) also notes the church's emphasis on evangelism in the 1930s and

similarly challenges Marshall's interpretation of that decade. Manson argues that the leaders of the United Church's Board of Evangelism and Social Service did not succumb to secularization, but rather vigorously combated what he describes as an increasingly secular society on several fronts from a Christian standpoint.

²³ For the most relevant overview of his general argument, including its extension into the 1960s and beyond, see David Plaxton, "'We Will Evangelize with a Whole Gospel or None': Evangelicalism and the United Church of Canada," in *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience*, ed. George Rawlyk (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997). Plaxton, "A Whole Gospel for a Whole Nation: The Cultures of Tradition and Change in The United Church of Canada and its Antecedents," (PhD diss., Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, 1997), although a longer work, focuses more narrowly on three United Church leaders and ends in the 1950s.

²⁴ Nancy Christie, "'Look Out for Leviathan': The Search for a Conservative Modernist Consensus," in *Cultures of Citizenship in Post-war Canada*, ed. Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 81-82.

²⁵ Nancy Christie, "Sacred Sex: The United Church and the Privatization of the Family in Post-War Canada," in *Households of Faith: Family, Gender, and Community in Canada, 1760-1969*, ed. Nancy Christie (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 362-366.

²⁶ Kevin Kee, *Revivalists: Marketing the Gospel in English Canada, 1884-1957* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006).

²⁷ Gary R. Miedema, *For Canada's Sake: Public Religion, Centennial Celebrations, and the Re-marking of Canada in the 1960s* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005). See especially chapter 8.

²⁸ As early as 1972, Grant's survey of Canadian church history had identified the 1960s as a significant period of change in the United Church and other mainline churches, but this conclusion has had to wait a quarter-century and more for in-depth historical examination by Plaxton, Christie, Miedema and others. Grant, *The Church in the Canadian Era, 185-187*, 199. Other works emphasizing the 1960s as a critical decade for a decline of evangelicalism in the mainline churches include Barry Mack, "From Preaching to Propaganda to Marginalization: The Lost Centre of Twentieth-Century Presbyterianism," and William Katerberg, "Redefining Evangelicalism in the Canadian Anglican Church: Wycliffe College and the Evangelical Party, 1867-1995," both in Rawlyk, *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience* (see particularly Mack, 151, and Katerberg, 183-184. For Katerberg's investigation of competing Anglican identities in North America between 1880 and 1950, see *Modernity and the Dilemma of North American Anglican Identities, 1880-1950* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001). In his overview of twentieth-century evangelicalism, John Stackhouse notes a long-term drift of evangelicals away from mainline churches to smaller evangelical denominations between 1900

and 1960, but highlights the period since 1960 as the period of most pronounced separation between the mainline and evangelicalism. John G. Stackhouse, Jr., *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century: An Introduction to Its Character* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 49-52, 111-3. Mark Noll, following Christie, has identified the 1960s as the endpoint of evangelicalism in mainline Protestantism in Canada in “What Happened to Christian Canada?” *Church History* 75:2 (June 2006), 266-267.

²⁹ Obvious exceptions to this generalization are Allen, “The Social Gospel” and *The Social Passion*, which focus on involvement in social reform movements, as well as Airhart, *Serving the Present Age* and Crouse, *Revival in the City*, both of which focus on revivalism. It should be noted, however, that these works also understandably draw heavily on the views of church leaders.

³⁰ See, for example, Airhart, *Serving the Present Age*, 8-9; Christie and Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity*, 248-249; Noll, “What Happened to Christian Canada?” 265-266.

³¹ Plaxton, for example, gives this impression in “A Whole Gospel for a Whole Nation,” xii-xiii, 19-21. By making the same assumption, Mack is able to interpret the resurgence of an emphasis on social causes in late twentieth century Presbyterian Church in Canada, in itself, as a sign of that denomination’s return to its “evangelical centre” – despite its increasing theological liberalization in the same period. Elsewhere he betrays the inadequacy of this approach, however, when he is forced to talk about the Atonement and the deity of Christ to explain why he does not consider one leader an evangelical. “From Preaching to Propaganda to Marginalization,” 151-152, 145-146.

³² George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4.

³³ David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 2-17.

³⁴ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 3. George Marsden offers a loosely similar five-point definition in *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1991), 4-5.

³⁵ Some of the many works that use Bebbington’s definition are George A. Rawlyk and Mark Noll, eds., *Amazing Grace: Evangelicalism in Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994), 17; Robert K. Burkinshaw, *Pilgrims in Lotus Land: Conservative Protestantism in British Columbia, 1917-1981* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995), 9; Rawlyk, ed., *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience*, xiii; Crouse, *Revival in the City*, 4; Kee, *Revivalists*, 5n4. In the second edition (2006) of *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, George Marsden remarks that Bebbington’s definition “has become more-or-less canonical.” (234n8).

³⁶ My own thoughts to this effect were reinforced by the similar argument of D.A. Carson in “What is an Evangelical? An Assessment of the Evangelical

and Roman Catholic Project,” (address to post-conference seminar of the European Leadership Forum, Eger, Hungary, June 2006), MP3 audio file <http://euroleadership.org/public/ELF06-999.mp3> (accessed June 11, 2007). Timothy Larsen also makes a very similar point in “Defining and Locating Evangelicalism,” in Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 2.

³⁷ By “worldview” here is meant simply what Al Wolters calls “the comprehensive framework of one’s basic beliefs about things.” See the definition and subsequent discussion in Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 2-11. For a thorough examination of the term and its philosophical and theological pedigrees, see David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2002).

³⁸ It should be noted, *pace* D.A. Carson, “What is an Evangelical?” that this “three-layer” definition is not meant to imply that Protestant and evangelical convictions did not appear until the last five hundred years, since all of these convictions were present in the Church at earlier times in its history, and as evangelicals would argue, in the Scriptures themselves.

³⁹ C.S. Lewis, “Mere Christians,” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1970), 336.

⁴⁰ Bebbington notes that the evangelical doctrine of conversion rested on the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith. *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 6. It is interesting in this context to recall that John Wesley himself experienced conversion while listening to a reading of Luther’s preface to the book of Romans, in which the Reformer outlines the doctrine of justification by faith.

⁴¹ J.I. Packer has persuasively argued that this principle of biblical authority distinguishes evangelicals, at a fundamental level, from Catholics on the one hand (who adhere to a “traditionalist” view) and liberals on the other (who adhere to a “subjectivist” view). J.I. Packer, *Fundamentalism” and the Word of God: Some Evangelical Principles* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1958), 44-51. Chapter four of this study further elaborates the evangelical approach to the Bible in contrast to other approaches.

⁴² This attempt to construct a historical-theological definition is parallel in several respects to the five-point definition given by Timothy Larsen. In particular the definition used here shares Larsen’s concern to make explicit the “orthodox Protestant” content of evangelicalism assumed by Bebbington’s definition. See Larsen, “Defining and Locating Evangelicalism,” 1-12.

⁴³ Though Allen, *The View from the Murney Tower*, xx, xxvii, portrays evangelicalism and liberalism as overlapping and even aligned categories, he has to run together the theological, political and economic meanings of “liberalism,” practically reduce evangelicalism to a one-dimensional emphasis on experiential

religion, and impose narratives and concepts drawn from the history of political theory to make this seem like a plausible classification. In contrast, the *religious* categories of evangelicalism and liberalism as defined in this study, and indeed in common usage at the time of writing, are mutually exclusive categories.

⁴⁴ Bebbington, 10-12.

⁴⁵ For examples of revivalism in Canada, see Crouse, *Revival in the City*, and Kee, *Revivalists*.

⁴⁶ This study avoids the general use of “liberal” and “conservative” to frame a two-way division in the United Church. Unfortunately, there is no generally accepted alternative to the ubiquitous term “liberal” for the specific orientation within modern Christianity described here. Fortunately, the usual usage of “conservative” can be replaced with the much more accurate and descriptive terms “evangelical” or “neo-orthodox” (as the case may be).

⁴⁷ The definition of liberalism given here encompasses William R. Hutchison’s use of the terms “modernism” and “liberalism” in *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976), 2-9. The somewhat different definition of “modernism” used in this study is given below.

⁴⁸ As Hutchison writes of the American experience, “over large areas of discourse the newer Protestant theologies of the ‘turbulent Sixties’ were turning up the volume on a liberal broadcast that had never really gone off the air.” *The Modernist Impulse*, 10.

⁴⁹ For a summary of neo-orthodox theology in Europe and the United States, see Justo L. González, *A History of Christian Thought*, 2nd ed., vol. 3, *From the Protestant Reformation to the Twentieth Century* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1987), 432-440, 455-457.

⁵⁰ Mack, “From Preaching to Propaganda to Marginalization,” 149-151. In the argument that follows, I do not suppose neo-orthodoxy to have become dominant in the United Church as a theological system, but rather suggest that the general emphases, or “mood”, brought to international Protestantism by neo-orthodoxy exerted an important influence on United Church leaders between roughly 1930 and 1960.

⁵¹ In the British situation of 1958 J.I. Packer pointed out that the proponents of the new “biblical theology” (more or less neo-orthodoxy) continued to rely on the same fundamental presuppositions as the older liberalism in their approach to the biblical text. “*Fundamentalism and the Word of God*, 151-160. The same thing was true in the United Church, as will be seen at various points in this study.

⁵² The complex relationship between neo-orthodoxy and evangelicalism, especially in the case of Barth, who was probably the closest neo-orthodox theologian to evangelicals in his thinking, continues to be discussed. A thorough though not up-to-date account of the various ways evangelicals have viewed Barth is Gregory G. Bolich, *Karl Barth and Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, Illinois:

InterVarsity Press, 1980). For a sampling of more recent approaches, see the essays in Sung Wook Chung, ed., *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology: Convergences and Divergences* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2006).

⁵³ Historians of religion have no agreed-upon use of the term “modernism,” which has been used variously as a synonym for liberalism, as an antonym for fundamentalism, to describe a particular “liberal” orientation within modern Catholicism, or to describe a particular phase of liberalism in the early twentieth century. See Ferenc Szasz, *The Divided Mind of Protestant America, 1880-1930* (University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1982), 99-100; and Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse*, 2, 7, for acknowledgement of the various ways in which the term has been used. The usage of this study has features in common with all of these definitions, but is limited more strictly to the listed accommodations to “modern” thought and therefore applies to a broader range of approaches (including many neo-orthodox approaches). While the somewhat unusual definition used in this study may be initially confusing to some readers, it is hoped that this cost is outweighed by the benefit of having a concise and meaningful term to identify the elements common to both liberal and neo-orthodox approaches in the United Church between 1930 and 1970.

⁵⁴ This is also the reason that evangelicals and anglo-catholics in the Anglican Church of Canada have found common cause in recent decades in reaffirming historic orthodoxy against the liberal-modernism dominant in their denomination. See Katerberg, “Redefining Evangelicalism in the Canadian Anglican Church,” 185-186. C.S. Lewis observed the same thing in a British context decades earlier: “To a layman, it seems obvious that what unites the Evangelical and the Anglo-Catholic against the ‘Liberal’ or ‘Modernist’ is something very clear and momentous, namely, the fact that both are thoroughgoing supernaturalists, who believe in the Creation, the Fall, the Incarnation, the Resurrection, the Second Coming, and the Four Last Things. This unites them not only with one another, but with the Christian religion as understood *ubique et ab omnibus*.” Lewis, “Mere Christians,” 336.

⁵⁵ This is one of the characteristics distinguishing this study from works like Masters, *Protestant Church Colleges in Canada*; and Manson, “‘Fighting the Good Fight’,” which limits itself to the Board of Evangelism and Social Service. Of course, this study is not able to examine every aspect even of the official national activities of the church, but the intent is to cast a broad enough net to determine the overall direction of the whole denomination with respect to the characteristics of evangelicalism outlined above.

⁵⁶ Studying the views of selected individuals, usually prominent church leaders, has been a common approach in Canadian religious history. Some examples are Cook, *The Regenerators*; Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith*; Van Die, *An Evangelical Mind*; Katerberg, *Modernity and the Dilemma*; and Plaxton, “A Whole Gospel for a Whole Nation.”

⁵⁷ This general outline fits well with what Burkinshaw argues for British Columbia, where he identifies a strong liberal presence in the mainline denominations by the First World War, but points to the 1960s as the key decade in which “liberal” mainline churches and “conservative” evangelical churches diverged most notably. One apparent difference between Burkinshaw’s description of the situation in British Columbia and the situation in the antecedents of the United Church nationally was that the sharp liberal-conservative split in the mainline denominations in British Columbia catalyzed by the revival campaign of French E. Oliver in 1917 appears not to have been characteristic of the whole country. See *Pilgrims in Lotus Land*, chapter 1, chapter 2, pp. 251-257, 263. On the 1960s, Burkinshaw echoes and extends Grant, *The Church in the Canadian Era*, chapter 9, who identifies that decade as a period of rapid change particularly within the mainline churches. The argument of this study also fits well with Robert Wuthnow’s argument in *The Restructuring of American Religion*. Wuthnow identifies the 1960s as a period of rapid religious “restructuring” that created a clear division between “liberals” and “conservatives” in American Protestantism. According to Wuthnow, this contrasted with the 1940s and 1950s, which were decades of relative consensus in which, importantly, liberals supported evangelism as a central practice of the church. See Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), 138-153.

⁵⁸ As indicated in the review of the literature given above, this can be seen in several works, perhaps most notably in the debate between Marshall’s *Secularizing the Faith* and Gauvreau and Christie’s *Full-Orbed*.

⁵⁹ Jeffrey Cox, “Master Narratives of Long-term Religious Change,” in *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750-2000*, ed. Hugh McCleod and Werner Ustendorf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Christian Smith, “Introduction: Rethinking the Secularization of American Public Life,” 8-24. See also Lucian Hölscher, “Semantic Structures of Religious Change in Modern Germany,” in McCleod and Ustendorf, *The Decline of Christendom*, 185.

⁶⁰ Significant Canadian works include Michael Gauvreau, *The Catholic Origins of Quebec’s Quiet Revolution, 1931-1970* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005) and Miedema, *For Canada’s Sake*. Some important international works are Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, and especially Hugh McCleod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

CHAPTER 1

FORMING A PARADIGM, 1930-1940

While differing in their interpretations, historians of religion in Canada have generally agreed that the 1930s brought an apparent resurgence of evangelical emphases to the United Church. Pronouncements by church officials extolled the need for evangelism. In the midst of the Depression, the people were said to be “athirst for God,”¹ and the influential Board of Evangelism and Social Service insisted that “the evangelistic spirit should be evident in every service in our churches.”² Nevertheless, interpreting the events of the decade through an overriding narrative of secularization, historian David Marshall sees this purported swing to evangelicalism – and especially the clergy’s flirtation with the controversial Oxford Group movement – as the dying gasp of a confused and internally secularized Protestantism.³ A second school of thought, headed up by Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, has pictured the 1930s as a full-scale resurgence of the evangelical heritage of the mainline Protestant churches. Christie and Gauvreau interpret the revivalism of this decade as a sign that the churches had accomplished their social objectives and were simply returning to an evangelicalism that had been just below the surface since the nineteenth century. In their view, this “subterranean stream” of traditional evangelical piety resurfaced in the 1930s, resulting in a renewal of this heritage of evangelicalism for clergy and laity alike.⁴ David Plaxton has similarly argued that the revivals of the 1930s were “a continuation of, not a break from denominational and social trends,” that demonstrated the United Church’s “powerful evangelical inheritance.”⁵

The argument of this chapter agrees that the 1930s were a time of heightened evangelistic emphasis, but disagrees with the interpretations of this phenomenon that historians have offered to date. There is no question that the leaders of the United Church in the 1930s began to emphasize revival, evangelism, and spiritual experience with a new enthusiasm, and that this emphasis was largely welcomed by the people of the church. Because they have neglected the theological content of evangelicalism, however, historians such as Christie, Gauvreau and Plaxton have incorrectly interpreted this seemingly evangelical emphasis as evidence that the United Church of the 1930s was an evangelical church. In fact, as this chapter will demonstrate, though they were willing to embrace evangelical practices and language, and promote traditional evangelical morality, the church’s leaders did not hold evangelical beliefs in this period. Consequently, neither they nor the church organization they steered can be called “evangelical” in the period. Marshall is likewise mistaken in his view that the events of the 1930s revealed a secularized faith or a desperate last stand. To the contrary, the positions adopted by United Church leaders in the 1930s – though not evangelical – were not secular, and, far from being a last stand, they endured with hardly any modification for nearly three decades. Indeed, these historians have misread the 1930s by interpreting them primarily as a continuation of something from the past – in the case of Marshall, the long-term collapse of evangelicalism and slide into secularism, and in the case of Christie, Gauvreau and Plaxton, a robust and undiminished evangelical identity. This chapter

proposes a different interpretation: that church leaders of the 1930s, under the influence of a variety of factors beginning in that decade, adopted a new synthesis of non-evangelical beliefs and evangelical practices that was unlike both the typical liberalism and the typical evangelicalism of the past. The continuities of the 1930s were not so much with preceding decades, therefore, as with the decades that followed.

This chapter, therefore, identifies the origins and character of a paradigm that emerged in the 1930s and guided United Church leaders through the 1940s and 1950s. It argues that in the 1930s, a number of factors, including domestic and international threats and an international theological shift, persuaded the United Church's leaders to embrace evangelical revivalism as a means of achieving their prime objective of transforming society. The success of these efforts convinced them of the instrumental value of evangelism as a tool for advancing the social objectives of the church. At the same time, these leaders promoted a traditional evangelical moral vision that suited their ideal of the church as a "colony of heaven" that could transform society. An evangelical Christian education program combined with the promotion of evangelical revivalism and moral reform to produce an evangelical-looking church. These seemingly evangelical practices, however, were not accompanied by evangelical beliefs on the part of church leaders. Close examination reveals that the leadership of the church eschewed the evangelical theology which had traditionally undergirded evangelism, moral reform, and Christian education, in favour of a "quiet" modernism that avoided affirming evangelical doctrines while at the same time not directly repudiating them. The paradigm of the 1930s, then, combined "loud" evangelical practices (in evangelism, moral reform, and education) with "quiet" modernist beliefs (of church leaders). This coupling of evangelical practices with non-evangelical beliefs formed an enduring strategy that would continue to characterize the church at least into the late 1950s.

Revival

There were several facets to the revival of evangelism in the United Church in the 1930s. Historians have rightly given much attention to the United Church's flirtations with the Oxford Group evangelistic movement led by the enigmatic Frank Buchman, most recently in a study by Kevin Kee.⁶ More representative of the mainstream attitudes of the United Church leadership towards evangelism in the 1930s, however, are the activities of the church's own Board of Evangelism and Social Service (BESS) and its participation in the evangelistic campaigns of the interdenominational Joint Committee on the Evangelization of Canadian Life. The Joint Committee originated in the mind of BESS secretary D.N. McLachlan. McLachlan, a former Presbyterian, had served under that denomination's Board of Home Missions and Social Service until Church Union, when General Council appointed him secretary of the BESS, a position he occupied until his retirement in 1938.⁷ In 1931, McLachlan reached

the conclusion that the unsatisfactory state of Canadian spirituality and society meant that “the time is ripe for a great forward step” of Canadian churches.⁸ Subsequent communications with the Anglicans, Baptists, and Presbyterians bore fruit in the formation of the Joint Committee on the Evangelization of Canadian Life, which was meeting by May 1932.⁹ The Committee included representatives of all four of the cooperating churches, including, for the United Church, former moderator George Pidgeon and McLachlan himself.

Several factors were behind the shift towards an evangelistic emphasis seen in the pronouncements of the BESS, the excitement over the Oxford Group, and the formation of the Joint Committee. The immediate reason behind the shift to evangelism in the 1930s was the socio-economic crisis of the Depression. United Church leaders believed that the ultimate cause of the Depression was not simply a stock market crash, but rather an ethical failure of the industrialized nations to build a truly Christian society. The nominally Christian world had neglected to apply Jesus’s moral teachings to its social and economic structures, and consequently the causes of the “economic and international anarchy” of the 1930s were “ethical.”¹⁰ The Depression therefore represented a momentous moral failure to which repentance was the appropriate response. Yet the resulting disillusionment with the economic order and human self-sufficiency also presented a unique opportunity. In the view of an early statement of the Committee,

surely such a period when men’s hearts are failing them for fear, when men consciously or unconsciously in the darkness are groping for the way out, is a time when, recognizing their own impotence our people are ready to turn to a Greater than themselves for leadership and salvation.¹¹

The crisis had the potential to ignite a desire for God in the midst of misery. Echoing this view, McLachlan painted a grim picture of the desperate situation facing Canada, and especially its unemployed, in the Depression, but nevertheless discerned that “in the midst of misery, want and uncertainty, there is a cry for God,” the Church’s “great opportunity.”¹²

The spiritual opportunity of the hour, however, had to be seized in the face of domestic and international threats. One domestic threat was the activities of small evangelical churches and fringe movements, referred to by United Church leaders as “sects.” According to McLachlan’s associate on the BESS, field secretary John Coburn, “the activities of various fanatical sects” were “a great embarrassment to our ministers and people.”¹³ Evidently, Coburn was aware of competition for his constituency from the growth of outside evangelical networks and groups that had occurred since the First World War and which has been documented by several historians.¹⁴ McLachlan too worried that as a result of uncertain teaching in the United Church, people were “seeking places where an outlet for their emotions is provided, and where the words from the pulpit and platform are more definite, and therefore more assuring.”¹⁵ This threat contributed

to the sense among United Church leaders that an enthusiastic, revivalist religion was right for the times. At the same time, the church leadership had to contend with a much different domestic threat to the United Church's vitality: the widespread apathy of "nominal Christians." Significantly, in the eyes of the Joint Committee nominal Christians were not merely those who called themselves Christians and stayed away from the churches, but those who were not involved in applying their faith to politics, business, and other spheres of life. All Christians were called to apply their faith through the Christianization of society, but the Committee feared that "Faith has become in many lives little more than a convention while it should be giving birth to adventurous thought and action."¹⁶ A warmly evangelistic religion was a convenient single answer to the double dangers of the "sects" and "nominal" Christianity.

The growing awareness of a looming international political crisis in the 1930s was another reason for the increase in evangelistic emphasis in the United Church. Robert Wright has shown that for many Canadian Protestant ministers in the interwar period, the best answer to the threats to world order posed by Fascism and Communism was a reinvigoration of the Christian missionary effort, and specifically, a return to a more evangelical and exclusivist view of missions. According to Wright, this shift was most apparent in the United Church.¹⁷ More generally, church leaders were convinced that Protestantism needed to return to the central Christian message which alone could provide an alternative to Communist materialism and Nazi paganism. For most mainline leaders, this central message had a spiritual, rather than purely social, focus.¹⁸ Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau have similarly argued that even proponents of "social Christianity" such as United Church minister C.E. Bland adopted a renewed emphasis on "personal evangelism" as an antidote to the materialistic, totalitarian ideology of Communism as seen in Russia.¹⁹ Drawing on European and American evidence for a slightly later period, Hugh McLeod similarly argues that the continuing spectre of totalitarian regimes, first Nazi and then Communist, had a similar effect in encouraging support for the concept of "Christian civilization" and traditional forms of religion in democratic Western societies.²⁰

Without a doubt, the same United Church leaders who were urging a return to evangelism were deeply concerned about the international situation. In 1935, the Joint Committee made a point of urging prayers for peace to be said each Sunday in its member churches.²¹ That same year the BESS was addressing "the threat to freedom in the rise of Dictatorship, in Communism and Fascism, and in the abnormal development of trust in the State."²² In a letter the preceding year, McLachlan had already warned the ministers of the United Church that rising "anti-Christian movements" of nationalism in Germany and Communism in Russia presented strong opposition to Christianity as quasi-religious worldviews.²³ In the view of these leaders, these dangers could only be confronted by a reinvigorated Christianity. On the eve of his retirement from the Board, field secretary Ernest Thomas warned that the church would have to confront the totalitarian spirit "with something other than a tradition."²⁴

So what, then, was the answer to totalitarianism? McLachlan wanted to see a Christian youth movement to counteract the “anti-Christian” movements of “Nationalism” and “Communism,” both of which in his view “resemble[d] a religion.”²⁵ A call for evangelism was the more common answer to the totalitarian threat, however. A report on evangelism and social service to the General Council in 1936 warned that the “foundations of civilization in our time are being shaken,” and that civilization would soon take on “a radically new form.” In the midst of this cataclysm, “the Church has at present no greater responsibility than to insure [*sic*] that any such changes shall come to pass under Christian direction, and embody the Christian ideal and will.” This momentous task was to be accomplished through evangelism. In fact, the report brought up this civilizational crisis simply in order to highlight the timeliness of the “effort to evangelize and Christianize our Canadian life” – in other words, the work of the Joint Committee. In the thinking of the report, “the Church requires an effectual revitalization that will endow her anew with ardour, adventurousness and strength.” Because one of the objects of the evangelization effort was “persuading our people to submit more wholly to God that He may work more mightily in and through them, to the transforming of themselves and the world,” it would supply the required “revitalization.”²⁶ In 1939 BESS chairman W. J. Gallagher made a similar argument for a return to evangelism and spiritual realities. In his view, “all the living issues of our time, economic, political, international, are at the bottom religious and theological... The questions raised by the dictatorships, by totalitarianism, by the claims of the State, take us back to our basic beliefs.”²⁷ Evangelism, therefore, was the best answer to totalitarianism. This interpretation of the international crisis and the appropriate Christian response was a key factor driving the surge of evangelistic effort in the United Church.

Changes in the international theological climate were also important in encouraging a renewed evangelistic emphasis in the United Church. The Joint Committee cited what it saw as a worldwide interdenominational movement emphasizing spiritual realities and the necessity of evangelism, evidenced by statements at the World Conference on Faith and Order at Lausanne (1927), the International Missionary Council at Jerusalem (1928), and the recent Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops (1930).²⁸ Interestingly, although historian Robert Wright has interpreted the Jerusalem meeting as a move towards acceptance of non-Christian religions and consequent weakening of the evangelistic impulse, at least some in the United Church saw it as a restatement of the urgency of evangelism.²⁹ At any rate, the Joint Committee explicitly adopted what it saw as the international movement’s stress on the experiential knowledge of God and “his redemptive purpose,” and distributed copies of statements from these meetings to reinforce its point.³⁰ This international and, more importantly, interdenominational context served to lend the Committee’s efforts legitimacy in the eyes of Canada’s largest Protestant churches.

At the same time, a broad revolution was underway in mainline Protestant theology. This revolution was led most notably by the Swiss pastor and theologian

Karl Barth. Beginning with *Der Romerbrief (The Epistle to the Romans)* published in 1919, Barth rejected what he saw as the anthropocentrism of liberal theology and urged a return to a theocentric approach grounded in the Bible and the classical doctrines of Reformed Christianity. Barth accused liberalism of reducing the Bible to a collection of human insights and identifying Christianity with human culture – a fatal mistake that had led German liberal theologians to support the aims of German imperialism in World War I. Instead, Barth argued that God was “wholly other,” beyond human thought and culture. As a corollary, Barth emphasized human sinfulness and the necessity of divine revelation. His attack on liberalism resonated with theologians and clergy disillusioned with liberal optimism in the wake of the war’s inhumanity. The resulting movement, variously termed “dialectical theology,” the “theology of crisis,” or “neo-orthodoxy,” gradually changed the dominant mood of mainline Protestant thought in the 1920s and 1930s, such that Protestants on both sides of the Atlantic expressed a newfound respect for traditional stresses on biblical and theological themes that had been overshadowed to an extent by liberalism.³¹ By the latter decade, neo-orthodoxy was making its influence felt not only in Canada, but in the United Church, as several historians have recognized.³² On the other hand, Marshall has dismissed the “theology of crisis” as an important factor in Canada, saying that it was “largely ignored in the councils of the churches.”³³ While it is true that the United Church did not adopt an official position on neo-orthodoxy, nor were United Church leaders generally won over outright by the new approach, it appears that the general “mood” created by neo-orthodoxy did influence the United Church in this period and contribute to the changes of the decade.

The influence of the climate created by neo-orthodoxy on the evangelistic emphasis of the 1930s in the United Church can be inferred from the words and actions of some United Church officials. The Joint Committee, for example, planned to ask the principals of the church’s theological colleges to invite Barth, the leading neo-orthodox theologian, to make a Canadian visit while he was in the United States in 1935.³⁴ More generally, the Joint Committee and several church leaders began to espouse basic theological positions in keeping with neo-orthodox emphases. In particular, they pointed to and welcomed the general “return to theology,” in the words of Chairman Gallagher of the BESS. Specifically invoking what he saw as an international return to spiritual and evangelistic concerns, Gallagher argued that “the Christian superstructure in personal redemption, in morals, or in the social order, cannot be supported without an adequate foundation in the apprehension of Christian truth ... our evangelism, to be effective, must lay its foundations deep.”³⁵ An early document of the Joint Committee called for a return to the primacy of spiritual realities such as “the nature and sovereignty of God ... the incarnation of His Dear Son, ... His Atoning Death, His Triumphant Resurrection and the reality of his reign as King.”³⁶ The report of the sessional committee on evangelism at the annual meeting of the BESS in 1938 also noted a widespread “return to theology” in the church.³⁷ John Line, a professor at Emmanuel College in Toronto, even recommended an abandonment of

“theological liberalism” for a new approach in line with the “present revival of theology.” While not advocating a “return to traditionalism,” he stressed the need for an “eschatological” Christianity that would emphasize “primary Christian convictions” and restore an emphasis on “worship and doctrine” without neglecting social service. Strongly echoing Barth, Line warned that “only as the prophet and interpreter of God to the conscience of men can the Church escape taking its tone and standards from the world in which it is set, and lapsing into a sub-Christian sociological existence in which its identity as Church is lost.” He urged the BESS to “Let God be God, and sin will again be sin, not just social unadjustment [*sic*].”³⁸ The statements of the Joint Committee and the BESS were replete with such approving references to a renewed emphasis on theological realities as more fundamental than ethical or social applications. This renewed emphasis was often linked with evangelism, as it was by the Joint Committee and Gallagher, for example.³⁹ Thus, with or without explicit statements about Barth or neo-orthodoxy, United Church officials welcomed the new theological emphasis and the encouraging context it provided for evangelism. The “return to theology” buttressed the return to evangelism.

In light of these several contributing factors, United Church leaders decided to promote a particular kind of evangelism that would result in the “consecration” of the individual to service in the Christianizing of society. In the definition of the Committee, this evangelism was to

bring about the real evangelization and consecration alike of the individual, of the community and of the nation in every phase and department of human life and activity and thus enthrone Christ as King and to apply His teaching in our own lives, our homes, our churches, our communities, our politics, our business, our industry, our social life.⁴⁰

This kind of evangelism was permeated with a this-worldly focus. Associate secretary of the BESS Hugh Dobson noted that the Depression had created not only “a turning to an evangelical experience as the beginning of a new way of life,” but also more openness to Jesus’s ethical teachings and “the project of establishing a Christian World Order.” These two aspects, personal and social, were connected in that the “vital experience” of redemption infused the work of the church with “an added zest and meaning.”⁴¹ Evangelism, therefore, could be used by the church as a tool for creating enthusiasm for its project of social transformation. McLachlan went so far as to see the link between spiritual awakening and social action as an historical law. As an example, he noted that “the Evangelistic revival in England” had stimulated an humanitarianism still expressed in “so much modern philanthropy.” He believed a modern spiritual revival could stimulate a far-reaching social revolution entailing no less than limitation of private property rights, redistribution of wealth, and ultimately a shift away from an economic system built on “competition” to one built on “co-operation.”⁴² This kind of language indicated that these leaders, like some earlier figures in Canadian

mainline Protestantism, were making a radical critique of the whole Western social order, including private property and the free market.⁴³ Believing that the Depression had revealed the moral bankruptcy of this socio-economic order, they hoped to stimulate massive and widespread change through the instrumental use of evangelism. In the minds of United Church leaders, therefore, the movement back to evangelism was a brilliant strategy for turning the misfortune of the Depression into a golden opportunity for total social transformation.

The early phase of the work of the Joint Committee, extending from 1932 to the middle of 1934, was fairly modest given such grand expectations. The Committee was doubtless disappointed by their repeated failure to secure the services of prominent British speakers for their revival.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, they went ahead with organizing days of prayer, printing and distributing literature, and planning ministerial retreats.⁴⁵ In 1934, while the Committee was still hopefully scheduling the arrival of British help for the upcoming year,⁴⁶ the United Church's BESS was busy preparing a significant "Statement on Evangelism." Prepared in response to a request by the United Church's General Council of 1932 to clarify the church's view of evangelism, the statement was a key document in revealing the contours of the developing leadership paradigm characterized by evangelical practice without evangelical belief. David Plaxton has suggested that the statement is evidence of the continuing evangelical tradition in the United Church, pointing to its definition of evangelism as "a powerful interest in human redemption as this is seen in the crisis of personal experience."⁴⁷ Indeed, the statement had an evangelical look. Evangelism through organized revivalistic missions, individual counseling, personal witnessing, and moral example were all endorsed by the Statement.⁴⁸ The aim of such methods was to be the "definite presentation of the gospel" in order to secure a "decisive" response or "critical decision."⁴⁹ Thus the statement promoted a vigorously active evangelism coupled with an apparent insistence on personal conversion.

Can the statement, then, be taken as evidence of a robust evangelicalism in the United Church of the mid-1930s? A closer examination reveals that it cannot. While it embraced the outward, activist practices of evangelism and revival, as well as language strongly reminiscent of evangelical conversionism, the statement either avoided or rejected key elements of evangelical belief at all three levels: historic classical Christianity, Protestantism, and distinctive evangelicalism. Put another way, the statement was decisively in favour of evangelical practices, but decisively opposed to evangelical beliefs.

The statement held the early Christian legacy at arm's length, describing but not affirming traditional convictions about the crucifixion, resurrection, and atonement. Always speaking of Jesus in the past tense, it refused to regard any particular interpretation of "the experience in which the friends of Jesus re-discovered Him with them after the crucifixion" as essential to the Christian gospel, explaining that "very different ideas of the resurrection may be found within the New Testament itself," thereby rejecting the evangelical insistence on a physical resurrection and at the same time affirming the modernist belief in a self-

contradictory Bible.⁵⁰ On a less significant level, modernist theology was evident in the statement's skepticism about New Testament "demons," its denial that "certain doctrines about Scripture" form a necessary part of the Christian faith, and its rejection of the transactional view of the atonement, which it characterized as a vestige of medieval thought.⁵¹

More obvious than these subtle and indirect departures from historic Christianity was the Statement's dismissal of the cardinal Protestant doctrines of salvation. Tellingly, the Statement historicized the biblical vocabulary of "Sin, Repentance, Propitiation, Reconciliation, Justification," as a peculiar reflection of the apostle Paul's training as a Pharisee, rarely seen in other early writers. These "Rabbinical arguments," therefore, were not an essential part of the gospel. In fact, the statement argued that Jesus said "very little" about forgiveness of sins and eternal life; these were primarily Pauline themes.⁵² The statement thus de-emphasized the aspects of faith having to do with a person's standing before God and eternal destiny, which were among the central concerns of the Protestant Reformation.

The Statement most clearly deviated from evangelical beliefs, however, in its direct criticisms of the evangelical tradition stemming from the eighteenth century. The "Evangelical Movement" did have its benefits in encouraging "personal regeneration" and stimulating "philanthropic activities of world-wide significance." Yet the movement had erred in its use of the term "evangelical" to exclude Catholics and Unitarians, in rejecting the findings of modern science and historical criticism of the Bible, and by exalting emotionalism and individualism. In these and other areas it had been associated "with dogmatic teachings now rarely welcomed by the educated Christian." Furthermore, apparent conversionism aside, the statement cautioned against distinguishing "too sharply between the life which by deliberate act has become consciously Christian and the life before that movement," instead arguing that a child could be gradually nurtured into the Christian faith.⁵³ This point baldly contradicted the central evangelical emphasis on the necessity of personal conversion. Underneath its promotion of vigorous evangelism, therefore, the theology of the Statement on Evangelism was not evangelical; rather, the statement offered evangelical practice yoked to modernist theology.

What, then, did this unlikely partnership look like? First of all, the Statement cannot be classified as embodying some sort of secularized faith. It was unequivocal in its insistence on theism and its rejection of "the materialistic interpretation of personal experience and of human history."⁵⁴ Nevertheless, the statement revealed a this-worldly faith, in which the ultimate object of both evangelism and social action was the transformation of society in the here-and-now. Whereas the urgency of evangelism had sometimes previously depended on saving souls from "ultimate punishment" in hell, it must now stem from the pressing need to purify the moral attitudes of the nation, "lest our society perish in the near future." There could therefore be no tension between evangelism and social action, since both were complementary means of reaching the same goal.

Evangelism was necessary, and yet it could not “be of abiding value unless it involve[d] the adoption of a thought-out Christian programme of life.” The “permanent elements” of the gospel listed in the statement consequently did not include a cross or a resurrection, but did include, for example, a belief that private property was not “for private advantage,” and a related belief that societies not organized according to Jesus’s moral example would ultimately “be removed from God’s world.”⁵⁵ Here again, the motivating factor behind the return to evangelism was unveiled as the opposition of some United Church leaders to a capitalist socio-economic system based on the self-interested use of private property. The thinking that went into the statement on evangelism, therefore, promoted evangelism not as a means of reconciling sinners with God, but as a means of stimulating fundamental changes to a social order those leaders regarded as unchristian.

The most intense phase of the movement of the Joint Committee for the Evangelization of Canadian Life followed the Statement on Evangelism, lasting from 1934 until the Second World War. Beginning in 1934, the Committee called for mass services in large cities, to be followed by similar gatherings in smaller centres.⁵⁶ This marked a change of approach for the Committee, which would henceforth enthusiastically promote mass evangelism. The members of the Committee believed that the moment of opportunity had come. By late 1934 they sensed a receptiveness to a greater movement for evangelism:

There is a wistfulness and expectancy among our people.... Church members in increasing numbers are praying and looking for a spiritual ‘renewal’ and are ready to respond to the Church’s call for a new surrender and trust and for a new consecration of their abilities and resources to the interests of the Kingdom of God.⁵⁷

Well-attended revival meetings took place in various parts of Ontario, including London and Toronto, in the winter of 1935.⁵⁸ Subsequent reports received by the Committee from 28 ministerial associations revealed that while nine had had no revival services, 16 of them, more than half, had hosted “very successful” services, and the remaining three were planning later services.⁵⁹ The Committee organized similar missions in various parts of Canada in the fall of 1936, the fall of 1937, and the summer and fall of 1938.⁶⁰ When the BESS met in 1939 for its annual report, the demand for preaching missions was still reportedly high.⁶¹ The success of the Committee’s work should not be overestimated, since the movement was at times criticized for serious communication failures, disorganization, and lack of ability to reach the unchurched.⁶² Nonetheless, the acceleration of evangelism in the mid-to-late 1930s reflected a serious attempt at large-scale evangelism on the part of Canada’s mainline Protestant churches and the United Church in particular.

Not only did the revivals of the later 1930s demonstrate the United Church’s renewed interest in evangelism, but their apparent success solidified this

recovered emphasis, even at times stirring up language reminiscent of a more consistently evangelical theology. Enthused that “whenever anyone brings a vital message there is a warm response,” the Committee urged “a real experience of God” for both clergy and laity.⁶³ A short article by George C. Pidgeon, enclosed in a 1936 letter to McLachlan, went so far as to question the emphasis on social application, contending that “the need of the moment is not that the Church should lay stress on the application of Christianity to all the relationships of life, but that she should give more thought to those deeper experiences and principles out of which all reform must flow.”⁶⁴ Although Pidgeon and others still saw evangelism as a means of stimulating social reform, they used strongly conversionist language to describe such evangelism. Both Pidgeon and the BESS insisted that evangelistic preaching must aim for “a verdict” in the heart of the listener, and the latter recommended the use of the “decision card” to record such moments of commitment.⁶⁵

Some historians have interpreted this conversionist language as evidence of a denominational shift away from social Christianity towards an older individualistic evangelicalism.⁶⁶ For every step taken in the direction of personal evangelism during the later 1930s, however, United Church leaders made redoubled efforts to harness evangelism to social action. By 1935 McLachlan thought that it was time that “some statements should be made by the Churches on ethical and moral issues,” and the Joint Committee formed a subcommittee “to study the various social pronouncements made by the Churches and draw up a statement of principles based on them.”⁶⁷ The fact that such issues were being considered at meetings of the Joint Committee on the Evangelization of Canadian Life, and not left to other bodies such as the Commission on Christianizing the Social Order, confirms that church leaders still saw evangelism as a tool to be used within a larger framework of social Christianity. The BESS likewise pushed for more social content in the revival movement in 1937, specifically asking the Joint Committee to consult with the Social Service Council of Canada, “looking to the application of the spiritual dynamic to our urgent social problems.” The revival movement, it insisted, needed to emphasize the “whole gospel” – its social as well as its personal aspects.⁶⁸ Similarly, in his 1938 report to the Board, McLachlan warned that what the church needed was “a broad evangelism, not one that simply cares for the soul and neglects the body.”⁶⁹ As shown above, United Church leaders like McLachlan and Dobson had originally conceived of the revival movement as a means of social transformation. If evangelism’s “spiritual dynamic” only cared “for the soul,” therefore, it would have failed in its ultimate purpose. Consequently, the danger of a purely personal evangelism taking on a life of its own, rather than remaining harnessed to social action, needed to be firmly countered with renewed social emphasis. Whatever the underlying motives, United Church leaders fervently promoted evangelism in the 1930s and thus held up this element of evangelical institutional practice as indispensable for their church.

Moral Reform and a “Colony of Heaven”

During the same period in which the United Church was returning to the evangelical practice of evangelism, the denomination continued to promote a moral reform program, primarily under the auspices of the BESS. Some elements of this program had their roots in nineteenth-century evangelicalism, while others embodied ancient Christian principles; the program as a whole consequently embodied a traditional Canadian evangelical morality. This morality included opposition to gambling, promotion of temperance, defense of Lord’s Day observance, and support for traditional Christian standards of marriage and sex.

The BESS vigorously combated gambling. In 1933 it recommended that sweepstakes remain illegal, and at the end of the decade, it was trying to create “a Christian public opinion” against gambling.⁷⁰ The Board took a similarly uncompromising stance on the issue of alcohol and temperance. In 1933 it called on the premier of Ontario to oppose “wider facilities for the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages” in that province. In 1934 the moral reform committee of the Board urged total abstinence from alcohol, hoping for “an enlightened and more definitely Christian society [which] will find no place for the drink traffic or for drinking customs.”⁷¹ This stance was echoed in a 1936 General Council statement urging total abstention from alcohol for all United Church members.⁷² The BESS also took a keen interest in preservation of Sabbath observance, approvingly hearing addresses at its annual meetings from representatives of the Lord’s Day Alliance.⁷³ In 1939 a special “Report on Observance of the Lord’s Day,” emphasized the spiritual use of Sunday “as a time set apart for worship and rest.”⁷⁴ Even during the war, the Board recommended that the church generate public pressure on the government so that it would enforce the Lord’s Day Act.⁷⁵

The BESS similarly promoted clear positions on issues of sex and marriage. It saw the family as a fundamental social institution in a “Christian Democracy” – one that needed protection in light of the various pressures of modern civilization.⁷⁶ Associate secretary of the Board, Hugh Dobson, argued for “the significance of the Christian family in the making of a Christian civilization; in laying the foundation of a valid democracy, and in any movement toward the Kingdom of God.”⁷⁷ Social trends that might threaten the family were therefore stridently opposed by the Board. Dobson, for example, worked against efforts to liberalize divorce laws in 1939.⁷⁸ “Salacious literature” was also unacceptable; in 1935 the Board approvingly noted the burning in New York of over 25,000 books and pictures with that description, and in 1939 a strongly worded report asked the government to suppress such literature with “utmost vigilance.”⁷⁹ The church allowed birth control, but in case this position might be interpreted as a departure from traditional values, the BESS assured the people of the church that “the Church in no way favors the childless home or sexual looseness outside of marriage.”⁸⁰ In the same vein, the Board equated abortion and infanticide, rejecting both as “abhorrent to the Christian conscience.”⁸¹ The Board again rejected extramarital sex in 1938.⁸² These positions did not necessarily entail a negative view of sex.

Veteran field secretary Ernest Thomas, for example, in his “valedictory” address before retiring from the Board, talked about the importance of “full sexual adjustment” to a “happy and fruitful” marriage, and warned that the church should not “chatter idly about divorce” if it would also do “nothing to ensure that boys and girls come to the supreme moment of life with a sacramental feeling for the human body and all its possibilities.”⁸³ Nevertheless, in the view of the Board, sex was acceptable only within marriage, and it opposed any dissociation of the two.

These moral positions, rooted though they were in traditional evangelical values, were part of a larger vision of social transformation held by United Church leaders. These leaders, in the words of BESS chairman Gallagher, saw the church as a “colony of heaven,” with a mandate to be “a centre for the diffusion of the culture of heaven,” thus “redeeming and transforming the world to the likeness of the Father’s home and family.”⁸⁴ This vision was embodied in the statement on “Christianizing the Social Order,” accepted by the United Church’s General Council in 1934, the same year as the Statement on Evangelism. “Christianizing the Social Order” affirmed the Church’s role in working to “purge society of its grosser evils,” in order that Christians “might have the opportunity of developing a Christian civilization, and that all might have an environment helpful to Christian living.” This transformation was to be accomplished by the Church as it influenced the morality of its members and more generally created “such public opinion as will demand the removal of manifest evils” from society.⁸⁵ The moral campaigns of the BESS must be understood in this context, as part of an overarching vision of a new society to be brought about through the work and influence of the Church.

As shown above, evangelism also fit into this overarching vision of social transformation. Both revived evangelism and continuing moral reform, therefore, were driven by this same impulse. The central goal of their promoters was personal and social ethical transformation that would result in a changed society. Within the paradigm, the Church was the central agent of positive change, acting as the conscience of society and as a “colony of heaven.” The church had the tools of evangelical institutional practices at its disposal, which it could use to fulfill its divinely appointed role. These tools included direct promotion of moral reform, but the central contribution of the 1930s was the recognition by church leaders that revivalism could be used to tap into the spiritual enthusiasm of Canadians and make them agents of social change. The evangelism of the United Church in the 1930s, therefore, was a technique focused on securing commitment to activism, not a means of saving sinners by challenging them to a truly evangelical conversion with its emphasis on justification by faith and eternal life. Thus, while the tireless promotion of evangelism and moral reform in the 1930s made the United Church appear evangelical, this promotion was in fact driven by a vision with little direct connection to evangelicalism.

Christian Education

During the 1930s the United Church also presented an evangelical face to its people through its Christian education program. Both “uniform” and “graded” curriculum materials were available to teachers in the church’s Sunday schools.⁸⁶ The “Uniform Lessons” were the older of the two, consisting of weekly Scripture lessons intended to cover the entire Bible. These uniform lessons had been developed by editorial staff of the Canadian churches, based on outlines from the International Sunday School Lesson Committee, an interdenominational organization that had had Canadian representation from the Methodist and Presbyterian churches since the late nineteenth century. Alongside the uniform lessons, the United Church offered a “Graded Series of Lessons” which had been used since before Church Union in 1925. The United Church Board of Religious Education released a Canadian revision of these graded lessons in 1931. Unlike the uniform lessons, which followed the same basic lesson for each age group, the graded series provided lessons designed specifically for the different departments of the church school (primary, junior, and so on) and were therefore used particularly for younger children for whom the uniform lessons might prove difficult.⁸⁷ For this reason the Board of Christian Education, which replaced the Board of Religious Education in 1932, phased out the uniform lessons for the primary department in favour of the graded lessons in 1938. With this exception, both curricula were available to teachers in the United Church throughout the 1930s and into the postwar period.

There were some faint traces of modernist theology in some of these curriculum materials. Comments by Sunday school publications editor George A. Little in part of a 1938 lesson for juniors, for example, hinted at a standard liberal evolutionary conception of Judaism by suggesting that the Old Testament prophets had humanly developed a more advanced conception of God than what had come before.⁸⁸ Additional explanation for intermediates of the same lesson by former Presbyterian and Knox College graduate J. Russell Harris (then a staff member of the department of Sunday school publications)⁸⁹ also hinted at modernist interpretations of the Bible in some carefully worded passages. Harris wrote that Moses “was very confident that he was inspired by God” – but not that he *was* inspired by God – and that Moses “gave laws to his people in the name of Jehovah, their God” – but not that these laws were in fact from God. Similarly, Harris did not actually teach the Trinity as fact, but simply noted that “we find Christians speaking of one God, but God revealing himself as Father, as Son, and as Holy Spirit.”⁹⁰ Writing in *The Pathfinder*, the weekly magazine for the young people’s department, George B. King, professor of New Testament and Church History at United College in Winnipeg, also seemed to question the historicity of the Old Testament by suggesting that Abraham was simply a figurative representation of the early Hebrews. Yet at the same time, he also talked about Abraham as if he was a real person.⁹¹ Clearly, while there were faint indications of modernism in the curriculum, these were so innocuous or ambiguous as to not

detract from the evangelical tenor of the materials. In any event, the materials were worlds apart from the bold modernism of the New Curriculum that would be introduced decades later.

Furthermore, the materials overwhelmingly promoted evangelical themes. A heavy emphasis on the Bible permeated both the graded and uniform lessons. Official promotions of the materials noted that the graded lessons were “based directly on Bible material,” and praised the uniform lessons because “as in the Graded Lessons, the Bible is the source book.”⁹² A Board of Christian Education publication promoting the graded lessons for juniors highlighted the fact that they were “based on the Bible, especially the parts of it which Juniors can understand best and translate into use in their own lives every day.”⁹³ These claims were borne out by the materials themselves. A typical weekly graded lesson for the primary department, for example, consisted primarily of a short Bible passage and a memory verse or verses.⁹⁴ The multi-lesson themes for the junior department in the late 1930s included “The Bible helping us to find God’s way”; “The Bible in the world,” and “Bible truths for World Builders.”⁹⁵ One sample lesson for juniors encouraged a devotional reading of the Psalms, saying that “the laws of God, his commandments, are perfect, right, pure, true, much to be desired and faithfully obeyed. Are these our personal convictions?” Board of Christian Education materials instructed teachers to treat the Bible as the peerless source for answers to students’ questions: “as questions about God emerge in our discussions, let us admit our inadequate knowledge, but let us turn often to the Book of Books, letting it speak for itself.” Teachers were also advised to have students regularly look up particular verses in their Bibles, following along with the teacher.⁹⁶ An intermediate lesson on “Why Are We Interested in the Bible” did not even implicitly question the Bible’s reliability, treating it instead as a collection of “stories about real people in real life situations.”⁹⁷ The curricula also encouraged Bible memorization.⁹⁸ An officially approved “Memory Course” primarily consisting of Bible verses, plus a few hymns and prayers, was in use through the 1930s and early 1940s. It emphasized memorization through drill work.⁹⁹ Church schools in this period also used “Bible Study Tests” on a quarterly basis, emphasizing factual Bible knowledge. The Board of Christian Education and the United Church Publishing House issued certificates for those students who passed three out of the four quarterly tests in any given year as a reward to encourage Bible study.¹⁰⁰

In addition to this focus on the Bible, the curricula in use during the 1930s also emphasized other topics dear to evangelicals, such as missions and evangelical morality. As a Board of Christian Education booklet for the junior church school pointed out, the materials included “studies pertaining to missionary and temperance education.”¹⁰¹ A sample lesson for the primary department, for example, included a story about an African boy who tells his family and village about Jesus, with the result that “The boys and girls learned to love Jesus. They learned to love God.”¹⁰² Generally, the graded materials taught students to use “the Bible as a guide for living,” emphasizing topics such as

“Being obedient at home,” “Working together,” and “Praising God for his good gifts.”¹⁰³ The uniform lessons also were designed as aids for the teacher “in the all-important task of helping the youth of our land to develop Christian character.”¹⁰⁴ In their emphasis on the Bible, missions, and evangelical morality, therefore, the graded and uniform lessons promoted a generally evangelical viewpoint.

This evangelical emphasis could also be seen in the official purposes of the church school, as stated in Board of Christian Education publications. Generally, the materials were designed to help students gain “a Christian view of life” and ultimately, “an intelligent faith in God, personal commitment to Jesus Christ, a desire to join the membership of the church and a willingness to participate in the building of a Christian community and Christian world.”¹⁰⁵ Specifically, the purposes of the church school were pro-Bible. Intermediates were supposed to learn “to know the Bible as a library of books through which God is revealed, supremely in the life of Jesus; [and] to see that the men and women who lived in Bible times have many experiences in common with their own, and to lead them to use the Bible in their devotional life today.” Significantly, the quintessential evangelical goal of conversion was also a central purpose of the church school in these curriculum materials. One of the purposes of the intermediate department was to “lead boys and girls to know Jesus as Friend, Companion, Teacher and Leader, and to accept him as Saviour and Lord.”¹⁰⁶ Similarly, teachers of seniors were to lead them “into a real experience of God,” and help them “to know Jesus Christ as the Son of God who reveals the Father, and to accept him as Saviour and Lord.”¹⁰⁷ Similarly, an emphasis on Christ-centred morality and character-building compatible with traditional evangelicalism characterized the purposes of the church school. For juniors, one of these purposes was learning “to act in every-day life according to the example and teachings of Jesus,” while intermediates were to learn “to apply the teachings of Jesus in their actions at home, their conduct in school, and in all their daily living.”¹⁰⁸

Interestingly, there were a few signs in the stated purposes that the Christian education staff, like the BESS, saw evangelical conversionism and morality as tools for building a new society and did not themselves hold evangelical beliefs. One of the purposes of the church school for juniors was to “awaken the desire to make the kingdom of God a reality on earth,” and as already mentioned, to produce “a willingness to participate in the building of a Christian community and Christian world.”¹⁰⁹ Teachers of intermediates were likewise expected to help their students “to see that they share in the bringing in of the kingdom, and in building a better world through taking part in the cause of Christian missions, social justice, world peace and other endeavours.”¹¹⁰ One of the purposes of the senior department was to “help Seniors to bring home, school, church, community, national and international life increasingly into accord with Christian standards by studying the bearing of our Lord’s life and teachings on both individual and social life, and by personal and corporate Christian action.”¹¹¹

Enlisting students in the project of social transformation was clearly a central goal of the church school. At the same time, other subtle aspects of the stated purposes call into question the commitment of the Christian education staff to evangelical beliefs. Conversion, for example, was implicitly desirable because it would produce renewed commitment to the moral and social purposes of the church. One searches the purposes in vain for a mention of justification, eternal life, or heaven. The description of the Bible in the purposes of the church school for seniors, as “the record of the growing revelation of God,” was suggestive of a modernist rather than an evangelical view. The Christian education program of the 1930s therefore fit well into the emerging paradigm of the church leadership, which harnessed evangelical themes and practices to a project of social transformation without embracing the evangelical beliefs traditionally linked to those themes and practices.

Even more interestingly, the way the Board of Christian Education handled a perceived crisis in Christian education towards the end of the decade shows that the shift to spiritual and evangelistic emphases seen in the BESS and the Joint Committee on the Evangelization of Canadian Life was also affecting the leaders of Christian education. In “The Sunday School At the Cross-Roads: A statement prepared by the Board of Christian Education for the use of Conference and Presbytery Committees,” (1938), the Board identified some “disquieting facts” about Christian education in the United Church.¹¹² Foremost among these was a “rather serious decrease in enrollment and attendance at our Sunday Schools” – specifically, a decline of over eight per cent in enrolment of pupils and teachers in United Church Sunday schools since 1932. Even accounting for a three per cent decrease due to a slowing birth rate, this left a real decline of about five per cent. While this was not as serious as the reported figures from British churches (a 16 per cent decrease in enrolment in Sunday schools of the Methodist Episcopal Church between 1922 and 1936, and 29 per cent in the Church of Scotland between 1901 and 1935) it was still significant enough to concern the Board. Citing a Methodist Episcopal Church study of the issue, the Board worried about the general decline in religious observance at home and church, a lack of evangelistic fervour, and a rise of “secularism” in popular thinking. In tandem with these trends the Board detected a “very serious general moral sag, not only among young people but adults as well, during recent years,” which was both in part a result and in part a cause of the decrease in Sunday school enrolment.

More telling than this concern about spiritual and moral decline – hardly a novelty in clerical thinking – was the Board’s analysis of the causes and suggested “remedies” for the problem. Some of the usual suspects were cited by the Board, including social factors such as the “demoralizing effect” of the Depression and the proliferation of “counter attractions” such as “Sunday motoring and visiting, the radio, amusements and recreation of every kind,” and, on a different note, competition from “opposition Sunday schools of other sects and cults.” These had some significance, but “Over and above all, is the fact that the main stream of life today is negative to religion, that secularism and materialism have come down

like a dark cloud upon us and in many cases have shut out the rays of religious idealism and hope.” In light of this major challenge of “secularism and materialism,” the main obstacles to the success of the church in general and Christian education in particular, according to the Board, were a lack of focus on spiritual and theological realities on the one hand, and a lack of evangelistic fervour on the other. The Board pointed to what it saw as a “serious loss in Christian faith and conviction, the loss of a sense of the reality of God in the world, and the weakening of the foundation principles of Christian faith and conduct.” Alongside this, the church had been neglecting its task of evangelizing adults: “A generation or more ago, large efforts were being put forth in the direction of adult evangelism. Now relatively few adults are being enlisted in the Christian faith and there has been also a serious decline in religious conviction on the part of many church members including parents.” Similarly, within the church school itself “there has too often been a lack of religious conviction and evangelistic passion on the part of officers and workers.” Simply imparting “religious truth” was “not enough”; students must also “be led to a definite commitment of their lives to these truths and to Him who is the Way and the Truth and the Life.”¹¹³ The solution to the poor state of affairs in Christian education, therefore, was an emphatic return to a spiritual, theological, and evangelistic faith. Invoking the example of John Wesley – one of the fathers of modern evangelicalism – the Board urged a greater emphasis on evangelism and (quoting the Methodist Episcopal Church) “a deeper experience of God.”¹¹⁴ According to the Board “a deeper experience of the nature and reality of God and the validity of those spiritual values which are at the basis of all true moral and religious progress” was needed to reverse the decline in enrolment. Ministers, parents, and Sunday school teachers all had a role to play in combating the problem. The Board urged ministers, for example, to seek “those resources of divine power which alone will enable the Church to meet the crises of today,” and exhorted teachers to cultivate “a deepening of their own spiritual lives.”¹¹⁵ These prescriptions strikingly paralleled the new emphases in the BESS and the Joint Committee.

Revisiting the issue the following year, the Board again propounded these principles for “renewal and recovery.” It called for a focus on theological verities, urging teachers to become “more convinced believers in the Christian faith,” and asking the Sunday school to “become more positive and definite in its interpretation of the fundamental principles” of that faith. In the view of the Board, Sunday school leaders needed to attend to their own personal spiritual experience by realizing that “divine resources are available” and making use of them.¹¹⁶ Specifically,

Deepening and renewal of the Christian experience and conviction of many teachers and officers is primary and essential, and can be brought about if the workers concerned are willing to cultivate personal

enrichment through private prayer, Bible study, group fellowship, the public worship of God and other means of grace.¹¹⁷

In addition to this reemphasis on foundational theological truths and spiritual experience, the Board reiterated its call for evangelism. One of the “necessary conditions” for renewal, in its view, was a “warm evangelistic and missionary tone in pulpit exposition, in pastoral service, and in the work of the congregation as a whole.”¹¹⁸ Suggesting that only about one quarter of Sunday school students eventually became church members, the Board exclaimed that this record “is certainly not good enough for today. The Sunday School should seek more earnestly to secure the commitment of young people to Christ and the Christian way of life.”¹¹⁹

In its response to the decline in Sunday school enrolment in the late 1930s, therefore, the Board of Christian Education demonstrated its participation in the general return to theological verities, spiritual experience, and hearty evangelism in the United Church. The above analysis of the curricula of the period has also revealed signs that the Board mirrored, albeit faintly, the lack of evangelical beliefs evident in the 1934 “Statement on Evangelism.” Nevertheless, the emphases on the Bible, conversion, and traditional morality in the curricula of the 1930s would have satisfied evangelically-minded teachers and parents in the United Church. As much as, and perhaps more than, the church’s emphasis on evangelism and moral reform, the character of Christian education in the 1930s gave the United Church an evangelical look in the eyes of its members.

The Statement of Faith, 1940

Despite their embrace of evangelical emphases in evangelism, moral reform, and Christian education, the lack of affinity among United Church leaders for evangelical beliefs was powerfully illustrated in the crafting of what became the United Church’s Statement of Faith in 1940. The preparation of the Statement began in 1936 when the General Council declared the need for “a Statement of Faith that shall embody in concise and intelligible form what we in the United Church conceive to be the substance of Christian belief.”¹²⁰ The resulting Commission on Christian Faith included as members at various times former moderators George C. Pidgeon and Richard Roberts, several theological professors (including original chairman J.M. Shaw, later chairman Richard Davidson, John Line, and John MacLeod) and D.N. McLachlan’s successor as secretary of the BESS, J.R. Mutchmor.¹²¹ The Commission was organized into a central committee with regional satellite groups, the idea being that the central committee would prepare an initial draft for comment by these regional groups, then a final draft taking their comments into account.¹²²

Since the central committee had some difficulty agreeing on the purpose and form of the statement, it took many drafts and multiple consultations with the regional groups before one was produced.¹²³ These consultations, which included

regional conferences in which the smaller groups met together, as well as at least one meeting with the principals of United Church theological colleges from across the country, revealed a modernist theology far removed from the basic elements of evangelical orthodoxy. At the meeting between the central committee and the principals of theological colleges in April 1939, the draft statement under consideration was criticized for not being sufficiently modern. Various participants in the discussion criticized the statement “God made man,” because it did not take into account the “biologist’s point of view,” insisted that the Statement of Faith should not be “tied-up” to the New Testament, since Jesus had never been married, had to vote, or joined a union, and warned that affirmation of the resurrection should not be “based on a physical fact.” A peculiar point arose in connection with the Holy Spirit; some felt that the draft statement under consideration erred in over-using personal pronouns for this traditional third Person of the Trinity, presumably because personal pronouns implied personhood. Echoing the Statement on Evangelism from 1934, others also felt that the draft statement’s comments on the atonement, the resurrection, and the deity of Christ were overly reliant on Pauline theology.¹²⁴

Meetings with the regional conferences produced similar criticisms, most of which centred on the doctrine of the Trinity. In addition to calls for more emphasis on Jesus’s earthly life, at least one participant urged the removal of lines describing Jesus as “truly man and truly God,” and as “God’s very being”¹²⁵ – a request that was honoured, as these lines did not survive into the final statement. As in the meeting with the theological college principals, some participants objected to the use of personal pronouns for the Holy Spirit, with others suggesting that the Holy Spirit be described simply as “God in action” or the “Power of God.” Negative reactions to the use of the word “person” in reference to the persons of the Trinity came from regional conferences at both ends of the country. In light of these problems, it is not surprising that there was some doubt about the value of having a section on the Trinity at all.¹²⁶

A letter from A.S. Tuttle, principal of St. Stephen’s College in Edmonton, to J.R. Mutchmor shows that at least some members of the church’s theological elite were miles away from evangelical orthodoxy in their thinking on basic Christian doctrines.¹²⁷ Having served in a variety of Methodist pastorates and as principal of Alberta College before Church Union, subsequently as principal of St. Stephen’s, and ultimately as moderator of the United Church from 1940-1942, Tuttle was a significant figure in the denomination.¹²⁸ His views in connection with the Statement of Faith are illuminating. To begin with, he saw theological concepts not primarily as accurate descriptions of reality, but rather as flexible tools in the hands of those who used them. Thus, there was “some value in retaining certain concepts which have arisen in the history of the Christian community in helping to keep the historical stream flowing through the church,” even when those using the concepts did not accept their traditional meaning. For example, his committee had struggled with the doctrine of the Trinity, being able to agree only that “there is a threefold manifestation of God.” Tuttle was not

content to leave the issue there, however. On the one hand, in a quintessentially modernist statement, he wrote that the “old conception, of course, of three persons in the Godhead is quite out of harmony with modern thinking,” and therefore, by implication, had to be discarded. On the other hand, if the doctrine was redefined it could be made to fit with “modern thinking.” Consequently, he argued that the traditional doctrine could somehow “be stated in such a way as to harmonize with modern psychology and with the doctrine of emergent evolution culminating in the incarnation.” In this view, the second person of the Trinity could be reconceptualized as a psychological aspect of God “immanently expressed” in the stages of biological evolution until it found “a form in which he could express the fullness of himself” – Jesus of Nazareth. Thus, the word “Trinity,” which had meant basically the same thing in Christian thought through almost the whole history of the faith, could actually mean something entirely different to a modernist such as Tuttle, even though he used the same word. While this particular interpretation was possibly unique to Tuttle, the basic modernist principle that lay behind it was not. Tuttle wanted a “re-statement of our doctrines ... in harmony with modern concepts,” and the foregoing analysis of the submissions from college principals and regional conferences suggests that the same desire motivated their reinterpretation of Christian doctrine.

Nevertheless, the final document, which received “general approval” from General Council in 1940¹²⁹ was, in one sense, conservative. It contained no statements that directly contradicted the doctrinal statement of the Basis of Union, the United Church’s 1925 constitution, and more generally did not contain any novel doctrines such as Tuttle’s evolutionary Jesus. This conservatism, which avoided promoting such radical ideas, perhaps reflects the desire of the Commission’s chairman, Dr. Richard Davidson, to have a statement that would be “timely and forward-looking” while remaining “conservative in the best sense of the word.”¹³⁰ Presumably Davidson realized that little would be gained by alienating the laity or the other Protestant denominations with a radical statement of faith, to say nothing of the risk such a statement would face of being ignominiously rejected by General Council. Given the rising star of neo-orthodoxy in theological circles, it is possible that this movement’s closer emphasis on traditional biblical concepts like sin and God’s transcendence also moderated the more radical ideas of classical theological liberalism to produce a more “conservative” statement.

Although the Statement of Faith was conservative in what it did say, it was liberal in what it left out. A simple comparison of the 1925 Basis of Union with the 1940 document shows that the latter considerably attenuated the orthodox aspects of the former. Like the Basis of Union, the Statement of Faith treated Holy Scripture as a “record” of God’s revelation, rather than God’s revelation itself. But going beyond this, the Statement of Faith excised the Basis of Union’s references to the existence of three equal persons in the Godhead, and by extension any explicit reference to the personhood of the Holy Spirit or the deity of Christ. Despite the warnings of the regional groups that it would have to make

a statement on the question one way or another, the Commission also passed over the virgin birth in significant silence.¹³¹ In a subtle downplaying of the doctrine of hell, the statement noted that those who reject God's mercy "shut themselves out from the light and joy of salvation," but shied away from the Basis of Union's clear reference to the "eternal punishment" of the "finally impenitent." In line with the recommendations of various participants in the consultative process, the statement did not assert a physical resurrection of Christ, nor did it use the "Pauline" terms of the Basis of Union which spoke of the atonement and salvation using concepts like sacrifice, propitiation, and justification. In addition to this reticence in matters of "mere" Christianity and traditional Protestantism, the Statement contained no clear statement on conversion, the evangelical doctrine *par excellence*, other than a short phrase mentioning that the Christian life "begins with repentance and faith."¹³²

The conclusion that the Commission on Christian Faith advisedly excised certain evangelical doctrines from the formal affirmation of the faith of the Church at the behest of various church leaders with modernist views, especially theological professors, is inescapable. This action cannot be attributed to a simple desire to minimize doctrine as such, since Davidson summarized the general consensus of the period when he emphasized the importance of doctrine for his time.¹³³ Rather, the loud silences of the document reveal the desire of the church elites¹³⁴ to refashion the faith of their church so that it no longer contained those elements in which they no longer believed. Yet the fact that the Statement carefully avoided contradicting the Basis of Union, or positively advocating modernist theology, points to a certain caution on the part of its framers. Thus, while the leaders of the United Church had embraced modernism, it was, for the time being, a quiet modernism.

Conclusion

The 1930s witnessed the formation of a new leadership paradigm in the United Church as the denomination's leaders promoted an emphasis on evangelism and a return to a personal religion of spiritual experience. This promotion was part of a strategy to respond to the Depression at home and the threat of materialistic totalitarian ideologies abroad, with an eye cocked to the "sects" whose emotional evangelism competed for the United Church's constituency. In its return to an emphasis on basic theological principles, the "revival" was helped along by the international theological climate produced by neo-orthodoxy. At the same time, the Christian education and moral reform programs of the church promoted evangelical values of Biblicism, conversionism, and traditional evangelical morality. Yet the leaders who crafted and maintained these programs and a reinvigorated evangelism did not actually hold evangelical beliefs themselves. Rather, they adopted evangelical practices and emphases to further other objectives – most notably, the creation of a Christian society under the tutelage of the Church. At the end of the decade, the administrative and

theological elite of the United Church gathered to produce a new “Statement of Faith” for the denomination. This statement abandoned the more evangelical elements of the 1925 Basis of Union, but through unobtrusive omissions and subtle distinctions rather than bold proclamations of modernism.

Using evangelicalism as a benchmark, then, this new paradigm combined “loud” evangelical practices and “quiet” modernist beliefs. The evangelical institutional practices – including evangelism, moral reform, and Christian education – were “loud” in that they were highly visible to the average church member. Being a member of the United Church in the 1930s meant being surrounded by almost incessant campaigns for more enthusiastic evangelism and more uncompromising moral reform, and, if one was a parent or church school teacher, with pervasive evangelical emphases in the Christian education curricula. On the other hand, the modernism of the church’s leaders was “quiet” because average church members were not likely to examine the annual reports of the BESS with a fine-toothed theological comb. Nor were they privy to documents like the submissions of the committees and conferences that produced the Statement of Faith. From the perspective of evangelicals in the United Church, consequently, their denomination was self-evidently evangelical. As this chapter has argued, however, while the United Church of the 1930s *looked* evangelical, it was, in fact, not.

¹ UCA, Records of the Joint Committee on the Evangelization of Canadian Life [JCECL], 45-2, "Evangelization of Canadian Life: A Canada-Wide Mission," n/d (1936?).

² Board of Evangelism and Social Service, Annual Report [BESS AR] 1935/1936, Report of Committee on Evangelism 22.

³ David B. Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith: Canadian Protestant Clergy and the Crisis of Belief, 1850-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 227.

⁴ Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada, 1900-1940* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 227, 248-249.

⁵ David Plaxton, "'We will Evangelize with a Whole Gospel or None': Evangelicalism and the United Church of Canada," in *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience*, ed. George Rawlyk (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 111-116.

⁶ See Kevin Kee, *Revivalists: Marketing the Gospel in English Canada, 1884-1957* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), chapter 3; see also Marshall, chapter 8; and Christie and Gauvreau, *Full-Orbed*, 227-234.

⁷ UCA, D.N. McLachlan biographical file, obituary from Manitoba Conference minutes.

⁸ BESS AR 1930/1931, Report of Secretary McLachlan, 16.

⁹ UCA, JCECL, 45-1, C.W. Vernon, "Report on the Proposed Simultaneous Movement for the Evangelization of Canadian Life. Prepared at the Request of the Primate for the Executive Council of General Synod," Oct. 25, 1932.

¹⁰ UCA, JCECL, 45-1, Minutes of Oct. 21, 1932. Marshall agrees that Protestant leaders saw the Depression as a spiritual crisis. See Marshall, 211-212.

¹¹ UCA, JCECL, 45-1, "Joint Committee on the Evangelization of Canadian Life," n/d.

¹² BESS AR 1932/1933, Report of Secretary McLachlan, 17-18.

¹³ BESS AR 1933/1934, Report of Field Secretary John Coburn, 34.

¹⁴ For this growth, see Robert K. Burkinshaw, *Pilgrims in Lotus Land: Conservative Protestantism in British Columbia, 1917-1981* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), especially chapters 4 and 5; and D. Bruce Hindmarsh, "The Winnipeg Fundamentalist Network, 1910-1940: The Roots of Transdenominational Evangelicalism in Manitoba and Saskatchewan," in *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience*, ed. George Rawlyk (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 303-319. Hindmarsh notes the inapplicability of the "sect" moniker to the conservative network in Winnipeg, 317.

¹⁵ BESS AR 1935/1936, Report of Secretary McLachlan, 26.

¹⁶ UCA, JCECL, 45-1 “Joint Committee on the Evangelization of Canadian Life,” n/d; Minutes of Oct. 21, 1932.

¹⁷ See Robert Wright, *A World Mission: Canadian Protestantism and the Quest for a New International Order, 1918-1939* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991), 233-243.

¹⁸ Wright, *A World Mission*; see, for example, 73-74, 226-230.

¹⁹ Christie and Gauvreau, 239.

²⁰ McLeod, *Religious Crisis*, 31-35, 45.

²¹ UCA, JCECL, 45-2 Minutes, Apr. 17, 1935

²² BESS AR 1935/1936, Report of Assoc. Sec. Dobson, 30.

²³ Letter from McLachlan to the ministers of the UCC, May 4, 1934, looseleaf insert in BESS AR 1933/1934.

²⁴ BESS AR 1935/1936, Report of Field Secretary Ernest Thomas, 35.

²⁵ McLachlan to ministers of UCC, May 4, 1934, found enclosed in BESS AR 1933/1934.

²⁶ United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings*, 1936, Report on “Evangelization of Canadian Life”, 80.

²⁷ BESS AR 1938/1938, Address of Chairman Gallagher, 5-6.

²⁸ UCA, JCECL, 45-1, “Joint Committee on the Evangelization of Canadian Life,” n/d.

²⁹ See Wright, *A World Mission*, 165-169; and C. Andrew Lawson, “Winning Men for Christ,” in *The Minister’s Handbook: A Guidebook for Ministers in The United Church of Canada*, ed. Randolph Chalmers (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1952), 103 and quotation there.

³⁰ UCA, JCECL, 45-1 Minutes of Oct 21, 1932, Minutes of Exec., Jan 9, 1933.

³¹ For a concise and accessible introduction to Barth and neo-orthodoxy in general, see Stanley J. Grenz and Roger Olson, *20th Century Theology: God & the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1992), chapter 3, “The Revolt Against Immanence: Transcendence in Neo-orthodoxy,” especially 63-77.

³² Plaxton, “A Whole Gospel for a Whole Nation: The Cultures of Tradition and Change in The United Church of Canada and its Antecedents,” (PhD diss., Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario, 1997), 120, 268, 291, 308, 342 notes the importance of neo-orthodox influences for the thought of the important leaders George Pidgeon and (especially) Gordon Sisco. Interestingly, Hubert Krygsman, “Freedom and Grace: Mainline Protestant Thought in Canada, 1900-1960,” (PhD diss., Carleton University, Ottawa, 1997), 257, suggests that some Canadian mainline Protestant leaders including Richard Roberts of the United Church, were already moving in this direction in the 1920s and were well prepared to accept Barth’s ideas when they encountered them. Robert Wright has also noted the impact of American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr’s radical political application of neo-orthodoxy on at least one United Church thinker. Wright, *A*

World Mission, 69-74. See also Christie and Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity*, 220.

³³ Marshall, 255.

³⁴ UCA, JCECL, 45-1 Minutes of Nov. 15, 1934, Minutes of Dec. 7, 1934.

It would seem that, like the Joint Committee's attempts to secure British speakers, this attempt was not successful.

³⁵ BESS AR 1938/1939, Address of Chairman Gallagher, 6.

³⁶ JCECL, 45-1, "Joint Committee on the Evangelization of Canadian Life," n/d (pres. 1932)

³⁷ BESS AR 1937/1938, Report of Sessional Committee on Evangelism, 27.

³⁸ BESS AR 1941/1942, Address by John Line, 44-49.

³⁹ BESS AR 1938/1939, Address of Chairman Gallagher, 5-6; JCECL, 45-1, "Joint Committee on the Evangelization of Canadian Life," n/d (pres. 1932).

⁴⁰ UCA, JCECL, 45-1, "Joint Committee on the Evangelization of Canadian Life," n/d.

⁴¹ BESS AR 1932/1933, Report of Associate Secretary Hugh Dobson, 19.

⁴² BESS AR 1933/1934, Report of Secretary McLachlan, 27-28.

⁴³ Various critiques of capitalist society were common, though not always dominant, themes among mainline Protestant leaders in Canada before the Second World War. On the heyday of the social gospel movement in Canada, which sought a wide-ranging transformation of Canadian society, see Allen, *The Social Passion*. Although Christie and Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity*, 239-242, argue that United Church leaders turned their backs on the project of social transformation in the 1930s, the research cited here suggests that several prominent leaders, including the leaders of the BESS, were still keenly pursuing that project.

⁴⁴ See, for example, UCA, JCECL, 45-1, "Minutes of the Joint Conference on Evangelism," May 2, 1932; Minutes, Sep 11, 1934.

⁴⁵ UCA, JCECL, 45-1 Minutes of Dec 28, 1932; Minutes of Exec., Jan 9, 1933.

⁴⁶ UCA, JCECL, 45-1 Minutes, Sep 11, 1934.

⁴⁷ Definition from "The Statement on Evangelism," in BESS AR 1935/1936, 38; see David Plaxton, 114-115.

⁴⁸ "The Statement on Evangelism," in BESS AR 1935/1936, 42-45.

⁴⁹ "The Statement on Evangelism," 43-44.

⁵⁰ "The Statement on Evangelism," 42.

⁵¹ "The Statement on Evangelism," 40, 42, 47.

⁵² "The Statement on Evangelism," 41, 39-40, 38.

⁵³ "The Statement on Evangelism," 40-41, 43.

⁵⁴ "The Statement on Evangelism," 42, 48.

⁵⁵ "The Statement on Evangelism," 47, 38, 42.

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- ⁵⁶ UCA, JCECL, 45-1 “A Mission of Renewal,” n/d, 45-2 Minutes, Jan. 23, 1935.
- ⁵⁷ UCA, JCECL, 45-1 “A Mission of Renewal,” n/d, (Dec. 1934).
- ⁵⁸ UCA, JCECL, 45-2 Minutes, Mar. 12, 1935; 45-6, Duncan McTavish to McLachlan, Mar. 7, 1935.
- ⁵⁹ UCA, JCECL, 45-2 Minutes, May 22, 1935
- ⁶⁰ See, for example, UCA, JCECL, 45-2, “Canada-Wide Evangelism – Autumn 1936”; 45-8 Pamphlet, “A Service of Witness,” Order of Service for Maple Leaf Gardens, Nov. 18, 1936; 45-3 Minutes of Executive, Oct. 15, 1937; 45-3 Minutes of Executive, Oct. 20, 1938.
- ⁶¹ BESS AR 1938/1939, Report of Field Secretary John Coburn, 37.
- ⁶² See, for example, UCA, JCECL, 45-8, J.A. Pue-Gilchrist to McLachlan, Oct. 14, 1936; 45-8, James W. Clarke to Hugh Dobson, Nov. 1, 1936; BESS AR 1938/1939, Report of Joint Committee on the Evangelization of Canadian Life, 44.
- ⁶³ UCA, JCECL, 45-2, “Evangelization of Canadian Life: A Canada-Wide Mission,” n/d; 45-2, “Canada-Wide Evangelism – Autumn 1936”.
- ⁶⁴ UCA, JCECL, 45-8, George C. Pidgeon, “The Challenge of Jesus to Canadian Life” (enclosed with Aug. 1, 1936 letter from Pidgeon to McLachlan in same file).
- ⁶⁵ UCA, JCECL, 45-11, George C. Pidgeon to JCECL conveners and Hugh Dobson, Mar. 1938; BESS AR, 1937/1938, Report of Sessional Committee on Evangelism, 33.
- ⁶⁶ Christie and Gauvreau, *Full-Orbed*, 227, 241-243; Marshall, 205-211; Plaxton, 111-116.
- ⁶⁷ UCA, JCECL, 45-2 Minutes, Mar. 21, 1935.
- ⁶⁸ UCA, JCECL, 45-9 “Copy of the Action of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service,” Apr. 7-9, 1937
- ⁶⁹ BESS AR 1937/1938, Report of Secretary McLachlan, 40.
- ⁷⁰ BESS AR 1939/1940, Report of Field Secretary John Coburn, 31.
- ⁷¹ BESS AR 1933/1934, Report of Sessional Committee on Moral Reform, 22-23.
- ⁷² BESS AR 1936/1937, “The United Church and the Liquor Problem,” 50-57.
- ⁷³ BESS AR 1932/1933, 6, 13.
- ⁷⁴ BESS AR 1938/1939, Report on Observance of the Lord’s Day, 48.
- ⁷⁵ BESS AR 1939/1940, Report of Field Secretary John Coburn, 31.
- ⁷⁶ BESS AR 1938/1939, 51.
- ⁷⁷ BESS AR 1939/1940, 29.
- ⁷⁸ BESS AR 1938/1939, Report of Associate Secretary Hugh Dobson, 36.
- ⁷⁹ BESS AR 1934/1935, Report of Secretary McLachlan, 35; BESS AR 1938/1939, Report of Sessional Committee on Social Problems, 29.

⁸⁰ BESS AR 1936/1937, Report of Sessional Committee on Social Problems, 27-29.

⁸¹ BESS AR 1936/1937, "Voluntary Parenthood," 57-58.

⁸² BESS AR 1937/1938, 60-61.

⁸³ BESS AR 1935/1936, Report of Field Secretary Ernest Thomas, 35-36.

⁸⁴ BESS AR 1937/1938, Address from Chairman Gallagher, 3, 6-7.

⁸⁵ "Christianizing the Social Order," in BESS AR 1935/1936, 52, 60. See also BESS AR 1939/1940, Report of Field Secretary John Coburn, 31.

⁸⁶ This brief chronological summary of which church school curricula were used in the 1930s is based primarily on the helpful overview in UCA finding aid 160, "Board of Christian Education, Series II: Functional Committees, subseries 2: Curriculum," pp.43-47.

⁸⁷ UCA, Board of Christian Education (BCE) 15-1, "The Intermediate Department of the Church School," (Board of Christian Education and Board of Publication, [1938 curriculum]), 7.

⁸⁸ UCA, BCE 15-1, "The One True God," *The Teacher's Quarterly* (Oct. 2, 1938), in "The Junior Department of the Church School," (Board of Christian Education and Board of Publication, [1938 curriculum]). UCA, George A. Little biographical file, obituary from Toronto Conference minutes, 1958.

⁸⁹ UCA, J. Russell Harris biographical file, obituary from *United Church Observer*, January 15, 1952, and archives biographical form.

⁹⁰ UCA, BCE 15-1, "The One True God," *Intermediate Scholar's Quarterly* (Oct. 2, 1938), in "The Intermediate Department of the Church School," (Board of Christian Education and Board of Publication, [1938 curriculum]), 21ff.

⁹¹ UCA, BCE 15-1, "The Christian Education of Young People and Adults," (Board of Christian Education and Board of Publication, [1938 curriculum]), 9-11. UCA, George B. King biographical file, archives biographical form and obituary from Toronto Conference minutes, 1956.

⁹² UCA, BCE 15-1, "The Intermediate Department of the Church School," 7; BCE 15-1, "The Junior Department of the Church School," 6.

⁹³ UCA, BCE 15-1, "The Junior Department of the Church School," 6.

⁹⁴ UCA, BCE 15-1, "The Primary Department of the Church School," (Board of Christian Education and Board of Publication, [1938 curriculum]), 8-10.

⁹⁵ UCA, BCE 15-1, "The Junior Department of the Church School," 7-8.

⁹⁶ UCA, BCE 15-1, "Lesson 2: What Do We Mean By Living God's Way?" 2, 4, insert in "The Junior Department of the Church School."

⁹⁷ UCA, BCE 15-1, "The Intermediate Department of the Church School," 9ff.

⁹⁸ UCA, BCE 15-1, "Junior Bible Leaflet," 3, insert in "The Junior Department of the Church School."

⁹⁹ UCA, BCE 16-7, "A Memory Course of Bible Passages, Hymns, Prayers and Graces."

¹⁰⁰ See UCA, BCE 17-1, Bible Study Test Statistics 1939-1942, and BCE 17 (various), sample tests for 1930-1964. See also BCE 13-1, "Do You Use Bible Study Tests?" (Christian Education Handbook, 1954).

¹⁰¹ UCA, BCE 15-1, "The Junior Department of the Church School," 6.

¹⁰² UCA, BCE 15-1, "Kasela Tells About Jesus," *Primary Bible Lessons*, lesson 2, Winter Quarter, n/d, insert in "The Primary Department of the Church School," 6. See also "The Junior Department of the Church School," 8.

¹⁰³ UCA, BCE 15-1, "The Primary Department of the Church School," 2, 8-10.

¹⁰⁴ UCA, BCE 15-1, "The Junior Department of the Church School," 6.

¹⁰⁵ UCA, BCE 15-1, "The Junior Department of the Church School," 3; "The Senior Department of the Church School," 5.

¹⁰⁶ UCA, BCE 15-1, "The Intermediate Department of the Church School," 3-4.

¹⁰⁷ UCA, BCE 15-1, "The Senior Department of the Church School," 28.

¹⁰⁸ UCA, BCE 15-1, "The Junior Department of the Church School," 3; "The Intermediate Department of the Church School," 3-4.

¹⁰⁹ UCA, BCE 15-1, "The Junior Department of the Church School," 3; "The Senior Department of the Church School," 5.

¹¹⁰ UCA, BCE 15-1, "The Intermediate Department of the Church School," 3-4.

¹¹¹ UCA, BCE 15-1, "The Senior Department of the Church School," 28.

¹¹² UCA, BCE 15-3, "The Sunday School At the Cross-Roads: A statement prepared by the Board of Christian Education for the use of Conference and Presbytery Committees," [1938], 2.

¹¹³ UCA, BCE 15-3, "The Sunday School At the Cross-Roads," 3.

¹¹⁴ UCA, BCE 15-3, "The Sunday School At the Cross-Roads," 3.

¹¹⁵ UCA, BCE 15-3, "The Sunday School At the Cross-Roads," 4.

¹¹⁶ UCA, BCE 15-3, "The Sunday School Moves Forward: A statement prepared by the Board of Christian Education for the use of Conference and Presbytery Committees," (April 1938), 1-2.

¹¹⁷ UCA, BCE 15-3, "The Sunday School Moves Forward," 2.

¹¹⁸ UCA, BCE 15-3, "The Sunday School Moves Forward," 1.

¹¹⁹ UCA, BCE 15-3, "The Sunday School Moves Forward," 2.

¹²⁰ UCA, Records of the Commission on Christian Faith [CCF], 1-1, "Digest of Proceedings," Nov. 17, 1938.

¹²¹ UCA, Records of the Commission on Christian Faith [CCF], 1-1, "Digest of Proceedings," Nov. 17, 1938.

¹²² UCA, Records of the Commission on Christian Faith [CCF], 1-1, "Digest of Proceedings," Nov. 17, 1938; Minutes, May 26, 1939.

¹²³ UCA, CCF, 1-1, "Digest of Proceedings," Nov. 17, 1938; Minutes, May 26, 1939.

¹²⁴ These comments are taken from UCA, CCF, 1-1, Minutes, Apr. 17, 1939; quotations are from the wording of the minutes.

¹²⁵ UCA, CCF, 1-1, Minutes of Conference of Western Regional Committees, Saskatoon, Oct. 16, 1939; I have arrived at the latter conclusion by comparing UCA, CCF, 1-1, Minutes of Conference of Central and Eastern Regional Committees, Montreal, Nov. 20, 1939, with the draft files in UCA, CCF, 2-12.

¹²⁶ UCA, CCF, 1-1, Minutes of Conference of Western Regional Committees, Saskatoon, Oct. 16, 1939.; Minutes of Conference of Central and Eastern Regional Committees, Montreal, Nov. 20, 1939.

¹²⁷ UCA, CCF 1-2, A.S. Tuttle to J.R. Mutchmor.

¹²⁸ UCA, A.S. Tuttle biographical file, archives biographical form.

¹²⁹ United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings*, 1940, 40.

¹³⁰ UCA, CCF, 1-1, Minutes, Apr. 17, 1939.

¹³¹ For this warning, see UCA, CCF, 1-1, Minutes of Conference of Western Regional Committees, Saskatoon, Oct. 16, 1939.

¹³² See "A Statement of the Faith," United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings*, 1940, 168-172; and "Basis of Union," United Church of Canada, *Yearbook and Record of Proceedings*, 1926, 389.

¹³³ UCA, CCF, 1-1, Minutes of Conference of Central and Eastern Regional Committees, Montreal, Nov. 20, 1939.

¹³⁴ As mentioned, participants in the work of the Commission included former and future moderators, principals of theological colleges, theological professors, and members of the BESS.

CHAPTER 2

THE PARADIGM ENDURES, 1940-1963

The publication of the Statement of Faith in 1940 did not of course slow the work of the United Church in other areas. Nor did the Second World War reduce its enthusiasm for evangelically-oriented projects of Christian education, moral reform, and evangelism. To the contrary, through the 1940s, the 1950s, and into the early 1960s, the United Church followed a path in these three areas that in all major respects reflected the central emphases of the 1930s. Thus, although many if not most church leaders continued to hold modernist beliefs, most of the time they continued to promote evangelical themes and practices in their work with the laity. Through the work of the Board of Christian Education, the United Church continued to promote frequent use, and by default, a high view, of the Bible, while explicitly working for the conversion of the children of the church and their adoption of a traditional moral attitude. Through the work of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service (BESS) and special commissions, the United Church continued to promote the prewar view of the church as a moral agent in society on a mission to promote traditional Christian moral principles in a wide variety of settings. Finally, through the work of the BESS, the United Church continued to emphasize vigorous evangelism. This is not to say, however, that the 1940s and 1950s were a time of unmitigated sameness or stagnation. Indeed, Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau have suggested that this was a time of “intense cultural and social negotiation, of a constant shifting of axes between the elements of tradition and modernity.”¹ Just as, according to Christie and Gauvreau, the years after 1955 were a time of intense adjustment to modernity, so too did the late 1950s bring changes to the United Church that heralded the end of the paradigm forged in the 1930s. Nevertheless, the shattering of the paradigm would not occur until the 1960s. Through all the activity of the 1940s and 1950s, the basic paradigm of the 1930s endured.

Christian Education, 1940-1963

As we have seen, Christian education in the 1930s strongly reflected an evangelical orientation in its emphasis on the Bible, personal commitment to Christ, and traditional moral themes. These emphases continued to dominate Christian education in the United Church through the 1940s and 1950s, and even into the early 1960s. In part, this strong continuity was due to the fact that there was no major change in curriculum until the New Curriculum was introduced in 1964. Sunday schools throughout the church continued to use the graded and uniform Sunday school lessons in a Christian education program that maintained the evangelical emphases of the 1930s. United Church Sunday school teachers were still using “Bible study tests,” in which students tested their knowledge of the Bible, in the 1950s. As in the preceding two decades, students wrote quarterly tests with questions designed to test factual knowledge and understanding of the Bible; those students who demonstrated their strong Bible knowledge by passing three out of four annual tests were rewarded with a certificate.² The “Memory Course” of the 1930s, a book designed to encourage student memorization of

Bible verses, was replaced in the 1940s by the similar *Memory Treasures* book. Like its predecessor, it was meant to be used “as an integral part of each unit of study and used frequently in worship” in the Sunday school. Ideally, parents were supposed to use it at home with their children, and all parents, teachers and officers of the Sunday school were expected to have a copy. An explanatory section in *Memory Treasures* impressed upon readers that it was of “the utmost importance that provision be made for the frequent use of these materials by children in the home, in the Sunday School, and in the Church.”³ Like the “Memory Course,” the bulk of the book was a listing of Scripture passages plus some hymns and prayers, arranged by age level. The overall emphasis was on knowing, appreciating, and obeying the Bible, with nothing to teach or indicate a modernist understanding of the Bible.

On the other hand, there was a disjunction between the modernist views of the clergy and their teaching between the 1930s and the early 1960s, as can be seen in a manual for students for the ministry who worked in local “mission fields” during the summer. Under the heading “Questions of Biblical Interpretation,” this manual stated that “children are not to be troubled with such problems, but emphasis should always be upon the spiritual realities behind any story likely to involve difficulty. Be ready to explain (if it should be necessary) that the Bible sometimes uses pictures to show great truths.” The manual gave the rather uncontroversial example of a boy asking who wrote the Ten Commandments. The recommended answer was:

The Bible tells us that God wrote them. That was the Bible-writer’s way of saying that those Laws were given to us by God, not just made by wise men. Of course, we know that God is a Spirit, and so we must not think that the way he ‘wrote’ them was with a human hand like ours.⁴

This manual was used as early as 1942 and continued to be used until at least 1961. Significantly, it shows that students for the ministry were trained to avoid, if possible, dealing with “problems” of biblical interpretation in Christian education. When such questions were unavoidable, the correct tactic was to recommend a “spiritual” interpretation rather than a literal one, although the example given was probably chosen for its inoffensiveness: nary an evangelical would have been concerned to insist that God has literal hands. A “Bible study course” on the life of Jesus prepared by students for use on summer mission fields in the early 1940s, however, dealt with the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection without questioning their miraculous elements.⁵ Generally speaking, then, it would seem that at least this aspect of Christian education avoided open promotion of a modernist view of the Bible. This practice also showed continuity with the 1930s.

In addition to this continuity in curricula, memory work, and the use of the Bible, the Board of Christian Education continued to supply Sunday schools with traditional moral reform materials. The Christian education handbook for 1954

included a list of “Temperance Education Materials,” for example, which featured such titles as “Guard Your Grey Cells,” “I Do Not Drink Because,” and “Drinking Spoils Fun.”⁶ Even in 1963, the last year before the introduction of the New Curriculum, the Christian education handbook contained a list of similar titles, such as “It’s Smarter Not To Drink,” and “Why We Gave Up Social Drinking.”⁷ In terms of the basic materials supplied to Sunday schools by the Board of Christian Education, the hallmark of the 1940s and 1950s was continuity with the past.

More evidence that the Christian education program of the 1940s continued the general themes of the 1930s can be seen in the Board of Christian Education’s participation in two large scale promotional campaigns in the 1940s. In part because of the promotional nature of these campaigns, if anything they heightened the evangelistic character of Christian education in the 1940s. The first of these two campaigns was the United Christian Education Advance, which ran in 1941 and 1942. The Advance was an interdenominational movement originating with the 1940 meeting of the International Council of Religious Education. The United Church was one of the denominations involved in planning the Advance, and it was supported by the Anglicans, Presbyterians, and various Baptist bodies in Canada. The Advance sought “to unite Protestantism in the enterprise of reaching every person with Christian Teaching.”⁸ Using wartime language, an information booklet about the Advance cited an “emergency” facing the Protestant churches, comprised of decreasing Sunday school enrolment and lack of “Christian nurture” in many Canadian homes.⁹ The gradual decline in United Church Sunday school enrolment in the 1930s, which was troubling Christian education leaders near the end of the decade (as seen in the previous chapter), had in fact accelerated somewhat during the war.¹⁰ The organizers of the Advance feared that “thousands of children and youth are growing up in ignorance of Christian teaching,” and pointed to increasing rates of juvenile delinquency and liquor sales as evidence of the long-term effects of the situation.¹¹ There is a striking similarity here to the panicky wartime and postwar fears of delinquent youth behaviour documented by several historians, suggesting that perhaps the organizers of the Advance were influenced less by the decline in Sunday school enrolment and more by the sensationalist reports they read in the newspapers.¹² In any case, their concerns also echoed exactly the reports of “disquieting facts” in Christian education that the United Church’s Board of Christian Education had produced just a few years earlier.¹³ Just as the Board had recommended a renewed emphasis on spiritual experience and evangelism to counteract this trend, so did the Advance, which aimed to promote “regular Bible reading and prayer” alongside its major evangelistic element of “bringing each person into the fellowship of some church” and working to “reach the unchurched and to christianize the pagan elements in each community.”¹⁴

This congruence between the thinking of the Board of Christian Education and the International Council of Religious Education may have reflected the United Church’s influence on the latter, or it simply may have reflected broad

agreement among the major Protestant denominations. In either case, it was a natural fit, and the United Church leadership eagerly supported the Advance. When the Board of Christian Education adopted a motion to participate in the Advance, it characterized the campaign as part of “the general spiritual awakening that is taking place throughout the Church,” specifically calling attention “to the renewed evangelistic emphasis which is becoming evident.”¹⁵ Moderator A.S. Tuttle – the former principal of St. Stephen’s College in Edmonton who had proposed a radically modernist redefinition of the Incarnation during the Statement of Faith discussions – endorsed the Advance, showing once again that even the highly modernist church leaders of the period had no trouble supporting outwardly evangelical initiatives.¹⁶

The Advance fit perfectly into the “loud” evangelical practice of the 1930s paradigm. It certainly contained an emphasis on Bible instruction and the role of the Sunday school in promoting “temperance and moral reform.”¹⁷ The most strongly evangelical elements, however, could be found in the campaign’s focus on evangelism. One of the major goals of the Advance was to “seek commitments to Christ and the Church.” An Advance bulletin issued by the Board of Christian Education noted that “the Church School has become one of the most powerful evangelistic agencies of our day.” Because of this role, the leaders of the Sunday school needed to set an example by recognizing the “necessity of personal commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour by every pupil under their care.” The bulletin advised local schools to set up special classes in which “the plan of salvation” could be taught.¹⁸ Another publication issued by the Board for the Advance also talked about conversion in evangelical terms. It encouraged teachers to lead “pupils to a sense of need and a personal choice of Christ as Saviour;” after this experience, those who had “signified their acceptance of Christ” could enter into church membership. This advice clearly reflected an evangelical understanding of the relationship between conversion and church membership. The evangelical practice of giving a “testimony” about one’s conversion was also featured in this literature, which recommended that local churches hold special services when “with no undue pressure, the decisions which have been secured by the teachers shall be publicly declared by the scholars themselves. These testimonies should be spontaneous, natural and freely given.”¹⁹

At other times the printed materials for the Advance were rather less evangelical in their views of conversion. Church membership was sometimes portrayed as the ultimate goal with little or no reference to conversion, or instead of clear references to conversion the materials talked in more ambiguous terms about “personal devotion and commitment to Jesus Christ” or a “way of life” characterized by moral choices.²⁰ Nevertheless, even more ambiguous statements on the topic could easily be interpreted in an evangelical manner by those so inclined, and generally speaking the materials distinguished between conversion and church membership and the distinct necessity of participating in both.²¹ Overall, by talking about the Bible, morality, evangelism, and conversion in ways characteristic of evangelicals, the aims and materials of the United Christian

Education Advance reflected the swing towards a more evangelistic and apparently evangelical emphasis that had begun in the United Church's Christian education program in the 1930s.

Similar conclusions can be drawn about another Christian education campaign from later in the decade, the Church School Crusade of 1947 and 1948. Unlike the United Christian Education Advance, which had been an interdenominational affair, the Church School Crusade was a United Church initiative hatched by the Board of Christian Education as a way to connect Christian education work with the denomination's evangelistic campaign called the Crusade for Christ and His Kingdom.²² The Church School Crusade had three main objectives: to extend the reach of Christian education programs to all parts of the church; to improve the quality of each local congregation's Christian education programme "through self-appraisal, setting of goals, and rededication;" and finally to bring everyone in the church constituency "to a definite commitment to Christ and into vital membership in His Church."²³ These objectives were supposed to be accomplished through what was called the "Three E Plan for Enrichment and Enlargement through Evangelism."²⁴ The most common approaches to involvement in the Church School Crusade by local church schools included things like self-evaluation and improvement programs guided by Board of Christian Education literature as well as means of identifying unreached members of the community using tools such as the "Church Census."²⁵ In the judgment of the Board, the Church School Crusade was a success; in the 1947-1948 church school year it "exceeded all expectations," with participation from "hundreds of churches" resulting in significant improvements to local Christian education programs.²⁶

Much like the United Christian Education Advance before it, the Church School Crusade reflected the evangelical themes of the late 1930s. One of the purposes of the Crusade was to bring people to "a definite commitment to Christ and into vital membership in His Church" and this theme was reflected in Crusade materials recommending home visitation programs and community list-building.²⁷ The "Three E" model heavily emphasized evangelism. Board of Christian Education literature told congregations that "Evangelism should underlie every method of work," and that "the evangelistic emphasis in leading boys and girls and men and women to Jesus Christ must always be present."²⁸ As in the earlier United Christian Education Advance, some of the Crusade materials appeared to equate conversion and church membership, such as an instruction booklet for Sunday school superintendents that interchangeably referred to a "decision" for Christ, a "decision for those purposes for which the Church stands," and a "decision to unite with the Church."²⁹ Other materials distributed as part of the Crusade, however, adopted a more clearly evangelical view of conversion. In a pamphlet promoting training classes for church membership, retired United Church minister J.W. Flatt³⁰ urged his readers to "reach the citadel of the will and secure a decision for Jesus Christ that will endure," and to "always teach for, hope for, pray for and work for a verdict no less than the surrender of the will to Jesus

Christ.”³¹ Instructions for Sunday school superintendents issued in connection with the Crusade listed “to help [students] to come into full fellowship with Jesus Christ as personal Saviour and Lord” as one of the main purposes of Christian education.³² A document on “Evangelism in the Church School” described the purpose of evangelism as “to lead people to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,” and that “men and women without Faith in Christ as personal Saviour, may be led to Him.”³³ In emphasizing evangelism and conversion, the Church School Crusade reinforced a basically evangelical understanding of the United Church’s Christian education program.

When it came to the Bible, the Church School Crusade again reinforced familiar themes. Crusade materials suggested that Sunday school students bring Bibles in “good condition” to their classes, and recommended that congregations provide Bibles for those who did not bring their own. Sunday schools were also advised to encourage the use of *Memory Treasures*, implement Bible study tests, and generally “cultivate the use and appreciation of the Bible by pupils in class work and in personal family and group worship.”³⁴ Such a high view of the use of the Bible did not of course commit anyone to an evangelical view. In fact, Board of Christian Education instructions for superintendents referred to the Bible in terms reminiscent of liberalism as “a record of the highest religious experience of men” rather than as God’s revelation.³⁵ Nevertheless, the heavy emphasis on the use of the Bible in Christian education, especially without any explicit modernist strictures on its interpretation, added to the evangelical appearance of the Church School Crusade. Combined with other familiar evangelical emphases, such as the recommendation that superintendents address “temperance, gambling and other moral problems” in their Sunday schools, and the suggestion that students be taught “that missionary work is an essential part of their Christian faith,” the Church School Crusade’s emphasis on evangelism and the Bible fit comfortably into the continuing “loud” evangelical practices of the postwar period.³⁶

A final interesting aspect of the United Church’s Christian education work from the 1940s through the early 1960s was that the Board of Christian Education kept a watchful and unfriendly eye on the activities of an evangelical Sunday school organization, the Canadian Sunday School Mission (CSSM). As Bruce Hindmarsh has shown, the CSSM was part of a Winnipeg-based network of nondenominational conservative evangelical organizations on the Canadian prairies that was well established by the 1940s.³⁷ The CSSM worked primarily in rural parts of western Canada teaching children without any other access to Sunday school teaching; its literature stated that it was trying to reach “vast areas [which] are wholly beyond the present operations of any evangelical body.”³⁸ Their own statistics suggested that in their 1941-1942 operating year, the CSSM organized 31 Sunday schools with an average attendance of 19, and 349 “summer Bible schools” with a total enrolment of 5465. In addition to this work the CSSM distributed over 35,000 tracts in that year alone, and carried out prayer meetings and Bible memory contests.³⁹ The CSSM was an unmistakably evangelical organization, with a doctrinal statement emphasizing the inspiration and authority

of the Bible, the orthodox view of the Trinity, and “the necessity of being born again through faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ.”⁴⁰ Its major aim was teaching which led children to accept Jesus as “Lord and Saviour,” although it also emphasized Bible learning and memorization.⁴¹

United Church leaders did not seem impressed with the CSSM, which they began watching at least as early as 1943 when a Board of Christian Education internal memo identified the group and suggested that more information on it be gathered.⁴² In response to a request in 1948, Peter Gordon White, then the General Secretary of the Christian Education Committee of Manitoba Conference, and later editor-in-chief of the United Church’s New Curriculum, wrote that he considered the “theology and endeavours” of the CSSM to be “borderline.”⁴³ Much later, in 1961, Board of Christian Education officials were still suspicious of the group. J.V. Martens, church secretary of a United Church congregation in Edmonton, wrote to the Board of Christian Education asking about the CSSM when it extended an invitation to the children of a family within her church. David I. Forsyth, secretary of the Board, responded to this inquiry by describing the CSSM as “a somewhat fundamentalist organization that presents a theology of literal inspiration and ultra-conservatism. Its teachings are somewhat like the teachings of the Pentecostals and United Christian Mission Alliance [*sic*] groups.” After listing their aims and doctrinal statement, Forsyth noted that Martens could contact the CSSM directly if she wanted more information, but added that “I am sure that they are very sincere persons, but I do feel that children who are subjected to their teachings might easily be alienated from The United Church of Canada.”⁴⁴ Similarly, Emmanuel College students going to work in their summer mission fields in 1960 were warned about the influence “of various resources in Christian education, some of which are definitely inferior, along with the influence of fundamentalist groups during the year and the kind of teaching that they do in the community.”⁴⁵ Some of the suspicion felt by United Church officials for the CSSM was doubtless due to simple competition between these two religious groups for the adherence of the people. The comments of White and Forsyth, however, and the use of loaded terms like “fundamentalist,” “literal inspiration,” and “ultra-conservatism,” suggest that for all their use of evangelical emphases in Christian education materials, these leaders were keenly aware of the theological divide that separated them from independent evangelical groups. The use of such language indicated that despite the dominant paradigm of “quiet modernism” the considerable divergence between the modernist views of church leaders and evangelical groups like the CSSM could lead these leaders to draw boundaries between them, foreshadowing the controversial public drawing of such boundaries in the mid-1960s (as will be discussed in the following chapters). Significantly, however, in earlier decades this conflict was a controlled and largely private affair out of sight of most United Church members.

Between the 1930s and the introduction of the New Curriculum in 1964, therefore, Christian education in the United Church continued to emphasize the themes that were dominant in the late 1930s: use of the Bible, moral education,

evangelism, and conversion. Although the more modernist orientation of church leaders could occasionally be seen in Board of Christian Education materials, for the most part these materials were either clearly evangelical or could be interpreted as evangelical – even when dealing with sensitive topics such as conversion and the Bible. The basic theological allegiances of leaders such as Forsyth were implied in their private attitudes towards the CSSM, but were not evident to the average Sunday school teacher, parent, or toddler. In the middle decades before the New Curriculum redefined Christian education in the United Church, therefore, Christian education continued the paradigm that combined highly visible evangelical elements with non-evangelical beliefs behind the scenes.

Moral Reform and the 1950 Commission on Culture

Alongside the evangelical emphases of Christian education, the United Church maintained its firm commitment to traditional moral reform projects both during and after the war. Wartime brought fears of moral laxity, as illegitimate birth statistics climbed and the Lord's day came under increasing pressure. In response, the BESS reiterated its unwavering opposition to extramarital and premarital sex, noting that "it is not by accident that Christian standards of sex relations have been established, and not with impunity will they be ignored or violated."⁴⁶ At the same time, it called for constant political pressure from the churches to maintain the sanctity of the Lord's day despite the war.⁴⁷ The wartime conditions even furnished the Board with extra ammunition in its perpetual campaign for total abstinence from alcohol, since it could characterize the money spent on production and consumption of alcohol as waste that undermined the war effort.⁴⁸ The end of the war, however, did not diminish the Board's zeal in the least. It continued to be so opposed to alcohol that it wanted the federal government to make it illegal for corporations to simultaneously hold shares in breweries and grocery stores, to make it less likely that alcohol would be sold in the latter.⁴⁹ The Board was also still resisting attempts to widen the grounds for divorce in 1953, while urging the government to take more extensive measures against the "producers and distributors" of "obscene literature and pornographic material."⁵⁰ In its mission of moral reform, therefore, as in its practice of evangelism, the postwar United Church stayed the course it had plotted in the 1930s.

Nancy Christie has argued that thinkers in the United Church in the 1950s fundamentally changed the denomination's attitude towards sex. While the United Church had formerly viewed sex as inherently "immoral," she argues, by the end of the 1950s these thinkers regarded it as a "sacramental act."⁵¹ Her research certainly suggests that at least some of the members of the Commission on Marriage and Divorce and the wider church were questioning the moral strictures limiting sex to a marital context, in part because they were increasingly seeing marriage as a private contract between two individuals without reference to

society as a whole.⁵² Nevertheless, the published report of the Commission, *Towards a Christian Understanding of Sex, Love, and Marriage*, maintained the same basic position on sexual morality that had characterized the church's teaching at least since the 1930s. This position was that the proper context for sexual relationships was marriage, and that any type of sexual relationship outside of marriage – whether premarital sex, adultery, or homosexual practices – was contrary to Christian morality. The report reaffirmed the traditional Christian view that marriage was created by God and that sexual intercourse between a man and woman cemented that union by making them “one flesh,” and consequently explicitly ruled out sexual relationships outside of marriage. While rejecting the notion that sex was “somehow shameful, even within marriage,” the report condemned sexual promiscuity outside of marriage as “a form of disobedience and rebellion against God.”⁵³ Even sex between a couple engaged to be married was rejected by the report as having “emotional and spiritual concomitants that weaken rather than strengthen the probability of growing together in marriage.”⁵⁴ While the report urged Christians to have an attitude towards homosexuals that was “fair, untinged with prejudice and always charitable,” it also described “homosexual conduct” as “an offense against the proper expression of sexuality in monogamous marriage.”⁵⁵ Finally, the Commission warned that divorce “always involves suffering and sin,” but urged the church to take concrete measures to help troubled couples, rather than adopt a judgmental attitude.⁵⁶ These views were eminently compatible with evangelical understandings of sex and marriage. Thus, whatever deviations from this position were being contemplated by United Church thinkers in the 1950s, the public position of the church continued to be defined by the traditional view.

The moral attitudes of the United Church and its projects of moral reform did not exist in a vacuum, however; they were grounded in a particular understanding of the Church and its role in society. This foundational understanding, expressed by BESS chairman W.J. Gallagher in the late 1930s when he called the Church a “colony of heaven,” was restated by the United Church's Commission on Culture in 1950. This body began when the General Council of 1946 instructed the BESS to appoint a Commission “to make a study of modern culture” and aspects of the relationship of Christian faith to that culture. Among these aspects, the General Council wanted the Commission to report on “the points of tension between culture and the Christian faith today,” “the task of transforming culture ... to a Christian pattern,” and “the role of the Church in the redemption of culture.” Following this direction, the BESS organized the Commission on Culture in 1947. Its large membership (a total of 26 individuals served at various times on the Commission, not including ten additional persons who did “special work” for it) was dominated by ministers and academics. Many of these members were already heavily involved in the work of the United Church, including R.C. Chalmers, who was an associate secretary of the BESS and secretary of the Committee on the Christian Faith; Harriet Christie, dean of residence and supervisor of field work at the United Church Training School; and

William Berry, also an associate secretary of the BESS.⁵⁷ In its final report in *The Church and the Secular World*, the Commission broadly defined culture as “the thought forms, the mental climate, customs, assumption and activities of the people” which are “expressed though the music, art, architecture, letters, sculpture, recreation, business, religion and the total ethos of the people.” The report admitted that it could not possibly deal with every aspect of this “very comprehensive term,” but the statements it made in its over one hundred pages nevertheless illuminate some important elements of the moral outlook of the church elite at the beginning of the 1950s.⁵⁸

Not surprisingly, there were some signs of modernist theology in the report. Its discussion of ancient Hebrew culture and the Old Testament suggested that the authors accepted the viewpoint and conclusions of higher criticism, and its brief mention of the Second Coming and the final judgment apparently regarded these doctrines as merely symbolic. The striking thing about the report, however, was not its relatively minor attention to these issues, but its thoroughly developed moral perspective on modern culture. The Commission believed in a transcendent and absolute moral order grounded in the Christian faith, from which standpoint its authors judged modern culture and found it wanting. Fundamental to this moral order were the principles that every human person was made in the image of God and was therefore inherently valuable, but that at the same time “original sin” existed in every person as a “deep-seated tendency” towards “the worship of self” that had to be resisted. These principles were derived from Christianity, which supplied the absolute moral values on which ethical systems depended; without this foundation ethical behaviour would eventually decline. To try to retain Christian moral values and Christian civilization without the Christian faith was therefore futile.

In light of these beliefs, the Commission argued that the proper role of the Church was to constructively engage and transform human culture. In its attitude towards culture the Church had to avoid two extremes: simply becoming part of the world, a mistake that would contribute to the “secularization of life,” or, at the other end of the spectrum, withdrawing from culture, limiting itself to a “pietistic” role, and thereby neglecting major aspects of human life. Rather, the Church’s legitimate and important role was to transform human culture as part of its central task of evangelism.⁵⁹ This conception of the moral order and the Church’s transformative role was fully in keeping with the thinking and policies of United Church leaders of at least the previous two decades. Just as former BESS chairman W.J. Gallagher in the late 1930s had seen the Church as a “colony of heaven” out to reshape society through the application of Christian principles, so too did the members of the Commission on Culture over a decade later.⁶⁰

The flip side of this positive transformative role of the Church, in 1950 as in the 1930s, was the belief that society was in desperate need of transformation. Indeed, if anything, the United Church’s assessment of the condition of modern society had grown more critical in the intervening years. According to the Commission’s report, modern Western culture was based on “the tenets of a

secular, non-theistic humanism,” and as a result, was experiencing a major crisis. This crisis was “the judgment which inevitably follows as a consequence of sin.” There were several aspects to this crisis. First, and most importantly, God had been “dethroned” in modern thought. Although the values of Christianity still exerted an influence in secular thought through conceptions of the dignity of human beings, the moral basis of legitimate government, and justice in international relations, modern thinking was increasingly secular and as a result “throughout our culture there is a deepening sense of sickness and demoralization.” Secularism “robbed man of his soul,” resulting in a “spiritual impasse” ultimately issuing in “despair” and “futility.” In the place of God, secular thought had substituted “lesser principles” such as “the law of inexorable progress,” the “principle of success,” the “worship of power,” the exaltation of “human reason,” or a “nihilism” devoid of ethics. Because of this confusion, in the judgment of the Commission, “there never was a culture more sinful or heretical than that of the twentieth century.”⁶¹ Furthermore, secularism had produced a “divorce of ethics from [its] religious ground,” and a human-centred view of life where even religion existed simply to solve human problems. These errors in turn had produced the moral “anarchy” of relativism. The report noted particularly the case of modern education, which partly due to the pernicious influence of William James and John Dewey, had come to the point where “absolute or final truth in any realm is taboo.... We are suspicious of all dogmas except the dogma which declares that all truth is relative.”⁶²

The Commission did not restrict its critique of modern culture to abstract concepts like secularization and relativism, but extended its analysis to particular moral problems that it believed resulted from these fundamental flaws. The practical result of moral relativism was moral “irresponsibility” seen in “family life” – evidenced particularly by the increased frequency of sexual promiscuity, common law marriage, separation, and divorce. The family had come under threat from “the development of a divorce mentality” as seen in the “glib talk about obtaining a divorce at the least provocation, the demand for a liberalizing and extension of the grounds for divorce and the secularizing of the wedding ceremony.” Other dangers, such as urban crowding, “the emancipation of women,” “the undue emphasis given to sex in our time,” and above all, individual selfishness, also contributed their share to family breakdown. While some of these dangers had been heightened in the postwar era, the basic concern to defend the stability of traditional marriage had remained constant since at least the 1930s.⁶³

Turning its attention to popular culture, the Commission targeted film and music for particular censure. The report severely castigated Hollywood. According to the Commission, Hollywood purveyed moral “distortion” through its movies:

The assumption or hypothesis of the secularistic culture of Hollywood is that the trappings of life are the terminal of the happy life, that momentary satisfying of the sense is the all important thing in life, that libertinism

rules the sex life and women are but playthings for men with money, that religion is mere play-acting, and that life is to be identified with pleasure without relation to God. This distortion of values and these artificial forms of behaviour bring about confusion in the lives of already troubled people.⁶⁴

Hollywood producers, however, only cared about their profits without reference to the “moral implications of their films” for the lives of their viewers. In the eyes of the Commission, this attitude put these producers in the same moral category as dope dealers. The Commission recommended that, to counteract the profit-driven morally debased films coming out of Hollywood, the Christian churches should not only work together to produce religious films, but more importantly, they must “continue to be the conscience in society creating public opinion for better commercial movies and guardians of our inherited culture.” Turning to music, the Commission also condemned jazz because among other things it “imperils the development of pure melody” and “stimulates eroticism.” Jazz, in the eyes of the Commission, was an excellent example of the “anarchy” of modern music, in which there were “no agreed patterns, no standards.”⁶⁵

These objections to suspect culture, however, did not lead the Commission into a stodgy cultural conservatism. To the contrary, in its examination of literary culture, the Commission condemned “commercial” publishers in favour of more radical cultural efforts among struggling poets, novelists and dramatists who eschewed commercial success. The Commission warned that the churches had

acquired a bad but deserved reputation for supporting prudery, for continually demanding the enforcement of the most trumpety social and moral taboos, and for showing no other interest in culture: for being, in short, a mouthpiece for middle-class vulgarity and for the commercial interests that pander to it.⁶⁶

If, on the other hand, these churches were to “make sure that they are always on the side of genuine and sincere creative effort, however new, different or ‘shocking,’” they would be repaid when “all the genuine culture in the world” would “bear witness” to the power of the true Word, Christ.⁶⁷ While this expectation was perhaps overly optimistic, it does illustrate that the conception of the Church as a transformative agent bringing the world into line with its moral principles informed both the “negative” task of condemning moral evils as well as the “positive” task of promoting moral culture. Above all, by casting the Church in this role, and by upholding well-worn moral principles and concerns, the 1950 report of the Commission on Culture was a clear continuation of the moral reform agenda that had characterized the United Church before the Second World War.

Postwar Evangelism and the Continuation of the Paradigm

Just as the United Church's passion for evangelically-oriented Christian education and moral reform continued from the 1930s into the postwar period, so too did its enthusiasm for evangelism. The United Church's first major evangelistic campaign of the postwar period, the Crusade for Christ and His Kingdom, which took place from 1945 to 1948, originated, like the evangelistic movement represented by the Joint Commission on the Evangelization of Canadian Life in the 1930s, with an essentially social concern. In 1943 the executive of General Council formed a committee on a Forward Movement After the War, with the omnipresent J.R. Mutchmor, secretary of the BESS, and the equally influential Gordon A. Sisco, secretary of General Council, as its chairman and secretary respectively. Arthur Organ, the postwar chairman of the BESS, was also a member of the committee. The Forward Movement was conceived amidst fears that the end of the Second World War would bring a crisis of class, ideological, and political conflict, unemployment and resulting discontent, and a decline in moral standards around sex and alcohol, as had happened after the First World War. It planned to head-off such a crisis by working to build a just society with an equitable distribution of wealth. Inspired by the emphasis on evangelism at two international conferences, Oxford in 1937 and Madras in 1938, the movement hoped to use evangelism to reach out to nominal United Church adherents, returning soldiers, young married couples, university communities, organized labour, and young people's groups, integrating them into the work of the church.⁶⁸ Much like the Joint Committee on the Evangelization of Canadian Life, therefore, the Forward Movement After the War was created in response to a (in this case, expected) socio-economic crisis, aimed to create a just society, drew inspiration from international conferences emphasizing evangelism, and planned to use evangelism to enlist support for the church's task of social transformation.

At war's end, the Forward Movement became the Crusade for Christ and His Kingdom. The Crusade's stated objectives mirrored the concerns of the Forward Movement, and it sought their realization through distribution of publications and the use of various types of evangelism. "Visitation Evangelism," in which church members conducted friendly visits to the homes of inactive members or the unchurched in order to challenge them to greater involvement, received special mention.⁶⁹ From its beginning, the Crusade committee seemed to attack its work with greater energy and better organization than had the Joint Committee, early advertising its activities, sending out large quantities of pamphlets and posters, creating a traveling exhibit of the work of the United Church, preparing a handbook on evangelism, and organizing "Services of Witness" to inaugurate the Crusade.⁷⁰ The first such "Service of Witness" took place at Maple Leaf Gardens in Toronto on June 10, 1945, and was simultaneously the 20th anniversary celebration of the United Church and the inaugural service of the Crusade. Approximately 21,000 people attended, "with hundreds turned away."⁷¹ The service featured colourful pageantry, with

armoured, sword-bearing “Crusaders” leading formal processions of adults and children representing various parts of the church and its associations, and was punctuated with trumpet fanfare and majestic hymns.⁷² Following the success of this service, the Crusade organized similar pageantry-laden services across Canada, drawing large crowds in Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, and even Moncton.⁷³

A comparison of the United Church’s practices and emphases of the postwar period with the paradigm of the 1930s reveals that the postwar church continued the earlier paradigm in its promotion of evangelical practices, its lack of corresponding evangelical beliefs, its underlying goal of social transformation, and its high view of the Church as the central agent to bring this transformation about. Evangelism quite evidently was, and was intended to be, “the central feature” of the postwar Crusade, and Crusade materials affirmed evangelism as being “at the very heart of Christianity.”⁷⁴ The Crusade used mass meetings, with their mass choirs and elaborate pageantry, to provide a forum in which the “loyalty and longing of the rank and file” could be expressed, but also wanted smaller-scale evangelism to carry on after the big meetings were over.⁷⁵ The handbook on evangelism prepared for the Crusade recommended a variety of methods of evangelism, including visitation evangelism, occupation-based evangelism, preaching missions, and study groups.⁷⁶ It also continued to use language about making a “decision for Christ.”⁷⁷

These evangelical practices, however, were not accompanied by evangelical beliefs. The foregoing analysis of the Statement of Faith has revealed that belief in conversion and associated doctrines was missing at the leadership level of the United Church by the end of the 1930s. In the absence of these beliefs, church leaders needed to advance various other rationales for evangelism. The 1944 report of the Committee for the Forward Movement After the War characterized conversion as a therapeutic psychological technique, to be used “to establish in each individual a strong emotional centre of life,” that will “save persons from the sins of a pagan environment and from being overcome by psychological reactions following the war.”⁷⁸ There was little room in such a view for spiritual considerations such as justification before God or eternal salvation. Indeed, referring no doubt to evangelical theology, the Forward Movement firmly resolved “to prevent an extreme interpretation of our position. We in no sense intend to capitulate to those forms of theology which repudiate everything in the church’s message of the past one hundred years.”⁷⁹ Given some of the literature produced by the Crusade, there was little danger of that. One pamphlet, apparently for distribution to teenagers, asked young Canadians if they were “ready to be followers of Jesus Christ,” yet defined following Christ in purely moralistic, this-worldly terms. According to the pamphlet, people needed to “try to find the way of God and follow it,” because this is the only way that God can “make life better and happier for everyone,” enabling them to “live together safely and happily.” As if to forestall someone accidentally reading in an emphasis on conversion, it added, “it isn’t a matter of making only one decision, however important that may

be.”⁸⁰ If postwar ideas of conversion bore even less resemblance to evangelical orthodoxy than they did in the 1930s, this may be due in part to the possibility that fewer ministers had themselves had conversion experiences. In the view of Arthur Organ, chairman of the BESS, “older men can tell of a day when, with burning heart, they went to a communion rail in repentance with tears, and gave their lives to God for whatever they might become in His service. That becomes less true as we come down to the younger groups in the ministry.”⁸¹ Perhaps even more telling is the fact that Organ’s only stated worry about this situation was that it might make for less arresting life-stories in speaking to “modern pagans”. Not only was evangelical conversion not part of the beliefs of these church leaders, it was not part of their experience. The postwar United Church, then, continued the unlikely marriage of evangelical practices and non-evangelical beliefs.

Church leaders, however, found this lack of evangelical orthodoxy no obstacle to using evangelism to accomplish their continuing central goal of social transformation. In fact, the Forward Movement described its “evangelistic message” as the proclamation of “the full implications of the love of God in our time;” these implications included government intervention to ensure equilibrium between contending social groups, a favorable climate for the success of “social security proposals,” and “a larger measure of social control for the common good,” likely to entail “considerable planned economy.”⁸² The executive secretary of the Crusade, Bruce Millar, noted that one of the hopes of the Crusade was “to get more sacrificial interest in all the work of the Church and to see that the United Church will do its share towards building a better Canada and a new world on a more Christian foundation.”⁸³ The very program of the Crusade – an early period of evangelistic emphasis followed by periods emphasizing the “stewardship of life and possessions” and “looking toward a Christian world” – was designed to channel the spiritual energy roused by evangelism into social transformation.⁸⁴ Like the Joint Committee in the 1930s, therefore, the postwar church leadership sought to further its social goals through the use of an evangelistic campaign.

Another continuing feature of the interwar paradigm, which was actually heightened after the war, was the high view of the Church as the key agent in transforming society. Again echoing the 1930s, the Forward Movement and Crusade sought to enlist supposedly nominal Christians in church membership and involvement. In particular, these efforts hoped to target the over half-million Canadians who reported themselves as United Church adherents in the national census but were not under pastoral oversight, as well as other potentially uninvolved groups such as returning soldiers. Literature for distribution to returning soldiers characterized the Church as the best vehicle to achieve “a better world,” since it could provide a sense of community, prevent juvenile delinquency by giving youth “irresistibly attractive and useful alternatives,” and undo immoral habits learned during the war with its teaching.⁸⁵ In this climate of heightened emphasis on the importance of the church institution, Crusade literature recommended that the reception of new members into the church “should be made

an occasion of deep solemnity in the life of the Church. Such a time of decision should be one of great significance to the new members and to the congregation.”⁸⁶ In part this increased emphasis on church membership and the church institution reflected the particular differences between the postwar situation and the 1930s. The Crusade was not an interdenominational effort, and therefore had a much freer hand than the Joint Committee to encourage membership and involvement in a particular denomination. The need to re-integrate returning servicemen and women, as well as war workers, into the life of the church during a period of high migration also no doubt contributed to this heightened emphasis. In general, however, the positive view of the Church and its role in society was a continuation from the earlier period.

Ongoing Evangelism and Increasing Tensions, 1951-1958

In the 1950s, the United Church continued to participate in large scale projects of evangelism. This included the work of American evangelist Billy Graham, who visited Canada in 1955. With his southern Baptist background, high view of the authority of the Bible, and direct preaching aimed at securing conversions to Christ, Graham was unmistakably evangelical, yet United Church ministers were intimately involved in the efforts to persuade the preacher to come to Canada. In his unsympathetic account of Graham’s work in Britain in the mid-1950s, Callum Brown portrays Graham as attempting to impose Americanism and a guilt-centred religion upon the largely unwilling British. Brown emphasizes opposition to Graham from mainstream churches, writing that his local support came largely from “sects” presumably marginal to the religious life of the nation.⁸⁷ If evidence from the United Church is any indication, this was not true of Canada in the 1950s. Seven United Church ministers were part of the effort to get Billy Graham to come to Toronto in 1951, tying the United Church with the Convention Baptists as the best-represented denomination in the group that issued the appeal. The group, which met at Trinity United Church, was unanimous in calling for Graham to visit the city.⁸⁸ Once an official committee was organized, the United Church had four official representatives on it. United Church minister Allan H. Ferry wrote directly to Graham assuring him of widespread support from most Protestant denominations, including the United Church.⁸⁹ Although it took four years to finally arrange it, Graham came to Canada in 1955. At his Toronto crusade in October, he preached to crowds as large as 30,000.⁹⁰ At the end of the crusade Toronto United Church minister Bruce G. Gray wrote to Graham’s crusade director stating that “What little we were able to do for the Billy Graham Mission was counted a high privilege.”⁹¹

Although the BESS officially left endorsements of Graham crusades up to the conferences and presbyteries of the church, Graham experienced widespread support from various parts of the United Church. Although statistics on the number of United Church members participating in his crusades are unfortunately unavailable, support from ministers was strong.⁹² The Ottawa Council of

Churches, which included the Ottawa Presbytery of the United Church and had a United Church minister as its president, invited Graham to Ottawa.⁹³ Middlesex Presbytery in southwestern Ontario “strongly endorsed” Billy Graham’s Canadian crusade and “urged attendance of ministers and church members.”⁹⁴ Simcoe Presbytery likewise “unanimously endorsed” the Graham crusade.⁹⁵

The generally positive reaction to Graham in the United Church was not entirely unmixed, however. The reactions in the press of two prominent United Church news writers showed that, as would be expected within the 1930s paradigm, they embraced Graham’s evangelism while expressing reservations about his theology. The former editor of the *United Church Observer*, A.J. Wilson, praised Graham’s work on balance, concluding that “it has been good to have had Billy Graham in our midst,” while admitting to finding his “Biblical literalism” hard to accept and wishing he would put less emphasis on God’s righteousness and more on his love.⁹⁶ A.C. Forrest, the current editor of the *Observer*, similarly worried about Graham’s view of the Bible, warning that “many United Church people ... cannot accept Graham’s literalism fully.” Forrest was also uncomfortable with the fact that Graham avoided addressing political and economic topics, although he conceded that Graham did not see this as part of his job as an evangelist. Like Wilson, however, Forrest concluded with an endorsement, praising Graham as a “great evangelist” and telling his fellow United Church members that “we feel he should be given our warm support.... We should pray for the success of his crusade, attend his meetings, and thank God that his voice is being heard summoning men and women in this age to make their stand for Jesus Christ.”⁹⁷ Writing after the end of the crusade, Forrest’s comments were even more positive, and he noted that “One of the most common things we have heard about [Graham] since the crusade ended is from ministers who say they wish they had known more about him before he came, for they would have tried to get their congregations to participate more fully.”⁹⁸ Thus, although some United Church ministers were uncomfortable with Graham’s clearly evangelical theology – and many may have felt no such discomfort – they were willing to overlook this difference because of his success in the practice of evangelism.

Beginning in the mid-1950s, just around the same time as Graham’s visit to Canada, the United Church mounted yet another campaign of evangelism, the National Evangelistic Mission. This mission, created by General Council in 1954, was divided between a preparatory phase from 1954 to 1956 and a public phase from 1956 to 1958. Like the movement of the Joint Committee for the Evangelization of Canadian Life and the Crusade for Christ and His Kingdom before it, the National Evangelistic Mission worked through a combination of literature distribution, retreats and conferences, mass preaching missions, and the latest fads in evangelistic method (in this case “friendship evangelism” and the “cell movement”).⁹⁹ If the mission’s own reports were generally accurate, the interest in revival within the United Church had not diminished in the 1950s; if anything, it had increased. The mission estimated that 90 per cent of ministers and 50 per cent of church workers had participated in one of its missions or retreats

during the preparatory period between 1954 and 1956. It also estimated that a half-million United Church members, more than half the actual membership of the Church, took part in special “services of re-dedication” to Christ held on Easter Sunday in 1956.¹⁰⁰ Aside from these efforts, the mission also planned one hundred preaching missions to “smaller cities, towns and villages” for the fall of 1956, plus major campaigns of mass evangelism in several larger cities in Ontario and one in New Brunswick, making use of American and British evangelists.¹⁰¹

It should not be surprising, then, that the National Evangelistic Mission continued the paradigmatic emphasis on evangelism. The mission endorsed mass evangelism, personal evangelism (especially visitation evangelism), “friendship evangelism”, “teaching evangelism”, “vocational evangelism”, the “cell movement”, and the use of the mass media. In addition, it was particularly concerned to inculcate the habit of ongoing evangelism at the local level. Training of laymen in evangelism, and training of aspiring ministers in evangelism in the church theological colleges, were also among its objectives.¹⁰²

More obviously than earlier campaigns, however, the National Evangelistic Mission saw personal evangelism as merely a stepping stone to social transformation, and individual “conversion” as merely a technique to stimulate moral and social change. It maintained that personal decisions “to accept Christ as both Saviour and Lord ... if they are not pietistic, but thoroughgoing and sincere, will gradually change man’s family, social, vocational and national life.”¹⁰³ According to William G. Berry, director of the National Evangelistic Mission and also associate secretary of the BESS, the Church had not had much difficulty in getting individuals “to accept Christ as Saviour,” but it had struggled with “the redemption of society.”¹⁰⁴ In fact, he argued, the Church had put too much emphasis on what he called “surface evangelism,” which

sweeps over a church or a community, bringing many personal decisions, making people glad at heart for a while ... and then subsiding leaving the community and the church little better than it was before. Surface evangelism does not plumb the depths of human need. This surface evangelism still has its place but it must be supplemented by evangelism at depth, an evangel that affects the community in its social organization, that effects a radical and permanent change in the attitudes of the governing bodies of the nations, our Parliaments, and our colleges, our trade unions and our chambers of commerce, our business empires and our community life.¹⁰⁵

This assessment reveals with unusual clarity the fact that the non-evangelical beliefs of church leaders were leading them to minimize the importance of conversion in evangelism in favour of an emphasis on social transformation. Individual conversion, in itself, had no value for Berry, since he was concerned entirely with a moral transformation of individuals and social structures rather than the salvation of souls. This view was reiterated in 1959 by the chairman of

the BESS, George Birtch, who in commenting on the necessity of “Evangelizing Evangelism,” maintained that evangelism must not be “concerned only with the individual’s salvation,” because individual salvation was not “an end in itself,” but rather “the essential step to be taken to become fellow workers with God.”¹⁰⁶

The increasing emphasis of leaders such as Berry on social transformation, however, and their decreasing emphasis on individual conversion, were stretching the 1930s paradigm to the breaking point in the late 1950s. Increasingly, Berry sounded like he was flirting with resurrecting the radical social gospel of the 1920s. In the most strident terms he rejected the idea that personal spiritual experience had any independent value whatsoever:

It needs again and again to be said that a so-called spiritual experience that does no [*sic*] result in social outreach is the worst of all sin. It is the pharisaism for which our Lord reserved his most vehement condemnation. Despite the fact that we are engaged in a National Evangelistic Mission to win persons for Christ and are bending most of the energies of the church in that direction we shall not truly serve our Lord unless our evangelism has a social content.¹⁰⁷

To this denunciation of personal religion Berry added his views that, on the one hand, moral reform was “also evangelism,” and on the other hand, that the most effective way to enable people to live as Christians was to change their social environment.¹⁰⁸ This attitude was still within the bounds of the old paradigm in that it gave evangelism a role in stimulating social change, but without the nourishment of evangelical beliefs, the emphasis on personal evangelism had noticeably atrophied in comparison with the 1930s, continuing the trend already evident in the Forward Movement and Crusade for Christ and His Kingdom at the end of the war. It was but a small additional step to dispense with the idea of personal evangelism altogether as an unnecessary distraction.

These tensions were also visible in the later 1950s as the church’s leaders subtly distanced themselves from the evangelicalism associated with Billy Graham and his organization. In publications, Berry could praise Billy Graham as an evangelist.¹⁰⁹ Behind the scenes however, an evangelist from the Billy Graham Foundation, Joseph Blinco, was only accepted by the National Evangelistic Mission on the condition that he avoid any appearance of a connection between the Mission and Billy Graham’s organization.¹¹⁰ Berry’s correspondence reveals that he could accept Blinco’s services primarily because his theology was “more in keeping with that of the United Church than perhaps Dr. Graham’s.”¹¹¹ Similarly, the church’s leadership embraced evangelist Charles Templeton, a former colleague of Graham – after he had turned his back on his earlier fundamentalist associations and evangelical view of the Bible.¹¹² In a way, Templeton embodied the paradigm of the 1930s: he provided a passionate commitment to evangelism without the troublesome evangelical theology.

On the other hand, the National Evangelistic Mission had to contend with the problematic presence of more consistently evangelical speakers in its campaigns. In one instance, the chairman of Lambton Presbytery wrote to Berry complaining of recent missions in his presbytery that savoured of a “narrow fundamentalist type of Evangelism,” and asking Berry to intervene to put a stop to further planned missions by the same committee.¹¹³ Berry’s response, which he twice emphasized should be kept “strictly confidential,” admitted that he knew something about the theology of the evangelist in question, but had thought he might be suitable for “a small rural area.” The subtext was that Berry saw more conservative evangelicalism as a permissible and perhaps useful presence in more traditionalist and out-of-the-way parts of the church, but not suited for the modern, urban, centres of power.¹¹⁴ When it proved troublesome even in a rural area, however, he did not hesitate to use his influence to snuff it out. Agreeing to try to find another evangelist to conduct the missions, he wrote that “The one thing I fear in the Mission to the Nation is a throw back to the narrow fundamentalist and false emotional evangelism of a previous generation. In this I am at one with you.”¹¹⁵

Thus, by the late 1950s, although interest in evangelism was still strong at all levels of the United Church, the tensions inherent in the promotion of evangelical practices without evangelical beliefs were coming to a head. Church leaders faced difficulties in dealing with evangelists of more evangelical views. At the same time, the value of personal evangelism in the eyes of church leaders grew more and more tenuous. Increasingly, leaders such as Berry reinterpreted evangelism in social and moralist terms. Without a supporting framework of evangelical beliefs, which assigned personal conversion inherent value as the objective means of reconciling sinners to God, the rationale for evangelistic effort, as distinct from moral reform and social transformation, was wearing thin.

Conclusion

The unlikely adoption of evangelical language and practices by modernist church leaders in the 1930s proved remarkably stable. The major elements of this odd hybrid remained intact well into the 1950s and even into the 1960s. Perhaps the most pervasive part, the ubiquitous emphasis on evangelism, spilled over into many departments of the church’s work, refusing to confine itself to the purview of the BESS. The Christian education campaigns of the 1940s, for example, really had evangelism at their heart. Evangelism, in the United Church of these decades, often carried a frankly evangelical view of conversion. Even when this was true, however, official church publications tended to be rather vague about what theological realities, if any, underlay catchphrases like “commitment to Christ.” At other times, conversion was lost in an emphasis on church membership or social transformation. And by the late 1950s, William Berry’s statements on the subject verbally played out the tensions, increasingly difficult to ignore, between non-evangelical theology and evangelical practices. These tensions were, as of

1960, less visible in the church's work of moral reform and Christian education, although both would soon be changed beyond recognition. Nevertheless, in its public treatment of evangelism, the Bible, and moral issues, the United Church presented a resolute and steadfast picture of endurance through the 1940s and 1950s. Through these decades of war and prosperity, the United Church held firmly to the paradigm of the 1930s, to a course mapped out in the darkness of the Depression.

¹ “Introduction: Recasting Canada’s Post-war Decade,” in Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, eds., *Cultures of Citizenship in Post-war Canada* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003), 17.

² UCA, BCE 13-1, “Do You Use Bible Study Tests?” in *Christian Education Handbook* (1954).

³ UCA, BCE 15-5, *Memory Treasures: Scripture, Hymns, Prayers and Graces for Use as a Language of Worship and as a Guide for Living* (Board of Christian Education), 4-6.

⁴ UCA, BCE 15-7, “Christian Education Manual for the Summer Mission Field,” (Board of Christian Education, 1942), 11; see also versions for 1945, 1947, and 1961.

⁵ UCA, BCE 15-7, “The Life of Jesus,” (Board of Christian Education; from internal evidence, 1939-1945).

⁶ UCA, BCE 13-1, “Temperance Education Resources,” in *Christian Education Handbook* (1954).

⁷ UCA, BCE 14-2, “Temperance Education Resources,” in *Christian Education Handbook* (1963).

⁸ UCA, BCE 60-2, “Reports and Agenda, Sixth Meeting of Board of Christian Education, Apr. 16-18, 1941,” Minutes of the Board of Christian Education, Nov. 1940-July 1942, 135; BCE 15-5, “Reach All You Can For Christ.” Religious Education Council of Canada, Toronto [1942], 3.

⁹ UCA, BCE 15-5, “Reach All You Can For Christ.” Religious Education Council of Canada, Toronto [1942], 3.

¹⁰ Sunday school enrolment in the United Church had declined from a peak of 653,315 in 1931 to 565,003 in 1939, a total drop of 13.5 per cent. During the first half of the war it declined further to 484,712 in 1942, a drop of 14.2 per cent. After a small further decrease to 469,905 in 1943, Sunday school enrollment began to climb steadily, surpassing the 1931 record in 1955, and would not decline again until 1962. Data taken from United Church of Canada, *Yearbook*, 1980.

¹¹ UCA, BCE 15-5, “Reach All You Can For Christ.” Religious Education Council of Canada, Toronto [1942], 3.

¹² Jeffrey A. Keshen, *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers: Canada’s Second World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 204-213; and Mariana Valverde, “Building Anti-Delinquent Communities: Morality, Gender, and Generation in the City,” in *A Diversity of Women: Ontario, 1945-1980*, ed. Joy Parr (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 23-31. Michael Gauvreau, “The Protracted Birth of the Canadian ‘Teenager’: Work, Citizenship, and the Canadian Youth Commission, 1943-1955,” in Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, eds., *Cultures of Citizenship in Postwar Canada, 1940-1955* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003), 223, notes that not all observers of Canadian youth were equally perturbed.

¹³ See chapter 1 for discussion of these, and also UCA, BCE 15-3, “The Sunday School At the Cross-Roads: A statement prepared by the Board of Christian Education for the use of Conference and Presbytery Committees,” [1938]; and “The Sunday School Moves Forward: A statement prepared by the Board of Christian Education for the use of Conference and Presbytery Committees,” (April 1939).

¹⁴ UCA, BCE 60-2, “Reports and Agenda, Sixth Meeting of Board of Christian Education, Apr. 16-18, 1941,” Minutes of the Board of Christian Education, Nov. 1940-July 1942, 135-136a.

¹⁵ UCA, BCE 60-2, “Minutes of Special Meeting of the Board of Christian Education, Jun. 16-17, 1942,” Minutes of the Board of Christian Education, Nov. 1940-July 1942, 181.

¹⁶ UCA, BCE 15-5, “Reach All You Can For Christ.” Religious Education Council of Canada, Toronto [1942], 2-4.

¹⁷ UCA, BCE 15-5, “Christian Education Advance: Helps for Superintendents and Teachers of the Church School,” Board of Christian Education [1941], 1; “Reach All You Can For Christ.” Religious Education Council of Canada, Toronto [1942], 2-3.

¹⁸ UCA, BCE 15-5, “The United Christian Education Advance,” Bulletin No.1 1941 (Board of Christian Education).

¹⁹ UCA, BCE 16-1, “Enlistment for Christ and Membership in His Church,” Board of Christian Education, n/d.

²⁰ UCA, BCE 15-5, “The United Christian Education Advance,” Bulletin No.3 1942 (Board of Christian Education); “The Six-Fold Objective of the Christian Education Advance in the Church School,” (Board of Christian Education), n/d; BCE 15-5, “Christian Education Advance: Helps for Superintendents and Teachers of the Church School,” Board of Christian Education [1941], 1.

²¹ UCA, BCE 15-5, “What Shall A Church Provide For Its Children? The United Christian Advance,” Bulletin No.4 [1942], (Board of Christian Education), 11; BCE 16-1, “Enlistment for Christ and Membership in His Church,” Board of Christian Education, n/d.

²² UCA, BCE 61-2, Minutes of the Interim Executive Committee of the Board of Christian Education, Nov. 26, 1946, 18.

²³ UCA, BCE 61-2, Minutes of the Board of Christian Education, Apr. 16-18, 1947, 80.

²⁴ UCA, BCE 15-5, “The Church School Crusade: The Three E Plan for Enrichment and Enlargement through Evangelism,” in *My Packet of Literature on the Church School Crusade (The Three E Plan) for Enrichment and Enlargement Through Evangelism* (Board of Christian Education, probably 1947).

²⁵ UCA, BCE 61-2, Reports and Agenda – Executive Committee of the Board of Christian Education, Apr. 1948, 306; BCE 15-5, Religious education council of Canada, “A survey on attendance at Church and Sunday School in your

Community,” in *My Packet of Literature on the Church School Crusade (The Three E Plan) for Enrichment and Enlargement Through Evangelism* (Board of Christian Education, probably 1947).

²⁶ UCA, BCE 61-2, Reports and Agenda – Executive Committee of the Board of Christian Education, Apr. 1948, 306-307.

²⁷ UCA, BCE 61-2, Minutes of the Board of Christian Education, Apr. 16-18, 1947, 80; BCE 15-5, “The Sunday School in Action: Practical Plans for Superintendents and Other Officers in This New Day,” (Board of Christian Education), 12; BCE 15-5, “Visiting in the Home,” in *My Packet of Literature on the Church School Crusade (The Three E Plan) for Enrichment and Enlargement Through Evangelism* (Board of Christian Education, probably 1947); “The Church School Crusade: The Three E Plan for Enrichment and Enlargement through Evangelism,” in *My Packet of Literature on the Church School Crusade (The Three E Plan) for Enrichment and Enlargement Through Evangelism* (Board of Christian Education, probably 1947).

²⁸ UCA, BCE 15-5, “The Church School Crusade: The Three E Plan for Enrichment and Enlargement through Evangelism,” in *My Packet of Literature on the Church School Crusade (The Three E Plan) for Enrichment and Enlargement Through Evangelism* (Board of Christian Education, probably 1947).

²⁹ UCA, BCE 15-5, “The Sunday School in Action: Practical Plans for Superintendents and Other Officers in This New Day,” (Board of Christian Education), 12.

³⁰ UCA, J.W. Flatt biographical file, obituary from Belleville Presbytery, 1971. No known relation to the present author.

³¹ UCA, BCE 15-5, J.W. Flatt, “Preparation for Membership,” in *My Packet of Literature on the Church School Crusade (The Three E Plan) for Enrichment and Enlargement Through Evangelism* (Board of Christian Education, probably 1947).

³² UCA, BCE 15-5, “The Sunday School in Action: Practical Plans for Superintendents and Other Officers in This New Day,” (Board of Christian Education), 1.

³³ UCA, BCE 15-5, “Evangelism in the Church School,” (Board of Christian Education), 2.

³⁴ UCA, BCE 15-5, “The Sunday School in Action: Practical Plans for Superintendents and Other Officers in This New Day,” (Board of Christian Education), 9, 13-14; BCE 15-5, “The Church School Crusade: The Three E Plan for Enrichment and Enlargement through Evangelism,” in *My Packet of Literature on the Church School Crusade (The Three E Plan) for Enrichment and Enlargement Through Evangelism* (Board of Christian Education, probably 1947).

³⁵ UCA, BCE 15-5, “The Sunday School in Action: Practical Plans for Superintendents and Other Officers in This New Day,” (Board of Christian Education), 1.

³⁶ UCA, BCE 15-5, "The Sunday School in Action: Practical Plans for Superintendents and Other Officers in This New Day," (Board of Christian Education), 7; BCE 15-5, "The Church School Crusade: The Three E Plan for Enrichment and Enlargement through Evangelism," in *My Packet of Literature on the Church School Crusade (The Three E Plan) for Enrichment and Enlargement Through Evangelism* (Board of Christian Education, probably 1947).

³⁷ D. Bruce Hindmarsh, "The Winnipeg Fundamentalist Network, 1910-1940: The Roots of Transdenominational Evangelicalism in Manitoba and Saskatchewan," in *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience*, 308-310. Hindmarsh describes this network both as "conservative evangelical" and "fundamentalist." Though the latter term is quite appropriate as an academic descriptor of this network, I have not used it here so as not to confuse it with the more polemical use of the term by Board of Christian Education leaders.

³⁸ UCA, BCE 16-9, "Kings – Conquered and Conquering," (Winnipeg: Canadian Sunday School Mission), 10.

³⁹ UCA, BCE 16-9, Canadian Sunday School Mission Bulletin No. 8 (Nov. 1942), 8.

⁴⁰ UCA, BCE 16-9, Wilbur K. Howard to David I. Forsyth, Dec. 17, 1951.

⁴¹ UCA, BCE 16-9, "Semi-Annual Report of Canadian Sunday School Mission Work Across the Dominion," (May 1949), 3, 7.

⁴² UCA, BCE 16-9, Netannis Semmens to C.A. Myers, Sep. 9, 1943.

⁴³ UCA, BCE 16-9, Peter Gordon White to J.P. Copeland, Dec. 13, 1948. UCA, Peter Gordon White biographical file, resume.

⁴⁴ UCA, BCE 16-9, David I. Forsyth to J.V. Martens, Dec. 19, 1961.

⁴⁵ UCA, BCE 15-7, "Session on Christian Education and Especially Boys' Work with Emmanuel College Students Going to Summer Mission Fields," (1960), 2.

⁴⁶ BESS AR 1940/1941, Address of Chairman Gallagher, 37; BESS AR 1942/1943, Address of Chairman Gallagher, 68.

⁴⁷ BESS AR 1940/1941, 73-74.

⁴⁸ BESS AR 1940/1941, 73; BESS AR 1945, Report of Sessional Committee on Moral Issues, 24.

⁴⁹ BESS AR 1946, Report of Sessional Committee on Moral Issues, 17.

⁵⁰ BESS AR 1953, Report of Sessional Committee on Moral Issues, 54-55, 58-59.

⁵¹ Nancy Christie, "Sacred Sex," 364, 367.

⁵² Christie, "Sacred Sex," 365-6.

⁵³ United Church, Commission on Christian Marriage and Divorce, *Toward A Christian Understanding of Sex, Love, and Marriage* (Toronto: Board of Christian Education, 1960), 7-9.

⁵⁴ *Toward A Christian Understanding*, 14.

⁵⁵ *Toward A Christian Understanding*, 15-16.

⁵⁶ *Toward A Christian Understanding*, 4, 31-34.

⁵⁷ UCA, R.C. Chalmers biographical file, fact sheet; K. Harriet Christie biographical file, fact sheet.

⁵⁸ United Church, Commission on Culture, *The Church and the Secular World: A Report of the Commission on Culture Presented to the Fourteenth General Council of The United Church of Canada* (Toronto: Board of Evangelism and Social Service, 1950), v-vii.

⁵⁹ Commission on Culture, *The Church and the Secular World*, vii-viii, 3-4, 70-74.

⁶⁰ See BESS AR 1937/1938, Address from Chairman Gallagher, 3, 6-7.

⁶¹ Commission on Culture, *The Church and the Secular World*, viii, 34, 53-55, 69.

⁶² Commission on Culture, *The Church and the Secular World*, 56-58, 65.

⁶³ Commission on Culture, *The Church and the Secular World*, 57, 63.

The mention of “the emancipation of women,” though it is sandwiched between other issues, merits special comment. Historian Nancy Christie has emphasized a concern among church leaders to prevent female economic independence as an important obsession of the United Church in the 1950s. This analysis, while not contradicting her point, situates that concern as part of a larger continuing program of defending a traditional conception of family against perceived threats. While the specific pressures on the family perceived by church leaders partly changed between the 1930s and the 1950s, the basic underlying concerns – especially divorce and extramarital sex – were the same. See Christie, “Sacred Sex,” 359-362.

⁶⁴ Commission on Culture, *The Church and the Secular World*, 40.

⁶⁵ Commission on Culture, *The Church and the Secular World*, 41-42, 48.

⁶⁶ Commission on Culture, *The Church and the Secular World*, 44.

⁶⁷ Commission on Culture, *The Church and the Secular World*, 42-44.

⁶⁸ United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings* (1944), Report of the Forward Movement After the War Committee, 114-120; UCA, Records of the Forward Movement After the War [FMAW], 1-1, Minutes, Jan. 12, 1944.

⁶⁹ United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings* (1946), Bruce Millar, Executive Secretary, Report of The Crusade for Christ and His Kingdom, 163-165.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 164; UCA, Records of the Crusade for Christ and His Kingdom, [CCHK] 1-1, Minutes of Executive Committee, Jun. 25, 1945.

⁷¹ UCA, CCHK 1-1, Minutes of Executive Committee, Jun. 25, 1945.

⁷² UCA, CCHK 1-7, “Programme of the Great Rally of The United Church of Canada to mark its Twentieth Anniversary...” June 10, 1945; 1-8, Order of Service for Jun. 10, 1945, Maple Leaf Gardens, Toronto.

⁷³ UCA, CCHK 1-1, Minutes of Sub-Executive, Oct. 30, 1945; Minutes of Executive, Dec. 11, 1945.

⁷⁴ UCA, CCHK 1-1, Minutes of Sub-Executive, Oct. 30, 1945; UCA Library, Angus J. MacQueen, “The Pulpit’s Supreme Task – Evangelism,” in *Ye*

Shall Be My Witnesses: A Handbook on Christian Evangelism (Prepared by the Department of Evangelism and Social Service for The Crusade for Christ and His Kingdom), n/d, 7.

⁷⁵ UCA, CCHK 1-1, Minutes of Sub-Exec., Oct. 30, 1945.

⁷⁶ UCA, "Some Evangelistic Methods," in *Ye Shall Be My Witnesses*, 31-32.

⁷⁷ UCA, "Programme for the Period of Evangelism," in *Ye Shall Be My Witnesses*, 35.

⁷⁸ United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings* (1944), Report of the Forward Movement After the War Committee, 117.

⁷⁹ UCA, FMAW 1-1, Minutes, Apr. 11, 1944.

⁸⁰ UCA, CCHK 1-7, "Let's Talk About The Crusade", n/d.

⁸¹ BESS AR 1948, Address of Chairman Arthur Organ, 43.

⁸² United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings* (1944), Report of the Forward Movement After the War Committee, 116-117.

⁸³ UCA, CCHK 1-3, Bruce Millar, Executive Secretary, to J.R. Mutchmor, May 14, 1945.

⁸⁴ UCA, "Answering your Question: What is My Part in the Crusade for Christ and His Kingdom," (Issued by the Committee for the Crusade for Christ and His Kingdom), n/d.

⁸⁵ UCA, CCHK 1-7, "Home Again ... In Church Again!" (Issued by the Committee on Rehabilitation of CCHK), n/d.

⁸⁶ UCA, "Programme for the Period of Evangelism," in *Ye Shall Be My Witnesses*, 35.

⁸⁷ Callum Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Harlow, England: Pearson, 2007), 188-197, 201-202.

⁸⁸ BGCA, BGEA, Willis Graham Haymaker papers, 1-29, "List of Ministers and Leaders of Work Who Were Present At The Meeting Under Auspices of T.E.F., April 25th, 1950, at 10.00 a.m. in Trinity United Church;" Telegram: Andrew Chisholm of TEF to Billy Graham, Jul. 26, 1950.

⁸⁹ BGCA, BGEA, Willis Graham Haymaker papers, 1-29, Allan H. Ferry to Graham, Jan. 13, 1951.

⁹⁰ BGCA, BGEA, Willis Graham Haymaker papers, 1-29, "Authorized News Release from the Billy Graham Greater Toronto Crusade," Oct. 17, 1955.

⁹¹ BGCA, BGEA, Willis Graham Haymaker papers, 1-29, Bruce G. Gray to Willis Graham Haymaker, Oct. 20, 1955.

⁹² Statistics for participation in some of Graham's Canadian crusades in the 1960s are available, however. These suggest that people who identified with the United Church were strongly represented at the crusades, even when their ministers were not (see the discussion in chapter 5). Other things being equal, since participation of ministers appears to have been higher in the 1950s, participation of the laity was likely higher as well.

⁹³ BGCA, BGEA, Willis Graham Haymaker papers, 1-31, Lester Randall, Secretary, Ottawa Council of Churches, to Rev. D.C. Percy, Vice-Chairman Billy Graham Toronto Committee, Toronto Bible College, May 28, 1955; "The Visit of Dr. Billy Graham to Ottawa," n/d.

⁹⁴ BGCA, BGEA, col. 360, reel 8, scrapbook 63, "Middlesex Presbytery Backs Graham Crusade," *London Evening Free Press*, Sep. 21, 1955.

⁹⁵ BGCA, BGEA, col. 360, reel 8, scrapbook 63, "President of Toronto Conference Addresses the Simcoe Presbytery," *The Barrie Examiner*, Oct. 21, 1955.

⁹⁶ BGCA, BGEA, col. 360, reel 8, scrapbook 63, A.J. Wilson, "Was Good to Have Him in Our Midst," *Toronto Daily Star*, Oct. 18, 1955.

⁹⁷ BGCA, BGEA, col. 360, reel 8, scrapbook 63, "Billy Graham's Canadian Crusade," *United Church Observer*, Sep. 15, 1955.

⁹⁸ BGCA, BGEA, col. 360, reel 8, scrapbook 63, A.C. Forrest, "Looking Back At The Graham Crusade," *Port Credit Weekly*, Oct. 27, 1955.

⁹⁹ United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings* (1956), "The National Evangelistic Mission," 183-184.

¹⁰⁰ For estimates, see United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings* (1956), "The National Evangelistic Mission," 181, and United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings* (1958), "National Evangelistic Mission," 205. United Church membership in 1956 was 933,488; see United Church of Canada, *Yearbook*, 1980. Interestingly, the literature of the mission that was most in demand was on the topics of "prayer, family worship, and the scriptures," which suggests a more pietistic popular religion than the leadership emphasis on social Christianity would allow; United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings* (1958), "National Evangelistic Mission," 208.

¹⁰¹ United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings* (1956), "The National Evangelistic Mission," 184.

¹⁰² United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings* (1956), "The National Evangelistic Mission," 182-184.

¹⁰³ United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings* (1956), "The National Evangelistic Mission," 191.

¹⁰⁴ United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings* (1956), "The National Evangelistic Mission," 188.

¹⁰⁵ UCA, Records of the National Evangelistic Mission [NEM], 1-12, W.G. Berry, "Calling Canada to Christ," in *Calling Canada to Christ: 500 Canadians Survey Family-Community-Daily Work-Political and Civic Life in Canada* (issued by The Mission to the Nation, UCC, n/d), 109.

¹⁰⁶ BESS AR 1959, Address of Chairman George Birtch, 9-10.

¹⁰⁷ BESS AR 1956, Report of Associate Secretary W.G. Berry, 35.

¹⁰⁸ BESS AR 1953, Report of Associate Secretary W.G. Berry, 30; UCA, NEM 1-12, W.G. Berry, "Calling Canada to Christ," in *Calling Canada to Christ*:

500 Canadians Survey Family-Community-Daily Work-Political and Civic Life in Canada (issued by The Mission to the Nation, UCC, n/d), 109.

¹⁰⁹ UCA, NEM 1-12, W.G. Berry, "Calling Canada to Christ," in *Calling Canada to Christ: 500 Canadians Survey Family-Community-Daily Work-Political and Civic Life in Canada* (issued by The Mission to the Nation, UCC, n/d), 110.

¹¹⁰ UCA, NEM 1-1, Minutes, Jan. 26, 1956.

¹¹¹ UCA, NEM 1-5, Berry to W.L. Langille et al., Nov. 25, 1955.

¹¹² Interestingly, Templeton moved in a more liberal theological direction while studying at Princeton Seminary – a term of study which Mutchmor had helped make possible. Kee, *Revivalists*, 163-179.

¹¹³ UCA, NEM 1-6, Harold M. Bailey to Berry, Dec. 14, 1956.

¹¹⁴ The research of Stewart Crysdale for the Board of Evangelism and Social Service in the mid-1960s suggested that United Church members in rural communities were marginally more theologically "conservative" than members in other communities. (Crysdale attributed this to the lower proportion of members with an "urbanized" lifestyle in rural areas, by "urbanism" meaning "openness to new ideas, heterogeneity in relations, a high rate of personal interaction, rationality in reaching decisions," and "a pluralistic system of authority, high exposure to mass and other media of communication, specialization in work and high mobility rates.") Whether a pre-existing preference in rural communities for evangelical religion was behind Berry's remarks, or whether attitudes and actions like Berry's actually resulted in rural communities becoming that way over time, is impossible to determine from the evidence available. See Stewart Crysdale, *The Changing Church in Canada: Beliefs and Attitudes of United Church People* (Toronto: Board of Evangelism and Social Service, 1965), 29-31, 25.

¹¹⁵ UCA, NEM 1-6, Berry to Harold M. Bailey, Dec. 20, 1956.

CHAPTER 3

THE NEW CURRICULUM, 1952-1971

In 1964, the United Church introduced a new denominational Christian education curriculum for teachers and students in its Sunday schools. The New Curriculum, as it came to be known, deserves an extended analysis. The public controversy that surrounded its introduction, more than any other event in the history of the United Church, redefined the denomination as a non-evangelical church in the eyes of its members and the public. From the beginning, the curriculum was guided by the non-evangelical beliefs of officials in the Boards of Christian Education and Publication, and the theological colleges of the church. Eschewing the “quiet” modernism of the preceding decades, the New Curriculum set out to bring the modernist beliefs of church leaders to the person in the pew through a total reorientation of the denomination’s Christian education programs. In the preceding decades, the paradigm of “quiet” modernist beliefs coupled with “loud” evangelical practices had obscured the differences between modernists and evangelicals in the United Church in the preceding decades. The modernist approach of the New Curriculum revealed this division, however, as evangelicals inside and outside the denomination protested its content and modernist church leaders and ministers rushed to its defense. By explicitly identifying themselves as modernists (or “liberals”) and portraying evangelical opponents of the curriculum as “fundamentalist” outsiders, United Church ministers and leaders redefined their denomination in the public eye as an explicitly non-evangelical church. The ultimate result was the alienation of many evangelicals in the church, an alienation that was partly responsible for a precipitous decline in Sunday school enrolment. The New Curriculum therefore represented a central turning point for the fate of evangelicalism in the United Church.

Origins and Development of the New Curriculum, 1952-1959

The process that culminated in the New Curriculum was set in motion by the 1952 General Council. At the council, the sessional committee on Christian education examined a memorial from Alberta Conference praising the “revolutionary” “Christian Faith and Life” curriculum recently produced by the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and asking the Boards of Publication and Christian Education to study the possibility of producing “similar materials” for the United Church. The sessional committee agreed that there was “an urgent need for thorough examination and strengthening of the present Christian Education curriculum,” so it asked General Council to instruct the Board of Christian Education and the editors of Sunday school publications “to make a thorough study of the total programme of Christian Education” in the United Church. The Board of Christian Education and the Sunday school editors were instructed to examine the curricula of “all the major Protestant churches” and ultimately to develop a new “integrated and effective curriculum for the total programme of Christian Education” for the United Church. The adoption of this recommendation by General Council marked the formal beginning of the New Curriculum process.¹

What induced the United Church to begin work on a new denominational curriculum in the early 1950s? The example of the “Christian Faith and Life” curriculum of the Presbyterians south of the border was the immediate impetus, as evidenced by the Alberta Conference memorial and the resulting actions of General Council. This curriculum had been prepared by the American denomination over the period 1937 to 1948, and went into publication in 1948.² As a purely denominational curriculum, it stood apart from the internationally-based uniform and graded curricula that had previously been used by the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. It also differed from earlier curricula in that it showed the influence of neo-orthodoxy’s theological and biblical emphasis. Although the curriculum was ultimately grounded in a modernist view of the Bible, this view made only a muted appearance in the actual curriculum. The curriculum featured a focus on the central doctrines of Christianity and a systematic treatment of the whole Bible. It was thorough, comprehensive, officially backed by the leadership of the church, and financially successful. Finally, although there was some criticism from the “fundamentalist” and “liberal” wings of the denomination, it was fairly popular, and Sunday school enrolment increased in the years after its introduction.

The example of this American curriculum would have appealed to United Church leaders for several reasons. The theological orientation of the curriculum, which combined the biblical emphasis and vaguely evangelical “feel” of neo-orthodoxy with a modernist approach to Scripture, fit well with the then predominant theological approach of the United Church. As we have seen, the “quiet modernism” of the United Church leadership similarly couched modernist thinking in evangelical-friendly language and ideas, partly under the influence of neo-orthodoxy. The idea of a denominational curriculum, tailored specifically to the United Church, also would have appealed to the large denomination that had produced a Canadian version of the international graded lessons in 1931. On a purely practical level, the success of the American curriculum among its intended constituency was also doubtless appealing to the United Church. Beyond these reasons, the wider context of the early 1950s also helped make a new curriculum possible. The denomination’s Christian education officials were open to potential curriculum changes; their new Curriculum Study Committee had already done three years of research by the time General Council formally initiated the New Curriculum project.³ More broadly, the recent crises of the Depression and the Second World War were fading into the background. Sunday school membership had been growing since its low point in 1943, and church membership statistics and finances were also improving.⁴ It was a time for new beginnings.

The Board of Christian Education proceeded cautiously with its new task at first. In fact, the first use of the capitalized term “New Curriculum” was actually in a sentence warning the 1954 General Council that “the present staff are in full agreement that we will never launch a ‘New Curriculum’ which appears to provide ‘The Answer’ to the task of Christian Education. We are, however, improving our curriculum plans continuously.” Nevertheless, the Board had made

a “thorough study” of other denominational curricula in Canada and the United States, and had begun a plan to evaluate its own curriculum.⁵ In 1956, when it reported again, the Board unveiled plans to develop a new curriculum over five years beginning in 1956. It reported that it had already undertaken consultations with the Conferences to improve existing materials, and hosted a “National Consultation of outstanding persons in the fields of theology, education, and the ministry,” in order to “examine a statement of the theological and educational emphases and a tentative proposal for a new Curriculum.”⁶ From the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, the single overriding concern of the Board of Christian Education and the relevant parts of the Board of Publication would be the production of this new curriculum.

The development of the New Curriculum was carried out by a curriculum workshop made up of personnel from the Board of Christian Education and the Department of Sunday School Publications of the Board of Publication.⁷ The major early task of this workshop, in addition to gathering information about the curricula of other denominations and consulting experts in curriculum development, was to develop a set of theological and educational presuppositions to serve as the core guiding principles for the New Curriculum. As officials (and, for the most part, ministers) in the United Church, the members of the workshop were attuned to the denomination’s modernist theological orientation, as is shown below. Some, such as A.J. Cooper, associate secretary of the Board of Christian Education, and David I. Forsyth, secretary of the Board, had been trained at major mainline Protestant institutions in the United States and Canada: Cooper received his theological education at St. Stephen’s College in Edmonton and Union Seminary in New York, and Forsyth’s training included post-graduate work at Yale Divinity School.⁸ The creation of a comprehensive, entirely new curriculum from scratch specifically for the United Church provided these officials with an unprecedented opportunity to create a curriculum that would reflect modernist beliefs, in contrast to the traditional curricula of the past. As Cooper noted, the workshop had “a large measure of freedom” in drafting the guiding presuppositions of the curriculum.⁹ Editor-in-chief Peter Gordon White later remarked that at the outset of curriculum planning, the Christian education staff such as associate editor of Sunday School publications Wilbur K. Howard “were in revolt, rather extreme revolt, against the authoritarian teaching in Sunday schools and all the moralisms.” As a result White had to “become acquainted with modern theology, and movements in education.”¹⁰ This dissatisfaction with the status quo and desire to embrace a “modern” theological and educational stance, however, was tempered by the workshop’s desire to produce a successful curriculum that the church would accept. In attempting to set out the workshop’s policy, Cooper counseled restraint. He observed that developing a full curriculum “is a task which our church has never previously tackled, and the creative compromises which will make a bold ‘step one’ successful, thus allowing a later, and still bolder ‘step two’ permissible [*sic*], should be considered.”¹¹ While it is unclear whether the majority of workshop members shared this opinion, the

heavily consultative process embraced by the workshop, and the later efforts to refine and test the curriculum materials, suggest that the workshop was attempting to strike a balance between radical change and wide acceptability. The initial intent, therefore, was to produce a curriculum for the United Church that reflected recent theological and educational developments without being so radical that it would be rejected by the church. If the first new curriculum succeeded, bolder steps would perhaps be possible in the future.

The workshop proceeded with the task of hammering out theological and educational presuppositions for the curriculum by producing individual papers and then synthesizing the results. These drafts provide a window into the thought of the people who would bring the New Curriculum to fruition, and they consequently provide valuable information about the basic theological and educational beliefs that shaped the curriculum. The picture that emerges is that the framers of the presuppositions held a relativist concept of truth, elevated “relevance” as the primary criterion for good teaching, and rejected evangelical beliefs on every specific subject they addressed.

To begin with, the members of the workshop agreed, in theory, that the curriculum should reflect the official beliefs of the United Church as set out in the 1940 Statement of Faith and the Catechism.¹² As educational staff member Frank Fidler pointed out, there had to be some “consistent doctrinal foundation for the curriculum.”¹³ David I. Forsyth noted that, as ministers, most of the members of the workshop had given “general agreement to the theological positions” of the United Church. The members of the workshop did not give their reasons for using the Statement of Faith and Catechism, rather than the Basis of Union, as their standard. As was shown in chapter one, however, the Statement of Faith, with its “quiet modernism,” was notably less evangelical than the Basis of Union and probably fit more comfortably with the non-evangelical views of the workshop members. This conjecture is borne out by the way the workshop actually understood the theological position of the United Church. On the one hand, they thought that this position was broad and inclusive. Because of this, Cooper held that the curriculum “must not represent one exclusive point of view in Christian theology,” but should “strive to be inclusive in matters of faith.”¹⁴ Paradoxically, however, for the workshop being “inclusive” meant adopting a particular point of view: the “middle-of-the-road position” they discerned at the heart of the church’s theology.¹⁵ As workshop member Bill Blackmore put it, the United Church had “considerable flexibility and freedom of thought in Biblical interpretation” and so the curriculum “should present a middle-of-the-road position so that it will be acceptable and meaningful to the largest possible number of persons.” Interestingly, by “middle-of-the-road” the workshop members meant, not a compromise position between evangelical and non-evangelical views, but rather, a combination of “the best theological emphasis of both neo-orthodoxy and liberalism,” the two essentially modernist viewpoints held by the church’s theological elite.¹⁶ According to Forsyth and assistant secretary of Sunday school publications E.R. McLean, this modernist middle ground explicitly ruled out both

Unitarianism on the one hand, and significantly, the “literalistic approach to the Scriptures” on the other.¹⁷ The term “literalistic approach” which Forsyth equated with “extreme fundamentalism,” was shorthand for the evangelical view that the actual text of the Bible was inspired by God, and therefore, fully authoritative.¹⁸ From the outset, therefore, the New Curriculum was to be shaped by a compromise of neo-orthodox and liberal theology that intentionally excluded the evangelical view of the Bible.

Therefore, although the members of the workshop wanted the curriculum to reflect the Statement of Faith, they did not want to imitate the “quiet modernism” that had characterized both that statement and much of the United Church’s teaching for the past twenty years. Instead, they were adamant that there be no “double-talk” in the curriculum, a practice in which theological words were used with intentional ambiguity, to mean one thing to the speaker and another to the hearers. The New Curriculum had to clearly and unambiguously teach the modernist theological position of the church as interpreted by the workshop. According to Forsyth, “there should be honesty in presentation of Christian truth and the Biblical records. Evasion and double-talk, or facts that have to be unlearned later cause confusion, distrust, and unbelief.”¹⁹ Similarly, workshop member Ruth Curry identified “the tendency to use double-talk” as one of the “sins of church publications.” She recommended that in the New Curriculum’s teaching materials the writer “should not hide what he is trying to say under the basket of biblical or theological language, so that three readers may easily infer from one sentence three different biblical or theological points of view.” For example, a writer addressing the doctrine of creation should not use language “which he hopes will say to the believers in the theory of evolution that the writer is using symbolical language, while the Biblical literalists will infer that the writer belongs to their camp. This is dishonest writing.”²⁰ In keeping with this view, Curry and others such as Board of Christian Education staff member Dency McCalla hoped that in the New Curriculum, nothing would be taught to children that would have to be “unlearned later.”²¹ As an example, Curry urged that young children not be “taught that ‘God made’ [the world] since this presents an anthropomorphic idea of God.”²² Even in these early stages, therefore, the workshop was planning a curriculum that would unambiguously teach even young children a modernist view of the Bible and theology rather than the “literalist” evangelical view.

What, then, was the content of the modernist vision drawn up for the New Curriculum? First of all, it included a highly non-traditional approach to theological truth, which rejected the attempt to describe God or religion with rational concepts, the notion of timeless theological truths, the notion of the unity of theological knowledge, and the importance of doctrine as such. Of the workshop members, Cooper devoted the most ink to asserting that God cannot be described by rational human concepts. According to Cooper, God “transcends all conditions. And because He transcends all of our concepts we must avoid trying to imprison him [*sic*] within rational categories, lest we revert to various sub[t]le

forms of ido[la]try. We must not give ultimate authority to our *ideas* of God.”²³ In a number of complex papers, Cooper contrasted “conditioned” thought, which was rational, inductive, and inherently divisive, with “unconditioned” thought, which was mystical, deductive, and focused on wholeness. He identified “conditioned” thinking as the pervasive feature of Western thought and a pernicious influence in religion and society, going so far as to blame it for wars and high military spending.²⁴ For the sake of the church, the New Curriculum had to avoid an emphasis on rational theological concepts in favour of “the continuous insight of the soul, in its conscious oneness with God.”²⁵ Olive Sparling, secretary of children’s work for the Board of Christian Education, reinforced this emphasis on “an inner dynamic experience” rather than belief in particular concepts. Although she thought that the curriculum should help people develop “faith,” she qualified this, adding, “by ‘faith’ I do not mean any set formulae of doctrine.”²⁶

Similarly, the workshop rejected the notion that theological truth was “static,” handed down from the past and preserved in the present.²⁷ Blackmore argued that “for too long many teachers have given the impression that the Bible contains a static and supernatural body of divine truth which bears little or no relation to the world in which [one] lives.” This “static” concept needed to be balanced by a more dynamic concept of God reaching out to humanity through continuing revelations in the present.²⁸ Expanding on her unique understanding of “faith,” Sparling emphasized that it is “dynamic ... not something that is static, received once and for all time, but rather a deepening and growing relationship.”²⁹

Building on these concepts, the workshop rejected the idea that there might be a single right answer to questions of theology. According to Curry, Sunday school teachers must give “adequate answers,” to questions from students, “but never insisting that this particular answer is the only one, or that you are not a Christian if you do not accept it.” She followed this admonition with a stern warning to those proponents of neo-orthodoxy who were too dogmatic by her standards: “Heaven help the Neo-orthodox! And may we remind writers of this persuasion that we have a large supply of well-sharpened blue pencils in the Department of Sunday School Publications editorial offices to use on manuscripts which present Christian theories in unchristian authoritarian ways!”³⁰ Sparling also advocated a “democratic” approach to Sunday school instruction in which “each person must come to his own interpretation of the Christian faith.... Each person must reach his own convictions if they are to be vital to him.” While the “Christian heritage” might be helpful in this process, this heritage “must, however, be given, not as an authoritarian truth, but as a personal conviction.”³¹ Cooper agreed that the curriculum must not pressure students to agree with particular theological beliefs, since a “distinctive quality” of the church was “the right to disagree and remain in full fellowship.”³²

Finally, in light of this understanding of theological truth as non-rational, fluid, and relative, the workshop played down the place of doctrine in religious instruction. Fidler argued that the curriculum should not focus on “expounding a set of ready-made and dogmatic propositions.”³³ Blackmore agreed that the

curriculum must avoid merely emphasizing “abstract truths about God.”³⁴ Howard thought the curriculum should stimulate “independent thinking” and discourage “conformity, passive acceptance, [and] toneless acquisition.” The teacher’s attitude towards doctrine should be that the pupil “can take it or leave it.”³⁵ Thus, the curriculum workshop embraced a view of truth that de-emphasized the transmission of doctrine to students.

Instead, the primary concern of the curriculum’s framers was to be student-sensitive and “relevant.” A certain amount of “content” was acceptable, but only if it was “always relevant to life.”³⁶ Curriculum materials had to take into account the changing needs of growing students, and always relate concepts to the actual “everyday situations relevant to people.”³⁷ According to McCalla, the curriculum needed to use “the best insights of group work, psychology and secular education” so that each student would “find his worth and place as an individual.”³⁸ To keep the curriculum relevant, Cooper suggested that it needed to always begin with “some basic need, problem or concern on the part of the learner.”³⁹ Blackmore wanted to see the student “discover the nature of truth in all its various forms for himself, rather than through the authoritarian approach.” This could be accomplished through various methods, such as “role-playing, the use of audio-visuals, [and] discussion groups.”⁴⁰ Sparling and McCalla offered similar suggestions.⁴¹

Given that the workshop embraced a fluid, relativist view of truth and a student-centred approach to instruction, one might have expected it to attempt to develop a pluralist curriculum. In practice, however, the workshop’s admonition to be non-dogmatic was really directed at those groups implicitly seen as inflexible: evangelicals and dogmatic proponents of neo-orthodoxy. The workshop members responsible for developing the presuppositions, like most United Church leaders, did not fall into either of these two categories, but in practice, they did hold firm theological positions of their own. Although there were shades of opinion among the members, the workshop took distinctly non-evangelical positions on God, the Bible, and conversion.

Although the existence of God was a given for workshop members, their beliefs about what God is like differed substantially from those of historic Christianity when it came to Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Only Blackmore gave the traditional view of Jesus as “both God and man.”⁴² Fidler was willing to grant that Jesus was the Son of God “in a peculiar way,”⁴³ but Curry saw him merely as a man who brought a message about the nature of God.⁴⁴ Sparling specifically denied that Jesus was God. Although God “was in him” and was revealed in him, “to be true to the gospel we need to be careful not to substitute Jesus for God. Jesus always turned men to God... He made no claims for himself... God alone is to be worshiped.”⁴⁵ Workshop members also avoided traditional views of the Resurrection and the Virgin Birth. Curry denied that Jesus had risen from the dead, interpreting the “Resurrection” as the sense Jesus’s followers had of his presence after his death.⁴⁶ A summary document noted that the workshop was uncertain about how to interpret the Resurrection accounts in the Bible, but

added, “None of us, however, expresses similar concern in connection with nativity records.”⁴⁷ In light of the New Curriculum’s later skeptical attitude towards the Virgin Birth, this statement can only mean that the workshop was unanimous in rejecting that traditional doctrine. Workshop members similarly eschewed the traditional Protestant view that Christ’s death was an atonement for sin. Curry said that the real significance of the crucifixion was that it showed Jesus’s willingness to die for his ideals, while E.R. McLean saw it as a symbolic representation of the awfulness of sin and God’s continual attitude of forgiveness.⁴⁸ Curry, at least, also rejected the traditional view of the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity. She reinterpreted the Holy Spirit as “the working of God in a group” and possibly even “a combination of the thoughts and feelings of the human spirit.” (Her remarks were radical enough that she prefaced them by saying, “Just in case someone sneaks off with a copy of this statement to my acquaintances in the Bay of Quinte conference, let me go on record as saying I do believe in the Holy Spirit.”)⁴⁹ These non-evangelical views about God were complemented by non-evangelical views about other issues such as prayer and original sin.⁵⁰

The members of the workshop also held non-evangelical views of the Bible.⁵¹ The workshop was not anti-Bible per se; members such as Blackmore and Fidler thought that the Bible needed to be central in Christian education and that it should serve as the “main source material” for the curriculum.⁵² Nevertheless, to be properly understood, the Bible needed to be seen through the lens of “modern Biblical scholarship,” a catchall term for the higher critical theories first developed in the nineteenth century. To be “honest” in its use of the Bible, asserted Curry, the church needed to embrace the viewpoint of higher criticism. This included the insight that “the religious message of the Bible is usually in poetic form, or myth. Thus ‘the truth’ is revealed through stories and does not necessarily have anything to do with ‘facts.’” By designating parts of the Bible “myth,” Curry and other modernists were separating the actual text of the Bible, with its purportedly historical accounts, from the spiritual meaning they discerned in those accounts. This strategy allowed them to preserve a spiritual value for biblical passages while unreservedly embracing theories that questioned the historical and scientific veracity of those same passages. Thus, the Bible could be seen as a record of humanity’s progressively improving ideas about God, rather than, as an evangelical would have it, God’s communication to humanity.⁵³ The workshop agreed that “to rightly discern Biblical truth Biblical scholarship arising out of the Church’s concern for truth is to be received gratefully and handled honestly.”⁵⁴

For members of the workshop, having a “scholarly” approach to the Bible meant rejecting “Biblical literalism.”⁵⁵ Curry here opposed “literalism” to her view that the Bible communicated truth through “poetry and myth” rather than historically true accounts.⁵⁶ She and the other members of the workshop were disturbed by the apparent prevalence of this “literalism” among the United Church laity. Cooper was concerned that “we are raising another generation of literalists

in the Church and illiterates without the Church, for the most part.”⁵⁷ In keeping with Cooper’s view of truth and the Bible, and Forsyth’s desire that the curriculum recognize “the limitations of words to convey truth, and ... that a word is most powerful when it is recognized as a symbol,”⁵⁸ the workshop planned to disabuse United Church members of their literalism. As Curry saw it, the church had “a responsibility for educating its people as to the nature of the Bible and must avoid any interpretation which presents a Biblican [*sic*] literalism.”⁵⁹ Interestingly, the members of the workshop thought that the literalist view was common among the laity. The workshop members, as insiders attuned to the modernism of the theological colleges and head offices, apparently thought that the ordinary members of the United Church were dangerously prone to evangelical thinking and badly needed theological enlightening to deliver them from such crude ideas. Not only did the workshop members hold a modernist view of the Bible, therefore, but they were determined to make this the view of the average United Church member. This program was fully in keeping with their desire to avoid the quiet modernism – or “double-talk” – that had characterized United Church teaching in the past.

In addition to their positions on God and the Bible, the workshop members held a non-evangelical view of conversion. In part, this stemmed from their stated aversion to “authoritarian” teaching methods that presented a particular theological viewpoint as correct, and their desire to be sensitive above all to the perceived needs and interests of students. Converting Sunday school students to Christianity, therefore, was not to be a major aim of the New Curriculum. Curry stated flatly that “it is not the task of the Christian educator ‘to make’ Christians, or even ‘to make’ church members. An educator has a responsibility not to try to manipulate the lives of others, even if our ends are of such a high order as ‘good people’ and ‘integrated personalities’!”⁶⁰ Similarly, she argued that “the church is not primarily concerned with making tomorrow’s Christians out of today’s children.”⁶¹ Cooper echoed the idea that Christian teachers should not “‘make’ Christians,” but rather “invite them into the fellowship of communion making available the resources of our heritage.”⁶²

Due in part to this reluctance to “manipulate” students by asking them to convert, and in part to the modernist theological orientation of the workshop, the presupposition papers did not include an evangelical doctrine of conversion. To be sure, the workshop members made occasional references to “decisions” and even “a conversion experience,” but closer examination reveals that these terms, as used by the workshop members, did not have evangelical theological meanings. Blackmore, who came closest to an evangelical view of conversion, did suggest that God made possible “some break with sin” and “a new life in which in which disorder and the sin and tragedy of our existence are borne in faith and begin to be overcome.”⁶³ He distanced himself from the evangelical emphasis on justification before God in an instantaneous conversion, however, by saying that “a conversion experience or salvation” is something that “can be the gradual result of a growth or developmental process over a number of years.”⁶⁴ A paper by Forsyth,

interestingly, noted that “some theory of salvation is necessary,” but did not specify what that theory was. Similarly, he wrote that the New Curriculum should emphasize “the fact that life contains ‘crisis experiences’ and decisions, and commitments need to be made,” but he did not explain what these experiences were or what these commitments involved.⁶⁵ This ambiguity was echoed by Cooper, who wrote that the “place of decision will be important in every unit of study,” but left the content or purpose of such decisions to the reader’s conjecture. The workshop papers, then, while they did make nonspecific evangelical-sounding references to “decision” and “commitment,” did not set forth an evangelical view of conversion, and in fact explicitly discouraged the idea of seeking student conversions. This was a radical shift from the older curricula, which explicitly aimed to lead children to “accept [Jesus] as Saviour and Lord.”⁶⁶

Overall, the workshop entrusted with drafting the guiding principles of the New Curriculum had proceeded from a “middle-of-the-road” modernist theological position, a relativist view of truth, and a student-sensitive educational philosophy to specific non-evangelical views of God, the Bible, and conversion. The end product of the workshop process was a document entitled “Presuppositions for the development of a curriculum for the Sunday Church Schools of The United Church of Canada,” produced in June of 1957.⁶⁷ This draft aimed to set forth a synthesis of the major ideas of the workshop as a set of presuppositions to guide the subsequent production of curriculum materials.

As would be expected, the June document emphasized relevance and sensitivity to student needs. A desire “that the Christian gospel shall have meaning for the person ‘here and now’” was identified as “a primary concern” of the planned curriculum. This meant that the teaching would have to be relevant to the “stage of development” of the child. It also meant that the teacher should teach not primarily by conveying knowledge, but by relating to the needs of students, since “learning takes place most readily when a concern or need in the life of the pupil is being met.” Consequently, while traditional concepts, like those in the Statement of Faith, were to be central to the curriculum, their message needed to be reinterpreted for the present. Also not surprisingly, the June draft of presuppositions also lacked reference to conversion. While the document talked at length about the nurturing aspects of Christian education, using “husbandry” and fruit-growing as metaphors, it did not talk at all about the need for a personal conversion. The only time the concept was broached was to point out that “redemption” is not “a transaction solely between the individual person and God,” but a process with “a social dimension.”⁶⁸ “Redemption” itself was left undefined. The June draft of presuppositions therefore followed most of the conclusions of the workshop fairly closely.

When it came to the Bible, on the other hand, the document pulled back from the clearly modernist viewpoints expressed in the workshop. Strangely, given the workshop’s emphasis on “honesty” in presenting “modern Biblical scholarship” and combating “literalism,” neither topic was mentioned in the June document. The Bible was simply portrayed in a positive light without caveats, as a

book “always at the heart of study within the Christian fellowship.” While the theologically astute may have noticed that the document carefully avoided identifying the Bible itself as a revelation from God, referring to it instead as “a resource for knowledge about God’s historical revelation of himself,” “an instrument by which God communicates himself to contemporary experience,” and a book that “points to God’s revelation of himself,” there was no trace of the workshop’s frankly critical attitude. Again, a careful reading would reveal that the authors of the document regarded the Bible not as a source of true knowledge about God in itself, but rather a *possible* means to produce a “personal encounter with God” if used in a worshipful context.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, there was no talk in the June document about the Bible containing “myth” or the dangers of “literalism.” Why did the draft shy away from explicitly raising these issues? In the absence of specific evidence, the most likely explanation is that the habits of quiet modernism died hard; even those who were convinced of the need for an openly critical view of the Bible were reluctant to state those views in a document that would ultimately be seen by the laity.

In any event, the June draft of presuppositions was combined with a tentative sketch of the overall organization of the curriculum teaching plan over a three year cycle, and sent out to a group of nearly 50 ministers and theological professors for their comments. Professors from Emmanuel College, St. Stephen’s College, Pine Hill Divinity Hall, Queen’s Theological College and Victoria University, as well as ministers from across the country and several officials from United Church headquarters, read the draft. About two-thirds of the readers were quite pleased with the document, indicating that the presuppositions draft did a fairly good job of reflecting the views of the church’s theological elite.⁷⁰ Most of these readers did not offer many specific comments on the presuppositions, being content to give their general approval of the document. A number specifically expressed their agreement with the theology of the presuppositions, with some finding it an improvement over past curricula in this regard.⁷¹ In particular, some readers approvingly noted the freedom afforded by the broad theological basis of the curriculum.⁷² Others expressed their approval of the tentative curriculum plan and its organization.⁷³

The most common criticism of the document was its writing style, which historian-archivist George Boyle castigated as “pedagogical jargon that, apart from doing violence to the Queen’s English, is meaningless.”⁷⁴ The other criticisms offered by some readers are worth analysis, since they concerned important features of the curriculum that would later prove controversial. One of these criticisms was that the student-sensitive presuppositions placed too much emphasis on man and not enough on God. J.D.H. Hutchinson of Toronto commented that “somehow man seems to emerge as more important than God by the end of the document,” and others shared the impression that the curriculum was too “experience centred” or “pupil centred.”⁷⁵ Boyle worried that “man is made the pivot around which the whole programme must revolve.” In particular, some readers felt that the proposed organizational scheme for the curriculum plan,

with a year each focusing on “God-Neighbour-Self”, was too human-centred, or “theoretical,” rather than biblical.⁷⁶ Some also thought that this anthropocentric organizational plan did not seem to follow from the presuppositions themselves. In parallel with those who criticized the anthropocentrism of the presuppositions and plan, some readers felt the proposed curriculum would lack doctrinal content. J.B. Corston of Pine Hill Divinity Hall felt there was an “under-emphasis on memory work and on precise doctrinal instruction” in the curriculum. Emmanuel College professor George Johnston emphasized the need for more content, especially from the Bible: “The failure to teach *content* results in dreadful ignorance at College age, as we prove every year in the English Bible exams set for theological students. Ministers and people should know the Bible thoroughly, and this demands training at an early age.”⁷⁷ No one else went as far as Boyle, who recommended that the presuppositions “be discarded to the waste basket,”⁷⁸ but a significant number of readers did foresee problems with the human-centredness and lack of doctrinal emphasis proposed for the New Curriculum.

Several critics of the presuppositions also pointed to their lack of conversionism.⁷⁹ A.B.B. Moore of Victoria University noted that the presuppositions seemed to assume “a sort of almost automatic progression toward the goal” which did “not sufficiently take into account the moral dilemma of sin.”⁸⁰ William Berry of the BESS, commenting on the purpose of Christian education, wrote, “The purpose as stated seems to presuppose a developmental kind of Christian life and make no reference to what God has done for man in Christ. Surely the purpose ought somehow to include the thought of salvation, decision for Christ.” He later added, “There is a conversion experience in Christianity, for example, which is not a growth, and towards which Christian Education must lead.”⁸¹ Berry did not himself hold to an evangelical view of conversion, as demonstrated in the previous chapter. Yet, as a leader committed to maintaining some level of evangelical practice in the United Church, he was troubled that the New Curriculum presuppositions neglected the issue of conversion.

A final point of criticism for a smaller number of readers was the document’s treatment of the Bible. Minister J.D. Fry of Winnipeg asked, “one of the greatest needs of our church is for a re understanding [*sic*] of Holy Scripture ... does this statement and Curriculum plan meet this need?” Hutchinson was more blunt. She asked, “Where and how are we going to deal with the problem of teachers and parents who hold a literalist view of the Bible? Are we going to set out, in our curriculum plan, the view our Church holds?”⁸² Again, Berry penetrated to the heart of the issue:

I like what is said about the Bible, but I wonder if enough has been said. Most of our people are Bible literalists in thought. We must strive to give them a higher and better view. We ought to be very frank about our view of the Bible. I find this statement just a little obscure.... The Bible is surely the deposit of the recorded experiences of men with their God. We

must teach our people that to understand the Bible they should strive to get behind the forms of communication in the printed word to the living form as it is in the lives of people. I know the Committee would agree but why not say so[?]⁸³

At least some of the readers of the presuppositions, therefore, felt that on the one hand too many United Church people held to a “literalist” view of the Bible, and that on the other hand the presuppositions needed to be more explicit in tackling this problem head-on.

After hearing from readers, the curriculum workshop produced a revised version of the presuppositions which only superficially took the main criticisms into account. There was some attempt to balance the emphasis on the needs of students with references to “content,” but the curriculum would still aim above all to be relevant to the perceived needs of adults and children. Although the curriculum would use Scripture and doctrinal standards like the Statement of Faith, “Christians of each generation are required to witness to their faith afresh in terms of the ideas of their time and the needs of their time.” The organizing scheme of the curriculum plan continued to be “Who is God? Who is my neighbour? Who am I?” which some readers had criticized as being insufficiently biblical and overly anthropocentric. The new drafts of the presuppositions also featured a number of nonspecific references to “crises,” “decisions,” and “changes” in the Christian life, but there was no statement of the need for a single, life-changing conversion, and nothing about why conversion might be necessary or connected to salvation. The primary emphasis continued to be on gradual growth. Finally, the revised presuppositions did contain a slightly more direct handling of the question of biblical interpretation. According to the new presuppositions, the Bible “can” reveal God, but only if one “reads it seriously but not literalistically, in expectancy but not in superstition.” It also noted that “Our understanding of these [biblical] writings is immeasurably advanced when we take advantage of critical Biblical scholarship.”⁸⁴ Thus, the revised presuppositions did suggest a modernist view of the Bible to a careful reader, although these rather oblique statements were still a far cry from the frank anti-literalism of the early workshop papers.

The curriculum proposal had come through a long process of refinement since the first curriculum workshop papers. It still needed formal approval, however, before development of the actual curriculum materials could begin, and criticisms would continue to dog the proposal. In keeping with the direction of the 1956 General Council, the Board of Christian Education circulated the final “Presuppositions” document to the conferences of the church for study and comment.⁸⁵ When the presuppositions and plan came before the 1958 General Council for approval, Manitoba Conference presented a memorial that was “severely critical” of the document, proposing instead that the “Faith and Life” curriculum of the United Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. be used. Manitoba Conference criticized both the “complexity” and “content and pedagogical

adequacy” of the document.⁸⁶ Presumably, the “God-Neighbour-Self” organizational schema and other features of the presuppositions and plan compared unfavourably with the successful and more unambiguously theocentric and neo-orthodox Presbyterian curriculum in the eyes of Manitoba Conference. Fortunately for the New Curriculum, General Council rejected Manitoba’s memorial and instead adopted a resolution moved by George Johnston. This resolution approved the actual presuppositions of the document, but asked that the attached curriculum plan be referred to the presbyteries of the church to decide “whether the proposed plan is in harmony with the theological directives and the Holy Scriptures,” in order that the plan could receive “the fullest support of the entire Church.” Importantly, however, the presbyteries were to report back to the Boards of Christian Education and Publication, not to General Council. These boards were then to “review the plan in the light of the recommendations of the Presbyteries and submit a final plan to the Committee on Christian Faith for comment and to the Executive of the General Council for approval.”⁸⁷ With this resolution, the basic presuppositions of the curriculum were approved, criticism was focused specifically on the proposed curriculum plan, and final approval of the curriculum itself was entrusted to the theological and administrative elite of the church rather than General Council.

Most of the presbyteries that reported back to the boards responsible for curriculum development thought the curriculum plan was acceptable, but a significant minority wanted “quite radical changes.” Taking these criticisms seriously, the curriculum workshop held a conference in February 1958 with one representative from each theological college of the United Church.⁸⁸ This step, which formally involved the theological elite of the church in the shaping of the New Curriculum, was later described by editor-in-chief Peter Gordon White as an “important move” that ultimately resulted in many of the church’s professors becoming authors of curriculum books.⁸⁹ With continued input from the theological professors, the curriculum workshop produced a new curriculum plan that was seemingly more biblical, and more in line with the presuppositions, than the original allegedly anthropocentric proposal. Unlike the earlier “God-Neighbour-Self” schema, the three themes of the new plan, “God and His Purpose,” “Jesus Christ and the Christian Life,” and “The Church and the World,” made it two-thirds of the way to being Trinitarian.⁹⁰ George Johnston, sounding rather neo-orthodox, wrote in the *United Church Observer* that the new plan “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.”⁹¹ This plan received the unanimous “general approval” of the Committee on Christian Faith, “as basically in conformity with the Holy Scriptures and the Pre-suppositions already approved by General Council.”⁹² Interestingly, in confidential comments forwarded to the Executive of General Council, the Committee on Christian Faith reiterated the neo-orthodox themes that the Bible should be treated as a “record of God’s dealings” with humanity rather than “the story of man’s developing ideas about God,” and that “the Bible should also be understood, not only as the record

of events and experiences in the past but as the book through which God speaks to his people today through the Holy Spirit.”⁹³ Finally, on November 3, 1959, the Executive of General Council approved the plan for the New Curriculum.⁹⁴

This overview of the origins and early development of the New Curriculum has shown that its guiding principles were grounded in theological modernism. The workshop initially aimed for what it called a “middle-of-the-road” theological position, which could encompass liberalism and neo-orthodoxy, but not evangelicalism. Although the workshop held back from a completely frank statement of its stance on biblical interpretation, its original curriculum plan of “God-Neighbour-Self” was too human-centred for some church leaders. As the curriculum proposal was shepherded through General Council, conferences with theological professors, and the Committee on Christian Faith, the church’s theological elite pulled the curriculum plan in a slightly more neo-orthodox direction – a process that, for the most part, was done out of public view.

In no way, however, did this theological intervention change the basic modernist orientation of the New Curriculum, with which both liberals and neo-orthodox were comfortable. Partly veiled in the oblique language of the presuppositions but fully alive in the convictions of the curriculum workshop and the church’s theologians, the desire to promote an “enlightened” understanding of the Bible and Christianity still lay at the heart of the New Curriculum. For both liberal and more neo-orthodox contributors to the curriculum’s development, this meant a specific, non-evangelical view of the Bible. In particular, it meant carefully maintaining the small but crucial distinction that the Bible was not itself a revelation from God, but rather a fallible human witness or record of God’s revelation. If understood properly, the Bible *might* become a source of revelation for present day readers and lead to an encounter with God. As curriculum contributors saw it, to be properly understood, the Bible needed to be read through the lens of higher criticism; in other words, it needed to be read as a collection of fallible human writings that could not be taken seriously as historical fact or precise communications from God. While those influenced by neo-orthodoxy might be willing to go further than liberals in acknowledging the potential for God to speak through the Bible, both were united in opposing what they caricatured as “literalism” – the evangelical belief that the Bible itself was God’s revelation to humanity and could be trusted as true in its specific affirmations. The views of United Church leaders on questions of biblical authority are dealt with in more detail in chapter four. The key point with respect to the New Curriculum is that several church leaders believed that many, perhaps most, United Church members were “literalists” in their thinking, and therefore one of the central purposes of the New Curriculum was to give them, as Berry put it, “a higher and better view.”⁹⁵

Because of the revision and approval process it went through, this modernist vision for the New Curriculum had the support of a wide spectrum of church leaders. At different stages, the presuppositions and plan for the New Curriculum had been thoroughly examined and directed by the personnel of the Board of Christian Education and the Board of Publication, as well as professors

from every United Church theological college, many of whom would write the actual curriculum materials. The Commission on Christian Faith (the doctrinal gatekeeper of the church), and the Executive of General Council (the highest administrative body of the church), both gave it their stamp of approval. As the New Curriculum entered into a new phase of material production and promotion, therefore, it had the full backing of the United Church's theological and administrative elites.

Publicizing the New Curriculum, 1960-1964

Between the final approval of the New Curriculum plan in late 1959 and the official launch of the full curriculum in the fall of 1964, the curriculum developers worked hard at testing the new materials and building support among the church membership. The publicity surrounding the New Curriculum in this 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. Given the fact that this publicity began in 1959, why was there no significant public controversy over the New Curriculum until the summer of 1964? The lack of controversy was not due to a lack of controversial content: the fact that there ultimately was a major controversy proves that there certainly were controversial elements in the curriculum. As is shown below, part of the reason there was no controversy in the period of publicity before 1964 was that this publicity told the large majority of church members little or nothing about the controversial content of the curriculum materials.

Once the curriculum plan was approved, there was no lack of publicity for the New Curriculum. Newspaper articles on the curriculum appeared in the *United Church Observer* in 1959, and in the *Montreal Star* and the *Hamilton Spectator* in 1962.⁹⁶ The Board of Christian Education promoted an annual theme for each school year between 1960-61 and 1963-64 highlighting some aspect of the New Curriculum, and even released a "Curriculum filmstrip" to raise awareness of the program.⁹⁷ These themes were intended to guide programming for virtually every Sunday school, session, and other sub-group within the local congregations of the church.⁹⁸ The Board also raised awareness and sought feedback through question-and-answer sessions with ministers and elders, and materials testing in selected Sunday schools.⁹⁹ One curriculum text, *The Word and the Way* by Donald Mathers, was released two years ahead of the general launch of the curriculum and promoted by the 1962 General Council as an introduction to the New Curriculum for "every adult" in the church.¹⁰⁰ By the summer of 1963 it had sold 125,000 copies.¹⁰¹ Due to these and related efforts, many if not most United Church members must have been aware of the imminent arrival of the New Curriculum.

This publicity emphasized two key aspects of the New Curriculum in particular: its backing by the whole administrative and theological structure of the

United Church, and its goal of becoming the guiding curriculum for every aspect of Christian education in every local church and for every United Church family. The New Curriculum was not formally compulsory; local churches, in theory, were free to order or not order the materials. For example, the curriculum committee initially intended to keep offering the traditional uniform lessons for those churches that wanted to continue using them, although the New Curriculum replaced the old curriculum's graded lessons.¹⁰² In practice, however, the promotion of the New Curriculum as the only official curriculum of the United Church, intended for its whole membership and interwoven with all its official educational programs, discouraged churches from using any other curriculum.¹⁰³

The official promotion of the New Curriculum underscored its official status and comprehensive intent. A strong endorsement of the New Curriculum came in a resolution drafted by the Sub-Executive of General Council and submitted to the 1962 General Council. This resolution emphasized the close involvement of the General Council, top officials, and every United Church theological college in New Curriculum development. It pointed out that a wide variety of lay people and ministers, as well as seven of the official Boards of the church, were involved in some way in its preparation.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, Board of Christian Education staff were instructed to emphasize that the New Curriculum books had been approved specifically for the United Church by "all the responsible committees and boards concerned as well as the General Council." The New Curriculum had been produced "for the whole United Church of Canada by the whole United Church of Canada." The publicity also promoted the New Curriculum as the total educational instrument of the church, in keeping with the desire of the Board of Christian Education to "incorporate the principles and emphases of the new curriculum in all phases of Christian Education work."¹⁰⁵ The introductory book, *The Word and the Way*, was to be promoted by the presbyteries as a means "to help all adults and young people participate in the New Curriculum."¹⁰⁶ During the 1962-1963 annual theme, "The Call," "each session in every local church," was to "arrange for an every family visitation so that every member of the congregation may hear about the New Curriculum and find out how it may minister to his needs."¹⁰⁷ In short, the publicity announced that the New Curriculum was intended to impact every educational ministry of every local church, with the reassuring approval of the whole leadership structure.

What was not publicized, however, was the actual content of the New Curriculum. As we have seen, the curriculum was shaped by liberal and neo-orthodox influences, and in particular, a modernist approach to the Bible, but this was not evident in the publicity. Even the "Presuppositions" were rather oblique in stating the New Curriculum's view of the Bible, and the theological nuances that suggested a non-evangelical approach would not have held much significance for the average lay reader. The annual promotional themes emphasized uncontroversial concepts like parents' responsibility to educate their children in the faith ("Remember We Promised"), the importance of studying the Bible ("The Message"), and the value of a personal devotional life ("The Covenant").¹⁰⁸ A

“Prospectus” for the New Curriculum released in 1961 might have raised a few eyebrows with its informal, edgy tone and a handful of provocative statements about the anxieties of modern society, but aside from reprinting the “Presuppositions,” it revealed nothing substantive about the actual content of the curriculum.¹⁰⁹

Even the early newspaper articles on the New Curriculum contained no hint of controversy. George Johnston’s 1959 article in the *United Church Observer*, the first to appear, actually made the curriculum sound fairly evangelical. He noted that the first year of materials would “concentrate on the message of the entire Bible” and include Bible study and memorization, while the second year would be devoted to Jesus, “the Lord and Saviour of the Church.” If this was not enough not put his evangelical readers at ease, Johnston added that “youngsters should be confronted many times with Christ’s claim and his offer of salvation.”¹¹⁰ One United Church minister, who was leaving the denomination to pastor a Reformed church in Strathroy, Ontario, wrote to the *Observer* in response to Johnston’s article. Noting that he had initially been concerned about the theological direction of the New Curriculum after seeing the presuppositions, he expressed his gratification that “a deeper understanding of what we have received in God’s revelation will be reflected in the new plan for the Sunday schools.”¹¹¹ A *Montreal Star* article appearing three years later reinforced this impression by emphasizing the curriculum’s devotion to “the plain teaching of scripture as well as ... the wisdom and interpretations of the historic church.” Anything “new” in the curriculum had to do with more effective teaching methods, and the goal of its developers was “to preserve abiding truths while using up-to-date methods.”¹¹² Later that year, a *Hamilton Spectator* article portrayed the curriculum as an uncontroversial attempt to improve the religious understanding of adults.¹¹³

Even many ministers and elders had little knowledge of what was in the New Curriculum. At a question-and-answer session about the New Curriculum held with the members of Saskatchewan Conference, only about 15% of the questions dealt with the content of the curriculum. Several of these questioners commented on the fact that they knew very little about what the curriculum contained, but no one asked about controversial content. One questioner asked, “How does the Board of C.E. expect the local churches (C.E. committees, Sunday schools, etc.) to talk up the new curriculum when we are left in the dark as to what it contains, and as to how it differs from the old U.C. curriculum and other church materials?”¹¹⁴ Some people in the church, especially ministers who recognized some of the theological jargon in the presuppositions or other materials as indicating a modernist orientation, may have been able to guess at the more controversial content of the New Curriculum. For those without such acuity, however, the official publicity and news coverage before 1964 would have given no hint of controversial content.

Some churches, on the other hand, were able to see the curriculum materials themselves due to the testing program put in place by the Board of Christian Education. This program selected individual Sunday schools across the

country to use draft versions of the New Curriculum materials ahead of time and report their experiences so that any necessary revisions could be made. If these testing materials, which probably contained the elements that would prove so controversial in 1964, were available in the church, why was there no controversy earlier on? The answer probably lies in the small number of people who were exposed to the materials. Only 48 congregations were involved in the testing program, which amounted to less than 1% of the Sunday schools in the United Church. Furthermore, the most controversial materials were in the teacher's guides and the reading books for older students, but a maximum of 587 teachers and roughly 1330 students, or under 0.2% of the total membership of the United Church, would have used these books.¹¹⁵ Taking into account the fact that at least some of these teachers and students may not have actually read their books, the number that were likely aware of the New Curriculum contents dwindles further. It should also be noted that the concentration of testing schools in Ontario and in particular the greater Toronto area, and the fact that the teachers on average appear to have been both younger and more educated than the typical church member, may have been additional contributing factors to the smooth reception of the New Curriculum in the testing schools. At any rate, the testing schools knew that the materials were not for public release, and the Board of Christian Education's report of testing results did not mention any problems with theological content.¹¹⁶ The testing program, therefore, did not create a public controversy.

Another means of publicity that could have created controversy was the introductory New Curriculum book for adults, *The Word and the Way*, published in 1962. Designed to introduce readers to the major themes of the first three-year cycle of the New Curriculum, *The Word and the Way* contained a number of the elements that would later stir up controversy over the other books. For example, it clearly taught a modernist view of the Bible that saw it as a witness to revelation rather than revelation itself, it directly denied that the Bible is infallible, it questioned the young-earth interpretation of the book of Genesis and suggested that the theory of evolution might be true, and it argued that biblical miracles had naturalistic explanations.¹¹⁷ Undoubtedly many evangelical readers would have taken exception to these points. In comparison to the later curriculum books, however, *The Word and the Way* dealt with these topics in a less controversial manner. Mathers's denial of biblical infallibility, for example, was complicated and somewhat insulated from criticism by the fact that it was couched in a critique of the Muslim view of the Koran.¹¹⁸ *The Word and the Way* was less direct than the later books in questioning the literal interpretation of Genesis, and although Mathers allowed for the truth of the theory of evolution, he added that humankind "is not the result of an evolutionary accident."¹¹⁹ Similarly, while he suggested that the miracles of the Bible could have naturalistic explanations, he did not think that this would diminish their status as miracles; nor did he rule out the possibility of genuine supernatural intervention.¹²⁰ Furthermore, aside from these and a few other issues, most of the teaching in the book was either consistent with

evangelicalism, as in the case of the atonement and the deity of Christ, or ambiguous, as in the case of salvation and conversion.¹²¹ Still, *The Word and the Way* reached many more people than the testing materials had, selling 125,000 copies by August 1963.¹²² Even if all of these copies were purchased by United Church members, however, this represented only about 12% of the membership, and the sales were probably disproportionately to ministers and Sunday school superintendents and teachers.¹²³ Responses by people in the testing group found that in the fall of 1962, when most copies of the book had already been sold, 82.2% of church school superintendents had read the book, compared to 43.7% of teachers, 8.7% of mothers, and 5.1% of fathers.¹²⁴ Overall, then, while *The Word and the Way* was probably troubling to some evangelicals in the church, a number of factors militated against this concern translating into a full-blown controversy.

In summary, there was extensive publicity preparing the United Church membership to welcome the New Curriculum. This publicity emphasized the support of the church's administrative and theological leaders for the curriculum, and the curriculum's goal of becoming the church's omnipresent means of Christian education. On the other hand, this publicity said little about the actual content of the curriculum. A small number of church members used the materials in the testing program, and a larger minority had a foretaste of the curriculum's content through the introductory book *The Word and the Way*, but neither of these avenues generated controversial publicity. The large majority of church members, exposed only to uninformative official publicity and benign news reports, were entirely unaware of the strong modernist orientation and frankly non-evangelical teaching of the New Curriculum. It is to the content of the teaching that this chapter now turns.

Content of the New Curriculum, 1964-1967

The New Curriculum was organized into a three-year repeating cycle, with each age department from nursery to senior having both pupil reading books and teacher's guides for each year. In addition, each year's curriculum featured a new "basic book" for adult study with an accompanying study guide. Most of the authors were either theological professors (such as Donald M. Mathers and George Johnston) or ministers (such as Frank Morgan and John Wilkie), but some were staff members of the two boards responsible for the curriculum (such as Olive Sparling).¹²⁵ The books also each had editorial consultants, most of them theological professors such as Ralph Chalmers, George Johnston, and Elias Andrews.¹²⁶

Before delving into the contents of the New Curriculum books, it is worth noting that though the authors all wrote from within a modernist perspective, this allowed for a range of theological stances on specific issues. James S. Thomson, retired theological professor and former moderator, for example, came closest to evangelical views of conversion and the Bible (although he still held to the neo-orthodox position that the Bible "becomes the word of God" if God uses it to

speak to the reader, rather than the more typical evangelical view that the Bible *is* the word of God in itself.)¹²⁷ There was a significant difference in theological emphasis between the reverent neo-orthodoxy of Thomson and, for example, the iconoclastic liberalism of Ottawa minister Frank Morgan, who described the Bible as “a very human book” containing “primitive ideas” and parts that “we reject as being less than Christian.”¹²⁸ Similarly, all of the authors who wrote about creation dismissed the Genesis account and defended the dominant scientific view of the age of the earth, but these same authors differed somewhat about what, and how much, was true in other biblical passages. There was also a range of opinion about the nature of the Resurrection, for example.

Nevertheless, there was a significant core area of agreement among the New Curriculum authors in their interpretation of the Bible. Nearly all of the controversy over the New Curriculum can be traced back to its view of the Bible, so this view receives the bulk of the attention in the following analysis: first through an exposition of its main features, and then through three examples showing how this view was applied by the New Curriculum authors. Finally, the distinct issue of the New Curriculum’s view of conversion is examined briefly.

The first key fact for understanding the approach of the New Curriculum authors is that they accepted the conclusions of human reason as sufficient to overrule and correct the Bible in matters of historical and scientific fact. This view, of course, was characteristic of the modernist approach to theology. For the New Curriculum, this meant that the conclusions of science were the final arbiter of the truth or falsity of biblical accounts. The *Intermediate Teacher’s Guide*, for example, instructed teachers to bring to students’ attention those biblical views which contradicted “modern science” and were therefore “incorrect.” In general, it asserted, the teachings of the Bible did not fit with “the carefully gathered evidence of many years of scientific research.” Therefore, the Bible needed to be treated as “pre-scientific,” and the guide warned teachers in no uncertain terms that “this fact must and should be accepted without reservation.”¹²⁹ Similarly, the *Primary Teacher’s Guide* rejected the biblical account of a universal flood on the alleged grounds that “no accredited archaeologist” would accept it.¹³⁰ The New Curriculum authors agreed that when the Bible and the consensus of modern science disagreed, science was right.

In the same way, the conclusions of biblical scholars working within the paradigm of higher criticism were accepted over traditional or biblical claims about the authors and dates of writing of the books of the Bible. Stories in the Bible, according to Morgan, were often a self-contradictory amalgam of different texts written at different times, requiring the esoteric skills of biblical scholars to untangle them: “Ordinary readers like ourselves would not be able to tell these stories apart, but skilled biblical scholars can.”¹³¹ While Jewish and Christian tradition ascribes the authorship of the first five books of the Bible – the Torah or Pentateuch – to Moses, the New Curriculum authors consistently preferred critical theories that made Mosaic authorship impossible.¹³² The *Intermediate Teacher’s Guide* argued that the supposedly Mosaic laws of the Pentateuch were not written

by Moses, and were in any case certainly not dictated by God as claimed in the biblical account.¹³³ In the intermediate reading book, *God Speaks Through People*, Morgan taught the documentary (or Graf-Wellhausen) hypothesis that divides authorship of the Pentateuch among four or five different, frequently contradictory, documentary traditions on the basis of textual analysis.¹³⁴ Moses was not the only target – according to the *Junior Teacher's Guide*, the prophetic book of Daniel was not written until after the events it purports to predict, and more than one curriculum author cast doubt on Isaiah's authorship of the second half of the book named after him.¹³⁵ Passages in Isaiah and Jeremiah traditionally understood by Christians as messianic prophecies pointing to Christ were reinterpreted by New Curriculum authors not as prophecies but as bursts of human religious insight. As Pine Hill professor J.B. Hardie explained in the senior reading book, *The Mighty Acts of God*, these supposedly prophetic passages could not possibly have been predictions of the coming of Jesus “for the simple reason that the idea of God becoming man was entirely unfamiliar” to the prophets.¹³⁶ Within the modernist worldview, divinely revealed predictions of the future were simply not a possibility. To the New Curriculum authors, then, higher critical theories, and the naturalistic assumptions underlying them, ruled out the acceptance at face value of alleged biblical prophecies, historical accounts, or claims of authorship.

If the first key to understanding the New Curriculum was its acceptance of scientific and critical claims over biblical ones, the second key was its attempt to salvage some spiritual value for the biblical text despite its alleged errors and inconsistencies. Because of their acceptance of critical scientific and textual theories, New Curriculum authors saw the Bible as a self-contradictory human document, and yet they sought to preserve an important role for the Bible in the church. They employed two strategies to accomplish this, both of them typical of neo-orthodoxy. The first was a bifurcation of the field of knowledge into a realm of verifiable facts on the one hand, and a realm of unverifiable spiritual values on the other. Whatever science, archaeology and higher criticism said about the realm of facts, the realm of values was immune. For example, Hardie explained that science tells us “*how* the universe came into existence” while Genesis tells us “the *meaning* of creation.”¹³⁷ Thomson agreed: both science (astronomy, geology, biology) and religion (Genesis) have legitimate accounts with truth from different viewpoints – “they do not cancel out each other's truth.”¹³⁸ The second strategy built on this bifurcation by distinguishing between the actual text of the Bible and the word of God. United Theological College professor J. Arthur Boorman wrote that “believing that the Bible *is* the Word of God, instead of recognizing that it *contains* the Word of God,” was an “error.”¹³⁹ Thomson likewise distinguished between the *words* of Scripture and God's *word* – even though the former were unreliable, the latter might still reach the receptive reader through the Bible.¹⁴⁰

The conflict between the views of church leaders and evangelical approaches to the Bible will be dealt with in more detail in chapter four. For now, it is sufficient to note that the New Curriculum's acceptance of scientific and

textual criticisms of the Bible, and its separation of the Bible and the word of God, tended to conflict with evangelical views of Scripture. Beyond this, the New Curriculum caricatured those who held typical evangelical views. In the language of the New Curriculum, those “who insist on accepting every word in the Bible from cover to cover as the very word of God himself” were called “literalists.” According to Boorman, “literalism” was a “form of idolatry,” indicating a confused and illogical theological understanding, and often, a psychological need for “a clear, unmistakable authority.” In fact, he argued, the literalist did not really know the Bible or Christ:

The literalist does not want to discover what the Bible really is, how it came to be written, or what it teaches. For he himself discards what does not accord with his own understanding of Christianity. This, then, is his idolatry, that he holds fast to a set of beliefs, and not to Christ himself. He knows *about* Christ, but his encounter with the living Christ is barred by the mistaken self-assurance he finds in his set of beliefs.¹⁴¹

By thusly caricaturing the evangelical view of Scripture as unscholarly, idolatrous, and spiritually fatal, the final products of the New Curriculum development process brought to fruition the curriculum workshop’s desire to clear away the “literalism” of United Church members. Interestingly, however, much of the controversy generated by this stance did not focus on the abstract viewpoint about the Bible, but on specific applications of that viewpoint made in the books. Three issues in particular attracted a great deal of attention: the creation account in the early chapters of Genesis, the account of Moses and the Israelite exodus from Egypt, and the New Testament accounts of the life of Jesus.

The Genesis creation account took more criticism from the New Curriculum authors, perhaps, than any other part of the Bible. Morgan suggested that at least part of it was dreamed up by an imaginative shepherd trying to answer his son’s questions about the universe.¹⁴² In keeping with higher critical theories, he and others also thought that there were not one, but two contradictory creation accounts in Genesis.¹⁴³ Neither account, of course, should under any circumstances be taken “literally.” Thomson warned his readers that “it would be very foolish to think of the story in Genesis as a scientific account of creation.”¹⁴⁴ Hardie agreed that interpreting Genesis “literally” would cause one to “miss the whole point and purpose.” He added that “the stories in the first section of Genesis are not to be taken as any attempt at factual history or science,” since the writers “were concerned less with facts than with the *interpretation* of facts. The worst mistake that can be made is to think of them as news-writers.”¹⁴⁵ Similarly, “Adam and Eve were never intended to be thought of as the actual parents of the human race,” but were rather “symbolic” of every person.¹⁴⁶ Rather than seeing the creation account as “history,” the curriculum authors described it variously as “parables or myths,”¹⁴⁷ a “poem,” or a “hymn.”¹⁴⁸ It should be noted that the New Curriculum authors held a non-literal interpretation of Genesis, not primarily

because they thought it was written to be symbolic, but because of their acceptance of the higher authority of science and biblical criticism. This distinction separated the modernist view of the curriculum authors from some evangelical views, which allowed for non-literal interpretations of what was regarded as an unquestionably true account.¹⁴⁹ Hardie, Morgan and Boorman argued that if one accepted a literal interpretation of the creation account, one would also have to believe that the earth was flat, that the sky was a hard dome, and that the sun circled the earth, because these views were allegedly held by the biblical author(s).¹⁵⁰ Similarly, argued Hardie, Genesis “certainly does not agree with the scientific facts we believe today,” and in particular it contradicted what had been known “since the earliest beginnings of geology.”¹⁵¹ Morgan wrote that Darwin had “demonstrated” that the animals evolved over a period of time, rather than being created together; also, “Modern scientists have shown that the earth came by a slow process, taking millions of years to reach its present state.” Morgan put it most succinctly when he dismissed the Genesis account on the grounds that it would be “marked wrong” on a science exam.¹⁵² In the end, for the authors of the New Curriculum, the science teacher was a higher authority than the book of Genesis.

The New Curriculum also applied a modernist approach to the book of Exodus, systematically denying or reinterpreting every purported miracle in the account of Moses and the Israelite exodus from Egypt. The intermediate reading book explained away the burning bush as a natural phenomenon, either a mirage or sap ignited by the sun. The miracles performed by Moses in the court of Pharaoh were actually “magic” tricks performed at the suggestion of his wife.¹⁵³ Both Hardie and Morgan offered naturalistic explanations of the biblical ten plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea. Hardie asserted that

there is little that is essentially supernatural about any of the plagues of Egypt. We can also find a reasonable explanation for the Hebrews’ miraculous crossing of the sea.... Almost all the plagues have been known at one time or another in Egypt at the season of the flooding of the Nile, and a strong wind at the head of a shallow arm of the sea can easily provide a dry-shod passage.¹⁵⁴

For Hardie, a “reasonable” explanation meant an explanation that did not include the supernatural. Similarly, Morgan did not mention God in connection with any of the plagues. He explained the death of the firstborn of Egypt, attributed in the Bible to God’s judgment on Pharaoh, as a simple “children’s disease” that happened to afflict Egypt at the time. In this reinterpretation, the Jewish Passover lost its traditional significance; rather, it was a festival invented by Moses as a way to create Israelite unity and readiness for the exodus. The parting of the Red Sea became instead the wading of the Israelites across a shallow reedy lake with a soft bottom. In Morgan’s retelling, the pursuing Egyptians got stuck in the mud, and God is not mentioned at all.¹⁵⁵ The *Intermediate Teacher’s Guide* informed

Sunday school teachers that “scholars are mostly agreed now that the Israelites probably forded a shallow lake,” not the Red Sea, and that there were “legendary additions” to the story.¹⁵⁶ The intermediate reading book hypothesized that the manna that fed the Israelites in the wilderness was actually the sweet-tasting droppings of a desert insect – not so much food as a handy sweetener. The provision of quail and water from the rock were similarly due, not to God’s miraculous help, but rather to Moses’s knowledge of desert survival techniques.¹⁵⁷ The New Curriculum authors, therefore, were fundamentally opposed to supernatural aspects of the book of Exodus, revealing the underlying naturalism of their modernist approach.

The life of Jesus serves as a final example of how the New Curriculum applied its view of the Bible. The treatment of the Virgin Birth proved especially controversial. Morgan simply left it out of the story altogether.¹⁵⁸ Without directly mentioning the Virgin Birth, Boyd downplayed the birth narratives as “vivid and imaginative word-pictures,” whose purpose was “theological, not biological.”¹⁵⁹ Emmanuel College professor George Johnston warned kindergarten teachers that “scholarly historians” had concluded that “we cannot trust the accuracy of the stories” concerning Jesus’s birth, “not even the tradition that Mary was a virgin.”¹⁶⁰ The most controversial passage was in the *Junior Teacher’s Guide*, which explained that the Virgin Birth was an optional belief for “modern Christians”:

Modern Christians do not easily accept even the Gospel narratives [of Jesus’s birth]: Matthew and Luke give different versions, and both can hardly be correct in the matter of Jesus’s genealogical tree. The wandering star and the angelic chorus are probably legendary. Is it necessary to believe in the virgin conception of Mary? This may rest on a mistaken translation of Isaiah 7:14, where the ‘young woman’ of the original Hebrew became a ‘virgin’ in the Greek rendering.... Because of the difficulties, many nowadays would say that no one should be compelled to accept the ideas of the Virgin Birth. Our faith in Jesus Christ is not dependent on them.¹⁶¹

Other supernatural elements in the life of Jesus were also left out or naturalistically explained. Morgan and Johnston both recounted the temptation of Jesus without mentioning the devil – no mean feat – and other books questioned whether Jesus had performed actual miracles, explaining them away as merely psychological healings or allegorical stories.¹⁶² The New Curriculum authors were more divided when it came to the Resurrection of Jesus, traditionally regarded by many Christians as the central miracle of the faith. Hardie seemed to accept the traditional view, and Morgan and Thomson, though less clear, also appeared to take the biblical accounts at face value.¹⁶³ The *Junior Teacher’s Guide* hedged on the question, simply observing that “some Christians take the stories literally, and may rightly do so. Others feel unable to do that.”¹⁶⁴ Boorman instructed teachers

of seniors not to “aggravate” the difficulties “young people” had in believing in the Resurrection by “insisting upon a scientific interpretation for the Gospel record, which is, above all else, a treatment of devotion and faith.”¹⁶⁵ Johnston went further in his instruction to kindergarten teachers, writing that “enquirers within the church” could be told that “Jesus is not very likely to have risen bodily from the grave, that is, with the old body of flesh and blood resuscitated.”¹⁶⁶ On balance, then, the New Curriculum questioned the biblical accounts of life of Jesus, just as it rejected the biblical accounts of creation and the exodus. These conclusions were the logical outcome of the modernist approach to the Bible, an approach that saw the text of the Bible as a human product subject to the judgments of science, biblical critics, and naturalistic philosophy.

One additional feature of the New Curriculum also attracted controversy: its failure to consistently teach the evangelical view of salvation, and specifically, conversion. Here again, most of the curriculum followed the basic approach of the presuppositions by acknowledging the necessity of “decisions” in the Christian life, but not teaching the necessity of a single personal conversion for becoming a genuine believer. There were some exceptions to this pattern. Thomson, in the adult basic book *God and His Purpose*, partially endorsed the evangelical view. He wrote that everyone must be “born anew” by the power of God’s Spirit, so they can be changed into “new men and women,” and evangelicals would have welcomed his affirmation that everyone needs “conversion.”¹⁶⁷ Even Thomson, however, distanced himself somewhat from the evangelical understanding of salvation by blurring the classical Protestant distinction between justification (being made right with God) and sanctification (being made into a holy person), and holding the related belief that conversion could be a “gradual” process.¹⁶⁸ Other authors also differed from the evangelical view. Although Hardie, for example, acknowledged a role for “personal decision,” he believed that for most church members, “We are born into a background of Christian faith, we are nurtured in the church, and it is by slow and gradual steps that God reveals his will to us.”¹⁶⁹ Other views of salvation espoused in the New Curriculum were further still from the evangelical view. Johnston, for example, taught that everyone would ultimately be saved, whether converted or not. “The Christian hope is not merely for individuals who have converted,” he wrote, and “in the end all men will become brothers of the last Adam, Jesus Christ.”¹⁷⁰ In addition to holding a non-evangelical view of the Bible, therefore, the New Curriculum taught a non-evangelical view of salvation, preferring instead modernist viewpoints on these issues.

The New Curriculum Controversy, 1964-1965

The public controversy over the theological content of the New Curriculum began in the early summer of 1964 with a dispute at the annual assembly of the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec. The BCOQ had earlier entered into a publication arrangement with the United Church whereby

the Baptists would officially use the New Curriculum materials, with some modifications to deal with differences on issues such as baptism. This arrangement came under fire at the 1964 assembly. H.W. Harmon, a delegate to the assembly, had obtained copies of some of the curriculum books and was disturbed by what she found in them. She told the shocked assembly that the New Curriculum taught that the first chapters of Genesis were myth, questioned the Virgin Birth, and reinterpreted the biblical plague on the Egyptian firstborn as a children's disease. Urging the assembly to have nothing to do with the New Curriculum, she reportedly told them to "Throw it away! Burn it!"¹⁷¹ Despite this plea, the Baptists narrowly voted to keep the curriculum arrangement with the United Church, 164 to 147. Each congregation had the option of using or not using the New Curriculum, however, and within weeks several BCOQ churches had announced that they would not be using the materials.¹⁷² At least one church, whose members unanimously voted to reject the New Curriculum, took the further step of withdrawing their financial support for the BCOQ Department of Christian Education.¹⁷³ A Baptist from another denomination, W. Gordon Brown of Central Baptist Seminary, called the BCOQ decision to continue the New Curriculum arrangement "one of the greatest mistakes they have ever made."¹⁷⁴ The BCOQ president had to address his denomination through *The Canadian Baptist* in an attempt to shore up unity in the wake of these developments.¹⁷⁵

The contention in the Baptist denomination alerted the secular newspapers to the issue. The *Toronto Daily Star* religion editor, Allen Spraggett, published a front page article in early July entitled "Virgin Birth, Goliath – are they just myths?" accompanied by a feature article with the title "New child text at odds with Bible."¹⁷⁶ These articles, which aimed to describe the "outspokenly liberal and bluntly critical view of the Bible adopted for the United Church Sunday schools," inaugurated the major phase of the controversy. Giving specific examples from the curriculum books, Spraggett told 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." United Church members and the public read that the New Curriculum books taught, among other things, that "the doctrine of the Virgin Birth of Christ" was "the result of a biblical mistranslation." The article quoted the editor-in-chief, Peter Gordon White, calling the curriculum a "major breakthrough," and explaining that "our church's general council, and the theologians we consulted, agreed with us that whether or not it raised a ruction we couldn't doubletalk in this curriculum. We decided to be absolutely honest and open." White said that although the curriculum itself was "revolutionary" in using a liberal view of the Bible, this approach had been used by most Protestant seminaries for the last forty years.¹⁷⁷ The same basic story was picked up and repeated in newspapers and magazines across the country.¹⁷⁸ The article on the New Curriculum launched a whole series by Spraggett in the *Toronto Daily Star*. In what would become a theme of the controversy, these articles featured "liberals" and "evangelicals" giving their

contrasting views on several theological issues. As Spraggett noted, the New Curriculum was drawing attention to the split in Protestantism between “Fundamentalism, or (as many of its advocates prefer to call it) evangelicalism, and liberalism.”¹⁷⁹ This extensive press coverage of the controversial aspects of the New Curriculum guaranteed that the issue would not disappear quickly.

United Church personnel were quick to react to this publicity. In mid-July Wilbur K. Howard, associate editor of the Department of Sunday School Publications, sent out a confidential memo to the personnel of the Board of Christian Education and the Board of Publications. Noting that “we are beginning to receive reactions from some people because of the flurry of activity on the newspaper front,” Howard explained the publicity as he saw it, focusing on Spraggett’s initial articles in the *Toronto Daily Star*. In Howard’s view, not only had Spraggett been well informed through interviews with United Church staff, he had tried “to present both negative and positive views ... leaving it up to the reader to draw his own conclusions.” Trouble had arisen because the newspaper had “hung out the provocative items on the headlines,” but Howard was nevertheless “grateful that the newspaper has made the general public aware of the New Curriculum.” As for the reaction in the church, he noted that “the initial hot line response came from the very vocal minority who were shocked and dismayed,” but was optimistic that soon the voices of the “several thousand people” who were involved in the curriculum’s production would be heard as a counterweight against the criticism. He instructed the staff to direct anxious questioners to the curriculum materials and the Bible; the former, he assured them, was quite orthodox in its theology.¹⁸⁰ On balance, Howard projected confidence that the negative publicity was a minor problem. Finally, Howard sent a letter to Spraggett thanking him for “creatively disturbing people with your articles on the New Curriculum.” This “warm-hearted commendation of [Spraggett’s] journalistic skill” suggests that Howard was genuinely unconcerned about negative fallout from the publicity.¹⁸¹

What was the reaction in the United Church to this publicity? Some of the phone calls and letters that came in to the Moderator, ministers, and church officials were probably positive.¹⁸² One writer, who may have been a United Church member, wrote to the *Toronto Daily Star* congratulating the United Church “for modernizing and humanizing our Christian faith,” arguing that “the life and teachings of Jesus form a sufficient and complete religion, unembellished by biblical myths, hatreds, vindictiveness, cruelties, and genocides.”¹⁸³ The private letters received by the Board of Christian Education, however, were overwhelmingly negative. Many, including people intimately involved with Christian education in their churches, wrote letters registering shock and surprise at the contents of the New Curriculum. Dorothy Wentworth, who had been responsible for ordering the curriculum for her Ontario congregation, sheepishly admitted that “we were remiss in not making a more thorough study before ordering, but we were confident the Church would maintain the dependability of the faith.” She cancelled her order for all but the youngest age groups, citing “the

excessively liberal handling of the Scripture in the new books.... We protest strongly the use of the word myth, whether it be re-defined or not.”¹⁸⁴ Sunday school superintendent Howard Walker had also ordered the New Curriculum for his church, but now that he knew what was in it he refused to teach it.¹⁸⁵ Even those who had been involved in training sessions to prepare for the New Curriculum claimed to be surprised at its contents. Doug Shaw, an elder, wrote that his wife had attended a Sunday school workshop, but “what we are presently reading in all our daily newspapers, was never brought to light or was never discussed. All she heard about was having an experience with God.”¹⁸⁶ P.E. McNabb protested, “I attended a school of instruction on this new curriculum but there was not a word about discarding any portion of the Bible.”¹⁸⁷ Another United Church member wrote to the *Toronto Daily Star* insisting that the high number of orders for curriculum materials “doesn’t mean that it is enthusiastically accepted; it was the result of expert salesmanship. The contents were kept very secret.” She thanked the *Star* for publishing the articles on the New Curriculum since they were “the first inkling we (including our minister) had of the new ideas they are trying to promote,” adding that “my husband has been an elder and I have been a teacher in the Sunday school for many years and we can show our disapproval by resigning.”¹⁸⁸ These remarks reinforce the conclusion drawn above, that the large majority of United Church members were ignorant about the curriculum’s contents until the public controversy broke.

For some letter writers, the introduction of the New Curriculum threatened to reduce or eliminate their involvement with the United Church. One woman found herself “wondering if I should keep my son home from Sunday School.”¹⁸⁹ Howard Walker feared that parents of children attending his Sunday school would feel the same.¹⁹⁰ He planned to resign his membership if his congregation disagreed with his stance against the New Curriculum, as did Doug Shaw and his wife.¹⁹¹ Letter writers were particularly concerned about the New Curriculum’s views about the Virgin Birth, miracles, and the Bible.¹⁹² Rosemary Robinson wrote to the moderator, saying, “Perhaps I’m dense, but I read and believe my bible, Mr. Mutchmor.”¹⁹³ Robert Cherry of Palmerston, Ontario, cited the *Junior Teacher’s Guide* comments on the Virgin Birth, noting that he and his friends were “questioning this seeming departure from the Apostles’ Creed.” Unsatisfied with Peter Gordon White’s response to his first letter, he wrote the moderator, J.R. Mutchmor:

I suppose I am a fundamentalist but – how could Jesus Christ be born of two human parents, and be any more divine at birth, or later than the rest of us? – how can a man who is an ordained minister of the United Church deny what is plainly recorded in the Bible, and how can he repeat the Apostle’s Creed in good conscience? In short, what does any one who thinks in this vein, believe or take a stand on?¹⁹⁴

Cherry's letter revealed that not only was he disturbed by the New Curriculum, he had also concluded that this views put him in the fundamentalist camp – outside the theological limits of the United Church. Such remarks illustrated the polarizing effect of the curriculum, a theme that is developed further below. These letters, which were all received within six weeks of the initial *Star* article, do not reveal much about the majority opinion in the United Church. They do suggest, however, that a number of United Church members were deeply upset about the modernist content of the New Curriculum.

The controversy quickly widened to include Christians outside the United Church. A few Catholic commentators approved of the New Curriculum's use of the word "myth," but Lutherans, Anglicans and Greek Orthodox criticized the curriculum.¹⁹⁵ By far the most vocal critics, however, were evangelicals in evangelical denominations. Within days of the initial *Star* article, the *Vancouver Province* reported criticism of the New Curriculum from Nazarene, Alliance, Pentecostal, and Baptist pastors.¹⁹⁶ By August, the curriculum was being criticized on the evangelical radio program "Back to the Bible."¹⁹⁷ Before the end of the summer, W. Gordon Brown, a professor at Central Baptist Seminary in Toronto, released a detailed booklet criticizing the New Curriculum, complete with specific page references to the curriculum books substantiating his concerns.¹⁹⁸ Dr. H.C. Slade of Jarvis St. Baptist in Toronto preached against the curriculum in September, and in October a critical editorial appeared in *The Evangelical Christian*.¹⁹⁹ In October a United Church minister wrote to the secretary of General Council, E.E. Long, drawing his attention to a newspaper advertisement by Perry F. Rockwood of the radio program "The People's Gospel Hour." The minister commented, "without being an alarmist, I wish to point out that this opposition is being furthered by means of the radio and T.V. and by the newspapers."²⁰⁰ Rockwood was indeed widely criticizing the New Curriculum, not only on the radio, but in a booklet and at least one letter to the editor.²⁰¹ Later in 1964, Paul B. Smith, pastor of the People's Church in Toronto, released a thirty-two-page booklet of detailed criticism supported by copious examples and quotations drawn from the New Curriculum books.²⁰² The criticism continued well into the new year from evangelical pastors, evangelists and radio preachers drawn from denominations ranging from Presbyterian to Pentecostal.²⁰³

Using the more extensive written criticisms as representative examples, the central themes of the criticisms by non-United Church evangelicals may be illustrated. Somewhat ironically, given the intent of the curriculum workshop, the evangelical critics accused the New Curriculum of "double-talk" in dealing with topics such as the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection.²⁰⁴ As Paul B. Smith put it,

The authors continually talk their way into the Virgin Birth and then back out of it. They have not been courageous enough to say that the birth of Jesus did happen in this manner or to say that it did not happen in this manner. It appears to us that The United Church of Canada does not

believe in the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ, but because it seems afraid to say so in as many words, it proceeds to 'double-talk' its way through it.²⁰⁵

Worse, in the eyes of the critics, than the alleged double-talk, was the way the New Curriculum handled the Bible. Pointing to the modernist viewpoint of the curriculum, Smith said that it "looks for its authority to human reason and science, not to the Bible," and that this attitude extended beyond the early chapters of Genesis to the "entire Bible."²⁰⁶ W. Gordon Brown highlighted the curriculum's reliance on higher critical theories, a reliance that in his view left it "hard to know what to believe" in the Bible.²⁰⁷ Perry Rockwood was less concerned with the attitude of the curriculum towards the Bible; what bothered him was the curriculum's claim to be "biblical" in light of this attitude. "How can anyone say the new curriculum is true to the Bible when it teaches that Genesis is composed of myths and parables? Is this not a radical departure from the faith of our fathers?" he asked.²⁰⁸ Evangelical critics also faulted the curriculum's teaching on salvation. Commenting on a passage in the *Primary Teacher's Guide* that explained the crucifixion but left out the doctrine that Jesus died "to take away our sins," Brown characterized the curriculum's stance as "denial of the gospel by fatal omission."²⁰⁹ Smith noted that some of the New Curriculum books taught universalism, the doctrine that everyone would ultimately be saved.²¹⁰ Not surprisingly, evangelical critics of the curriculum honed in on the two areas in which it was furthest from evangelicalism: its view of the Bible, and its view of salvation.

Some evangelicals in the United Church were unhappy with the criticisms from evangelicals outside the United Church. One United Church minister wrote that these criticisms were "degrading our church," emphasizing that "while I disagree with much of the theology in the New Curriculum and wish it were more evangelical in interpretation, I do consider the United Church a truly Christian Church and am proud to be associated with it."²¹¹ On the other hand, a United Church member who felt that the curriculum "has been thrust upon us," appeared to be listening sympathetically to the criticisms of the curriculum she heard on the "Back to the Bible" radio program.²¹² It is likely that other evangelicals within the United Church found themselves agreeing more with the external critics than their own officials, which may be why Robert Cherry prefaced his letter to the moderator by saying "I suppose I am a fundamentalist but..."²¹³

At any rate, the criticisms of the curriculum by evangelicals outside the United Church highlighted the division between "liberals" and "evangelicals" (or "fundamentalists") noted by Allen Spraggett. Indeed, Smith began his booklet by contrasting "Liberals and Evangelicals." The key difference, said Smith, was that "liberals" explained apparent "Scriptural problems" by assuming there was error in the Bible, whereas evangelicals explained such problems by assuming there was error in their own understanding. Perhaps responding to the common modernist practice of calling evangelicals "literalists," Smith also pointed out that although evangelicals believed the Bible to be "infallible," this did not mean that

everything in it should be interpreted “literally.” In fact, evangelicals were quite capable of recognizing “parables and symbols,” “hyperbole,” and so on in the Bible.²¹⁴ Brown also drew a clear distinction between his own evangelical theology and the “liberalism” of the New Curriculum. Interestingly, Brown put both classical liberalism, strictly speaking, and neo-orthodoxy (or “Barthianism”) into the same category of “liberalism.”²¹⁵ This bipolar characterization arose as a natural response to the content of the New Curriculum itself, the modernist approach of which was clearly at odds with the beliefs held by these evangelicals. The opposition of evangelical critics outside the United Church, therefore, reinforced the nature of the emerging controversy over the New Curriculum as a debate between two camps, one “evangelical” and one “liberal.”

The public controversy brought a steady stream of official and unofficial responses from United Church leaders and ministers. When the 1964 General Council of the United Church met in September, Peter Gordon White, editor-in-chief of the New Curriculum, addressed the council to promote the official launch of the full set of curriculum materials and respond to the growing criticism from inside and outside the church. White emphasized the support of the General Council, the long process of curriculum production, and the wide involvement of the church in that production.²¹⁶ Directly addressing the public controversy, White portrayed the curriculum’s critics as biblically uninformed outsiders. Most of the critics who had written letters to the editor protesting the curriculum, he told the council in a line later frequently repeated by the press, were people “who read their newspaper religiously and their Bible intermittently.”²¹⁷ The strongest criticisms, he assured the council, had come from non-members, and in particular, outside groups hostile to the United Church. As he put it, “Spokesmen for Pentecostal and Evangelical groups issued statements endorsing the Bible, supporting God, and damning the United Church.... Passionate appeals were issued to Baptists and United Church members to leave their church.”²¹⁸ White admitted that “some” United Church members had been “disturbed,” but not so much by the New Curriculum itself, as by the “clash of opinions” in the press. Nevertheless, in light of the broad involvement of the church in developing the curriculum, he asserted that “those critics ... who claimed the New Curriculum had suddenly been foisted upon them” were “not United Church members.” He concluded by urging commissioners to the council to go back to their congregations and reassure anyone who had been “upset by the clash of opinions,” by telling them that the New Curriculum “reflects faithfully” the Christian faith as expressed in the 1925 Basis of Union.²¹⁹ White’s message, which was widely quoted in the newspapers, cast the controversy as a debate between faithful, well-informed insiders and hostile, ignorant outsiders.²²⁰

Nevertheless, White’s remarks did not silence the critics or end the controversy. In mid-October, E.E. Long, who as secretary of General Council was the highest permanent official in the United Church, took the unusual step of sending a letter to all United Church ministers in Ontario (the area most affected by reports in Toronto newspapers). Long told the ministers that he had “felt grave

concern over the criticisms and bad newspaper reports that have appeared, particularly in Toronto papers, about the New Curriculum.” He enclosed an additional letter, which he suggested could be used as a “pastoral letter” to be read to their congregations, or with the local press. This pastoral letter repeated the same themes as White’s address to General Council. He emphasized that the church itself supported the New Curriculum. His pastoral letter was being written “at the request of the Senior Secretaries of the Boards and Departments of our Church,” and the curriculum had been embraced by “most of our congregations.” “Already enthusiastic reports are coming in of quickened interest on the part of teen-agers and adults,” he added, and churches using the curriculum were finding that “the attendance increased.” Criticism of the curriculum was not coming from within the United Church, he claimed. Some people in the United Church had been “seriously disturbed” – not by the curriculum itself, but by “newspaper stories asserting that the new materials are not Biblically sound and are teaching false doctrine.” He specifically blamed the press controversy on hostile outside groups of “ultra-fundamentalists”:

These stories have originated with small sectarian groups of ultra-fundamentalist persuasion that are struggling for existence, who believe they have found a means of justifying their own position by attacking ours. In almost every case, these critics have no knowledge of the content of the New Curriculum or its one great aim of communicating the Gospel of Jesus Christ to this generation.²²¹

Ignoring the detailed, thoroughly documented attacks that had been issued by evangelical critics such as W. Gordon Brown, Long seized on the example of a Greek Orthodox priest, John Koulouras, who had harshly criticized the New Curriculum in an interview without having seen the books. Long dryly commented that “His interview was based entirely on newspaper reports of comments by people who themselves had no knowledge of the Curriculum. Nothing need be said about the propriety or ethics of giving such an interview.”²²²

Even though the criticism was “ill-informed and destructive,” however, Long was confident that in “ten years from now we shall have forgotten these minor irritations.” In the meantime, each minister had “a responsibility to reassure his people and those in the community that the New Curriculum is in no way a radical departure from the faith and the theology that we have been preaching and teaching in the United Church for the past generation.” The New Curriculum authors were “all trusted ministers and members of the Church,” their books were “faithful to the Scriptures.” Finally, without using the word “evangelical,” Long portrayed the New Curriculum as a basically evangelical attempt to promote the Bible and secure conversions. The curriculum’s “chief concern,” he asserted, was that everyone “may have a firm knowledge of the Bible and of Christian doctrine and, above all, may be brought into a personal experience of the redemptive power of Jesus Christ our Lord, and may thus become members of the redeemed

community in the world which is the Church.”²²³ This letter, which would have reached a large percentage of the ministers and congregations in the United Church, reinforced the message that the New Curriculum was supported by the leaders and people of the church, and that critics were almost all badly misinformed outsiders driven by an “ultra-fundamentalist” agenda.

Leading figures in the United Church added their voices to this defense of the curriculum by White and Long. The newly elected moderator E.M. Howse, who described himself as “an unrepentant liberal,” told the *Toronto Daily Star* that the critics of the curriculum were “fundamentalists.” The theological views of these critics, he said, were a century out of date and intellectually on par with the belief that the earth is flat. The New Curriculum was valuable, in his view, because of the “dreadful gap between the accepted conclusions of modern theological scholarship and what is taught in many Sunday schools.”²²⁴ A *United Church Observer* editorial also defended the curriculum’s view of the Bible, claiming that “most Biblical scholars of repute, ministers, writers of the New Curriculum,” believed that the Bible includes “fables”, “fictional accounts” and “unscientific tales.” If the Bible was read literally, rather than symbolically, it was “full of contradictions and confusion.”²²⁵ Widely respected former moderator J.R. Mutchmor, known for being an uncompromising traditionalist on moral issues, also came out in favour of the New Curriculum, calling it “one of the crowning achievements of the 40 years” of the United Church and a fulfillment of the promise of the Statement of Faith.²²⁶ In November of 1964 Wilbur K. Howard sent a package of pro-New Curriculum material to all the conference and presbytery publication conveners in the church.²²⁷ Included in this package was a sermon by United Church minister George Birtch entitled “The Fundamentalist’s Dilemma.” In the sermon, Birtch caricatured the evangelical view of the Bible, which he interchangeably called “fundamentalism” and “literalism.”²²⁸ Not only were the views of the fundamentalist wrong and doomed to irrelevance, he alleged, but he drew a clear line between “them” and “us.” His listeners, and by extension at least one member of every presbytery and conference in the church, were told that there were two options: “our position” on the Bible, and his caricature of the “fundamentalist” position. These widely disseminated statements by Howse, Birtch, and the editors of the *Observer* echoed the themes advanced by White and Long and heightened the polarization of opinion between modernists and evangelicals.

In addition to these official and semi-official statements from United Church leaders, many of the church’s ministers defended the New Curriculum in sermons, radio broadcasts, articles, and letters to the newspapers. Most of what they said echoed the themes of earlier defenses of the curriculum. These ministers alleged that the critics were guilty of “colossal ignorance about the Curriculum,” because most of them had not read the curriculum books.²²⁹ Contrary to the criticisms, they asserted that the New Curriculum was not only true to the United Church’s Statement of Faith, Basis of Union, and even the Apostles’ Creed, but was in fact *closer* to the teachings of these standards than previous curricula.²³⁰

Furthermore, the curriculum had been produced by “professors and biblical scholars from every Theological college in our Church,” approved by the Committee on Christian Faith, “which is the guardian of our orthodoxy,” and endorsed by the General Council. These ministers also said that the New Curriculum encouraged study of the Bible, and emphasized the role of “decision” (a non-specific euphemism for conversion) and the need to bring “salvation” to all people.²³¹ They also defended the specific positions of the curriculum on issues such as creation²³² and the Virgin Birth.²³³ Finally, they characterized the church’s response to the curriculum as enthusiastic, and repeated the claim that it increased Sunday school attendance.²³⁴ In making these points, the ministers of the church reinforced the themes established by the official response to the controversy.

In their speaking and writing about the New Curriculum, these ministers also went beyond the official response to further define the United Church and the curriculum’s critics in the eyes of the membership and the public. First of all, they consistently described modernism or “liberalism” as the official theological position of the United Church. In the *Globe and Mail*, Kingston, Ontario minister J.A. Davidson wrote that although the ministers of the church had often been “conservative” in handling the Bible, “the liberal orientation has been dominant in the United Church of Canada since that church came into existence.... For many years it has been implicit in the church’s educational programs and materials, and it has been consistently expressed in the teaching in its theological colleges.” Indeed, in a possible reference to the church’s commission on the authority of the Bible, then underway, he added that “there is good evidence that within the next few years the General Council of the church will officially declare an unequivocally liberal orientation toward the Bible.” This liberal position, which he equated with “modern critical biblical scholarship,” was in his opinion held by “an overwhelming majority of the ministers and other leaders in the United Church.”²³⁵ According to others, not only was the “liberal orientation” dominant in the United Church of the present, but it had been taught in the theological colleges of the church for decades. In a radio broadcast minister and Christian education official George Connolly noted that “I have not discovered anything in this Curriculum which I had not been taught when I attended theological college twenty-five years ago.”²³⁶ Frank Ball, a minister from Cornwall, Ontario, believed that the modernist view of the Bible had been “believed officially and taught in all our theological colleges for years.”²³⁷ Another minister stated that the theological colleges of all denominations other than the “fundamentalist Biblical-literalist sects” had been using higher critical approaches to the Bible “for four or five generations.”²³⁸ Winnipeg minister William Onions asserted that the New Curriculum’s view of the Bible “has been taken for granted among ministers and scholars for half a century or more. It can’t be news to anyone that intelligent Christians long since quit believing that the Creation, the Fall, the Flood, or the crossing of the Red Sea were actual historical events that happened exactly as described in the Bible.”²³⁹ The clear consensus of these ministers was that the

modernist viewpoint, as represented by the New Curriculum, was the established position of the United Church and had been for a long time.

Modernism may have permeated the beliefs of church leaders and clergy for decades, but these ministers were also convinced that this belief system had not penetrated to the laity. They blamed themselves. Minister Harvey Moats confessed that “most clergymen, including the writer, have been guilty of ‘pussyfooting’ with their congregations to the extent that the folk in the pew did not really understand what their ministers did believe about Biblical studies and interpretations.”²⁴⁰ Even the moderator, E.M. Howse, laid the blame at the feet of the ministers of his church:

That is one of the reasons why, for example, when a New Curriculum is introduced accepting principles of Biblical study common to all educated clergymen for the best part of a century, the teaching still comes as a surprise to many people in the pews. Too many ministers have failed to educate their congregations because they have thought more about operating smoothly than of teaching soundly.²⁴¹

George Goth, minister of Metropolitan United in London, was equally blunt, saying that “none of this bewilderment and criticism would have been possible if the Christian Church had been more forthright and courageous two generations ago. Adults of today have their ridiculous ideas because fifteen years ago they were taught the wrong things in Sunday school.”²⁴² Since Connolly equated non-modernist viewpoints with theological ignorance, he believed that “a great many” adults in the church were in “what might be called the thumb-sucking stage” of theological maturity.²⁴³ These ministers were also agreed in seeing the New Curriculum as the cure for this gap between pulpit and pew. It was time for the laity to get “the facts which have been in the possession of our clergy for a great many years.”²⁴⁴ Finally, through the New Curriculum, “mature Biblical scholarship” was “being allowed to filter down from the ivory towers of academic theological circles ... to people in the Church.”²⁴⁵ The image presented by these explanations was that of an enlightened ministry belatedly dispelling the dark ignorance of its flock. In this image, enlightenment was equated with a modernist view of the Bible, and ignorance with an evangelical (or “fundamentalist”) view.

Not surprisingly, given their understanding of the issues, the ministers defending the New Curriculum also agreed that an evangelical view of Scripture was unacceptable in the United Church. Some of these ministers painted the evangelical view as “slavish adherence to the literal words of the Bible,”²⁴⁶ or as “the idolatry of literalism or Biblicism.”²⁴⁷ Frank Morgan, author of one of the curriculum books, now ministering in Kitchener, Ontario, asserted that “to believe that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God is just about the same thing as saying that God put the commas in the King James Version.”²⁴⁸ The pastor of Grace United Church in Brampton claimed that “the ‘inerrancy’ of the Bible” believed in by evangelicals “means that the Holy Spirit dictated the very words and stories

of the Bible to some human stenographer, and implies that the King James Version is the final, unchangeable result.”²⁴⁹ For Ball, the issue was as simple as pointing out that “Jesus Christ was not a fundamentalist.”²⁵⁰ Even when they were not setting up straw men, however, these ministers agreed that the “literalist” view was incompatible with biblical scholarship or even a “thoughtful mind.” In the thinking of these ministers, the final and perhaps most decisive stroke against the evangelical view was that it was hard for “modern minds” to believe.²⁵¹ As Connolly explained, “a great many people have turned away from the Church ... because a *literal* interpretation of many of the most ancient stories in the Bible could no longer be accepted by them in modern times.” He warned that defending a literal interpretation of the book of Genesis, for example, would put the United Church on the same plane as the men who had persecuted Galileo. Anyone who held such a view, he concluded, “thereby disqualifies himself from being taken seriously by people who know the truth about the world as it really is. We cannot permit the Church to be put in this position in our time.”²⁵² The ministers who defended the New Curriculum, therefore, emphatically excluded an evangelical view of the Bible as a legitimate option for the United Church.

The final theme elaborated on by the United Church ministers who defended the curriculum was that of polarization between modernists and evangelicals. Davidson argued that Protestantism was divided between “liberal” and “conservative” orientations towards the Bible, in a “split” that “in the long run may prove more inhibiting to Christian unity than the traditional denominational differences.”²⁵³ Connolly agreed that the controversy over the New Curriculum stemmed from a divide between “theologically conservative Christians, who are sometimes called fundamentalists though I do not like that name,” and “theological liberals.”²⁵⁴ There was no doubt which side the United Church should be on. J.W. Young, a minister in Toronto, framed the issue as a choice between “cowards with the religion of the closed mind, hidebound with tradition, fearful of new truth, irrational, intolerant, born in ignorance and swaddled in sentimentality,” or “another type of religion altogether, open-minded, forward-looking, a religion that regards the mind as a God-given tool.”²⁵⁵ Brampton minister D.M. Stringer told his congregation that it would no longer cooperate with evangelicals:

For years we have tried to work together with these people, only to have them shout insults at us as Mr. Spraggett has done. We worked with them in the Sunday School Union, going along with their favourites – Jonah and the Whale, David and Goliath, Daniel in the Lions’ Den – these are supposed to be examples of how God looks after good Christians. Ten years ago the Presbyterian Church withdrew from the Union.... This month we will withdraw too, letting our conservative brothers go their own way.²⁵⁶

In the future, wrote George Goth in the *Toronto Telegram*, the United Church, aided by the New Curriculum, would steer away from the “obscurantism” and “wooden-headed literalism” of the “fundamentalists.”²⁵⁷ Provoked, perhaps, by the criticisms from outside evangelicals, these United Church ministers had circled the wagons – with “liberals” on the inside, and “fundamentalists” without.

Having examined the origins of the controversy and the responses of non-United Church evangelicals and United Church officials, it is now appropriate to investigate the broader response in private letters and letters to the editor.²⁵⁸ A small but significant number of positive letters came to the Board of Christian Education or the newspapers, many of them from United Church ministers. A minister from Telfordville, Alberta reported that the Christian education convenors of his conference had experienced “great satisfaction” with the New Curriculum.²⁵⁹ Another minister, from Welland, Ontario, wrote that positive comments about the New Curriculum from his Sunday school teachers had “countered some of the criticisms which people in the congregation were making.”²⁶⁰ Another minister from Alberta wrote to his local newspaper to defend the New Curriculum and insist that “we DO believe that the Bible is the Word of God.”²⁶¹ One man wrote to the editor of the *United Church Observer*, happy to see that the United Church had “made scepticism official” with the New Curriculum, and congratulating its creators on “the courageous and skilful performance of a difficult assignment.”²⁶² Another writer saw the New Curriculum as part of the inevitable progress of the church and wondered why it was such a contentious issue. Noting that her minister had admitted her to church membership despite knowing that she did not believe in the Apostles’ Creed, she “felt that the United Church had settled all these questions of fundamentalism and modernism, many years ago.” She sympathized with the goals of the New Curriculum, saying, “I do see that you must get us into the 20th century, gently if possible, but if necessary, ‘kicking and screaming’.”²⁶³ A minister from Chatham, Ontario thought that the New Curriculum was rendering valuable service since most people in the United Church were “literalists” and needed to be educated in “the modern approach to the Bible.”²⁶⁴

The negative responses, on the other hand, outnumbered the positive responses by nearly three to one.²⁶⁵ Since it is reasonable to assume that people upset over the New Curriculum would be more likely to write a letter than those pleased with it, this disparity can not be taken as a direct indicator of general opinion inside or outside the United Church. Of those negative letters that gave an indication of the writer’s denomination, however, a majority were United Church members. This fact suggests that there was a significant group of United Church members who were displeased with the New Curriculum, although it is of course impossible to determine what percentage of members fell into this category. Even in late winter 1965, eight months after the controversy broke, Peter Gordon White could say, “The criticisms continue to pour in.”²⁶⁶

Many of the critical letters focused on specific aspects of the New Curriculum. Some deplored what they saw as the elevation of relevance over

truth. One member felt that the New Curriculum was “trying to make God acceptable to men,” rather than explaining “how man is made acceptable to God” through conversion.²⁶⁷ Several writers criticized the curriculum’s approach to the Bible. One woman, a United Church member and Sunday school teacher, asked “who decides which stories are *not* to be taken literally and which are true[?]”²⁶⁸ Another woman noted that the official publicity was saying “that some outraged fundamentalists take their Scriptures literally,” to which her reply was “why not?”²⁶⁹ Not surprisingly, a number of writers took issue with the curriculum’s views on creation, miracles, and the Virgin Birth.²⁷⁰ The lack of conversionism in the curriculum also took criticism from letter writers. United Church member Allan Down was disturbed that “I could find nothing in the material which brought out one of the most elementary beliefs in the gospel – that the Christian life *begins* with a new birth, when after our acceptance by faith of Him in a real and personal way, the Holy Spirit does a work in our heart.”²⁷¹ These specific criticisms show that the modernist basis of the curriculum was rejected by some of the lay people of the church, who apparently held more evangelical views.

As in the initial letters from the summer of 1964, later writers continued to express surprise at the contents of the curriculum. A United Church member from Regina reported that he knew Sunday school teachers who had ordered the curriculum, thinking it represented a new teaching method but knowing nothing about the content.²⁷² A Sunday school teacher from Prescott, Ontario, felt that the curriculum had “been thrust upon us.”²⁷³ Many letter writers felt their options were to either block the use of the curriculum or curtail their involvement with the United Church. The member from Regina mentioned above wrote to J.R. Mutchmor, apparently assuming he was opposed to modernist theology due to his conservative moral stance, imploring him to put a stop to the curriculum:

In view of what is taking place and the number of people who will be driven out of their Churches as a result, my wife and myself among them, I am appealing to you, Dr. Mutchmor, to use your position and influence to smash this horrible nightmare that is upon us. If you need support publish a full report of [the] curriculum and all its ramifications in the ‘Observer’ and I am sure the members of the Church, and others, will rise up in wrath and righteous indignation, and help throw out these bewitched, bewildered and befuddled general council, theologians and all else having a hand in this U.C. crucifixion, out on their ears, but hard.²⁷⁴

Mutchmor responded by simply denying the newspaper reports about the curriculum and sending him copies of the Basis of Union and the Statement of Faith. Other United Church members responded to the New Curriculum by withdrawing their children from United Church Sunday schools. One mother, appalled that her eight-year-old son had returned from Sunday school filled with “anxious and urgent questioning” about the veracity of the Bible, wrote that she would “certainly waste no time in registering my children in a different Sunday

School, one that teaches the truth and sanctity of God's word."²⁷⁵ Some teachers, as well as students, felt they would not be able to continue their participation in United Church Sunday schools if the New Curriculum was taught.²⁷⁶

More generally, some members upset over the curriculum left the church. The widow of the former minister of a United Church in Guelph, Ontario, wrote warning that her church "has been thrown into confusion over the 'New Curriculum', several have left, they refuse to accept it, and won't teach it." Another church in the same pastoral charge had the same problem.²⁷⁷ Allan Down wrote that he and his wife had decided to "take a 'leave of absence' from the United Church," partly for the sake of their children.²⁷⁸ Other members from Ontario and Quebec also wrote simply stating that they were leaving the church because of the New Curriculum.²⁷⁹ United Church minister James R. Holden responded to E.E. Long's "pastoral letter," protesting that "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." Convinced that the "extreme liberals" in the church had "captured the teaching processes of our church" through the New Curriculum, Holden feared that he had no choice but to leave the denomination that had ordained him. Expressing what was doubtless the feeling of many evangelicals in the church, he concluded that "I have not forsaken the church. The church has forsaken me."²⁸⁰

In the end, the controversy meant different things to different groups in the United Church. For the modernists holding most of the official posts and pulpits in the church, the controversy confirmed that the New Curriculum was needed to end the gap between pulpit and pew by teaching the laity a modernist understanding of the faith. An article by *United Church Observer* editor A.C. Forrest, featuring an interview with Peter Gordon White, captured this sentiment well. According to the article, the producers of the New Curriculum were "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 Sunday school." White explained that the flow of theological knowledge in the church normally began with biblical scholars and theological professors, was transmitted to ministers through the theological colleges, and then in theory, from ministers to parents and teachers, and ultimately to children. Unfortunately, despite the fact that the ministers were "well-educated and well-trained," they had generally not communicated their up-to-date theological knowledge to their congregations. Continuing this line of thinking, White characterized the New Curriculum controversy as the birth pains of a new era. "Maybe the gospel itself, really heard by adults for the first time, is bringing its own crisis," he mused. "If this is the uncomfortable way renewal begins, Lord deliver us from the soothsayers who want peace at a price, even as high as 30 pieces of silver."²⁸¹ As has been shown, the strident criticism from evangelicals outside the United Church also appears to have encouraged the church's modernist ministers to close ranks against "fundamentalists" inside and outside the church. The church's

modernist leaders and ministers, therefore, had their support for both the New Curriculum and its underlying theology confirmed and strengthened by the controversy.

A second group of people in the church, neither confirmed modernists nor confirmed evangelicals, felt that their middle position had been excluded by the controversy. *United Church Observer* columnist Victor Fiddes wrote that the

publicity that has been given to the controversy seems to imply that there are only two kinds of people in the United Church. There are the liberals who, enlightened by science and historical criticism, want to bring the teaching of the church into harmony with the facts of life and there are the conservatives who ... would keep their religion in a ghetto where it will remain safe if irrelevant. Some of us refuse to be labelled for either group. We do not consider ourselves liberals or conservatives, modernists or fundamentalists.²⁸²

Judging by his views on the Bible, Fiddes could perhaps have been categorized as neo-orthodox with evangelical leanings. Such subtleties disappeared, however, in the polarization engendered by a controversy that of necessity forced church members to pick sides for or against the New Curriculum.

A final group, evangelicals in the United Church, felt increasingly alienated from their own denomination. Beyond the fact that the church leadership was promoting a curriculum contrary to their beliefs, the controversy resulted in many of the church's ministers explicitly defining the United Church as a "liberal" denomination in which "fundamentalists" were outsiders. An evangelical United Church minister from Newfoundland wrote that he and his fellow evangelicals were "beginning to wonder about our future in the ministry of the United Church" given that they could not accept the New Curriculum in good conscience. He feared that "we will probably be labelled 'odd-balls', 'separatists', and 'fundamentalists'. In some ways we are already beginning to feel that a squeeze is being placed on those who differ."²⁸³ With the controversy over the New Curriculum, the decades in which an evangelical could easily feel at home in the United Church had come to a decisive end.

Aftermath of the Controversy, 1964-1970

One of the outcomes of the New Curriculum controversy was the exit of the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec from its publication arrangement with the United Church. The opposition of some Baptists to the curriculum that had begun in June 1964 continued through the summer and fall. The Toronto Association of Baptist Churches, for example, voted in November to ask its parent body to drop the New Curriculum as an officially approved curriculum.²⁸⁴ By November, only 75 of the 420 churches in the BCOQ were using any part of the New Curriculum. Following an investigation by the Department of Christian

Education, the council of the denomination announced that it would recommend to the next assembly in 1965 that it be dropped as an official curriculum.²⁸⁵ At the assembly itself, the Baptists voted overwhelmingly to discontinue the arrangement with the United Church and destroy the materials that had already been printed with marks of official approval.²⁸⁶ Using the terms of a dichotomy so sharply revealed by the controversy, the United Church moderator E.M. Howse told the press that he was disappointed that the “conservative element” in the BCOQ had triumphed over the “liberal element.”²⁸⁷ The outspoken United Church minister George Goth deplored this action by Baptist “diehards” and “fanatics,” but the curriculum arrangement was finished.²⁸⁸

Within the United Church, however, leaders were moving in the opposite direction. The order catalogue of year two curriculum materials trumpeted the fact that the 90% of the church that had used the New Curriculum in year one found “increased enrolment,” “better attendance,” and “growing enthusiasm.” Comments in the catalogue seemed designed to address the controversy of the first year. These comments explained that while the New Curriculum “offers a colourful and dynamic approach to the Gospel, the basic truths that have remained unchanged down the ages are there. Problems of biblical interpretation are courageously and honestly faced with the result that most people have found the truths of the Bible becoming clearer and more meaningful.” Potential buyers were assured that the curriculum used “the enlightened attitude to the Bible that is commonly held throughout our denomination.”²⁸⁹ Staff members seemed satisfied with the direction of the curriculum. Nelson Abraham, member of the General Curriculum Committee for “Adult Work”, reported at the beginning of year two that the curriculum was “facing head-on the problems of ‘entrenched fundamentalism’ or ‘literalism’ with integrity and is having a liberating effect on a large number of adults.”²⁹⁰ As editor-in-chief Peter Gordon White’s comments in the *United Church Observer* had indicated, the controversy had only served to further convince church leaders of the value of the curriculum.²⁹¹ In fact, White was rewarded for his own efforts by a promotion to the position of associate secretary of the Board of Christian Education in September 1965, replacing the retiring David I. Forsyth.²⁹²

Indeed, the New Curriculum became more and more pervasive in the United Church after the controversy. In January 1965, the Boards of Christian Education and Publication reversed their initial plan and decided to discontinue the old curriculum’s uniform lessons, eliminating that option for the 2% of the United Church constituency that was still using them.²⁹³ This action made the New Curriculum the only officially approved curriculum in the United Church. The General Curriculum Committee also turned its attention to bringing all of the church’s midweek programs in line with New Curriculum teaching. This included existing programs like the *Tyro* program for junior boys, which was undergoing revisions to topic materials and the teacher handbook to better reflect the New Curriculum approach. It also included new programs like the *Messenger* program, which was being specially “developed in keeping with the new curriculum

presuppositions.” Surprisingly, the committee was even working to introduce New Curriculum emphases to programs run jointly with other denominations. At times, this appears to have been done against the presumed wishes of those other denominations. The existing *Explorer* program for juniors, for example, was run in cooperation with the Baptists and Presbyterians. Although the committee believed that “overt co-ordination with the curriculum for juniors in our church” was not possible because of the involvement of these denominations, it was trying discreetly to increase New Curriculum emphases in the *Explorer* materials. In the short term, this was being done through methods such as encouraging counselors in the program to read the curriculum’s *Junior Teacher’s Guide*. More permanently, the committee planned to increase New Curriculum emphases in future revisions of *Explorer* materials, and it expressed “appreciation” for the fact that the manual for *Explorer* counselors “while co-operatively produced, can also be implicitly tied in with the new curriculum presuppositions.” Similar plans were expressed for a wide range of interdenominational programs such as *Sigma-C* for intermediate boys, *Tuxis* for senior boys, and *C.G.I.T.* for teenaged girls. Even the Scouts program was to be used “in promoting the purposes of the New Curriculum.”²⁹⁴ Opponents of the curriculum, such as former minister J. Donald Lister, who left the denomination over it, questioned whether the curriculum was really voluntary for local congregations, when it had “been so cleverly woven into every department of the church.” In his view, congregations that rejected the New Curriculum “would cease to have their place in the total life of the church.”²⁹⁵ Thus, the New Curriculum became virtually inescapable for children involved in United Church-related activities, whether in Sunday school or midweek programs.

How successful was the New Curriculum in terms of book sales and Sunday school enrolment and attendance? Initially, the curriculum was a resounding numerical success. At the end of year one over 90% of United Church Sunday schools had ordered New Curriculum materials, representing 4000 Sunday schools with 95% of the total enrolment.²⁹⁶ In January 1965 the General Curriculum committee noted that circulation “has exceeded our expectations” especially in the youth department; senior New Curriculum materials led the way with twice the circulation of the old curriculum materials, but there were significant increases over the old curriculum across the board.²⁹⁷ Also in year one, the *United Church Observer* reported that adult participation in Bible study had increased 800%, and senior and intermediate participation in Sunday School had increased 98 and 30% respectively.²⁹⁸ Judging by the evidence given above, that most members of the church were ignorant of the contents of the New Curriculum even when ordering it, these numbers are probably better interpreted as evidence of an effective promotional campaign than as evidence of acceptance of the curriculum’s theology. It should also be noted that ordering by ministers or Sunday school superintendents did not necessarily represent the attitudes of average church members. At any rate, however, the New Curriculum enjoyed healthy statistics in its introductory year.

This picture changed considerably over ensuing years, however. Although there had been minor decreases in Sunday school enrolment since 1961, this trend accelerated dramatically after the introduction of the New Curriculum, and enrolment numbers remained in free fall until the early 1970s. It is important to note that the drop in enrolment in the 1960s was likely due to multiple factors, and certainly not the New Curriculum alone. The decade witnessed a widespread decline in indices of religious involvement other than Sunday school enrolment (church membership, for example) and in other denominations in Canada and elsewhere,²⁹⁹ which strongly suggests that the factors involved went beyond Sunday school and beyond the United Church.

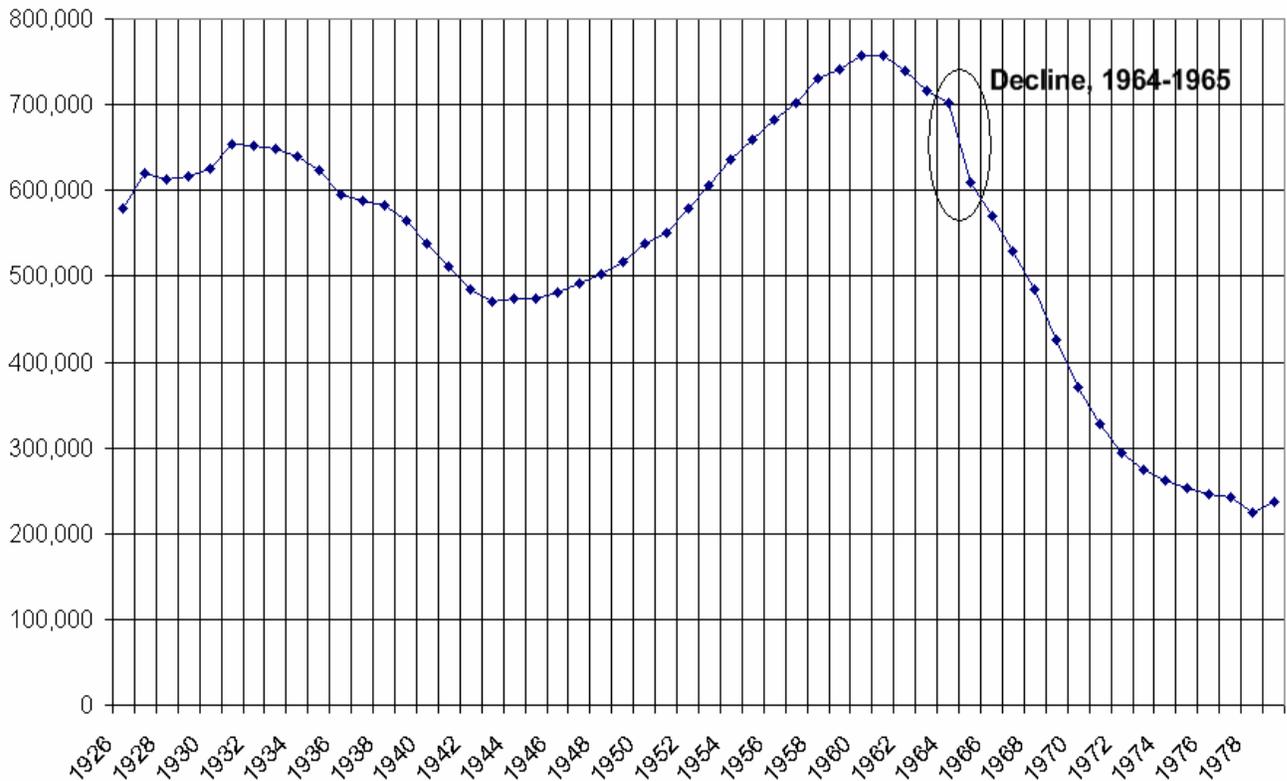
Nevertheless, the data suggest that demographic factors are not sufficient to explain the United Church's decline in Sunday school enrolment, and that the New Curriculum at least aggravated what would otherwise have been a more gentle decrease. In the first place, while the slowing Canadian birthrate can account for a corresponding slowing of enrolment, it cannot explain the magnitude of the decline in Sunday School membership in the 1960s. Why not? Simply because even with the slowing birthrate, the number of Canadians aged 5 to 14 *increased* in each census: from 1956 to 1961, again from 1961 to 1966, and again from 1966 to 1971.³⁰⁰ Within that category, which closely approximates the prime Sunday school ages, the same holds true of the 10 to 14 age group. Although there was a minor decrease in the younger 5 to 9 age group between the 1966 and 1971 censuses, this only amounted to 47,000 children for the entire country, while the decrease in Sunday school enrolment for the United Church alone in the same period was over 240,000 students. Admittedly, this picture is qualified somewhat by other factors. A portion of the decrease in enrolment may be due to a decrease in the nursery department (the segment of the Canadian population under 5 years old decreased significantly between 1961 and 1971).³⁰¹ It is also possible that the baby boom peaked earlier for the United Church constituency than other groups. In sum, demographic factors likely contributed to the decline in enrolment in the United Church after the mid-1960s, but they cannot account for the entire decrease.

The most compelling quantitative evidence that the introduction of the New Curriculum did affect enrolment is that the sharp downward turn in the enrolment trend coincided exactly with the introduction of the curriculum. Enrolment declined by over 90,000 people (or 13%) in the first year of the New Curriculum, by far the largest one-year decrease in the entire history of the church.³⁰² The previous year's decrease had been less than 15,000 persons, and the largest decrease in the past, between 1935 and 1936, had amounted to only 28,000. This decrease wiped out in a single year about half of the gains experienced during the 1950s. As Figure 3.1 illustrates, the 1964-1965 drop in enrolment represented a dramatic acceleration of the minor decreases of the preceding years, and was even more severe than the steep annual declines of the rest of the decade. The fact that by far the largest one-year decline in enrolment in the 1960s was also the year in which the New Curriculum was introduced can

hardly be a coincidence; in light of the documentary evidence of parents withdrawing themselves or their children from the church, the most likely explanation is that a large portion of the 1964-1965 decline represents the exodus of children of parents unhappy with the curriculum.

Figure 3.1 - United Church Sunday School Membership, 1926-1979

Source: United Church Yearbook, 1980



In keeping with the continued decline in enrolment, there was also a significant drop in curriculum sales from 1964 to 1969. Sales of the annual adult basic book and the other curriculum components fell precipitously from about 90,000 in 1964 to about 10,000 in 1969, with the sharpest drop happening between 1964 and 1966.³⁰³ By the later sixties, church officials were predicting a continued decline in circulation.³⁰⁴ As is argued elsewhere in this study, a variety of factors in addition to the New Curriculum also led to general declines in United Church membership and other measures of numerical strength. Nevertheless, it seems likely that the introduction and extension of the curriculum came at a price: some evangelical and evangelical-leaning church members, alienated by the modernist content of the New Curriculum, withdrew their children from United Church Sunday schools and themselves from membership.

Conclusion: The Significance of the New Curriculum

Seen in perspective, the introduction of the New Curriculum was probably the most significant event in the long process of de-evangelicalizing the United Church. To begin with, the foregoing examination of the curriculum confirms the earlier conclusion of this study that the leaders of the United Church were not evangelicals in their approach to the Bible and theology, but instead held modernist perspectives. The guiding presuppositions of the curriculum were explicitly derived from two modernist approaches, namely liberalism and neo-orthodoxy, and the final curriculum product unquestionably taught a modernist, non-evangelical view of Scripture and doctrine. The modernism of the church's leaders was nothing new – the administrators, theologians, and probably most of the clergy had held modernist beliefs in decades. This has been established in the preceding chapters by the examination of statements made by church leaders in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. It has now also been confirmed by the fact that so many United Church leaders and ministers insisted, during the course of the curriculum controversy, that the church had been teaching its ministers modernism for decades.

What *was* new about the New Curriculum, however, was that it was designed to end the long period of “quiet modernism” – that is, the three decades in which the public statements of the church had avoided explicitly promoting modernist beliefs or explicitly contradicting evangelical beliefs. As we have seen, the framers, developers, and authors were committed to teaching the laity a clearly modernist view of the Bible and theology for the first time. Although some ambiguous writing and “double-talk” about sensitive doctrines persisted in the New Curriculum, for the most part it upheld the church leadership's desire to bring an end to the theological gap between pulpit and pew. This was most obvious in the curriculum's approach to the Bible, which directly attacked the evangelical or “literalist” view in theory and in specific application. The public controversy that raged in 1964 and 1965, furthermore, only served to confirm to ministers and leaders like Peter Gordon White that the laity desperately needed to be disabused of their evangelical view of the Bible.

Not only did the New Curriculum intend to end “quiet modernism”, in reality it did accomplish this purpose. Admittedly, a number of the responses of church officials to the controversy tried to downplay the non-evangelical aspects of the curriculum and reassure the church of the curriculum's orthodoxy. This phenomenon can be attributed to a lingering instinct on the part of some leaders to minimize theological conflict, a desire on the part of the curriculum's producers to win its acceptance in the church, and finally the belief of modernist leaders and ministers that the curriculum was indeed orthodox by their standards. Even with these reassurances, however, there was no avoiding the fact that the New Curriculum was frankly non-evangelical, as the curriculum materials themselves amply proved. In addition, since the official publicity had so heavily emphasized the thorough involvement of the church's theological elites in producing the

curriculum, there could be no doubt that they too were not evangelicals. Publicly confirming and amplifying these conclusions was the response of church leaders and many clergy to the controversy. In sermons, articles, and radio broadcasts the ministers of the United Church stated over and over again their opposition to “fundamentalism” and their own adherence to “liberalism” – even to the extent of describing “liberalism” as the official position of the church.

As a result, the curriculum redefined the relationship of evangelicalism to the United Church. Before the New Curriculum, the combination of “quiet” modernist beliefs and “loud” evangelical practices made it quite possible to be an evangelical and not feel out of place in the United Church. To an extent far beyond anything that had happened in the past, however, the New Curriculum evicted evangelicalism from the United Church. As we have seen, the framers of the curriculum explicitly and intentionally targeted core doctrines of evangelicalism, especially the evangelical view of the Bible, in a way that could not be accepted by evangelicals in the church. The ensuing controversy publicly established that the bulk of United Church leaders and ministers were strenuously opposed to evangelical views, and in some cases actually regarded evangelicalism with undisguised contempt. It revealed a clear division between evangelicals and modernists (a division that had been obscured by the earlier paradigm) and showed that the church establishment was located firmly in the modernist camp. In this respect the controversy did not so much *create* an evangelical-modernist divide, as *reveal* it in a public and unavoidable way. The responses of church leaders and ministers to the controversy further portrayed opponents to the curriculum as non-United Church members, or at best a small and probably disloyal minority in the United Church. Conversely, the controversy showed United Church evangelicals that the defenders of evangelicalism were mostly to be found outside their denomination rather than within it. Finally, the heavy promotion of the curriculum, the widespread adoption of the materials throughout the church, and the reorientation of midweek programs made the New Curriculum the total, all-pervasive influence on Christian education in the United Church. While earlier signs of modernism in the church could be ignored, the New Curriculum made modernism nearly inescapable. For most evangelical families with children, the only way to avoid the New Curriculum was to cut off meaningful involvement with the United Church. The New Curriculum, therefore, struck a death blow to “quiet modernism” and decisively redefined the United Church as a non-evangelical denomination in the eyes of its leaders, its members, and the public at large.

¹ United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings*, 1952, 59, 73, 81.

² This and the following information about the Presbyterian curriculum is taken from William B. Kennedy, “Neo-Orthodoxy Goes to Sunday School: The Christian Faith and Life Curriculum,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* 76:1 (Spring 1998).

³ United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings*, 1960, 554.

⁴ United Church of Canada, *Yearbook*, 1980.

⁵ United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings*, 1954, 359, 367-368.

⁶ United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings*, 1956, 364.

⁷ The organizational structure for curriculum development and implementation was quite complicated. It involved two boards of the church, the Board of Christian Education and the Board of Publication. The Board of Christian Education had a General Curriculum Committee. The Board of Publication had a Department of Sunday School Publications, on the committee of which the officers of the Board of Christian Education sat ex-officio. These worked together in developing the New Curriculum. On top of this, there was a Curriculum Cabinet made up of five officers of the two boards, and still further, a “task force for curriculum development planning” or “Curriculum Workshop” made up of the editorial and program staff of the two boards. See UCA, BCE 198-7, Alvin John Cooper, “Organization and Structure for Curriculum Development,” Oct. 18, 1966, 1.

⁸ UCA, A.J. Cooper biographical file, “Brief Biographical Sketch of Dr. Cooper;” D.I. Forsyth biographical file, obituary from Guelph Presbytery, 1967.

⁹ UCA, BCE 198-8, Alvin John Cooper, “Some Suggestions for a Common Staff Paper on Theological and Educational Presuppositions in Curriculum Development,” 2.

¹⁰ A.C. Forrest, “The Crisis and the New Curriculum, Part 2: Why does the New Curriculum continue to produce such controversy?” *United Church Observer*, March 1, 1965, p.17.

¹¹ UCA, BCE 198-8, Cooper, “Some Suggestions,” 2.

¹² UCA, BCE 198-8, Cooper, “Some Suggestions,” 3; Wilbur Howard, “Some Theological Presuppositions,” 3; “Some Points of Agreement in Workshop Statements: Theological,” 1.

¹³ UCA, BCE 198-8, Frank P. Fidler, “Some Theological and Educational Presuppositions on which to build a curriculum...: A Summary,” for circulation to curriculum workshop members, Jun. 1955, 8. UCA, Frank P. Fidler biographical file, obituaries from *Toronto Star*, July 8, 1995.

¹⁴ UCA, BCE 198-8, Cooper, “Some Suggestions,” 3.

¹⁵ UCA, BCE 198-8, David I. Forsyth, “Theological and Educational Presuppositions,” n/d, 1; BCE 198-8, W. Blackmore, “Theological Presuppositions in Sunday Church School Curriculum Building,” n/d, 1.

¹⁶ UCA, BCE 198-8, Blackmore, “Theological Presuppositions,” 1.

¹⁷ UCA, BCE 198-8, Forsyth, “Theological and Educational Presuppositions,” 1; E.R. McLean, “The Presuppositions of the Church School Curriculum,” n/d, 1. UCA, E.R. McLean biographical file, biographical card.

¹⁸ The rejection by United Church leaders of the evangelical view of the Bible is discussed in more detail in chapter four.

¹⁹ UCA, BCE 198-8, Forsyth, “Educational and Theological Presuppositions,” 4.

²⁰ UCA, BCE 198-8, Ruth Curry, “Educational Presuppositions,” n/d, 3.

²¹ UCA, BCE 198-8, Dency McCalla, “Educational Presuppositions for Curriculum,” n/d. UCA, Dency McCalla biographical file, archives biographical form.

²² UCA, BCE 198-8, Curry, “Educational Presuppositions,” 3.

²³ UCA, BCE 198-8, Cooper, “Some Suggestions,” 3.

²⁴ UCA, BCE 198-8, Cooper, “Some Suggestions,” 5-7; Alvin John Cooper, “Theological Presuppositions in Curriculum Development,” n/d, 1-3; Alvin John Cooper, “Educational Presuppositions in Curriculum Development,” n/d, 3-4.

²⁵ UCA, BCE 198-8, Cooper, “Educational Presuppositions,” 3-4. Here and in other passages Cooper’s emphasis on mystical oneness with God and “soul-consciousness” appears to show the influence of mysticism of a Christian or possibly non-Christian tradition. Unfortunately, since his workshop papers lack references to other works, it is not possible to at this time to determine the source of this influence. See, e.g., Cooper, “Some Suggestions,” 7.

²⁶ UCA, BCE 198-8, Olive D. Sparling, “Theological Presuppositions for a Church School Curriculum,” n/d, 1. UCA, Olive Sparling biographical file, biographical fact sheet.

²⁷ UCA, BCE 198-8, Cooper, “Some Suggestions,” 6.

²⁸ UCA, BCE 198-8, Blackmore, “Theological Presuppositions,” 2; W. Blackmore [?], “A Synthesis of Theological and Educational Presuppositions in a Sunday Church School Curriculum,” Jun. 21, 1955, 1-2.

²⁹ UCA, BCE 198-8, Sparling, “Theological Presuppositions,” 1.

³⁰ UCA, BCE 198-8, Ruth Curry, “Theological [Presuppositions],” n/d, 7.

³¹ UCA, BCE 198-8, Olive D. Sparling, “Educational Presuppositions for a Church School Curriculum,” n/d, 1. See also Sparling, “Theological Presuppositions,” 1.

³² UCA, BCE 198-8, Cooper, “Some Suggestions,” 4.

³³ UCA, BCE 198-8, Fidler, “Some Theological,” 8.

³⁴ UCA, BCE 198-8, Blackmore, “Theological Presuppositions,” 2.

³⁵ UCA, BCE 198-8, Wilbur Howard, “Some Educational Presuppositions,” n/d, 2.

³⁶ UCA, BCE 198-8, McCalla, “Educational Presuppositions;” see also Blackmore, “Theological Presuppositions,” 1; Blackmore [?], “Educational Presuppositions,” 1; Blackmore [?], “A Synthesis,” 3.

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- ³⁷ UCA, BCE 198-8, Cooper, "Some Suggestions," 5; see also Sparling, "Educational Presuppositions," 2; Curry, "Educational Presuppositions," 3.
- ³⁸ UCA, BCE 198-8, McCalla, "Educational Presuppositions."
- ³⁹ UCA, BCE 198-8, Cooper, "Educational Presuppositions," 2.
- ⁴⁰ UCA, BCE 198-8, Blackmore [?], "A Synthesis," 5-6.
- ⁴¹ UCA, BCE 198-8, Sparling, "Educational Presuppositions," 1; McCalla, "Educational Presuppositions."
- ⁴² UCA, BCE 198-8, Cooper, "Theological Presuppositions," 1; Blackmore [?], "A Synthesis," 1.
- ⁴³ UCA, BCE 198-8, Fidler, "Some Theological," 3.
- ⁴⁴ UCA, BCE 198-8, Curry, "Theological [Presuppositions]," 4.
- ⁴⁵ UCA, BCE 198-8, Sparling, "Theological Presuppositions," 2.
- ⁴⁶ UCA, BCE 198-8, Curry, "Theological [Presuppositions]," 6.
- ⁴⁷ UCA, BCE 198-8, "Some Points of Agreement in Workshop Statements: Theological," n/d, 3.
- ⁴⁸ UCA, BCE 198-8, Curry, "Theological [Presuppositions]," 5; McLean, "The Presuppositions," 3.
- ⁴⁹ UCA, BCE 198-8, Ruth Curry, "Theological [Presuppositions]," 8.
- ⁵⁰ UCA, BCE 198-8, Curry, "Theological [Presuppositions]," 9; Forsyth, "Theological and Educational Presuppositions," 2-3.
- ⁵¹ What an evangelical view of the Bible entailed, and what the members of the Committee on Christian Faith thought about such a view, is discussed in more detail in chapter four.
- ⁵² UCA, BCE 198-8, W. Blackmore [?], "Educational Presuppositions in Sunday Church School Curriculum Building," n/d, 1; Blackmore [?], "A Synthesis," 3; Fidler, "Some Theological," 7.
- ⁵³ UCA, BCE 198-8, Curry, "Theological [Presuppositions]," 7, 10-11; Forsyth, "Theological and Educational Presuppositions," 4.
- ⁵⁴ UCA, BCE 198-8, "Some Points of Agreement in Workshop Statements: Theological," n/d, 3.
- ⁵⁵ UCA, BCE 198-8, Forsyth, "Theological and Educational Presuppositions," 4.
- ⁵⁶ UCA, BCE 198-8, Ruth Curry, "Synthesis," Jun. 9, 1955, 4.
- ⁵⁷ UCA, BCE 198-8, Cooper, "Some Suggestions," 5.
- ⁵⁸ UCA, BCE 198-8, Forsyth, "Educational and Theological Presuppositions," 4.
- ⁵⁹ UCA, BCE 198-8, Curry, "Synthesis," 4.
- ⁶⁰ UCA, BCE 198-8, Curry, "Educational Presuppositions," 2-3.
- ⁶¹ UCA, BCE 198-8, Curry, "Educational Presuppositions," 3.
- ⁶² UCA, BCE 198-8, Cooper, "Some Suggestions," 4.
- ⁶³ UCA, BCE 198-8, Blackmore, "Theological Presuppositions," 1.
- ⁶⁴ UCA, BCE 198-8, Blackmore [?], "A Synthesis," 3.

⁶⁵ UCA, BCE 198-8, Forsyth, “Theological and Educational Presuppositions,” 3.

⁶⁶ See discussion in chapter one, and specifically, UCA, BCE 15-1, “The Intermediate Department of the Church School,” 3-4; “The Senior Department of the Church School,” 28.

⁶⁷ UCA, BCE 198-10, “Presuppositions for the development of a curriculum for the Sunday Church Schools of The United Church of Canada,” Board of Christian Education, fourth draft, June 1957.

⁶⁸ UCA, BCE 198-10, “Presuppositions,” June 1957, A1, B2, B12, B13.

⁶⁹ UCA, BCE 198-10, “Presuppositions,” June 1957, B14-17.

⁷⁰ The readers’ responses to the presuppositions, pro and con, can be found in UCA, BCE 198-10.

⁷¹ UCA, BCE 198-10, Alvin John Cooper to General Curriculum Committee Workshop Members, Oct. 1, 1957, 36-37; “Report on Reading Test of ‘Presuppositions for the development of a Curriculum for the Sunday Church Schools of the The United Church of Canada,’” n/d [probably Sep. 1957; document contains comments dating between Jul. 2 and Sep. 5], 3.

⁷² UCA, BCE 198-10, Cooper to Workshop Members, 34, 36. Dr. H.W. Kerley wanted even more theological freedom, arguing that the curriculum should not “limit Christian education to the formal revelation within the confines of the New Testament,” as “some sects” do. “Report on Reading Test,” 6.

⁷³ UCA, BCE 198-10, “Report on Reading Test,” 6, 10.

⁷⁴ UCA, BCE 198-10, George Boyle, Archivist-Historian, UCC Committee on Archives, to Cooper, Sep. 5, 1957, 1. See also Cooper to Workshop Members, 34, 36; “Report on Reading Test,” 8, 17, 29.

⁷⁵ UCA, BCE 198-10, “Report on Reading Test,” 5, 21, 23.

⁷⁶ UCA, BCE 198-10, Boyle to Cooper, 2-3; “Report on Reading Test,” 8.

⁷⁷ UCA, BCE 198-10, “Report on Reading Test,” 6, 10; Cooper to Workshop Members, 8, 23, 33, 37.

⁷⁸ UCA, BCE 198-10, Boyle to Cooper, 3.

⁷⁹ See, for example, UCA, BCE 198-10, Boyle to Cooper, 2; “Report on Reading Test,” 2, 4-5.

⁸⁰ UCA, BCE 198-10, Cooper to Workshop Members, 33.

⁸¹ UCA, BCE 198-10, “Report on Reading Test,” 17-18.

⁸² UCA, BCE 198-10, “Report on Reading Test,” 6-7.

⁸³ UCA, BCE 198-10, “Report on Reading Test,” 18.

⁸⁴ The draft of the plan and presuppositions that took the criticisms from readers into account was written in November 1957. Another draft, basically identical in the section on presuppositions, was produced in April 1958. Both are used here. UCA, BCE 198-9, “Presuppositions for the development of a curriculum for the Sunday Church Schools of The United Church of Canada,” a statement from the Board of Christian Education and the Board of Publications, November 1957, 1-2, 4-7, 10, 13, 15, 19A, 26; BCE 198-11, “Presuppositions for

the development of a curriculum for the Sunday Church Schools of The United Church of Canada,” a statement from the Board of Christian Education and the Board of Publication of the UCC, April 1958, 9-10, 12-13, 18-19.

⁸⁵ United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings*, 1956, 73, 83.

⁸⁶ George Johnston, “What Sunday Schools Are Going To Teach,” *United Church Observer*, June 15, 1959, p.21; United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings*, 1958, 77-78.

⁸⁷ United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings*, 1958, 74. See also Johnston, “What Sunday Schools Are Going To Teach,” pp.21, 24.

⁸⁸ Johnston, “What Sunday Schools Are Going To Teach,” pp.21, 24.

⁸⁹ Forrest, “The Crisis and the New Curriculum, Part 2,” p.17.

⁹⁰ For an overview of the new plan, see UCA, BCE 198-5, “Catalogue of Materials for Year One of the New Curriculum.”

⁹¹ Johnston, “What Sunday Schools Are Going To Teach,” pp.24, 26. See also UCA, BCE 198-4, “New Curriculum, 1952-1966, forty-two steps,” n/d, 2 for a chronological outline of these steps.

⁹² UCA, CCF 5-1, Minutes, Sep. 21, 1959, 3.

⁹³ UCA, BCE 198-3, D. Mathers to E.E. Long, Sep. 22, 1959, 1-2.

⁹⁴ UCA, BCE 198-4, “New Curriculum, 1952-1966, forty-two steps,” 2.

⁹⁵ UCA, BCE 198-10, “Report on Reading Test,” 18.

⁹⁶ Johnston, “What Sunday Schools Are Going To Teach;” UCA, BCE 273-6, Douglas J. Wilson, “A Revolution in Teaching Methods,” *Montreal Star*, Jun. 16, 1962; “Study Books on Religion Written to Help Adults,” *Hamilton Spectator*, Dec. 10, 1962.

⁹⁷ UCA, BCE 198-4, “Tentative Suggestions for Interim Staff Paper for the Presentation of the Development of the New Curriculum and the Preparation Period,” n/d [internal evidence suggests between Jan. 1961 and Mar. 1961], section C, 1-3.

⁹⁸ See, e.g., UCA, BCE 198-5, “The Message: Second Emphasis of the Preparation Period for the New Curriculum,” n/d, 12.

⁹⁹ UCA, BCE 198-4, “Questions People Asked About New Curriculum”; BCE 198-6, Research Department of the Department of Sunday School Publications in cooperation with the BCE, “A Report on the Testing Program for the New Curriculum,” n/d [internal evidence suggests 1963-1964], 4.

¹⁰⁰ Donald Mathers, *The Word and the Way*. See also UCA, BCE 198-3, Peter Gordon White and Wilbur K. Howard, “Progress in the Development of New Curriculum,” Nov. 28, 1960, 2; and United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings*, 1962, 56, 419-421.

¹⁰¹ UCA, BCE 198-3, White to A.G. Reynolds, Aug. 1, 1963.

¹⁰² UCA, BCE 198-8, Cooper, “Some Suggestions,” 1. The uniform lessons were soon dropped due to their small circulation; BCE 198-7, Minutes of General Curriculum Committee, Jan. 15, 1965, 3.

¹⁰³ See the comments by former United Church minister J. Donald Lister on the pervasiveness of the curriculum, UCA, BCE 273-7, J. Donald Lister, "Why I left the Ministry of the United Church," *News for the Nation* (Battleford, Saskatchewan: First Baptist Church, Dec. 1964).

¹⁰⁴ United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings*, 1962, 418-419.

¹⁰⁵ UCA, BCE 198-4, "Tentative Suggestions," section D, p.2, section C, p.1.

¹⁰⁶ United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings*, 1962, 421, 56.

¹⁰⁷ UCA, BCE 198-4, "Tentative Suggestions," section C, p.2.

¹⁰⁸ UCA, BCE 198-4, "Tentative Suggestions," section C, pp.1-2; BCE 198-5, "The Message."

¹⁰⁹ UCA, BCE 198-13, "Prospectus for a New Curriculum for the Sunday Church Schools of The United Church of Canada," A statement from the Board of Christian Education and the Board of Publication of the UCC, May 1961.

¹¹⁰ Johnston, "What Sunday Schools Are Going To Teach."

¹¹¹ T. Hogerwaans, Letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, August 1959, p.2.

¹¹² UCA, BCE 273-6, Wilson, "A Revolution in Teaching Methods."

¹¹³ UCA, BCE 273-6, "Study Books."

¹¹⁴ UCA, BCE 198-4, "Questions People Asked About New Curriculum," 2.

¹¹⁵ UCA, BCE 198-6, Research Department of the Department of Sunday School Publications in cooperation with the BCE, "A Report on the Testing Program for the New Curriculum," n/d [internal evidence suggests 1963-1964], 5, 10. My estimate of 1330 older students is derived by adding the given percentages of intermediate and senior students in the testing program, multiplying the result by the total number of students in the program, and rounding. The relevant membership statistics can be found in United Church of Canada, *Yearbook*, 1980.

¹¹⁶ UCA, BCE 198-6, "A Report on the Testing Program," 9-11, 16.

¹¹⁷ Mathers, *The Word and the Way*, 17-26, 67-72, 80, 98-101, 107.

¹¹⁸ Mathers, *The Word and the Way*, 90-91, 107.

¹¹⁹ Mathers, *The Word and the Way*, 17-26, 80.

¹²⁰ Mathers, *The Word and the Way*, 70-74.

¹²¹ Mathers, *The Word and the Way*, 103-105, 111-115, 117-118, 141-143.

¹²² UCA, BCE 198-3, White to Reynolds.

¹²³ Membership statistics taken from United Church of Canada, *Yearbook*, 1980.

¹²⁴ UCA, BCE 198-6, "A Report on the Testing Program," 14. For long term sales figures, see BCE 198-3, Peter Gordon White, "Editorial Report," Feb. 20, 1963; and BCE 198-7, Minutes of General Curriculum Committee, Jan. 15, 1965, 18.

¹²⁵ See UCA, BCE 250-3 for a complete bibliography of the printed New Curriculum materials. UCA, Donald Murray Mathers biographical file, fact sheet;

Douglas Walkington, *United Church Ministers 1925-1980*, s.v. "Johnston, George,"; Frank Morgan biographical file, archives biographical form; John Wilkie biographical file, archives biographical form; Olive Sparling biographical file, fact sheet.

¹²⁶ UCA, BCE 202-2, lists of writers, editors, and consultants. UCA, R.C. Chalmers biographical file, fact sheet; Elias Andrews biographical file, archives biographical form.

¹²⁷ Thomson, *God and His Purpose*, 42. UCA, Walkington, *United Church Ministers 1925-1980*, s.v. "Thomson, James S."

¹²⁸ Morgan, *God Speaks Through People*, 20.

¹²⁹ Boyd, *The Intermediate Teacher's Guide*, 58, 62.

¹³⁰ Wilkie, *The Primary Teacher's Guide*, 9.

¹³¹ Morgan, *God Speaks Through People*, 19. See also p.18.

¹³² Morgan, *God Speaks Through People*, 16; Boyd, *The Intermediate Teacher's Guide*, 80; Dobbie, *The Junior Teacher's Guide*, 1.

¹³³ Boyd, *The Intermediate Teacher's Guide*, 100.

¹³⁴ Morgan, *God Speaks Through People*, 19.

¹³⁵ Dobbie, *The Junior Teacher's Guide*, 2, 32; Hardie, *Mighty Acts*, 139.

¹³⁶ Hardie, *Mighty Acts*, 111-112, 131, 140-141. UCA, John B. Hardie biographical file, obituary from *United Church Observer*, October 1987.

¹³⁷ Hardie, *Mighty Acts*, 15, 18; there is an excellent example of this thinking put into practice on p.7.

¹³⁸ Thomson, *God and His Purpose*, 52.

¹³⁹ Boorman, *Senior Teacher's Guide* (Year 3), 243.

¹⁴⁰ Thomson, *God and His Purpose*, 39-41.

¹⁴¹ Boorman, *Senior Teacher's Guide* (Year 3), 243-244.

¹⁴² Morgan, *God Speaks Through People*, 26-27.

¹⁴³ E.g., Hardie, *Mighty Acts*, 19; Morgan, *God Speaks Through People*, 18.

¹⁴⁴ Thomson, *God and His Purpose*, 49.

¹⁴⁵ Hardie, *Mighty Acts*, 18, 27.

¹⁴⁶ Hardie, *Mighty Acts*, 20; Thomson, *God and His Purpose*, 60-61.

¹⁴⁷ Dobbie, *The Junior Teacher's Guide*, 4; see also Wilkie, *The Primary Teacher's Guide*, 9.

¹⁴⁸ Thomson, *God and His Purpose*, 49.

¹⁴⁹ For example, B.B. Warfield, a staunch defender of the evangelical doctrine of biblical inerrancy, interpreted the creation account non-literally. See David N. Livingstone and Mark Noll, "B.B. Warfield (1851-1921): A Biblical Inerrantist as Evolutionist," *Isis*, 91:2 (Jun., 2000): 283-304.

¹⁵⁰ Hardie, *Mighty Acts*, 15; Morgan, *God Speaks Through People*, 24-25; Boorman, *Senior Teacher's Guide* (Year 3), 244.

¹⁵¹ Hardie, *Mighty Acts*, 15.

¹⁵² Morgan, *God Speaks Through People*, 24-25.

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- ¹⁵³ Morgan, *God Speaks Through People*, 46, 53-55, 58.
- ¹⁵⁴ Hardie, *Mighty Acts*, 43.
- ¹⁵⁵ Morgan, *God Speaks Through People*, 49, 58-59, 61-64.
- ¹⁵⁶ Boyd, *The Intermediate Teacher's Guide*, 95-96.
- ¹⁵⁷ Morgan, *God Speaks Through People*, 51-52, 65-66.
- ¹⁵⁸ Morgan, *God Speaks Through People*, 6, 236.
- ¹⁵⁹ Boyd, *The Intermediate Teacher's Guide*, 270.
- ¹⁶⁰ Johnston, *The Kindergarten Teacher's Guide* (Year 2), 13. See also Johnston, *The Kindergarten Teacher's Guide* (Year 2), 22; and Wilkie, *The Primary Teacher's Guide*, 22, for rejections of the historicity of the stories of the Magi and the chorus of angels.
- ¹⁶¹ Dobbie, *The Junior Teacher's Guide*, 18.
- ¹⁶² Morgan, *God Speaks Through People*, 6, 237; Johnston, *The Kindergarten Teacher's Guide* (Year 2), 40; Joblin, *Senior Teacher's Guide* (Year 2), 140; Dobbie, *The Junior Teacher's Guide*, 36.
- ¹⁶³ Hardie, *Mighty Acts*, 192, 194.
- ¹⁶⁴ Dobbie, *The Junior Teacher's Guide*, 40. See also Joblin, *Senior Teacher's Guide* (Year 2), 268, which also hedges on the issue.
- ¹⁶⁵ Boorman, *Senior Teacher's Guide* (Year 3), 224.
- ¹⁶⁶ Johnston, *The Kindergarten Teacher's Guide* (Year 2), 38.
- ¹⁶⁷ Thomson, *God and His Purpose*, 138, 181.
- ¹⁶⁸ Thomson, *God and His Purpose*, 122-123, 133-134, 181-182.
- ¹⁶⁹ Hardie, *Mighty Acts*, 94.
- ¹⁷⁰ Johnston, *The Kindergarten Teacher's Guide* (Year 2), 38-39.
- ¹⁷¹ UCA, BCE 273-5, Allen Spraggett, "Virgin Birth, Goliath – are they just myths?" *Toronto Daily Star*, Jul. 4, 1964, p.1. See also BCE 272-5, Peter Gordon White, "Good News? ... Or Bad?" text of an address given to the 21st GC, Sept. 1964, 4.
- ¹⁷² UCA, BCE 273-5, Spraggett, "Virgin Birth," p.1.
- ¹⁷³ UCA, BCE 273-5, Arno M. Kelly, letter to the editor, *Kincardine News*, Ontario, Aug. 12, 1964.
- ¹⁷⁴ UCA, BCE 272-8, W. Gordon Brown, "The New Curriculum in the Light of Scripture," n/d, 9. See also, "Brands new Sunday school curriculum 'unbiblical'," *Toronto Daily Star*, Sep. 5, 1964, p.70.
- ¹⁷⁵ UCA, BCE 273-13, "Asks reason, tolerance on 'new curriculum'," *Toronto Daily Star*, Jul. 25, 1964; Roy C. Cook, "The Curriculum Issue," *The Canadian Baptist*, Aug. 1, 1964.
- ¹⁷⁶ UCA, BCE 273-5, Spraggett, "Virgin Birth," p.1; BCE 273-6, Allen Spraggett, "New child text at odds with Bible," Jul. 4, 1964.
- ¹⁷⁷ UCA, BCE 273-5, Spraggett, "Virgin Birth," pp. 1-2; BCE 273-6, Spraggett, "New child text."
- ¹⁷⁸ For some of the many examples, see UCA, BCE 273-9, "Sunday School Denies Noah Built Ark For Flood," *St. Catherines Standard*, Ontario, Jul.

8, 1964; BCE 273-3, "Churches hit teaching," *Vancouver Province*, Jul. 10, 1964; Aubrey Wice, "They Are Teaching That Christ Was A Fraud," *Telegram*, Oct. 3, 1964; BCE 273-22, "The Churches: How to reinterpret the Bible and bring a new look to Sunday Schools," *Maclean's*, Sep. 19, 1964; BCE 273-22, Charles Wilkinson, "United Church, Baptist, Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Presbyterians, Lutherans all take a fresh look at their Christian Education," *Hamilton Spectator*, Sep. 19, 1964, p.19; BCE 273-1, Douglas J. Wilson, "Trouble Over A Four Letter Word," *Montreal Star*, Oct. 10, 1964.

¹⁷⁹ UCA, BCE 273-22, Allen Spraggett, "Christians today – the riddle of their faith," *Toronto Daily Star*, Aug. 8, 1964.

¹⁸⁰ UCA, BCE 201-6, Memo, Wilbur K. Howard to Staff Personnel of Board of Publication and Board of Christian Education, "Some confidential notes re New Curriculum press publicity for your guidance," July 14, 1964, 1-3.

¹⁸¹ UCA, BCE 272-1, Wilbur K. Howard to Allen Spraggett, July 22, 1964. For a much less sanguine reaction to Spraggett's articles from a liberal United Church minister, see BCE 272-4, D.M. Stringer, "The Letter and the Spirit," sermon preached at Grace UC, Brampton, Aug. 23, 1964, 2.

¹⁸² UCA, BCE 272-5, Peter Gordon White, "Good News? ... Or Bad?" text of an address given to the 21st GC, Sept. 1964, 7.

¹⁸³ UCA, BCE 273-5, True Christian Love, letter to the editor, *Toronto Daily Star*, Aug. 31, 1964.

¹⁸⁴ UCA, BCE 272-7, Dorothy Wentworth to United Church Publishing House, July 14, 1964. For another example of a Sunday school canceling its order, see BCE 272-7, Doreen Gow to United Church Publishing House, n/d [stamped received July 14, 1964].

¹⁸⁵ UCA, BCE 272-7, Howard Walker to J.R. Mutchmor, July 25, 1964.

¹⁸⁶ UCA, BCE 272-7, Doug Shaw to Peter Gordon White, July 8, 1964.

¹⁸⁷ UCA, BCE 272-7, P.E. McNabb to United Church Publishing House, Jul. 20, 1964, 1-2.

¹⁸⁸ UCA, BCE 273-6, J. Estey, letter to the editor, *Toronto Daily Star*, Jul. 29, 1964.

¹⁸⁹ UCA, BCE 272-7, Rosemary Robinson to J.R. Mutchmor, July 26, 1964, 3.

¹⁹⁰ UCA, BCE 272-7, Howard Walker to J.R. Mutchmor, July 25, 1964.

¹⁹¹ UCA, BCE 272-7, Doug Shaw to Peter Gordon White, July 8, 1964.

¹⁹² UCA, BCE 272-7, Shaw to White; Howard Walker to J.R. Mutchmor, July 25, 1964.

¹⁹³ UCA, BCE 272-7, Robinson to Mutchmor, 3.

¹⁹⁴ UCA, BCE 272-7, Robert S. Cherry to J.R. Mutchmor, Aug. 9, 1964.

¹⁹⁵ UCA, BCE 273-1, "Roman Catholics Agree: 'Myths' Included in Bible," *Toronto Telegram*, Nov. 4, 1964; "Ecumenical News Notes," *The B.C. Catholic*, Vancouver, Jul. 16, 1964; BCE 273-3, Aubrey Wice, "They Are Teaching That Christ Was A Fraud," *Toronto Telegram*, Oct. 3, 1964; "Dislike

new curriculum,” *United Church Observer*, April 1, 1965, p.33; Arnold Edinborough, “Faith without quibble,” *Canadian Churchman*, May 1965, p.5. The positive reaction from the few Catholics who commented publicly was mostly with respect to the New Curriculum’s use of the word “myth,” which they regarded as consistent with their own views – though at least one commentator objected to extending this idea to the virgin birth or the deity of Christ. Of course, these comments cannot necessarily be taken as representative of the official Catholic position or the general opinion of Catholic leaders or laypeople.

¹⁹⁶ UCA, BCE 273-3, “Churches hit teaching,” *Vancouver Province*, Jul. 10, 1964.

¹⁹⁷ UCA, BCE 272-7, H.W. Kirk to Peter Gordon White, Aug. 10, 1964.

¹⁹⁸ UCA, BCE 272-8, W. Gordon Brown, “The New Curriculum in the Light of Scripture,” n/d. The booklet was mentioned in BCE 273-21, “Brands new Sunday school curriculum ‘unbiblical’,” *Toronto Daily Star*, Sep. 5, 1964, p.70.

¹⁹⁹ UCA, BCE 272-8, H.C. Slade, “Protestant Infidelity as Revealed in the Canadian New Sunday School Curriculum,” booklet containing sermon preached at Jarvis St. Baptist Church, Toronto, Sep. 27, 1964; BCE 273-3, J.H. Hunter, “Myths, Fables or Gospel Truth?” *The Evangelical Christian*, Toronto, Oct. 1964.

²⁰⁰ UCA, BCE 272-6, Wilson Bridge to E.E. Long, Oct. 27, 1964.

²⁰¹ UCA, BCE 272-8, Perry F. Rockwood, “The New Curriculum of the United Church of Canada,” n/d; BCE 273-5, Perry F. Rockwood, letter to the editor, *Fredericton Gleaner*, Nov. 10, 1964.

²⁰² UCA, BCE 272-8, Paul B. Smith and Daniel Edmundson, “What’s Wrong with the New Curriculum? Seven Accusations against the New Curriculum of The United Church of Canada,” (Willowdale, Ontario: The People’s Church, 1964). See also the *Observer* article questioning his intellectual integrity, “Dead experts,” *United Church Observer*, May 1, 1965, p.5.

²⁰³ UCA, BCE 273-3, “THAT curriculum still draws fire,” *Toronto Daily Star*, Jan. 2, 1965; BCE 272-7, Arthur J. Durnan to Peter Gordon White, Jan. 21, 1965; BCE 272-8, A.W. Ness, “The New United Church Sunday School Curriculum: An Open Letter to All United Church and Convention Baptist People,” n/d; “Presbyterian ‘Plain Talk’ cancelled by Sydney station,” *Presbyterian Record*, April 1965, p.22.

²⁰⁴ UCA, BCE 272-8, Brown, “The New Curriculum in the Light of Scripture,” 6.

²⁰⁵ UCA, BCE 272-8, Smith and Edmundson, “What’s Wrong with the New Curriculum?” 24-27.

²⁰⁶ UCA, BCE 272-8, Smith and Edmundson, “What’s Wrong with the New Curriculum?” 7, 9.

²⁰⁷ UCA, BCE 272-8, Brown, “The New Curriculum in the Light of Scripture,” 3.

²⁰⁸ UCA, BCE 273-5, Rockwood, letter to the editor, *Fredericton Gleaner*, Nov. 10, 1964.

²⁰⁹ UCA, BCE 272-8, Brown, “The New Curriculum in the Light of Scripture,” 7.

²¹⁰ UCA, BCE 272-8, Smith and Edmundson, “What’s Wrong with the New Curriculum?” 30-32.

²¹¹ (Rev.) Milton A. Swaren, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, May 15, 1965, p.8.

²¹² UCA, BCE 272-7, Kirk to White.

²¹³ UCA, BCE 272-7, Cherry to Mutchmor, 2.

²¹⁴ UCA, BCE 272-8, Smith and Edmundson, “What’s Wrong with the New Curriculum?” 5.

²¹⁵ UCA, BCE 272-8, Brown, “The New Curriculum in the Light of Scripture,” 2. In other words, what Brown called “liberalism” would in the parlance of the present work be called “modernism.”

²¹⁶ UCA, BCE 272-5, White, “Good News? ... Or Bad?” 1-2.

²¹⁷ UCA, BCE 201-2, Press release on United Church New Curriculum, Board of Information and Stewardship, n/d [“For release at will”], 1.

²¹⁸ UCA, BCE 272-5, White, “Good News? ... Or Bad?” 5.

²¹⁹ UCA, BCE 201-2, Press release, 1-2.

²²⁰ For examples of newspaper coverage, see UCA, BCE 273-7, “United Church New Curriculum,” *Regina Leader Post*, Saskatchewan, Oct. 17, 1964; “Church school arouses interest,” *Yellowknife News of the North*, Northwest Territories, Oct. 28, 1964; “Critics Do Not Read Bible Church Council Is Told,” *Trenton Trentonian*, Ontario, Oct. 9, 1964; “New Curriculum Strongly Supported, Criticism Was Outside The Church,” *Daily News*, St. John’s, Newfoundland, Oct. 22, 1964.

²²¹ UCA, BCE 272-5, E.E. Long to ministers and congregations of the UCC in Ontario, Oct. 15, 1964, 1.

²²² UCA, BCE 272-5, Long to ministers and congregations, 1.

²²³ UCA, BCE 272-5, Long to ministers and congregations, 2.

²²⁴ UCA, BCE 273-22, Allen Spraggett, “The highly-quotable Dr. Howse,” *Toronto Daily Star*, Oct. 24, 1964, p.57.

²²⁵ “Myths” [editorial], *United Church Observer*, June 1, 1965, p.10.

²²⁶ J.R. Mutchmor, “40 Years,” *United Church Observer*, June 1, 1965, p.11.

²²⁷ UCA, BCE 201-2, Wilbur K. Howard to Conference and Presbytery Publication Convernors, Nov. 5, 1964.

²²⁸ UCA, BCE 201-2, George Birtch, “The Fundamentalist’s Dilemma,” sermon preached at Metropolitan United Church, Oct. 18, 1964, 1-4. According to Birtch, people who believed in the “verbal inspiration of Scripture” also believed that God inspired the Bible through a process like dictation, that everything in the Bible had to be taken strictly literally, that every statement in the Bible had equal authority, that out-of-context quoting of Bible texts was the correct way to

theologize, and that all non-literalists were necessarily heretics. He also implied that “fundamentalists” worshiped the Bible rather than God.

²²⁹ UCA, BCE 272-2, George G. Connolly, text of a radio broadcast given on radio station CFRB, Toronto, Nov. 22, 1964, 7; BCE 272-4, Frank E. Ball, minister of St. Paul’s United Church, Cornwall, ON, “What’s all the fuss about the United Church’s New Curriculum?” text of a sermon preached Sept. 27, 1964 and broadcast on radio station CJSS, 2.

²³⁰ UCA, BCE 272-4, Rev. D.M. Stringer, “The Letter and the Spirit,” sermon preached at Grace UC, Brampton, Aug. 23, 1964, 1; Ball, “What’s all the fuss,” 2; BCE 273-5, Harvey Moats, “What the United Church Believes About the Bible,” *Fort Frances Times*, Ontario, Aug. 5, 1964.

²³¹ UCA, BCE 272-2, Connolly, radio broadcast, 2,7: BCE 272-4, Ball, “What’s all the fuss,” 8.

²³² UCA, BCE 272-4, Ball, “What’s all the fuss,” 3; Rev. J.W. Young, “Does the Theory of Evolution Contradict the Bible?” sermon preached at Glebe Road UC, Toronto, Nov. 22, 1964, 2; BCE 272-2, Connolly, radio broadcast, 4.

²³³ UCA, BCE 272-4, Stringer, “The Letter and the Spirit,” 1; Ball, “What’s all the fuss,” 4-5.

²³⁴ UCA, BCE 272-2, Connolly, radio broadcast, 7-8.

²³⁵ UCA, BCE 201-6, J.A. Davidson, “Canadians and their Religion,” copy of an article which appeared in the *Globe and Mail*, July 18, 1964, 1, 3.

²³⁶ UCA, BCE 272-2, Connolly, radio broadcast, 2-3. UCA, George G. Connolly biographical file, archives biographical form.

²³⁷ UCA, BCE 272-4, Ball, “What’s all the fuss,” 3. UCA, Walkington, *United Church Ministers 1925-1980*, s.v. “Ball, Frank Ernest.”

²³⁸ UCA, BCE 273-5, Harvey Moats, “Let the Bible Speak!” *Fort Frances Times*, Ontario, Aug. 5, 1964.

²³⁹ UCA, BCE 273-1, W.G. Onions, “Naturalistic Views ‘Waste of Time – Let Stories Stand’,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, Nov. 14, 1964.

²⁴⁰ UCA, BCE 273-5, Moats, “Let the Bible Speak!”

²⁴¹ UCA, BCE 273-22, E.M. Howse, “Is What’s Good Enough for Ford Good Enough for Us?” *Toronto Telegram*, Oct. 31, 1964.

²⁴² UCA, BCE 273-7, George Goth, “New Curriculum Marks Giant Stride For Church,” *Toronto Telegram*, Sep. 14, 1964.

²⁴³ UCA, BCE 272-2, Connolly, radio broadcast, 3.

²⁴⁴ UCA, BCE 272-2, Connolly, radio broadcast, 5. See also BCE 272-4, Ball, “What’s all the fuss,” 3.

²⁴⁵ UCA, BCE 273-5, Moats, “Let the Bible Speak!”

²⁴⁶ UCA, BCE 273-1, W.G. Onions, “Naturalistic Views.”

²⁴⁷ UCA, BCE 272-4, Ball, “What’s all the fuss,” 7.

²⁴⁸ UCA, BCE 273-1, Richard K. Taylor, “Here’s What the Fuss Is About,” *Kitchener-Waterloo Record*, Ontario, Nov. 7, 1964.

²⁴⁹ UCA, BCE 272-4, Stringer, “The Letter and the Spirit,” 4.

²⁵⁰ UCA, BCE 272-4, Ball, "What's all the fuss," 6.

²⁵¹ UCA, BCE 272-4, Ball, "What's all the fuss," 4, 6; BCE 272-2, Connolly, radio broadcast, 4-5.

²⁵² UCA, BCE 272-2, Connolly, radio broadcast, 5, 6.

²⁵³ UCA, BCE 201-6, Davidson, "Canadians and their Religion," 1.

²⁵⁴ UCA, BCE 272-2, Connolly, radio broadcast, 3. Connolly was unusual in his aversion to the term "fundamentalist," compared to the other ministers under study here.

²⁵⁵ UCA, BCE 272-4, Young, "Does the Theory of Evolution Contradict the Bible?" 2.

²⁵⁶ UCA, BCE 272-4, Stringer, "The Letter and the Spirit," 4.

²⁵⁷ UCA, BCE 273-7, Goth, "New Curriculum Marks Giant Stride For Church."

²⁵⁸ The letters in question can be found in UCA, BCE 272-6, 272-7, 273-1, 273-5, and 273-6.

²⁵⁹ UCA, BCE 272-6, Gerald M. Hutchinson to White, Oct. 16, 1964.

²⁶⁰ UCA, BCE 272-6, Robert Wright to White, Nov. 3, 1964.

²⁶¹ UCA, BCE 273-5, Barry David Moore, letter to the editor, *Grand Prairie Herald Tribune*, Alberta, Dec. 21, 1964.

²⁶² UCA, BCE 272-6, Ronald Knott to A.C. Forrest, Aug. 27, 1964.

²⁶³ Louise Pettingell, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, March 1, 1965, p.2.

²⁶⁴ UCA, BCE 272-6, George R. Service to White, Oct. 9, 1964.

²⁶⁵ The numbers in this discussion are based on an analysis of the total correspondence in UCA, BCE 272-6, 272-7, 273-1, 273-5, and 273-6.

²⁶⁶ A.C. Forrest, "The Crisis and the New Curriculum, Part 2: Why does the New Curriculum continue to produce such controversy?" *United Church Observer* March 1, 1965, p.18.

²⁶⁷ UCA, BCE 272-7, Allan A. Down to United Church Publishing House, Jan. 6, 1965, 3. See also BCE 272-7, Arthur J. Durnan to White, Jan. 21, 1965.

²⁶⁸ UCA, BCE 272-7, H.W. Kirk to White, Aug. 10, 1964.

²⁶⁹ UCA, BCE 272-6, M. Patten to White, Sep. 19, 1964. See also Down to United Church Publishing House, 1-2.

²⁷⁰ See, for example, UCA, BCE 272-7, Roland S. Garrett to the *United Church Observer*, Sep. 19, 1964; Durnan to White; Leland Soderberg, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, April 1, 1965, p.2.

²⁷¹ UCA, BCE 272-7, Down to United Church Publishing House, 2.

²⁷² UCA, BCE 272-7, W.L. Wilson to J.R. Mutchmor, Aug. 9, 1964.

²⁷³ UCA, BCE 272-7, Kirk to White.

²⁷⁴ UCA, BCE 272-7, Wilson to Mutchmor. Wilson was probably not satisfied with Mutchmor's reply, in which he simply denied the newspaper reports and enclosed copies of the Basis of Union and the Statement of Faith. J.R. Mutchmor to W.L. Wilson, Aug. 20, 1964.

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- ²⁷⁵ UCA, BCE 273-11, S. O’Driscoll, letter to the editor, *Winnipeg Tribune*, Manitoba, Jul. 10, 1965.
- ²⁷⁶ UCA, BCE 272-7, Ethel B. Johnston to Sunday School Department, United Church Publishing House, Aug. 20, 1964.
- ²⁷⁷ UCA, BCE 272-7, Eva F. Dilts to “Friends,” Sep. 17, 1964.
- ²⁷⁸ UCA, BCE 272-7, Down to United Church Publishing House, 3.
- ²⁷⁹ See, for example, UCA, BCE 272-7, Mildred C. Young to A.C. Forrest, Sep. 20, 1964; BCE 272-7, Georgina Robinson to the Moderator, Aug. 14, 1964; BCE 272-7, H. Hocken to Peter Gordon White, Aug. 7, 1964.
- ²⁸⁰ UCA, BCE 272-7, James R. Holden to E.E. Long, Dec. 4, 1964.
- ²⁸¹ A.C. Forrest, “The Crisis and the New Curriculum, Part 2: Why does the New Curriculum continue to produce such controversy?” *United Church Observer*, March 1, 1965, pp. 16, 32.
- ²⁸² Victor Fiddes, “Of potter’s clay,” *United Church Observer*, October 15, 1965, p.38.
- ²⁸³ (Rev.) J. Berkley Reynolds, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, April 1, 1965, pp.4, 6. For a similar perspective from another evangelical minister, see L. Warr, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, September 15, 1965, p.9.
- ²⁸⁴ UCA, BCE 273-13, “Curriculum changes protested,” *Winnipeg Tribune*, Manitoba, Nov. 7, 1964.
- ²⁸⁵ UCA, BCE 273-13, “Ask Baptists to stop ‘bible myth’ teaching,” *Toronto Daily Star*, Nov. 19, 1964; “Baptists Ask Schools Drop New Course,” *Toronto Telegram*, Nov. 19, 1964; “Recommends ‘New Curriculum’ Be Dropped by Ont.-Que.,” *Maritime Baptist*, St. John, NB, Dec. 9, 1964.
- ²⁸⁶ UCA, BCE 273-14, Jerry Hames, “Sunday School Material Brings Baptist-UC Split,” *London Evening Free Press*, Jun. 9, 1965; Aubrey Wice, “Baptists Will Lose Says Moderator,” *Toronto Telegram*, Jun. 10, 1965; “The Baptists search for \$50,000 to burn,” *Toronto Daily Star*, Aug. 21, 1965; “The Baptists quit,” *United Church Observer*, August 1965, p.5.
- ²⁸⁷ UCA, BCE 273-14, “Baptists Said Losers in Curriculum Shift,” *London Evening Free Press*, Jun. 10, 1965.
- ²⁸⁸ UCA, BCE 273-14, George W. Goth, “Ecumenical Movement Meets a Wall of Baptist Diehards,” *Toronto Telegram*, Jun. 19, 1965.
- ²⁸⁹ UCA, BCE 198-5, “Catalogue of New Curriculum Teaching Materials, Year 2,” 2-3.
- ²⁹⁰ UCA, BCE 198-7, Minutes of General Curriculum Committee, Sep. 13, 1965, 5.
- ²⁹¹ Forrest, “The Crisis and the New Curriculum, Part 2” pp. 16, 32.
- ²⁹² UCA, BCE 273-16, “Rev. P.G. White To New Church Post,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, Sep. 25, 1965.

²⁹³ UCA, BCE 198-7, Minutes of General Curriculum Committee, Jan. 15, 1965, 3. The original plan had been to continue the Uniform Lessons. See BCE 198-8, Cooper, "Some Suggestions," 1.

²⁹⁴ UCA, BCE 198-7, Minutes of General Curriculum Committee, Jan. 15, 1965, 3-11.

²⁹⁵ UCA, BCE 273-7, J. Donald Lister, "Why I left the Ministry of the United Church," *News for the Nation* (Battleford, Saskatchewan: First Baptist Church, Dec. 1964).

²⁹⁶ UCA, BCE 198-5, "Catalogue of New Curriculum Teaching Materials, Year 2," 2.

²⁹⁷ UCA, BCE 198-7, Minutes of General Curriculum Committee, Jan. 15, 1965, 2-3; BCE 200-8, "New Curriculum Sales Statistics to Dec. 31, 1964."

²⁹⁸ "The study boom," *United Church Observer*, March 1, 1965, p.7.

²⁹⁹ Using English evidence, McLeod, *Religious Crisis*, 203-207, identifies a "gradual decline from the 1950s onwards" in Sunday school enrolment, driven by a range of factors including changing social norms, competition from other activities, and permissive approaches to childrearing.

³⁰⁰ See Canada, Statistics Canada, "Table A78-93: Population, by age and sex, census dates, 1851 to 1976," in *Historical Statistics of Canada*, 2nd edition (1999) [online edition] http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/11-516-XIE/sectiona/A78_93.csv (accessed February 17, 2007).

³⁰¹ On the other hand, the nursery department only accounted for about 6% of enrolment in 1963. See UCA, BCE 200-8, Stewart Porteous, "New Curriculum Sales Statistics to Dec. 31, 1964."

³⁰² The Sunday school enrolment statistics in this section are drawn from United Church of Canada, *Yearbook*, 1980.

³⁰³ UCA, BCE 200-8, Chart: Sales of Adult Basic Book, first two cycles (1964-1969), "Sales – Adult Basic Book."

³⁰⁴ UCA, BCE 200-8, Chart: "Circulation – All Magazines Projected Into Fall 1970."

CHAPTER 4

A NEW GOSPEL: THEOLOGICAL UPHEAVAL AND REDEFINITION,

1959-1968

Although it was the single most important factor in changing the face of the United Church in the 1960s, the New Curriculum was only one part of a larger redefinition of the denomination in that decade. Beyond the New Curriculum itself, this redefinition can be divided into two conceptually distinct but related changes: first, the death of “quiet modernism” and its replacement with a frank modernism, and second, the abandonment of the evangelical understanding of the church’s mission as expressed in evangelism and moral reform. While the next chapter deals with changes to the church’s mission, this chapter is devoted to examining the general theological reorientation of the United Church in the 1960s, and placing that reorientation in the broader context of theological turmoil in worldwide Protestantism.

The New Curriculum had its roots in the longstanding modernist beliefs of church leaders which became prominent in the 1960s. The first major manifestation of these beliefs in a public way, however, came in 1959 with the publication of the book *Life and Death*, a project of the Committee on Christian Faith that espoused several controversial beliefs derived from a modernist approach to theology. The 1960s were also a time of theological change in Protestantism, which encouraged church leaders to openly state modernist beliefs on controversial subjects.¹ Together with the surfacing of modernist beliefs represented by *Life and Death* and the New Curriculum, this theological unrest contributed to the collapse of quiet modernism in the United Church. Over the course of the decade, the Committee on Christian Faith also engaged in two important projects – one on the authority of the Bible, and one on the place of creeds in the United Church. Both projects reached conclusions inimical to evangelicalism. By the end of the decade, therefore, the United Church had charted a new theological path reflected in a new public identity as a non-evangelical church.

A Matter of Life and Death

The first major, public sign of the demise of “quiet modernism” in the United Church was the official publication in 1959 of *Life and Death*, a modest book dealing with death, eternal destiny, and the end of the world. *Life and Death* was written by the Committee on Christian Faith, which was the official doctrinal voice of the United Church and the successor to the body that produced the 1940 Statement of Faith. This project originated with the General Council of 1954, which instructed the Committee to prepare a statement “regarding the Doctrine of Last Things, including the return of our Lord in glory; the Last Judgment, and the ‘Consummation of All Things’.” It took the Committee close to five years to produce its report on what it acknowledged as a “difficult and even controversial” subject.² The Committee ultimately submitted its finished project to the executive of General Council in May 1959, from which it received “general approval ... as worthy of study in the Church.” The executive of General Council also instructed the Board of Christian Education and the Board of Evangelism and Social Service

to make the book widely available and “promote its circulation and study throughout the church.”³ Some of the chapters from the book were also condensed and printed in the *United Church Observer*.⁴

The book is worth noting because it ignited controversy by publicly questioning a number of traditional evangelical beliefs and thereby heralding the later demise of “quiet modernism” in the 1960s. Although it often hedged on specific issues and sometimes contradicted itself (a possible byproduct of having been written by a committee) *Life and Death* reached a number of conclusions that flew in the face of evangelical orthodoxy at all of its three historical layers. The book rejected the idea that human beings were composed of an “immortal soul and a mortal body” as an ancient Greek concept foreign to the New Testament. In fact, the book suggested that the soul has no existence apart from the body, a doctrine obviously at odds with traditional Christian views.⁵ At the same time, however, the book talked about what happened to people after they died but before the general resurrection – apparently while their souls were existing apart from their bodies. The book rejected the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory because of its undertones of “penal suffering” for sin, which it judged to be incompatible with the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith: “It is on the ground of faith, not of merit or works, that eternal life is given.” Nevertheless, the book allowed for the possibility of a purgatory otherwise similar to the Catholic conception, “a state between the crisis of death and the glory of Heaven, where believers are purified and brought to the condition which is in harmony with the perfect life with God.”⁶ Traditionally-minded Protestant readers unsure about whether this was an acceptance of the idea of purgatory or not would have been more startled by the fact that the book left open the possibility of repentance and salvation for unbelievers after death, and consequently endorsed prayers for the dead, whether believers or not.⁷ In this the book departed more clearly from traditional Protestant teachings.

Similarly, *Life and Death* differed from traditional Protestant and evangelical teachings about salvation. In contrast to an evangelical view, which emphasized the conversion of the individual, the book taught that individual salvation could not be separated from the salvation of all of creation. Most notably, even though the book had cited justification by faith as its reason for rejecting a Catholic understanding of purgatory, it elsewhere denied the cardinal Protestant doctrine. According to the book, some parts of the Bible taught that people are judged by their “works, their actual deeds,” while other parts taught “justification by faith.” The book concluded that “we cannot really separate faith and works (though faith has priority) and that we are judged on the basis of both faith and deeds.”⁸ In a stroke, then, the book rejected the material principle of the Reformation, and with it, the evangelical understanding of salvation that rested on it.

As for heaven and hell, the book taught that they might be the same place, but experienced differently depending on “the soul’s level of spiritual growth.” The book further suggested that biblical passages describing hell were not to be

taken as factual. Thus, while it was “quite wrong to explain away the strong language of the New Testament where it speaks of ‘unquenchable fire’, ‘eternal fire’, ‘outer darkness’, and ‘eternal destruction’,” at the same time it was “equally wrong to interpret such phrases literally.” These passages were intended “not so much to *describe* realities as to *suggest* them” with the aim of producing desired attitudes in the reader, symbolizing “the gravity of sin and the necessity of repentance for salvation.” In any case, any punishment that might occur after death must have as its object “the awakening and correction of the evil-doer”; it would certainly not be “retributive, that is, inflicted simply as a recompense for evil done.”⁹ Here too, the idea of repentance and salvation in the afterlife was implicit.

Despite this talk of hell, the book maintained that every human being would ultimately be saved. It maintained that this doctrine of “universalism” was taught in the Bible by the apostle Paul. Beyond this, the book asserted that a God who allowed anyone not to be saved in the end could not inspire worship. But if the Bible taught that everyone would be saved, the book asked, “How are we meant to decide between the doctrines of universal salvation and eternal punishment?” As statements of fact, the doctrines were contradictory. The answer, according to *Life and Death* was that neither doctrine should be taken as a statement of fact; both ideas were purely metaphorical. The doctrine of universal salvation was simply “an affirmation of the present fact that God seeks to save us and all men.” The doctrine of eternal punishment, likewise, was not “a statement about another world which we may accept or reject, but ... a warning for us to repent.”¹⁰ The book also interpreted the second coming of Jesus in a highly metaphorical way, to the point that it ceased to exist as a distinct event. Biblical statements on the subject, it said, are “symbolic” and “do not necessarily mean that Jesus will return in a physical manner.” The book cautioned that “Jesus’s coming in the past and his coming in the future should not be separated or contrasted too sharply,” and in fact it was better to think of continual symbolic or spiritual “comings” of Jesus into the lives of his followers, rather than a concrete single return at the end of history.¹¹ In effect, therefore, *Life and Death* treated both eternal punishment and the second coming as abstract symbols rather far removed from the traditional Christian understandings of these doctrines.

Although it was such specific teachings that attracted the controversy described below, the modernist theological method employed by the Committee in reaching its conclusions was more significant. The central element of this method was what it called an “intelligent interpretation of the Bible.”¹² The Committee viewed the Bible as a fallible human product that could and did contradict itself. It argued that the apostle Paul, for example, had advocated views in some biblical passages that he later “outgrew and discarded,” and which he thus contradicted in later writings.¹³ Similarly, general principles the Committee detected in the Bible not infrequently contradicted the Bible’s specific teachings on various subjects. In such cases, the general principle was preferred:

We must find out what the Bible is saying by comparing one part with another. But is it permissible to build doctrine on the essential Christian truths to which the Bible witnesses? Christians no longer believe in slavery, and yet it is accepted in the New Testament as the will of God. Christians now take an attitude to the social order that is quite different from that shown in the New Testament. And we believe that this departure from explicit teachings of the New Testament is warranted, or rather, necessitated, by the supreme teaching of the Bible that God is love and that in His sight every person is infinitely precious. This same teaching, as well as a close examination of the Bible, leads us to suspect certain traditional beliefs, for example, eternal punishment, and to suggest certain beliefs that may seem new and even dangerous to many people.”¹⁴

Thus, since the Committee believed that the specific teachings of the Bible about hell were incompatible with the general principle that God is love, they rejected the teachings about hell. In addition, the Committee held the belief that all biblical statements could be interpreted symbolically. This principle applied not only to prophetic imagery, such as God’s throne of judgment in the book of Revelation, but also to ordinary narrative descriptions. Thus, in an example given to illustrate this point, when the Gospels reported that Judas left Jesus “and it was night,” this was not a factual statement about the time of day, but a metaphorical reference to the fact that Judas had left the true Light, Jesus. Similarly, when Gospel-writer Matthew reported that saints rose from the dead after the resurrection of Jesus, this was his symbolic “attempt to unveil the meaning of the Cross as the source of salvation,” rather than a report about something that had happened.¹⁵ As seen above, *Life and Death* also applied this principle of interpretation to biblical statements about heaven, hell, and the second coming. Not only could biblical statements be interpreted non-literally, they could be interpreted as not having factual content at all; as shown above, this was the case with the statements about eternal punishment, which the book did not take as even symbolically factual, but rather as instruments meant to evoke a particular response from the reader.

Significantly, in contrast to the evangelical view, which more strictly treated biblical narratives and doctrinal statements as factual, the modernist approach of the Committee on Christian Faith gave it considerable freedom to reinterpret or reject biblical teachings. They were thus free to discard beliefs they found “impossible for intelligent modern people,” like the ancient conception of hell as an “underworld abode of the dead,” or beliefs they simply found “preposterous,” like the belief that some people who had never heard the Christian gospel would be condemned.¹⁶ Here, the significance was not the specific conclusions reached (neither of these two conclusions were inherently incompatible with evangelicalism), but rather the method used to reach them. Not surprisingly, however, using a modernist theological method at cross-purposes with the evangelical approach did produce several conclusions – about salvation,

the afterlife, and the return of Christ – that were incompatible with evangelical views.

The book's controversial positions attracted headlines like "United Church Rejects Hell" and "Fundamental Beliefs Rejected by UC Committee."¹⁷ It also drew fire from members of other churches, including a Presbyterian minister who called the book's conclusions "utterly dippy" and a Baptist minister who said it could not be "dignified as a Christian document." The book even attracted criticism from American evangelist Billy Graham. Some Anglicans and Presbyterians had more positive reactions, and the Unitarians congratulated the United Church for reaching conclusions they had held for over a century.¹⁸ United Church leaders, on the other hand, consistently defended the book. William Berry, a member of the Committee on Christian Faith who privately disagreed with the book's support of universalism, publicly defended the book, saying that its ideas were nothing new to theologians or United Church theological colleges and noting that "the man in the pew is 30 – even 50 – years behind in his thinking." He conceded, however, that some of the ideas might "cause a stir among the fundamentalist end of the Church."¹⁹ In the *Toronto Telegram* the moderator of the church, Angus J. MacQueen, agreed with the book's endorsement of prayers for the dead and salvation after death, adding, "I have never believed that Hell is a place of everlasting fire and I have never preached it."²⁰ An editorial in the *United Church Observer* admitted that one could make "a good case for heresy" by arguing that the book contradicted the Basis of Union's statement that "the finally impenitent shall go away into eternal punishment." But on the other hand, the book was more biblical than the "perverted hell-fire doctrines which too many preachers have relished as an effective way of frightening sinners to repentance." Also, significantly, the editorial suggested that the United Church did not have many of the "literalists suggested by the term 'fundamentalist.'"²¹

Some United Church members were less pleased with the book. The moderator had to field not a few concerned phone calls after the book's publication.²² One letter-writer to the *United Church Observer* asked whether it was really necessary to call basic beliefs into question, a second doubted that the book's teachings were compatible with the "faith of our fathers", and a third said its authors were wasting their time writing about things like purgatory that were not taught in the Bible.²³ A minister wrote to the *Observer* accusing the book of being "intellectually dishonest, deliberately misleading and self-contradictory" and using Scripture arbitrarily. He also objected to the use of the "loaded words 'literalist' and 'fundamentalist'."²⁴ One member even wrote to the *Toronto Daily Star* complaining that United Church theologians were "tearing the Bible to pieces" and announcing his decision to "find a church home where the Bible is believed."²⁵ Meanwhile, however, the *United Church Observer* portrayed the internal disagreement about *Life and Death* as minor, while at the same time dismissing criticism from other churches and suggesting that critics had not read the book in question.²⁶

Compared to the controversy over the New Curriculum five years later, the row over *Life and Death* was indeed minor. It was nevertheless significant as an early example of the application of modernism, in a public way, to doctrinal issues in the United Church. While modernist theology had already played an important role in shaping the official beliefs of the United Church – in the 1940 Statement of Faith, for example – previous documents had not advocated modernism as frankly and obviously as *Life and Death*. The acceptance of modernist ideas by church leaders, however, was likely to produce more public results when these leaders were asked to pronounce on difficult doctrinal questions or thoroughly rethink traditional positions. In the long run, “quiet modernism” was an unstable strategy. The Committee on Christian Faith’s theological approach, with its modernist presuppositions about the Bible and theological reasoning, was bound to produce modernist conclusions at odds with evangelicalism. This was a process indigenous to the denomination, as a natural outworking of the popularity of modernism among the leaders responsible for setting the direction of the whole church. The same process was at work in the development of the New Curriculum, which was prefigured in a minor way by *Life and Death*. Similarly, the reaction to *Life and Death* paralleled the reaction to the New Curriculum in striking ways. Vocal support from prominent United Church leaders, opposition from some church members, labeling of opponents as “literalists” or “fundamentalists”, portrayals of critics as misinformed, and attempts by some to downplay any internal disagreements, were all features of the New Curriculum controversy that were seen, on a much smaller scale, in the reaction to *Life and Death*. The New Curriculum, therefore, should not be understood in isolation, but rather as simply the most visible and consequential product of a larger trend in the United Church.

Ferment

Life and Death was an early sign of the breakdown of “quiet modernism”, signaling that the modernist beliefs of the church’s theological elite and other leaders were prone to surface in detailed statements on doctrinal issues. In a similar but far more consequential way, the New Curriculum also demonstrated the fact that sooner or later, the modernist beliefs of church leaders would be reflected in the public direction of the denomination. These examples indicated the long-term public consequences of non-public beliefs of church leaders. As was frequently pointed out by theologians, officials and ministers in the controversy over the New Curriculum, modernist beliefs were not new to church leaders in the mid-1960s. Nor were they new in 1959. As earlier chapters have illustrated, the fundamental convictions of leading figures in the United Church in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s were modernist. Both the New Curriculum and *Life and Death* reflected the fact that the period of “quiet modernism” had simply postponed the eventual reckoning necessitated by the disjuncture between the quietly-held views of church leaders and the content of the church’s teaching and

practices. Thus, these moves towards a publicly modernist interpretation of the denomination's stance can be seen as a natural consequence of factors indigenous to the United Church.

At the same time that quiet modernism was undoing itself in the United Church, however, mainline Protestant thought worldwide was undergoing a profound shift. This shift, which was comparable in its importance to the rise of neo-orthodoxy earlier in the century, was rooted in the thinking of post-Barthian German theologians, especially Rudolf Bultmann, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Paul Tillich. These men set a new direction for mainline Protestant theology that left behind the more conservative neo-orthodoxy of Barth, and although they lived in Barth's shadow, their ideas reinvigorated important aspects of the liberal tradition and were therefore further removed from evangelicalism. Between the Second World War and the 1960s this new orientation – for convenience, it can be called the new liberalism – won over increasing numbers of theological professors, ministers and church officials in mainline Protestant churches throughout the world. It found its warmest welcome among those committed modernists who had never been entirely comfortable with the influence of neo-orthodoxy, and among younger thinkers impatient with the status quo. This sea change bore fruit in two overlapping phenomena of the 1960s: the emergence of new, highly publicized theological movements more radical than anything that had come before, and the appearance in English of several bestselling religious books popularizing the new liberalism to lay audiences. At the same time, these theological changes interacted with and drew additional impetus from the broader cultural changes sweeping the Western world in the 1960s.²⁷ All of these phenomena broke upon the English-speaking world in the mid-1960s, and thus coincided exactly with the release of the New Curriculum (which had nonetheless been under development for over a decade). As a result, the word on everyone's lips was "ferment".²⁸

Stimulated, in part, perhaps, by the combined effect of this theological ferment and the New Curriculum controversy, United Church theologians, ministers, and officials could be found openly and sometimes stridently stating liberal beliefs – not only in the *United Church Observer*, but in the secular press as well. These ubiquitous avowals of liberalism were coupled with a notably hardened attitude against evangelical (or "fundamentalist") beliefs and evangelicals themselves. At the same time, commentators of all descriptions bemoaned the universally acknowledged gap between the beliefs of the clergy and the beliefs of the laity, so clearly revealed by the new openness. In other words, most no longer thought quiet modernism an option. Some of these points have already been made above in the context of the New Curriculum, but in what follows it can be seen that these changes extended beyond that immediate controversy to constitute a major public theological reorientation of the United Church.

This ferment, as has been mentioned, only makes complete sense in the context of a long-term, large-scale shift in Protestant theology. Neo-orthodoxy

was the influence of note in most mainline Protestant circles until the 1960s, but by that time leading theologians had already laid the groundwork for a new approach.²⁹ The foremost among these were Rudolf Bultmann, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Paul Tillich. Bultmann was a German New Testament scholar who retired from his post at the University of Marburg in 1951. At least initially, he was associated with Barth's neo-orthodox reaction against the continental liberalism of the pre-First World War period, because he rejected the earlier liberalism's desire to base its faith on the ethical system of a historically reconstructed Jesus. Nevertheless, far less ambiguously than Barth, Bultmann enthusiastically accepted the basic modernist suspicion of supernaturalism and critical attitude towards the Bible that had always been major components of liberal theology. Indeed, Bultmann's primary scholarly contribution was his radically critical approach to the New Testament. He famously regarded the New Testament accounts of Jesus as riddled with mythological elements derived from ancient Mediterranean mystery religions, and therefore as so unhistorical that the "historical Jesus" could not possibly be known with any certainty. In this, he went farther than most biblical scholars in denying the historical reliability of the New Testament. Nevertheless, he agreed with Barth, and disagreed with earlier liberals, that the historical reality behind early Christianity was not in fact important. For Bultmann, the historical background was irrelevant to the core of Christianity, which was an encounter with God that could come through the ahistorical proclamation (or *kerygma*) of God's deliverance through the Christ.

On the other hand, the biblical records reflected an outdated understanding of the world that was unacceptable to modern people. In particular, Bultmann asserted, first-century Christians believed in a three-storey physical universe (heaven above, earth, and hell below) and accepted the tremendously unscientific idea of miraculous occurrences, both ideas unacceptable in the twentieth century and yet completely entwined with the New Testament records. Since these "mythological" elements presented a barrier to thinking moderns, Bultmann proposed that the New Testament needed to be "demythologized". By this, he was not suggesting that the "mythological" elements be removed, since nothing significant would be left, but rather that they be reinterpreted according to an acceptably modern philosophy. Bultmann found this philosophy in the existentialism of Martin Heidegger, which he believed accurately corresponded to the teachings of the apostles in the New Testament. In sum, then, Bultmann advocated infusing the allegedly mythological elements of the Bible with a new, non-literal meaning derived from modern secular philosophy.³⁰ These views came through clearly in a sympathetic profile of Bultmann in the *United Church Observer* in 1966, as well as a 1964 article in the *Toronto Daily Star* which described the New Curriculum as "'demythologizing' the Bible for the small fry."³¹

The second thinker of consequence in preparing the way for the shifts of the 1960s was Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer was a young German theologian intimately involved in the resistance to the Nazi regime, first through his work in

an underground seminary, and later through a plot to assassinate Hitler. Tragically, the latter was found out, and the theologian was executed in a concentration camp just as the war was ending. As a result of his untimely death, Bonhoeffer never had the opportunity to develop his ideas fully. He did, however, introduce some tentative concepts that exerted a profound influence on the theological movements of the 1960s. One these was the idea of a world “come of age”. Bonhoeffer suggested that the world had matured, and no longer needed God as an explanation for science or even as an emotional crutch. The church therefore needed to stop presenting him as such. Bonhoeffer proposed a “religionless Christianity” in which traditional Christian language would be set aside, and biblical terminology interpreted in a non-religious sense, so that Christians could devote themselves to lives of service in the world. In light of the maturity of the world, Christians should not try to live out their faith in a closed sacred community, or cultivate a private life of piety, but should instead fully immerse themselves in the world. There, they could truly imitate Christ, who above all else was the “man for others.”³² Although it is not completely clear what Bonhoeffer meant by these ideas, they struck a chord with many thinkers wrestling with the church’s role in a seemingly secular age. In the *United Church Observer*, for example, he was invoked in highly favourable terms, both as a prophet of secularization and as justification for the idea that the church had to change radically to remain relevant in the late twentieth century.³³

Rounding out the trinity of seminal thinkers was Paul Tillich, another German theologian, who fled to the United States in 1933. Tillich became a celebrated figure, widely honoured by academia and the state, and his ideas were the most crucial factor in the resurgence of liberalism in the 1960s. His overriding concern, not unlike Bultmann, was making Christianity acceptable to modern people. This meant answering the questions that moderns were asking rather than the traditional questions of Christian theology. For Tillich, the questions of modernity were found in contemporary secular philosophy, which he saw as being preoccupied with the relationships between being and non-being, and essence and existence. Not surprisingly, this theological method led to novel conclusions. Tillich’s answer to the questions he saw in philosophy included reinterpretations of God and Christ. For Tillich, God was the “ground of being” transcending essence and existence. Thus, one should not say that God “exists” or that he is a “being” or “person”, since he transcends being and existence. The God who is said to exist cannot really be God, and thus Tillich spoke of a “God above God”, the God who was the “ground of being.” This God did not reveal himself in the sense of communicating information in words or propositions; rather, revelation was an experience or event. Similarly, the Bible was not the “Word of God” – Tillich regarded such an identification as badly misguided – but rather it was a human record of experiences of God. As for Jesus, Tillich took an ahistorical view. The details of his life, and indeed even his very existence as a historical figure, were irrelevant to Christian faith. Jesus the man had no necessary historical connection with the Christ, an ideal figure who overcomes the tension

between existence and essence and the alienation between people and God. Moreover, Jesus could not be considered God as in traditional Christianity. Like Bultmann, Tillich took a consistently modernist view of the New Testament, rejecting literal belief in the virgin birth, the resurrection, ascension, and second coming of Jesus.³⁴ In the 1960s, Tillich too attracted sympathetic attention from the *United Church Observer*.³⁵

Together these three thinkers provided the basic concepts that drove much of the theological ferment of the 1960s, and the more radical theological movements of the decade drew their inspiration from them. Two movements in particular attracted the most attention. The less controversial of these was the “secular Christianity” movement. Taking Bonhoeffer’s idea of a “religionless Christianity” as its starting point, it embraced secularization as a liberating force that freed society from the control of a religious ideology. Advocates of secular Christianity proposed that the church should dissolve itself into the secular world’s pragmatic focus on daily living, rather than metaphysical or religious preoccupations. In fact, the dividing line between the church and the world should be erased altogether; the church should not be a separate religious entity apart from the world. The key figure in this movement was the American Baptist professor, Harvey Cox, author of *The Secular City* (1965). Cox wrote that God himself was at work in secular social and political movements, including secularization itself. He identified the Kingdom of God with the new secular “City of Man” towards which history was progressing. By identifying itself completely with secular political and social movements, the church could find God. In secularizing itself, the church may even need to give up the word “God” altogether.³⁶ In an interview with the *United Church Observer* in late 1965, Cox predicted that there would be split in the churches between those concerned about traditional beliefs and protecting the church institution (in his term, “establishmentarians”) and those who wanted to become “involved in social change.” According to Cox, God could no longer provide the answers to the world’s questions; instead he and the church would put their questions to the world. Cox also repeated the idea that the word “God” should be dropped.³⁷ This radical message resonated with a significant number of United Church ministers. One minister, from Tillsonburg, Ontario, wrote to the *Observer* expressing his appreciation for the interview and “avant-garde” theology in general, and noting that he was already reading *The Secular City*.³⁸ In his choice of reading material he was far from alone: the editor of the *Observer* observed that *The Secular City* had become a best-seller among United Church ministers.³⁹ The apparent popularity of the book indicates that this rather extreme version of accommodation to secular modernity touched a chord among United Church ministers who had been trained in modernist ideas.

The *ne plus ultra* of extreme modernism, however, came with the “God is dead” or “death of God” movement, which also achieved prominence in the mid-1960s.⁴⁰ This attention-grabbing movement was mostly identified with two Americans, William Hamilton, a professor of church history at Colgate Rochester

Divinity School, and Thomas Altizer, a professor of Bible and religion at Emory University. Echoing Friedrich Nietzsche, these two proclaimed that “God is dead” and called for existing forms of Christianity to be superseded by a “Christian atheism.” Along with secular thinkers such as Hegel, Nietzsche, and Camus, the death-of-God theologians counted Tillich and Bonhoeffer as major influences. While there were ambiguities in the writings and ideas of Hamilton and Altizer, such as the concept of God’s death itself, which was sometimes interpreted by themselves and others to indicate that the concept of God was no longer useful in theology, or that society was able to function without reference to God, it appears that they believed that God did not exist. In short, the Christian atheists were, strictly speaking, atheists. Altizer suggested that God had once existed, had become man in Jesus, and had actually died on the cross, leaving a God-less universe. Despite denying what was arguably the most fundamental element of Christianity, however, Hamilton and Altizer still considered themselves Christians in that they drew inspiration from the example of Christ.⁴¹ The movement, therefore, can be considered an example of the basic conviction of modernism – that Christian concepts and symbols could be salvaged by accommodating certain Christian beliefs to modern thought – taken to its furthest extreme. The controversial ideas of the God-is-dead theologians unsurprisingly drew the attention of journalists, and thus they received wide exposure to a popular audience, most notably through *Time Magazine*’s cover story, “Is God Dead?” in October 1965.

Death-of-God theology did not gain many (if any) outright adherents in the United Church, but some of its leading commentators showed a startling degree of sympathy and tolerance for the movement. A lengthy article in the *United Church Observer* by its editor, A.C. Forrest, was almost entirely devoted to the possible beneficial or benign interpretations of the movement, sympathetically citing Harvey Cox to make its point. Forrest refrained from criticizing the movement, other than noting that its methods may be clumsy and reminding his readers that those who believed that God was literally dead were “wrong.”⁴² The movement also attracted a tolerant or even sympathetic gaze from some of the church’s top leaders. In 1965, the church’s outspokenly liberal moderator, E.M. Howse, told *Observer* readers that death-of-God theology, while extreme, was more reasonable than the neo-orthodoxy of past decades:

The God-is-Dead school of theologians is now the centre of attention. Anyone might have foretold that, after the massive flight from reality in the so-called neo-orthodox theology, reaction was bound to come. But when the pendulum of human thought swings from one extreme, its natural consequence is to swing to an opposite extreme. Only the fact that the second swing is not quite as far out as the first gives hope that we shall soon come back to centre.⁴³

In another column, in which Howse said that South Africans praying for rain were indulging in a “crass superstition”, he suggested that church members could “have more sympathy” with the death-of-God theologians in light of the fact that they were “protesting against such childish ideas.” The kind of a God who could be invoked to bring rain in a drought, Howse remarked, “has long been dead.”⁴⁴ A later moderator, Wilfred C. Lockhart, said that the “Death of God theology” was helpful to the church because it “will stimulate us to rethink and redefine the concepts of our faith, and to restate our convictions in terms that are meaningful to our age.” If there was a problem with the movement, it was its approach, which could appear “brash” and “arrogant.” Lockhart enjoined the “iconoclasts” leading the movement to remember that “new truth dawns slowly.”⁴⁵ At the highest levels, then, United Church leaders showed themselves relatively comfortable with this most radical of the radical theologies seen in the decade.

These novel theological movements coincided in the mid-1960s with a flood of radical, critical, or otherwise controversial books on the church and religious subjects. In 1966, sales of books on religious topics were said to be “at an all-time high,” leading a commentator in the *United Church Observer* to speak of a “bestseller boom.”⁴⁶ These books, which included *Honest to God* (1963) by the Anglican bishop of Woolwich, John A.T. Robinson, *The Christian Agnostic* (1965) by English Methodist minister Leslie Weatherhead, and *The Comfortable Pew* (1965) by Canadian journalist Pierre Berton, exposed not only clergy but also large numbers of laity to the new theological orientation. As representative of the ferment of the mid-1960s, these three books, and their reception in the United Church, merit examination.

John A.T. Robinson’s *Honest to God* was the first and most influential of this heady trio. Robinson explicitly sought to blend and interpret the main ideas of Bultmann, Tillich, and Bonhoeffer for a popular audience.⁴⁷ He hoped to take their ideas “out of the world of the professional theologians” and make them accessible to “the intelligent thinking churchman,” with the ultimate hope that they would be used in theological courses and training for lay people.⁴⁸ From Bonhoeffer, Robinson took the ideas of non-religious Christianity, a humanity independent of God, and a conviction that God could best be encountered in “an entirely ‘secular’ concern for food, water supplies, housing, hospitals and prisons.”⁴⁹ From Tillich, Robinson borrowed his most fundamental ideas, especially the reconceptualization of God as the “Ground of our very being.”⁵⁰ While God had previously been thought of as a supernatural being either “up there” in the sky or “out there” distinct from the world, this conception had to be abandoned. He admitted that “to the ordinary way of thinking, to believe in God means to be convinced of the existence of such a supreme and separate being,” but in his view, such “theists” were mistaken while atheists, by destroying the “idol” of the traditional view, were closer to the truth.⁵¹ Along with giving up the traditional concept of God as a “highest Being” somehow distinct from other beings, Robinson rejected the Trinity, the belief that Jesus was fully human and fully divine, and the idea that Jesus bore God’s punishment for human sin on the

cross, as outmoded and incompatible with his new God-concept.⁵² From Bultmann, Robinson drew the idea of demythologization. The Bible was tainted with a primitive worldview that included a “three-decker universe” and miraculous intervention.⁵³ This old, mythological picture, said Robinson, was no longer credible to modern people other than a small group inside the church, and it was becoming less credible all the time. The life of Jesus, in particular, needed to be demythologized. The traditional view of Jesus “as the incarnation from ‘the other side’ of a celestial Being who enters this earthly scene through a miraculous birth, performs signs and wonders as an indication of his heavenly origin, and after an equally miraculous resurrection returns by ascent to the celestial sphere whence he came,” was rife with “mythical” elements unnecessary to Christianity.⁵⁴

Combining the ideas of these three theologians, Robinson concluded that the church needed a “radical recasting” to survive in the modern era. As part of this “recasting,” he argued, “the most fundamental categories of our theology – of God, of the supernatural, and of religion itself – must go into the melting.”⁵⁵ Robinson conceded that his ideas were “almost heretical,” and that to many they would seem to be “a denial of the Gospel” or “a betrayal of what the Bible says.” The idea of abandoning the traditional idea of God, for example, he expected to “encounter the opposition not only of the fundamentalists but of 90 per cent of Church people.”⁵⁶ Nevertheless, Robinson believed that in the long term, his book would “be seen to have erred in not being nearly radical enough.”⁵⁷

A second controversial book, also from Britain, arrived in the year of most violent ferment, 1965. This was *The Christian Agnostic* by Leslie Weatherhead, a well-known English Methodist minister with liberal views. While the direct impact of this book in Canada appears to have been less than that of *The Comfortable Pew*, it was made accessible to United Church members through the *United Church Observer*. In the winter of 1965, A.C. Forrest, editor of the *Observer*, had interviewed Weatherhead at his home in England, where Weatherhead had shown him the manuscript of the upcoming book. Forrest secured permission to publish excerpts from the book in the *Observer*, and upon his return to Canada he recommended the book to his United Church readership.⁵⁸ The excerpts themselves, when they were published over several *Observer* issues in the fall of 1965, expressed a liberal theology as unconventional as Robinson’s. In them, Weatherhead laid out his basic idea, which was the existence of a praiseworthy class of person he called the “Christian agnostic.” Such a person “is immensely attracted by Christ,” but “feels that he cannot honestly and conscientiously ‘sign on the dotted line’ that he believes certain theological ideas about which some branches of the church dogmatize,” such as the beliefs summarized in the Apostles’ Creed. These agnostics, according to Weatherhead, were often “nearer belief in the true God than many conventional churchgoers who believe in a bogey that does not exist whom they miscall God.” In fact, wrote Weatherhead, *beliefs* as such were not important to Christianity, which after all was “a way of life, not a theological system with which one must be in intellectual

agreement.” In any case, the beliefs held by many Christians were obsolete: “One wonders how long we shall be imprisoned in the outworn ideas of Augustine and Paul.” Traditional formulae of belief, especially the ancient Christian creeds, constituted a “prison” that prevented individuals from forming their own conclusions about their faith.⁵⁹

Quite naturally, Weatherhead also advocated a frankly modernist view of the Bible. The Bible was only “inspired” in the sense that other great literature could be considered inspired. It was therefore a pity that the canon of Scripture had been closed in the early church, since according to Weatherhead, several twentieth-century writings were at least as inspired as the books of the Bible. Not only was the Bible fallible, but Weatherhead recommended that Christians should

take a blue pencil and cross out whole chunks of it like the violent imprecatory Psalms, and other passages which contradict the Christian spirit, long genealogies, incomprehensible parts of Isaiah and Ezekiel and Jeremiah, the worries of Paul about circumcision, his obsession with sin and guilt, and his Jewish emphasis on animal sacrifice – meaningless to a modern westerner – and the parts of Revelation written in code to members of an underground movement in danger of persecution.

Furthermore, he added, “all honest readers” of the Bible would admit that “much of the Old Testament is dull, meaningless, irrelevant and hopelessly sub-Christian in its sentiments.” According to Weatherhead’s reading of the Hebrew Scriptures, they pictured the God of the ancient Jews as “a local storm god who lives on the top of Mt. Sinai” and as a “jealous, vindictive tyrant.” Therefore, the idea that every part of the Bible was equally inspired by God was “stupid”; the Bible could only be read helpfully “if we use a blue pencil freely” (that is, in order to delete objectionable sections) and interpret it through the lens of modern translations and commentaries.⁶⁰ In addition to these liberal views of belief and the Bible, Weatherhead embraced unorthodox doctrines such as reincarnation – which he alleged was taught by the early church for “the first 500 years of its existence” – while at the same time he strongly rejected traditional doctrines such as the Trinity (“a bit of sheer speculation” invented by the church), the deity of Christ, the distinct personhood of the Holy Spirit, and the reality of the Virgin Birth.⁶¹

Predictably, such staunchly liberal ideas provoked a reaction from *United Church Observer* readers, both favourable and unfavourable. Two letter-writers promptly objected to Weatherhead’s belief in reincarnation, while another wondered why he was “not taught, 20 or 30 years ago, some of the things Leslie Weatherhead is now saying – about the Bible, for instance?”⁶² The *Observer* noted that Weatherhead’s articles were one of a number of controversial topics that had provoked a flood of letter to its offices in late 1965 and early 1966. The editor, however, merely admonished his readers not to take themselves so seriously. Besides, “namby-pambyism [had] cursed religious discussion for too long” and the time for open debate had arrived.⁶³ Indeed, the *Observer* did not

venture to criticize Weatherhead, who in his interview in the past winter had proved himself a “delightful person, handsome, relaxed, exceedingly gracious.”⁶⁴ Readers shocked by Weatherhead’s unquiet modernism looked in vain for criticisms from prominent United Church leaders.

A third controversial book which attracted significant attention in the United Church in the mid-1960s was Pierre Berton’s *The Comfortable Pew*, published in 1965. It was written by the well known Canadian journalist at the invitation of the Anglican Church of Canada to serve as a Lenten book for its members. In 1963, Ernest Harrison, an official at the Anglican Department of Religious Education, persuaded Berton to take on the project. Harrison, himself a believer in the new radicalism,⁶⁵ told Berton he wanted a book which would “present sharp positive and negative criticism of our Church.” He added that “no attempt will be made to control the nature of the criticism, though it would be helpful if it stimulated a desire for change and reform.”⁶⁶ Berton was initially reluctant, since although he had been raised Anglican, he had in fact been attending a United Church, the only church in his town, for the last fifteen years. (A few years later he would describe himself as a “non-religious humanist.”)⁶⁷ But he agreed to write the book. Significantly, an “excited” Harrison sent him a copy of Robinson’s recently published *Honest to God*.⁶⁸ This book, as is shown below, exerted a strong influence on Berton’s final product.

Berton obliged Harrison’s request for strong criticism that would encourage change in the church, and he did not restrict himself to the Anglicans, but broadened his critique to include the other mainline Protestant churches as well. The main thrust of *The Comfortable Pew* was Berton’s criticism of the role of the Protestant churches in the larger society. He portrayed the churches as status-obsessed instruments of social conformity and conservatism, chronically dragging their feet behind social progress, and lacking the revolutionary spirit of early Christianity. According to Berton, with the exception of a few forward-thinking individuals, the churches were more concerned with preserving their power, influence, and numerical success than exhibiting loyalty to Christ’s radical example. As the balance of this criticism pertained to the mission of the church in society, and thus dealt primarily with questions of social activism, morality, and evangelism, it is examined in more detail in the next chapter.

In the latter part of the book, Berton turned his attention away from social involvement to the fundamental beliefs of the churches themselves. Here he closely followed the standard modernist viewpoint; traditional Christianity had become unacceptable to modern people and had to be radically modified if it wanted a chance of survival. Harrison’s gift had borne fruit: Berton had clearly read *Honest to God* with great interest and strong agreement, and in *The Comfortable Pew* he repeatedly and approvingly cited Robinson’s main ideas.⁶⁹ More remarkably, however, he reached behind Robinson to draw explicitly and directly on key themes from Tillich and Bonhoeffer. Berton embraced Bonhoeffer’s belief in a world come of age and a non-religious Christianity.⁷⁰ Likewise, he accepted Tillich’s redefinition of God as “the ground of everything

personal” and consequent redefinition of the true atheist as one who thinks life “has no depth,” as well as the general idea that traditional Christian doctrinal terms (in Berton’s word, “clichés”) needed to be given new, modern meanings or abandoned.⁷¹ Although he did not directly cite Bultmann, Berton also put his idea of demythologization to work.⁷² As far as Christian belief was concerned, then, *The Comfortable Pew* stood squarely in the camp of the new liberal theology.

Berton also put his finger on a contentious issue raised by the New Curriculum, namely, the gap between pulpit and pew in the mainline churches. He noted that much of the criticism of *Honest to God* by clergy was not directed at what it said, but at the fact that it was being said in a manner so accessible to the laity. On the other hand, some church leaders had insisted that the book was not saying anything new. If this was true, Berton asked, “then why all the fuss? Why have hundreds of thousands of people bought the book? Why has the Bishop been attacked by some clerics, praised by others? Why is his post-box jammed with letters from thousands of people who have told him that he has let a breath of fresh air into their lives?” The answer, according to Berton, was that the theology taken for granted by the clergy had not been communicated to their congregations. Berton pointed to an “arrogance” on the part of religious leaders that led them to avoid bringing disturbing or difficult ideas before the laity.⁷³ In particular, he noted, it had become proverbial among the clergy he talked to that

most ministers preach to the right of their theology, that they are more conservative in the pulpit than they are in the parlour. Many a man known to be liberal in his own philosophic approach to Christianity may sound like a mossback when he preaches; often enough, because church elders are elderly in attitude as well as age, he will purposely clothe his ideas in an ancient terminology. In doing so he obscures a message that, delivered honestly, forthrightly, and in simple language, could electrify his congregation. The fact is that most ministers do not want to electrify or disturb anybody, and that is why so many preachers have lost their power.⁷⁴

Thus Berton agreed with the increasingly common recognition that the modernism of church leaders, and ministers in general, had until recently been largely unknown to the laity.

Berton’s theological prescription for the churches was that they create a “faith without dogma” for the “New Age.” First of all, traditional views about the New Testament needed to be purged of their “mythological” elements, including the “various miraculous events that are said to have attended Christ’s birth, his ministry, and his death.” Similarly, parts of the Apostles’ Creed suggested an unacceptable “three-layer universe and an anthropomorphic God” and should not be made a condition of belonging to the Christian church. According to Berton, even the traditional concepts of sin and moral responsibility had been rendered obsolete by “modern psychiatry.” Not only these particular dogmas, however, but

all dogmas needed to be removed from the church. A faith without dogma was not only possible, but necessary if the church wanted to survive in the coming era, Berton wrote: "I should think that in the late twentieth century it would be almost impossible to have faith *with* dogma." Finally, Berton concluded, only a "violent revolution" along the lines of that proposed by Bishop Robinson could "save Christianity." A new non-religious Christianity, shorn of "any fixed set of rigid principles," stripped even of its traditional conception of God as a "daddy on the cloud," was needed for a new non-religious age. The only people who could save the faith were "those Christian radicals who question [the existing church] and who are, in time-honoured fashion, attacked as heretics. But it is from the ranks of the so-called heretics that the revolution must surely come if it is to come at all."⁷⁵

The Comfortable Pew was a sensational publishing success, especially by Canadian standards, selling 101,500 copies within two weeks of its publication.⁷⁶ Like some of the other controversial books of the mid-1960s, it attracted favourable comment from United Church leaders. The moderator, E.M. Howse, wrote Berton, praising the book and telling him that he would like to see it used as "prescribed reading" for first-year students and professors in all United Church theological colleges.⁷⁷ Prominent ministers W.G. Onions of Winnipeg and George Goth of London both sent their thanks and congratulations to Berton for writing the book.⁷⁸ Goth enclosed a list of twelve sermon topics he was preaching on the book, which closely followed the book's contents. William Berry, formerly of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service, now minister of St. Paul's-Avenue Road United Church in Toronto, was so impressed with the advance publicity for the book that even though he had not yet seen it, he expressed his support. Although he said he doubtless would not agree with everything in the book, he was certain that "the general view that a new and far reaching radical approach to the Christian faith is needed is to me incontrovertible. Religion must be delivered from credulity, superstition, narrow minded prejudice, and above all from the emphasis on personal religion at the expense of dealing with the shocking corporate evils and needs of our time."⁷⁹ Some United Church commentators, such as A.C. Forrest, thought Berton had underestimated the Protestant churches' role in social progress, but still agreed with other aspects of the book.⁸⁰

A substantial number of other United Church ministers also wrote to Berton expressing their approval and gratitude, including one who suggested he was "in the line of prophets along with Amos," and another wishing that the United Church, and not the Anglicans, had asked him to write the book.⁸¹ Mervyn Dickinson, director of pastoral counseling service of the Kingsway-Lambton and Royal York Road churches in Toronto, congratulated Berton "for having stated so articulately what needs to be proclaimed from the roof-tops." Dickinson noted that Berton referred to a "minority" in the Protestant churches that was "beginning to speak more openly of the need for a radical re-thinking and re-structuring of the Church's mission." Implicitly identifying himself with this minority, Dickinson wrote, "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.” He also noted the existence of a “small but growing group of Anglican, Presbyterian and United clergy” in the Toronto area, who had been meeting “to share their concerns and to consider the possibilities of future corporate action,” and would be glad of Berton’s encouragement in their cause.⁸² United Church ministers also praised Berton’s book in more public settings, such as two ministers, who, like Goth, preached sermon series on the book at least partly agreeing with Berton’s views, and another minister who urged all the members of his congregation to buy and read the book.⁸³ Thus, as with other elements of theological ferment in the mid-1960s, United Church leaders and clergy showed themselves largely in sympathy with those calling for a major move towards liberalism.

The foregoing analysis has shown the reality of a significant shift in international Protestant thinking that in the 1960s contributed to ferment expressed in radical theological movements and popular books calling for radical change in the beliefs of the church. As a result, church leaders and ordinary members of the United Church were confronted, not only with modernist beliefs, not only with a reinvigorated liberalism, but with the most radical liberal-modernist proposals of the twentieth century. Within the United Church, the indigenous trend away from quiet modernism was hastened and amplified by this atmosphere of ferment. Significantly, none of these new theologians, movements, or books drew a consistently negative response from United Church leaders. To the contrary, most of the reactions from the *United Church Observer* and prominent United Church figures were sympathetic to the new liberalism, even to its most extreme proponents who denied the existence of God outright.

In itself, this reaction delivered a strong axe-blow to the trunk of any remaining conception of the United Church as an evangelical denomination, since church leaders’ public reactions to these public changes left little doubt that they embraced, or at least were sympathetic to, convictions completely incompatible with evangelicalism. The New Curriculum, coming in the midst of this ferment, solidified that conclusion. In addition to the general ferment and the advent of the New Curriculum, however, the mid-1960s brought several notable public statements by United Church theologians, administrators, and ministers disavowing central evangelical beliefs and distancing themselves from evangelicalism itself. While these statements were doubtless stimulated by theological ferment and the New Curriculum controversy, by going beyond the immediate and ultimately transitory debates over either issue, they further removed any ambiguity about the theological stance of the United Church as a predominantly liberal, non-evangelical church.

An important factor in solidifying the image of the United Church as theologically liberal was a ten-part series in the religion section of the *Toronto Daily Star* in 1964 beginning during the New Curriculum controversy. The series was written by Allen Spraggett, whose article that summer had alerted the public to the controversial nature of the New Curriculum. Although the provocative format of the series fit generally with a characteristic frankness in discussing

religious divisions of those years (seen also, for example, in Britain),⁸⁴ it was more immediately conceived as an aid to readers trying to make sense of what Christians believe in the midst of the confusion introduced by the New Curriculum. For each article in the series, Spraggett interviewed three Christians about a particular issue: a Roman Catholic, an “evangelical” (or “fundamentalist”) Protestant, and a “liberal” Protestant. Spraggett described evangelicals as those who believed in an infallible Bible, a “literal interpretation” of traditional doctrines like the virgin birth, heaven and hell, and human sinfulness, and “the necessity of instantaneous conversion as the only means of salvation.” According to Spraggett, although some evangelicals were found in the mainline Protestant churches, including the United Church, they were mostly found in smaller churches. Liberals, on the other hand, constituted the majority in the mainline denominations such as the United Church. They had a critical perspective on the Bible (Spraggett cited the New Curriculum as an example) and a flexible view about traditional doctrines.⁸⁵ Significantly, Spraggett thus framed the divide in the United Church as one between “evangelicals” and “liberals,” in which the “liberals” were the normative party for the church. Even more significantly, the United Church ministers interviewed for his articles fit quite naturally in the latter category and usually disagreed significantly with their evangelical counterparts.

A sampling of these articles suffices to illustrate the fact that the United Church figures interviewed adopted clearly liberal, non-evangelical positions on important doctrinal issues. Representing the liberal Protestant view on the second coming of Jesus was George Goth, prominent minister of Metropolitan United Church in London, Ontario. In sharp contrast to the Catholic priest and the evangelical pastor interviewed, Goth called the traditional belief in the return of Christ “theological mumbo-jumbo.” He went on to say that many ancient beliefs such as this one had no relevant meaning for the modern world.⁸⁶ In an article about a doctrine even closer to the hearts of evangelicals, Christ’s atonement for human sin, Stewart Crysedale, associate secretary of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service, represented the liberal position. Even though Crysedale noted he preferred the self-designation “neo-orthodox,” he took a distinctly liberal view of the matter. “The notion that Christ bore on the cross the wrath of God and appeased that wrath is an outmoded religious concept,” he said. Instead, through his crucifixion Jesus was simply a “symbol of the consequence of human evil.”⁸⁷ Similarly, United Church minister Donald Gillies rejected the idea that Jesus is God, another concept fundamental to evangelical Christianity. Jesus could be called divine, he said, but only in the sense that “to be fully human is to be ‘divine’.” According to Gillies, the “view of some Christians that Jesus was God in disguise makes nonsense of history. It is a presumptuous claim.” Citing *Honest to God* but by implication condemning the entire history of Christian worship, Gillies added that Jesus should not be worshipped. Moreover, to call Jesus God “may be the greatest heresy of all.”⁸⁸ Admittedly, the article quoted an anonymous professor saying that most United Church ministers believed in the divinity of Christ (although this term, unlike the unambiguous word “deity,”

preferred by evangelicals, left the door open to Gillies's definition of "divine"). Nevertheless, the overall impression created by the *Star*'s series on Christian belief was clear: United Church ministers and officials tended to be "liberals" who rejected beliefs central to evangelicalism, and indeed, traditional Christianity in general.

Another factor reinforcing the image of the United Church as a liberal denomination in the 1960s was the term of E.M. Howse as moderator of the denomination from 1964 to 1966. In an interview with the *Toronto Daily Star* shortly after his election, Howse indicated the direction that would characterize his period at the helm of the church, by describing himself as an "unrepentant liberal." Liberalism, according to Howse, was the "only theology that will endure," since it was "willing to make truth its one criterion." He also referred to the large-scale changes underway in Protestant theology. Neo-orthodoxy, or as Howse called it, "the present outdated European theology," was in his view "the reflection of despair in an age of human depravity." It was collapsing, however, and would soon be replaced by "another era of more deeply liberal theology."⁸⁹ In his capacity as the symbolic head of the United Church, Howse's public advocacy of a self-described liberal position was an important factor in making his diagnosis a reality for his denomination.

Within his first year in office, Howse ignited controversy at a press conference for the second year of New Curriculum materials by saying that he did not believe that Jesus had physically risen from the dead, and implying that his body may in fact have been stolen by Roman soldiers. The story was widely reported in the secular press, both in major Toronto-based newspapers and smaller local ones.⁹⁰ Some United Church ministers expressed their public disapproval of Howse's comments, in particular pointing out that he did not speak for the entire church.⁹¹ One United Church professor at Victoria University offered his opinion that four out of five ministers in the church disagreed with the moderator.⁹² In the press, however, United Church ministers, while divided, were more likely to agree with the moderator than those of other denominations. Reactions from other mainline denominations were mixed, and the evangelical reaction was universally negative.⁹³ The *United Church Observer* downplayed the issue in a news item and its "Question Box" by minimizing the extent of the disagreement between Howse and other ministers, describing the resurrection as a "mystery" that was open to differing interpretations, and reiterating that Howse only spoke for himself.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, Howse's remarks undoubtedly reinforced the public perception, recently established by the New Curriculum, of the United Church as a liberal denomination. In the case of at least one minister, who wrote in to the *Observer*, Howse's remarks also heightened his own self-awareness as part of a group of more "conservative and orthodox" people within the United Church. In light of such remarks, he wrote, "our voice needs to be raised and heard and known throughout the church."⁹⁵ The outspoken Howse made several other controversial statements during his term as moderator, including denying that belief in the Trinity was important for Christians and portraying the God-is-dead movement in

a sympathetic light as less extreme than neo-orthodoxy.⁹⁶ Again, although such comments attracted opposition as well as support from within the church, Howse's position as its paramount leader, and his timing, guaranteed that his remarks would be seen as part of a wider liberalization of the United Church.⁹⁷

Alongside these signals of liberalism, the conceptual distance between the United Church and evangelicalism grew in the mid-1960s. Increasingly, "evangelical" and "United Church" came to be seen by those inside and outside the church as mutually exclusive categories. Much of this growing distance could be attributed to the New Curriculum, as discussed in the last chapter. The *Toronto Daily Star's* articles quoting United Church ministers as "liberal" Protestants in contradistinction to "evangelicals" contributed to the same impression. Adding further to the elimination of an evangelical identity for the United Church was a number of *United Church Observer* articles in 1964 and 1965. Early in 1964, before the New Curriculum controversy, the *Observer* ran two articles discussing "evangelicals" and "fundamentalists" (used synonymously). One was an editorial proposing that the United Church "discuss union with the evangelicals." As befitted an article calling for unity, it contained no criticism of evangelicalism. Significantly, however, it made a clear conceptual distinction between "evangelicals," who inhabited smaller denominations, and "liberal churches" such as the United Church.⁹⁸ Another article in the same issue outlined ways the United Church could learn from "fundamentalists," also called the "evangelical movement." Like the editorial, it took a fairly positive view of evangelicalism, although it did criticize some of its features, including "otherworldly piety", "verbal inspirationism and doctrinal dogmatism," and "undue emotionalism." Here again, however, the significance lay in the fact that the article treated evangelicals as a group outside the United Church.⁹⁹

Later in the year, after the New Curriculum controversy, the *Observer* took a more critical tone. An editorial praising the value of "disturbing" teaching in the church took aim at evangelical ministers who criticized the United Church for perpetuating liberal ideas. Such ministers, "in Pentecostal Tabernacles and even in a few Baptist Churches," did not "understand their Bibles very well, or they would help their people to understand these things instead of excitedly and unfairly distorting the teaching of the United Church *and of the Bible*. They do a grave disservice to their sincere people when they quote out of context and distort the meaning, in order to perpetuate some pet fundamentalist theory."¹⁰⁰ The following spring, when Howse denied the physical resurrection of Jesus at a press conference, he also took the time to question the scholarly credentials of "fundamentalists." "There are no fundamental [*sic*] scholars in the world today with any body of competence in biblical study," he said. (George Johnson, a United Church professor at the conference, disagreed, as did a Pentecostal who was present.) Although Howse quickly backtracked from his comment, it highlighted the disdain some liberals in the church felt for evangelical views of the Bible.¹⁰¹

This disdain had already been expressed most vehemently in a November 1964 article by the outspoken minister of Metropolitan United Church in London, Ontario, George Goth. The entire article was dedicated to denouncing “fundamentalists” or “self-styled evangelicals” in the strongest terms as dangerous extremists. Goth drew an analogy between evangelicals and far-right politicians in the United States: both indulged in simplistic Cold War thinking that saw the world in black and white; both promoted “conformity” by exploiting “insatiable nostalgia for the simpler days of the frontier.”¹⁰² For Goth, however, this was more than an analogy, since he also accused fundamentalists as a group of promoting “hate and suspicion against Martin Luther King” and believing that the United Nations was the “advance guard of a communist take over.” In fact, “by and large,” he alleged, fundamentalists sympathized with “their perverted brethren in the Southern States who believe in, and practice, segregation.”¹⁰³

In addition to their reprehensible political views, Goth took exception to the theological beliefs of evangelicals. He disagreed with their understanding of salvation, which made them claim to “know who has been saved,” and to preach “hell-fire and damnation.” Their pastors peddled the “sickening slogan that, if we come to Jesus through their slanted vision, we shall be given a passport to heaven.” He found the prospect of “some immature evangelist, with a guitar, who offers us salvation on a one-night stand” to be “an affront to our dignity” surpassed only by “an American political convention.” Not surprisingly, he also castigated their view of the Bible. As he saw it, evangelicals “fume and rant against anyone who uses his mind in an interpretation of the Bible.” But by insisting that the Bible was “the exact, literal word of God,” evangelicals were “lacking in faith” and therefore according to Jesus fell into the category of “wicked and adulterous people [who] demand signs and wonders.” Due to their unacceptable views, Goth labeled evangelicals “Neanderthal types,” “apostles of discord,” “pied-pipers,” and “human dinosaurs.” They “spread their poisonous vapor and hate in the name of Jesus,” and their preaching was “sanctimonious belching.”¹⁰⁴

Apparently unaware of the irony, Goth also made reference to the ecumenical movement, noting that “the hour has passed for the hurling of thunderbolts and anathemas against those Christians who don’t belong in one particular fold.” Yet, significantly, even in light of the trend towards Christian unity, Goth insisted that as far as he was concerned this could not extend to evangelicals: “Please don’t tell me that, because they call themselves Christians, I have to accept them as brothers in Christ.” He was “prepared to co-exist” with evangelicals, but he said he could only do so “in the same way that I believe we should co-exist with communists, segregationists, and fascists.” He found he had more in common with adherents of non-Christian religions than he did with these evangelicals: “I do not speak the same language as these people. Their God is not my God.” Although some would suggest that such differences should be kept “behind closed doors,” Goth said that this was not possible. Drawing another analogy, this time between evangelicalism and fascism, Goth warned that just as

fascism succeeded in Germany and Italy “because decent people didn’t take the trouble to oppose it,” so too “everything that is healthy, intelligent and good in Christianity could be lost, by default, if we allow the hate-mongers and the fanatics to have a monopoly of this mighty faith.”¹⁰⁵ Although Goth was possibly thinking primarily of evangelicals outside the United Church, the message for evangelicals inside the church was clear: they were contemptible and dangerous outsiders with whom there could be no unity. Quite possibly, the *United Church Observer* editors were amenable to printing Goth’s article due to the heavy criticism leveled against the United Church by outside evangelicals, and it is also likely that they would not have shared the stridency of his views. Nevertheless, the fact that such an article could be printed in the official paper of the United Church spoke volumes about the dwindling place of evangelicals in that denomination.

The mid-1960s, then, were a time of theological unrest in Protestantism, as ideas formulated earlier by Bultmann, Bonhoeffer and Tillich gave rise to radical theological movements and spawned controversial popular books bringing these ideas to the people in the pews. This ferment, for the most part, was welcomed by United Church leaders. At the same time, these leaders contributed to distancing the United Church from evangelicalism by framing the debate as one between “liberals” and “evangelicals” or “fundamentalists” (together with other commentators like Allen Spraggett) and then taking the “liberal” side. Hugh McLeod has noted that throughout the Western world, the 1960s sharpened divisions between “liberals” and “conservatives” in Christian churches; the same was clearly true for Canadian Protestantism.¹⁰⁶ It should be emphasized that the division articulated by commentators was not merely a construct to minimize opponents or sell newspapers, but corresponded to a real division between the basic presuppositions of evangelicals and modernists, in which those leaders influenced by neo-orthodoxy consistently sided with liberals in taking a modernist position. Though this division had been partially obscured for decades by the leadership paradigm of “quiet modernism” coupled with evangelical practices, it continued to exist in the United Church. These leaders did not so much invent a liberal-evangelical split in the United Church as draw attention to a division that had long been more-or-less dormant. By giving this division explicit labels and aligning themselves with one of these labels, United Church leaders in the 1960s redefined the public image of their church as a non-evangelical church. They did this indirectly, by frankly stating their liberal beliefs, and directly, by portraying evangelicals as outsiders. Together with the indigenous trend towards open modernism seen in *Life and Death* and the New Curriculum, this period of ferment buried “quiet modernism,” and with it died any illusion that United Church leaders held evangelical beliefs.

The Authority of the Bible

During the period of greatest ferment in the United Church, its theological elite had an opportunity formally to define the stance of the denomination on a crucial issue. In 1960 Hamilton Conference submitted a memorial to General Council asking that the Committee on Christian Faith study the authority of the Bible, and the idea of divine revelation in general, with a view to making a statement on the topic.¹⁰⁷ This had recently proved to be an important issue. As shown above, the theological conclusions of *Life and Death* hinged on its view of the Bible. Disagreements about the nature of the authority of the Bible would also prove central to the New Curriculum controversy. Interestingly, however, though the Committee studied the issue for six years, it found itself unable to produce a final report to General Council due to internal disagreements between Committee members about revelation outside of the Bible and revelation outside of Christianity. Nevertheless, the Committee did agree in its rejection of an evangelical view of the Bible, which demonstrated that only a modernist approach could be officially sanctioned by the United Church.

A word here is necessary to clarify what this study means by “the evangelical view of the Bible.” There have been a variety of evangelical views on the doctrine of biblical inspiration and its implications for biblical interpretation, and such differences have produced great debate between evangelicals, not only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but also in more recent decades.¹⁰⁸ There is nevertheless a core area of agreement that has distinguished the various evangelical approaches from liberal and neo-orthodox approaches. At the core of various evangelical approaches has been the belief that the Bible contains statements of truth (or propositions) about faith and morals, that these statements were inspired by God, and that these statements are therefore infallible: a final authority that cannot properly be overturned by the authority of human tradition, experience, or reason.¹⁰⁹ This position of infallibility was held by Canadian evangelicals inside and outside the United Church in the 1960s,¹¹⁰ and without this minimal criterion, it would be difficult to meaningfully distinguish evangelical views of the Bible from liberal or neo-orthodox views.¹¹¹ Although United Church leaders’ critique of the evangelical position sometimes muddied the waters by conflating it with other issues,¹¹² at the root of their critique was a rejection of the minimal evangelical view.

The large number of position papers produced by members of the Committee in the course of six years of examining this authority of the Bible did contain several significant areas of agreement, all of which contradicted the minimal evangelical view. The first area of agreement had to do with divine revelation, the concept underlying the evangelical understanding of the Bible as containing a propositional communication from God. Here, the Committee overwhelmingly agreed that divine revelation did not consist of propositions. In other words, whatever God’s revelation was (and the Committee was rather unclear on this point), it was certainly not made up of statements, doctrines, or

truths that could be believed or disbelieved. McGill University professor of divinity and member of the Committee D.D. Evans suggested that aside from the exception of “fundamentalist Protestants” there was consensus among twentieth-century Protestant theologians that “God reveals Himself, not propositions concerning Himself.”¹¹³ Emmanuel College professor E.C. Blackman agreed: “Christian revelation is not truth about God, but God himself.”¹¹⁴ D.M. Mathers, professor of theology at Queen’s Theological College, wrote that among Protestants, “revelation is no longer thought of as a series of revealed propositions set down in scripture or in the official dogmatic declarations of the Church. It is seen rather as God’s manifestation of himself to men.”¹¹⁵ God’s revelation was not propositional, and propositions were not God’s revelation. Since this idea meant that any statement that might be considered true or false, *ipso facto*, could not be considered a revelation from God, it rendered the concept of “revealed truth” an oxymoron.

The importance of this idea for the Bible can be seen in the Committee’s second area of agreement: the Bible was not a revelation from God. Logically, since revelation was not propositional, the Bible, insofar as it consisted of propositional statements, could not be considered part of divine revelation. Instead, the Bible was a record of or witness to divine revelation. Thus Blackman wrote, “The Bible is the *record* of God’s revelation, not the revelation itself.”¹¹⁶ W.O. Fennell, professor of systematic theology at Emmanuel College, wrote that the Scriptures “in themselves are not the revelation. They are the record of the witness to revelation by means of which our participation in the revelation is made possible.”¹¹⁷ Mathers similarly asserted that the Bible was “no longer considered to be a set of divinely revealed and divinely guaranteed propositions, but as the historical documents which bear unique witness to the events and people through whom God made himself known to men.”¹¹⁸

The “crucial corollary” of all this, as Evans pointed out, was that “the Bible is not infallible.”¹¹⁹ If revelation was not propositional, propositions in the Bible could not be considered divinely “revealed,” and if propositions in the Bible were not divinely revealed, then there was no reason to think they were infallible. Here, too, the Committee was unanimous. Blackman, for example, praised the modern critical approach to the Bible because it rescued the church from “an impossible literalism which tries to take each word of the Bible as divine and infallible.”¹²⁰ According to Kingston minister J.A. Davidson, the “refusal, on doctrinal grounds, to apply historical-scientific methodology to the Bible” was a characteristic of “fundamentalism.” Fundamentalism, with its “rigid literalism,” in interpreting the Bible, had to be rejected.¹²¹ Blackman also maintained that the Bible contained human errors and therefore could not be considered “inerrant.”¹²² Mathers argued that just as Protestants rejected the idea of an infallible Pope, so too should they reject the idea of an infallible Bible. He went so far as to argue that not only did Jesus, Paul, Luther and Calvin reject biblical infallibility, “neither the Christian Church as a whole, nor the United Church of Canada in particular, has ever taught that the Bible was infallible, though there have at

different times been individuals, denominations and sects that taught this.” Although the United Church’s Basis of Union taught that the Bible contained “the only infallible rule of faith and life,” Mathers maintained that this did not mean that the Bible as a whole was infallible.¹²³ Fennell argued, moreover, that the Bible was fallible, not only in scientific matters, but also in matters of morality.¹²⁴ Although some of these critiques evidently caricatured or oversimplified the range of evangelical positions, it is clear that the underlying thrust of the Committee’s comments was a rejection of an evangelical belief in Biblical infallibility.

Not only did the Committee agree that what they saw as the “fundamentalist” view was wrong, they were willing to allow only a minimum of tolerance for this view in the United Church. D.M. Mathers had the task of preparing a set of “Questions and Answers” about the authority of the Bible for the Committee. An early draft of this document took a harsh tone against the “fundamentalist” claim that the Bible was infallible, saying that it “cannot be justified and should not be made,” and that it was “dangerous and wrong” to claim that something other than God himself was infallible. Worse, demanding an infallible Bible demonstrated a lack of trust in God and even posed “a temptation to idolatry.”¹²⁵ Furthermore, the doctrine of biblical infallibility encouraged “legalism, dogmatism and reaction.”¹²⁶ In short, Mathers portrayed belief in infallibility as unambiguously harmful. Nevertheless, he conceded that United Church ministers were permitted to believe in infallibility, since the church allowed “liberty of opinion” on nonessential matters. Finally, in a rather unsuccessful attempt to sound conciliatory, he added “it is also important to recognize that believers in biblical inerrancy and infallibility, though they may sometimes be fanatical and narrow-minded and intolerant of others, are often sincere and dedicated Christians who deserve to be admired and respected.”¹²⁷

Despite Mathers’s clear position that the evangelical view of the Bible was “dangerous and wrong,” the Committee on Christian Faith, as recorded in its minutes, felt that he “took a too permissive view toward literalists in the Church, especially ministers who were specially trained and charged with the task of teaching the faith.” It went on to say, very clearly, that “in the United Church we are opposed to the literalist view of Scripture, even though we have liberty of opinion whereby we allow ministers to preach error without forcing them out.”¹²⁸ As a result, a later document by Mathers took a harder line towards evangelicals in the ministry. “Infallibilist beliefs are widely tolerated, but the Presbyteries and Conferences of our Church would be very unwilling to approve the ordination of ministers who regarded infallibility as the basis of the Bible’s authority or an essential part of it,” he wrote.¹²⁹ Since the evangelical view of the Bible as a revelation from God, by its very nature, regarded infallibility as an essential part of the Bible’s authority, this statement amounted to an opinion that evangelicals were not welcome in the ministry of the United Church. While these sentiments of the Committee on Christian Faith were never made public, due to the failure of the Committee to produce a final report, they suggest that the theological leaders

of the United Church regarded the evangelical view of the Bible as an alien belief with no legitimate place in the denomination.

Though the Committee agreed in its understanding of the authority of the Bible, it disagreed on two other questions about divine revelation: whether there was any revelation of God outside of the Bible, and whether there was any revelation of God outside of Christianity. The first question hinged on the theological concept of general revelation, that is, the idea that the human intellect could learn about God from the created world. The Committee found itself split on the issue, with some accepting the idea of general revelation and some arguing that such revelation was only meaningful to those who had already developed Christian “thought patterns” from other sources.¹³⁰ The Committee was equally split on the question of revelation outside of Christianity, which turned into a debate about the merits of non-Christian religions relative to Christianity. On the one hand, Blackman and Mathers argued that other religions did have true revelations of God comparable to that in Christianity; although these were imperfect, so was Christianity. On the other hand, Pine Hill Divinity Hall professor Ralph Chalmers, and Pieter deJong, professor at St. Andrew’s College in Saskatoon, argued that Christianity had a uniquely valuable revelation of God not found in other religions.¹³¹ In part, these disagreements reflected differing degrees of sympathy with either liberal or neo-orthodox positions.¹³² In any case, the Committee found itself unable to reach an agreement on these issues.

Consequently, after nearly six years of work, the Committee was still not ready to present a full and final report to General Council. Instead, the Committee decided to prepare a short summary of areas of agreement and disagreement to present to the 1966 General Council.¹³³ This report listed the main areas of disagreement, briefly outlining the different positions held on the Committee. It also stated the main areas of agreement. Among less remarkable areas of “full agreement,” the report reflected the Committee’s consensus that the evangelical belief in an infallible Bible was wrong. The report acknowledged that “God uses the scriptures to speak to his people today,” but warned that these Scriptures “must not themselves be regarded as infallible objects of faith.” The Bible, said the report, was made up of “human words” which were “subject to the fallibility that belongs to human limitations and sin.”¹³⁴ The General Council meeting came to a close without considering this partial report of the Committee, and in a follow-up meeting later that year, the Committee decided not to “re-open [the] discussion” barring concrete proposals from its members about how to proceed. Such proposals were not forthcoming, and the project disappeared from the agenda.¹³⁵

Although the Committee on Christian Faith failed to deliver a full report on the question of revelation and the authority of the Bible, the internal documents produced by the Committee members demonstrate a complete rejection of evangelical views on the subject, even by those who disagreed sharply on other issues (due, in part, to conflicting liberal and neo-orthodox theological commitments). The evangelical view of the Bible, particularly the belief in

infallibility, was considered fundamentally misguided by these theological leaders of the church, whatever their positions on other questions. Not only were such beliefs wrong in the eyes of the Committee, they were clearly beyond the pale of acceptable theological disagreements. Thus, by the mid-1960s, the official theological arbiter of the United Church saw itself as a defender of modernist orthodoxy against an evangelicalism it found unwelcome in the denomination. Although only a muted version of the Committee's views on this issue were made public, and even this report was not discussed by General Council, the Committee's work on the question of biblical authority was another element of the hardening definition of the United Church as a denomination with a strictly non-evangelical theological position.

A New Creed

The unsuccessful attempt of the Committee on Christian Faith to produce a statement on the authority of the Bible was not the only official attempt at theological definition of the United Church in the 1960s. A second process, this one successful, was the Committee on Christian Faith's dual task of deciding how the Apostles' Creed should be used in the United Church and drafting an entirely new creed as an alternative. The Committee on Christian Faith came upon this task almost accidentally, when the Committee on Church Worship and Ritual sent it a proposed new baptismal service order for comment in the spring of 1965. As the Committee on Christian Faith discussed the proposed service, some of its members expressed doubts about a line in the order stating "the Apostles' Creed shall be said by all." After considering the issue, the Committee asked the sub-executive of General Council for permission to prepare an alternative "modern statement of faith" that might be used in the place of the Apostles' Creed. This permission was granted, and subsequent correspondence between E.E. Long, the secretary of General Council, and D.M. Mathers, chairman of the Committee, resulted in enlarged terms of reference: the Committee was now to also "examine the status and authority of the classical creeds" in the United Church, as well as prepare a modern creed.¹³⁶ The Committee was therefore faced with a dual task: determining the proper use of the Apostles' Creed in the United Church and drafting a new creed suitable for a new age.¹³⁷

The first issue was the status of the Apostles' Creed in the United Church. The research of the Committee, conducted by minister and Committee member Hugh Rose, determined that in practice, there were a variety of attitudes towards and uses of the creed in the United Church in the mid-1960s. The guiding doctrinal documents of the denomination – the Basis of Union and the Statement of Faith – mentioned the creed in passing without specifying its authority or role. The Apostles' Creed was listed in the denominational *Hymnary*, but seemingly "as an after thought" between the amens and the indices. The Book of Common Order did not mention them anywhere, except in the order for the Lord's Supper which allowed for the optional saying of "a Creed."¹³⁸ Since the official

documents, in the words of the Committee minutes, appeared to have “carefully avoided use of the ancient Creeds,” individual congregations were able, but not required, to incorporate them in worship.¹³⁹

In practice, however, many in the United Church had objections to the use of the traditional creeds. According to R.H.N. Davidson, a member of the Committee on Christian Faith and the Committee on Church Worship and Ritual, information he had gathered suggested that roughly half of United Church ministers were opposed to making the Apostles’ Creed a required part of the baptismal service.¹⁴⁰ A 1966 editorial in the *United Church Observer* argued that “no one should ever be compelled to assent to it, or put in a position where he feels compromised by refusing to recite it,” and expressed “misgivings” about even including it as an optional element in the baptismal service.¹⁴¹ One columnist in the *Observer* referred to a letter he had received in which a congregant had identified objectionable parts of the Apostles’ Creed, including the resurrection of the body and Jesus’s descent into hell.¹⁴² Another writer noted that the creeds were tied to obsolete ways of thinking and thus needed to be rewritten using the “vastly increased knowledge of modern days.”¹⁴³ Moderator E.M. Howse, who could always be relied upon for pithy statements, thundered: “If widespread acceptance and long survival can clothe belief with sanctity, then some of the weirdest superstitions known to man merit an awesome veneration.” Many ancient Christian beliefs had been discarded by modern Christians, argued Howse, and in the modern world the Apostles’ Creed had only a “thin pretense” of being the “faith of the church.”¹⁴⁴ A Hamilton minister whose congregation sometimes used the Apostles’ Creed wrote to the Committee on Christian Faith, saying “when I see some of my best educated men and women shutting their mouths on certain phrases or just standing without participation, I do have to raise certain questions as to the value of the Apostles’ Creed.”¹⁴⁵

John Fullerton, a minister at Keene, near Peterborough, Ontario,¹⁴⁶ and a member of the Committee, outlined the main problems he thought United Church ministers and laity had with the traditional creeds. Fullerton wrote, in a passage echoing Bultmann, that “Christians today” were not able to “express their faith” in what he called the “assumptions of the first century thought world.” Thus, the old creeds, just like the Bible, could not be used without reinterpretation. For example, the coming return of Jesus could not be taken literally as a doctrine. Indeed, he said, implicitly denying the Resurrection, Jesus himself had been mistaken about his return because he had expected it to happen “in his own lifetime.” Similarly, the Virgin Birth could not be believed literally in the modern world. Comparing the Apostles’ Creed affirmation of the Virgin Birth with the stance of the New Curriculum, he asked, “should we expect a Christian believer of our church both to affirm and deny this doctrine?”¹⁴⁷ J.R. Hord, who in addition to being a member of the Committee on Christian Faith was secretary of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service, agreed that use of the creeds was undesirable. At a meeting of the Committee, he expressed his concern that the “Western Church” had used the creeds “as a weapon against what they believed to

be heretical groups, which today might not be regarded as heretical,” and that this had “resulted in the Church being a predominantly western authoritarian body of people.”¹⁴⁸

In light of its minimal use, and these various objections, why did the Committee ultimately recommend that the Apostles’ Creed be retained by the United Church and printed in its service books?¹⁴⁹ Part of the answer lies in the context provided by the push for a merger between the United Church and the Anglican Church of Canada, then at its height. In the spring of 1965 the two denominations had produced an agreed statement of principles for a merger.¹⁵⁰ The doctrinal section of the document included the following clause:

We gratefully receive from the Ancient Church the Ecumenical statements of faith, and the Apostles’ Creed, as rehearsing the mighty acts of God recorded in Holy Scripture, as witnessing to the faith of the Fathers, and as a bond of union with Christians of all ages throughout the world. We acknowledge them as having an authority and deserving an honour beyond that which can be accorded to the decrees of local councils or regional churches.¹⁵¹

By the time the Committee on Christian Faith began evaluating the place of the creeds in the United Church, these principles had already been approved by the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, as well as the General Council of the United Church.¹⁵² In the midst of these steps towards union, the Apostles’ Creed became a contentious issue. Moderator Howse, for example, in the context of a 1965 article about the proposed union, stated that he would refuse to “repeat the phrases of the creeds” as a condition of membership in a church, because it would it would violate his conscience.¹⁵³ J.R. Hord, secretary of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service and also a member of the Committee on Christian Faith, penned an article in the Anglican newsmagazine, the *Canadian Churchman*, in which he agreed with Howse’s stance on the grounds that “much of the language of our traditional creeds is incomprehensible to modern man.”¹⁵⁴ Moreover, the following year the Board of Evangelism and Social Service passed a resolution criticizing the proposed principles of union on several grounds, including the undefined authority they gave to the Apostles’ Creed. The Board noted that as they stood, the principles seemed “to imply exclusion from membership in the ‘united Church’ of committed Christians who cannot accept the traditional formulae as they understand them or in conscience participate in their ritual use.”¹⁵⁵

Such statements raised the ire of some Anglicans. The editor of the *Canadian Churchman* noted that the Board of Evangelism and Social Service seemed “caught in a maze of bishops, creeds and sacraments.” “Could it be,” he asked, “that they don’t want to see the Anglican Church of Canada bring any gifts into the proposed union – just Anglicans!”¹⁵⁶ Other Anglicans wrote letters to the *Canadian Churchman* expressing their opposition to the proposed union, citing

Howse's rejection of the Apostles' Creed as their reason.¹⁵⁷ Another Anglican wrote to the *United Church Observer* offering her opinion that since opinions offered by "United Church leaders" and the New Curriculum "openly cast doubt, to say the least, on both the Scriptures and the Creeds," union between the two churches was impossible. The real prerequisite for unity, she wrote, was "a common faith as taught by the Apostles and stated in the Creeds."¹⁵⁸

As it wrestled with the status of the Apostles' Creed in the United Church, the Committee on Christian Faith was aware of these tensions. Although nothing came of it, one meeting of the Committee considered the idea of cooperating with the Anglicans in preparing an alternative creed. The Committee also noted that the classical creeds had been used more widely by the Anglicans than by the traditions that produced the United Church.¹⁵⁹ Several months later, the Committee again had the Anglican question brought to its attention by R.H.N. Davidson, who presented a copy of a document being issued by the "Council for the Defense of the Faith" a conservative Anglican group opposed to union with the United Church. The document stated that the creeds were a central aspect of their opposition to union: "We believe that the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Creed of St. Athanasius are statements of faith binding on clergy and laity alike."¹⁶⁰ The Committee's awareness of the sensitive status of the creed in light of union conversations likely influenced its decision to retain the use of the Apostles' Creed in some form.

The desire to retain the creed, however, presented a dilemma for the Committee. The Committee believed there were two possible ways to deal with the parts of the Apostles' Creed that presented difficulties for some in the United Church. One approach was "demythologizing" – Bultmann's word – which they understood to mean the removal of supposedly "mythological elements." Given the context, it was impossible to do this without alienating the Anglicans and possibly disrupting union (although this route was followed for the new creed drafted by the Committee). The other approach was educational, or better put, re-educational: "letting the congregations understand the truth behind the Creeds."¹⁶¹ Such language indicated the importance of a non-literal interpretation: it was not the truth *of* the creeds that was important, but the truth *behind* the creeds. The educational approach was intended to teach congregants to interpret the creeds in a way considered suitable for a modern context.¹⁶² Ultimately, the Committee decided to make educational efforts in the congregation an important prerequisite of the use of the historic creeds in public worship.¹⁶³

This still left the question of how the Apostles' Creed would be introduced in public worship. Initially, a majority of the Committee wanted the introductory formula to be "Let us confess the Christian faith as it has been confessed by the historic Church in the Apostles' Creed." A "sizeable minority" of the Committee, however, still had "some or grave reservations" about the use of the creed in worship – the whole project, after all, had begun because the Committee had expressed its concerns about the proposed use of the Apostles' Creed in the baptismal service. Mack Freeman, a member of the Committee and professor of

religious studies at Victoria College,¹⁶⁴ strongly disagreed with the majority opinion. He recognized that the majority formula implied that the congregation was agreeing with the creed, and he therefore preferred the noncommittal formula “Let us hear the faith as the Church has historically confessed it.”¹⁶⁵ In a substantial written dissent, Freeman laid out his reasoning. There was strong evidence that many in the United Church, including two (unnamed) former moderators, were opposed to the use of the Apostles’ Creed. In addition, most of the members who voted in favour of the majority introductory formula had done so only on the condition that the use of the Apostles’ Creed be “accompanied by extensive re-education in its meaning for us to-day.” In fact, continued Freeman, “the majority vote ... was largely due to the reports from three members that they had attempted, with some success, so to reeducate persons in their pastoral care.” Although Freeman supported such “re-education,” he doubted that it would be successful most of the time, and found it impossible that congregants would be able to agree on appropriate interpretations for the “controversial clauses” when the Committee itself could not do so. Besides, Freeman argued, such a practice risked worsening the impression already held by many people that the church was hypocritical in mouthing platitudes it did not believe. Such a practice was indeed dishonest: “Right in the United Church, persons (with re-educated exceptions) will be encouraged to say ‘I believe ...’ when many of them will know full well that they do not so believe, but are going through the motions at the invitation of their minister who (with re-educated exceptions) also may not so believe.”¹⁶⁶ Ultimately, perhaps in an attempt to compromise with Freeman, the Committee changed the introductory formula to “Let us repeat the historic expression of Christian faith known as the Apostles’ (Nicene) Creed,” which did not imply consent as strongly as the original “Let us confess the Christian faith as it has been confessed by the historic Church in the Apostles’ Creed.”¹⁶⁷

In its final report to the 1968 General Council, the Committee concluded that the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds should be retained by the United Church because of their value as “ecumenical instruments” that could “symbolize the unity of all Christians.” Perhaps with an eye cocked at the Anglicans, the report noted that these creeds could serve as “bonds of union between separated churches.” A number of caveats surrounded this retention of the historic creeds, however. “Responsible use” of these traditional creeds in worship required “preparatory instruction,” which would “provide explanations and interpretations of the classical creeds so that those who use them can do so with more understanding.” The creeds should also be used with “appropriate introductory formulae,” like the one recommended, which were “suitable to the variety of perspectives concerning creeds which are present in most congregations.” Finally, the “literal sense” of the creeds should not be imposed as a test of orthodoxy.¹⁶⁸ The Committee on Christian Faith therefore managed to preserve the use of the Apostles’ Creed in the United Church while guaranteeing that no one would be required to believe what it said.

The second creedal task of the Committee was the preparation of a new, modern creed for use in worship. Here, the Committee had considerable freedom to “demythologize” to its heart’s content, and that is in fact what it did. Before inviting its members to write possible creeds, the Committee heard from Ontario minister John Fullerton, who submitted a detailed document that set the tone for what was to follow. His proposals are worth examining because they were largely followed in the final creed. Fullerton’s starting point was the new liberal theology characteristic of the decade. It was a time of revolution in Protestant thought, argued Fullerton. This was exemplified by “a rising flood of literature” begun by John A.T. Robinson’s *Honest to God*, which had popularized the ideas of “Tillich, Bonhoeffer and Bultmann.” For Fullerton, this ferment was evidence that “the thinking Christian of today is no longer satisfied with the traditional theology and the historic creeds.” Wide-ranging developments in secular thought over the past two centuries had given rise to new, radical theologians, who believed that it was “necessary ... to pull down the metaphysical and ontological structures in which the historic faith has been expressed.”¹⁶⁹

Fullerton accepted this analysis. Echoing Bultmann, he argued that the classical creeds, like the Bible, were tied to an obsolete way of thinking which was unacceptable to “modern man,” who wanted “his faith expressed in contemporary terms in the thought world of his time.” The solution was to incorporate the new theological ideas into a contemporary “restatement of the Christian faith” from which the “offending elements” of the Apostles’ Creed had been removed. For Fullerton, these offending elements included the virgin birth, resurrection and ascension of Christ, his descent into hell between the crucifixion and the resurrection, his second coming, the general “resurrection of the body,” and finally “life everlasting.” A new creed should eliminate these elements by restating the faith in other terms.¹⁷⁰

Shortly after studying this document, the Committee asked its members to compose brief creeds as candidates for the new creed.¹⁷¹ Mack Freeman, who had objected most strenuously to asking congregations to “confess” the Apostles’ Creed, submitted the draft that served as the basis for the final creed. Significantly, this draft creed eliminated nearly all of the “offending elements” flagged by Fullerton. The resurrection was affirmed indirectly by a phrase referring to “our risen Lord,” and another phrase mentioned “life beyond death.” The other elements of the Apostles’ Creed listed by Fullerton – the virgin birth, the descent into hell, the ascension, the second coming, and the general resurrection – were all missing.¹⁷² Over the next six months, the Committee made various revisions, mostly fairly minor, to Freeman’s creed. On the one hand, an element of Trinitarian structure was introduced by making roughly equal lines referring to the Father (or creator), Jesus, and God’s Spirit. On the other hand, the phrase “risen Lord” was removed, and with it, any reference to the Resurrection. The structure of the creed was improved, resulting in a more poetic, suitably liturgical statement.¹⁷³ The main features of Freeman’s creed were preserved, however, including the lack of “offending elements.”

By the General Council meeting in 1968, the Committee had the following creed ready as its proposed “New Creed” for use in the United Church:

Man is not alone; he lives in God’s world.
 We believe in God;
 who has created and is creating,
 who has come in the true Man, Jesus, to reconcile and renew,
 who works within us and among us by his Spirit.
 We trust him.
 He calls us to be his Church:
 to celebrate his presence,
 to love and serve others,
 to seek justice and resist evil.
 We proclaim his Kingdom.
 In life, in death, in life beyond death, he is with us.
 We are not alone; we believe in God.¹⁷⁴

The Committee recommended this creed for “experimental use”, but it was clearly intended as the modern alternative to the Apostles’ Creed proposed at the beginning of the project. Even this doctrinally broad creed, however, was not intended to become a test of orthodoxy. The Committee attached an introductory formula similar to that of the Apostles’ Creed, “Let us repeat together a contemporary expression of Christian faith.” In its report, the Committee also noted that the creed intentionally used language that was “suggestive rather than definitive,” which allowed it to be “filled with personal content” by worshipers. Thus “Christians in any branch of the Church” should feel comfortable saying the creed. The report admitted that there were some in the church who might feel that “some important aspects of the faith (e.g. the atonement or the resurrection) have not been stated adequately.” Nevertheless, the Committee concluded that the New Creed was “admirably suited to our needs” and that “it speaks to people today.”¹⁷⁵

To the disappointment of the Committee, however, a number of people at General Council were dissatisfied with the proposed New Creed. Ralph Chalmers, professor of systematic theology at Pine Hill Divinity Hall in Halifax, made some direct criticisms, and George Johnson, principal of United Theological College in Montreal, also had some suggestions for improvement. When Chalmers moved that the Creed be referred back to the Committee on Christian Faith for revisions which would then report back to the executive of General Council, the motion carried.¹⁷⁶ In a written submission to the Committee, Chalmers criticized the creed for being “theologically ‘thin’” and having “several serious omissions.” Among other things, Chalmers objected to the first statement being about man rather than God; the absence of several traditional terms including “Father” for God, “Holy Spirit”, and “Lord” and “Saviour” for Jesus; and finally, the lack of references to important aspects of Jesus life, including his incarnation, ministry, teaching, death, resurrection, ascension and second coming.¹⁷⁷

The Committee disagreed with most of Chalmers's criticisms, but conceded the need for some mention of the crucifixion and resurrection.¹⁷⁸ One member of the Committee, Donald Evans, now a professor of philosophy at the University of Toronto, proposed the addition of a phrase referring to "the risen Jesus, our judge and our hope," which would constitute a reference to the Resurrection while still being "open to various interpretations" of how Jesus had "risen."¹⁷⁹ The Committee changed this phrase to "Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope," in order to incorporate a reference to the crucifixion. Aside from another minor change to indicate that God's Spirit worked outside the church as well as within it, the additional of "Thanks be to God" at the end of the creed, and two insignificant wording changes, these were the only changes made to the creed before it was submitted to the executive of General Council for final approval.¹⁸⁰ The resulting creed would henceforth be known as the New Creed of the United Church (changes are underlined):

Man is not alone, he lives in God's world.

We believe in God:

who has created and is creating,
 who has come in the true Man, Jesus, to reconcile and make new,
 who works in us and others by his Spirit.

We trust him.

He calls us to be his church:

to celebrate his presence,
 to love and serve others,
 to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope.

In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us.

We are not alone.

Thanks be to God.

Satisfied with the extent of the changes, the executive of General Council accepted this revised creed in November 1968, approving it for inclusion in the new service book of the United Church.¹⁸¹

Reaction in the United Church to the New Creed was muted, especially in comparison to the controversies of the middle years of the decade. The *United Church Observer* ran a feature in which two ministers assessed the New Creed, one from a liberal perspective and one from an evangelical perspective. The liberal, John Burbidge, had preferred the version originally submitted to General Council. Unfortunately, "the orthodox" had complained that the virgin birth, the crucifixion, and the resurrection were missing: "All those dead old things which

had been forcing the churchman to stand on his head had been taken away.” Fortunately, despite this criticism, the Committee on Christian Faith had kept the changes to a minimum. Although Burbidge thought that the executive of General Council “should be ashamed” for allowing the new phrase about Jesus crucified and risen, which he regarded as a sop to the conservatives that put “the faith back in the arena of individual piety,” he was content to accept the compromise rather than lose the New Creed entirely.¹⁸² On the other side of the debate, Berkley Reynolds was critical of the original creed, which he saw as “a last ditch stand of the liberals to remove every last vestige of conservatism from the United Church,” but with the changes he was minimally satisfied with the final version. On balance, however, he preferred the Apostles’ Creed.¹⁸³ The Committee on Christian Faith did receive a few letters critical of the New Creed, as did the *United Church Observer*, but most of the church seemed to accept the New Creed as an accomplished fact.¹⁸⁴

In its examination of the use of creeds in the United Church, therefore, the Committee on Christian Faith managed to contribute to the redefinition of the denomination without unduly upsetting union efforts with the Anglicans. The Apostles’ Creed had been retained, but hedged about with admonitions to re-education and an introductory formula that made its use in public worship an act of historical reflection rather than a reaffirmation of traditional Christianity. More significantly, it had produced a New Creed with theological roots in the new liberalism of the decade. In line with Fullerton’s proposal, the Committee drafted a creed that omitted most of the supernatural doctrines of ancient Christianity in the name of the new theology, a fact that did not go unnoticed by evangelically-minded observers like Berkley Reynolds. Had it not been for the intervention of General Council, the New Creed would have lacked even a reference to the crucifixion and resurrection. Even with the intervention, however, the New Creed still represented a different faith from that of the Apostles’ Creed. In short, the Committee on Christian Faith had “demythologized” the faith of the United Church for a new age.

Conclusion

The theological redefinition of the United Church in the 1960s had several interrelated elements. The first of these was the internal development of modernism. As previous chapters have shown, modernist beliefs were common among United Church leaders for decades before 1960. In the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, however, official statements of the church and even clerical discourse in general avoided disturbing the evangelically-minded by avoiding open statements of modernist ideas. In particular, the Statement of Faith of 1940 and the Christian education curricula up to 1964 avoided teaching modernism and were compatible with broadly evangelical ideas. This thesis has called this phenomenon “quiet modernism” to indicate that these modernist beliefs differed from evangelical orthodoxy, but were not obtrusively promoted by church leaders and therefore did

not seriously affect the United Church's image as an evangelical church. In the long term, however, it was inevitable that, as church leaders found it necessary to make public statements about difficult theological questions or rethink traditional beliefs, modernism would become more visible in the denomination. This internal process of modernist presuppositions working their way out into public statements can be seen in the 1959 publication *Life and Death*, and of course in the much more far-reaching New Curriculum of 1964. These developments arose out of the modernist beliefs held by United Church leaders over a long period of time and were therefore not a product of the theological "ferment" of the 1960s. In other words, "quiet modernism" was not a stable long-term strategy, and by the 1960s it was already collapsing under its own weight, apart from larger developments in Protestant theology.

The theological tremors that swept international Protestantism in the 1960s also shook the United Church, however, and accelerated the demise of quiet modernism. The ferment produced by far-out theologians and popular bestsellers propagating controversial ideas certainly made it difficult for United Church leaders to avoid giving their opinions on theological topics. Some leaders, such as E.M. Howse and George Goth, embraced this new openness with relish, as did many other less prominent officials and ministers. These leaders showed their sympathy and often enthusiasm for the radical theologies seen in the press, leaving the public in no doubt as to where they stood. At the same time, public statements by some leaders showed that they considered evangelicals outsiders in the United Church. The atmosphere of controversy, especially in the secular press, also encouraged church leaders to align themselves with either an evangelical or a "liberal" position, and United Church officials, theologians and ministers almost invariably sided with the latter. The collapse of quiet modernism in the 1960s, therefore, was not simply a product of internal developments in the United Church but was helped along by these factors originating outside the denomination.

The newly unambiguous identity of the United Church as non-evangelical was solidified by the efforts of the Committee on Christian Faith to stake positions on two central issues of faith: the role of the Bible and the role of the traditional creeds. The Committee rejected the entire concept of propositional revelation and along with it, the revealed character and infallibility of the Bible. The evangelical view, which rested on precisely these beliefs, was resoundingly rejected by the Committee. Similarly, in its investigation of the place of creeds in the United Church, the Committee demonstrated that it could only tolerate the ancient Christian orthodoxy of the Apostles' Creed if it was accompanied by re-education and introductory formulas to guard against the danger that someone might regard its assertions as essential elements of Christianity. The New Creed the Committee produced systematically omitted exactly these elements making it a suitably modernist statement of belief. Thus the work of the Committee formally rejected fundamental evangelical concepts of biblical authority and traditional Christian orthodoxy. Therefore, the 1960s, and more specifically the years 1964-

1968, demolished quiet modernism and unambiguously defined the United Church as a modernist, non-evangelical, and in popular terms, “liberal” church.

¹ Although it does not address Canadian Protestantism, McLeod, *Religious Crisis*, 83-92, provides an international overview of some of these shifts in Protestantism in Western societies.

² United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings*, 1956, 122.

³ United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings*, 1960, 347.

⁴ Observations, *United Church Observer*, October 1, 1959, 5; see, for example, "What is the Resurrection of the Body?" *United Church Observer*, October 15, 1959, 19, 24.

⁵ A.G. Reynolds, ed., *Life and Death: A Study of the Christian Hope* (Committee on Christian Faith, 1959), 22-23, 28.

⁶ *Life and Death*, 37-38.

⁷ *Life and Death*, 39, 43, 45-6, 55-61

⁸ *Life and Death*, 29, 70.

⁹ *Life and Death*, 43-44, 53.

¹⁰ *Life and Death*, 47-49.

¹¹ *Life and Death*, 76, 79-82.

¹² *Life and Death*, 6.

¹³ *Life and Death*, 30.

¹⁴ *Life and Death*, 6-7.

¹⁵ *Life and Death*, 115-117.

¹⁶ *Life and Death*, 44, 51, 53.

¹⁷ UCA, CCF 3-66, Canadian Press, "Fundamental Beliefs Rejected By UC Committee," *Chatham News*, Ontario, September 15, 1959; "United Church Rejects Hell," *Sarnia Observer*, September 14, 1959; "United Church Committee Rejects Soul, Hell, Damnation Doctrine," *Ottawa Citizen*, September 15, 1959; "Hellfire Idea Rejected In United Church Book," *Toronto Daily Star*, September 14, 1959; "Churchmen Clash Over 'Life After Death'," *Toronto Telegram*, September 15, 1959; "New Doctrine on Sin, Soul, Hell Breaks With the Fundamentalists," *Toronto Globe & Mail*, September 15, 1959.

¹⁸ UCA, CCF 3-66, "New Doctrine on Sin, Soul, Hell Breaks With the Fundamentalists," *Toronto Globe & Mail*, September 15, 1959; "Churchmen Clash Over 'Life After Death'," *Toronto Telegram*, September 15, 1959; "New Views on Hell 'Dippy'," *Toronto Daily Star*, September 15, 1959.

¹⁹ UCA, CCF 3-66, Canadian Press, "Fundamental Beliefs Rejected By UC Committee," *Chatham News*, Ontario, September 15, 1959; "Hellfire Idea Rejected In United Church Book," *Toronto Daily Star*, September 14, 1959. Berry himself did not accept universalism, which put him at odds with the majority of the committee. He held this position, not on biblical grounds, but rather because he believed "that the will of man must have its way and that it may be possible for a man to continue indefinitely in his opposition to God." CCF 1-1a, William Berry to R. Ernest Ludlow, May 9, 1960.

²⁰ UCA, CCF 3-66, "Churchmen Clash Over 'Life After Death'," *Toronto Telegram*, 15 September 1959, p.34.

²¹ “When There’s Death There’s Hope,” editorial, *United Church Observer*, October 15, 1959, 6.

²² Observations, *United Church Observer*, November 1, 1959, 5; CCF 3-66, “New Views on Hell ‘Dippy’,” *Toronto Daily Star*, 15 September 1959.

²³ Norville E. Luck, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, November 1, 1959, 2; H.P. MacLean, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, December 1, 1959, 4; Frank Pritchard, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, December 15, 1959, 2.

²⁴ H. Corry Martin, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, December 1, 1959, 4.

²⁵ UCA, CCF 3-66, “Heartsick Member,” letter to the editor, *Toronto Daily Star*, 21 September 1959.

²⁶ “When There’s Death There’s Hope,” editorial, *United Church Observer*, October 15, 1959, 6; Observations, *United Church Observer*, November 1, 1959, 5; Observations, *United Church Observer*, December 1, 1959, 5.

²⁷ McLeod, *Religious Crisis*, 15, suggests some of the broader cultural and social changes that intersected with theological change in this period to produce a religious crisis in several Western societies in the 1960s. Not all of these are applicable to Canada, or, more narrowly, the focus of this study, but some of them (notably the sexual revolution and political radicalization) are briefly discussed in chapter 5. Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c.1958-c.1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), has little to say about religious change, but is otherwise a detailed overview of international cultural developments between 1958 and 1974. Doug Owram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby-Boom Generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), chs. 7-11, addresses the general social and political ferment of the period as it related to the baby-boom generation in Canada.

²⁸ For one example among many that could be given, see the retiring moderatorial address of Wilfred C. Lockhart, “Ferment,” *United Church Observer*, October 1, 1968, 9.

²⁹ See Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (InterVarsity Press, 1992), 113. The following discussion of major theologians and new theological movements largely follows the accounts given by Grenz and Olson.

³⁰ Grenz and Olson, 86-95.

³¹ J.W. Burbidge, “A Layman’s Guide to Rudolf Bultmann,” *United Church Observer*, September 15, 1966, 43; BCE 273-22, Allen Spraggett, “The ‘Real’ Jesus is an Enigma: Bultmann,” *Toronto Daily Star*, August 8, 1964, 54.

³² Grenz and Olson, 146-156.

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- ³³ Kenneth Bagnell, "New Faith for a New Age," *United Church Observer*, April 15, 1965, 13; J.W. Burbidge, "Martyred Prophet of Life for Others," *United Church Observer*, October 15, 1966, 42-43.
- ³⁴ Grenz and Olson, 114-129.
- ³⁵ Kenneth Bagnell, "Paul Tillich: Dangerous Theologian?" *United Church Observer*, November 1, 1965, 24-25.
- ³⁶ Grenz and Olson, 164-167.
- ³⁷ Kenneth Bagnell, "Harvey Cox on the Crisis We Didn't Expect," *United Church Observer*, November 15, 1965, 37.
- ³⁸ W.H. Carnes, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, January 1, 1966, 2.
- ³⁹ The Editor's Observations, *United Church Observer*, December 15, 1965, 9.
- ⁴⁰ McLeod finds it misleading to associate the "Death of God" theologians with Robinson and Cox. While the Death of God theologians certainly went further in their conclusions, and used more provocative language, it seems to me that there was a strong continuity in the basic approach of all of these theologians in self-consciously rejecting traditional conceptions of God and Christianity as unsuited to their times. Similarly, while McLeod sympathetically echoes Robinson's claim that he was primarily updating the language used to describe Christian belief, it seems clear from *Honest to God* that he was quite intentionally replacing the traditional understanding of God with a substantially different concept. See McLeod, *Religious Crisis*, 11.
- ⁴¹ Grenz and Olson, 157-160.
- ⁴² A.C. Forrest, "What Do They Mean, 'God Is Dead'?" *United Church Observer*, February 15, 1966, 12-13, 45-46.
- ⁴³ E.M. Howse, Here's Howse, *United Church Observer*, December 15, 1965, 9.
- ⁴⁴ E.M. Howse, Here's Howse, *United Church Observer*, March 1, 1966, 9.
- ⁴⁵ Wilfred C. Lockhart, "Ferment," *United Church Observer*, October 1, 1968, 9.
- ⁴⁶ Sheila Kenyon, "Bestseller Boom in Religious Books," *United Church Observer*, January 1, 1966, 27.
- ⁴⁷ See especially John A.T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 21-24.
- ⁴⁸ Robinson, 26.
- ⁴⁹ Robinson, 23, 36-39, 61.
- ⁵⁰ Robinson, 21-22.
- ⁵¹ Robinson, 17-18, 39.
- ⁵² Robinson, 14, 30-31, 65-67, 70, 78.
- ⁵³ Robinson, 11, 24.
- ⁵⁴ Robinson, 34.

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- ⁵⁵ Robinson, 7.
- ⁵⁶ Robinson, 21, 10, 18.
- ⁵⁷ Robinson, 10.
- ⁵⁸ The Editor's Observations, *United Church Observer*, April 15, 1965, 9.
- ⁵⁹ Leslie Weatherhead, "The Christian Agnostic," *United Church Observer*, October 1, 1965, 17-18.
- ⁶⁰ Leslie Weatherhead, "The Bible and Its Inspiration," *United Church Observer*, October 15, 1965, 19-20.
- ⁶¹ Leslie Weatherhead, "Reincarnation and Renewed Chances," *United Church Observer*, November 1, 1965, 29-30, 46; Leslie Weatherhead, "What I Believe," *United Church Observer*, December 1, 1965, 29-30.
- ⁶² Letters to the editor, *United Church Observer*, December 15, 1965, 4; G.E. Funk, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, January 1, 1966, 2.
- ⁶³ The Editor's Observations, *United Church Observer*, January 1, 1966, 7. A hotter letter-writing topic was an article by chaplain Ben Smillie denouncing Billy Graham, which is discussed in the next chapter.
- ⁶⁴ The Editor's Observations, *United Church Observer*, October 15, 1965, 9.
- ⁶⁵ See, for example, "A Time for Witches?" *United Church Observer*, March 1, 1966, 7.
- ⁶⁶ McMaster University Archives, Pierre Berton Papers [PB] 266-10, Ernest Harrison to Pierre Berton, May 14, 1963.
- ⁶⁷ PB 266-10, Berton to Harrison, May 28, 1963; "The Communicators," *United Church Observer*, March 1, 1969, 13.
- ⁶⁸ PB 266-10, Harrison to Berton, August 20, 1963.
- ⁶⁹ See, for example, Berton, *The Comfortable Pew*, 120-122, 124-125, 127-129, 140.
- ⁷⁰ Berton, *The Comfortable Pew*, 103, 125, 139.
- ⁷¹ Berton, *The Comfortable Pew*, 106-107, 125.
- ⁷² See, for example, Berton, *The Comfortable Pew*, 122-124.
- ⁷³ Berton, *The Comfortable Pew*, 103-104, 120-121.
- ⁷⁴ Berton, *The Comfortable Pew*, 111.
- ⁷⁵ Berton, *The Comfortable Pew*, 122-129, 139-141, 143.
- ⁷⁶ Patricia Clarke, Books, *United Church Observer*, March 1, 1965, 46.
- ⁷⁷ PB 266-10, Ernest Marshall Howse to Berton, January 6, 1965.
- ⁷⁸ PB 266-10, W.G. Onions to Berton, January 25, 1965; George W. Goth to Berton, January 31, 1965.
- ⁷⁹ PB 266-10, William G. Berry to Berton, January 5, 1965.
- ⁸⁰ "Pierre Berton's Research," *United Church Observer*, March 1, 1965, 10; PB 280A, file "Ministers Respond NC+R 1965," Allen Spraggett, "The Church Must Answer Back," *Toronto Daily Star*, May 1, 1965; see also PB 266-4, W.H. McDannold to Berton, March 10, 1965.

⁸¹ PB 266-10, Donald A. Stiles to Berton, February 3, 1965; PB 266-10, R. Watson French to Berton, January 25, 1965. See also PB 266-10, Russell D. Horsburgh to Berton, January 1965; PB 266-10, R.B. Rice to Berton, February 12, 1965.

⁸² PB 266-10, J. Mervyn Dickinson to Berton, January 27, 1965. Original emphasis.

⁸³ PB 266-4, Newton C. Steacy to Berton, February 10, 1965; Lindsay G. King to Berton, February 17, 1965; PB 266-10, George Southall to Berton, February 1, 1965.

⁸⁴ McLeod, *Religious Crisis*, 72.

⁸⁵ UCA, BCE 273-22, Allen Spraggett, "Christians Today – The Riddle of Their Faith," *Toronto Daily Star*, August 8, 1964.

⁸⁶ UCA, BCE 273-21, Allen Spraggett, "Will Jesus Christ Return?" *Toronto Daily Star*, October 10, 1964.

⁸⁷ UCA, BCE 273-22, Allen Spraggett, "Denominations Differ on Christ's Atonement for Sin," *Toronto Daily Star*, August 29, 1964.

⁸⁸ UCA, BCE 273-21, Allen Spraggett, "The Case for Christ's 'Divinity'," *Toronto Daily Star*, August 15, 1964.

⁸⁹ UCA, BCE 273-22, Allen Spraggett, "The Highly-Quotable Dr. Howse," *Toronto Daily Star*, October 24, 1964.

⁹⁰ UCA, BCE 273-11, Warren Gerard, "Moderator Rejects Belief That Christ's Body Resurrected," *Globe and Mail*, April 22, 1965; Canadian Press, "United Church Moderator Believes Christ Rose 'Spiritually'," *London Evening Free Press*, April 22, 1965; "Resurrection: Was It Physical or Spiritual? What the United Church Says on Vital Issue," *Hamilton Spectator*, April 24, 1965; "Clerics Express Opinions on Moderator's Statement," *Galt (Ontario) Reporter*, April 24, 1965; "City Clergy Disagree with UC Moderator," *Stratford (Ontario) Times*, April 28, 1965.

⁹¹ A.K. Griffiths, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, July 1965, 2; Colin L. West, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, September 15, 1965, 6, 9; G. Campbell Wadsworth, letter to the editor, *Canadian Churchman*, July-August 1965, 10.

⁹² UCA, BCE 273-11, "4 in 5 Clerics Oppose Moderator," *Toronto Telegram*, April 23, 1965.

⁹³ UCA, BCE 273-11, "Clerics Express Opinions on Moderator's Statement," *Galt (Ontario) Reporter*, April 24, 1965; "Some Clerics Hedge on Old Question," *Toronto Telegram*, April 22, 1965; "City Clergy Disagree with UC Moderator," *Stratford (Ontario) Times*, April 28, 1965; Arnold Edinborough, "Faith Without Quibble," *Canadian Churchman*, May 1965, 5; E.S. Salmon, letter to the editor, *Canadian Churchman*, June 1965, 14; BCE 273-3, "'Save Families from United Church'," *Ottawa Citizen*, June 16, 1965.

⁹⁴ "The Battle of Words," *United Church Observer*, May 15, 1965, 6; "The Question Box," *United Church Observer*, July 1965, 18.

⁹⁵ Colin L. West, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, September 15, 1965, 6, 9.

⁹⁶ UCA, BCE 273-22, Ernest Marshall Howse, "It's Not New to Disbelieve in a Three-Person God," *Toronto Telegram*, November 21, 1964; E.M. Howse, Here's Howse, *United Church Observer*, December 15, 1965, 9; E.M. Howse, Here's Howse, *United Church Observer*, March 1, 1966, 9.

⁹⁷ For one debate within the church over Howse's remarks, see John B. McTavish, et al., "A Letter to the Moderator," *United Church Observer*, May 1, 1966, 2, and various letters to the editor, *United Church Observer*, June 1, 1966, 2. For an example of Howse's comments being linked with the orientation of the New Curriculum, see UCA, BCE 273-11, "Resurrection: Was It Physical or Spiritual? What the United Church Says on Vital Issue," *Hamilton Spectator*, April 24, 1965. For an example of an external evangelical critic characterizing Howse's statements as part of a general slide of the United Church into Unitarianism, see BCE 273-3, "'Save Families from United Church,'" *Ottawa Citizen*, June 16, 1965.

⁹⁸ "Let's discuss union with the evangelicals," editorial, *United Church Observer*, March 1, 1964, 10.

⁹⁹ Duncan Chalmers, "The Fundamentalists and the Sophisticates," *United Church Observer*, March 1, 1964, 12-13.

¹⁰⁰ "Don't Spare the Doubts," editorial, *United Church Observer*, October 1, 1964, 6. Original emphasis.

¹⁰¹ UCA, BCE 273-11, Warren Gerard, "Moderator Rejects Belief That Christ's Body Resurrected," *Globe and Mail*, April 22, 1965.

¹⁰² Goth was unusual in the United Church in linking evangelicalism with American conservatism as a major part of his critique of the former. J.R. Hord, secretary of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service, was critical of both evangelicalism and American foreign policy, and he combined these opinions in his opposition to Billy Graham (Kenneth Bagnell, "What's All This So-Called New Evangelism," *United Church Observer*, April 15, 1966, 16). But even the harsh criticism leveled against Billy Graham by chaplain Ben Smillie in 1965 focused almost entirely on strictly theological issues, aside from a brief suggestion that Graham should get more active in promoting the civil rights movement (Ben Smillie, "Let's Stop Backing Billy Graham," *United Church Observer*, August 1965, 17). Smillie's approach appears to have been the more typical one.

¹⁰³ George W. Goth, "Christians Have a Moral Obligation to be Intelligent," *United Church Observer*, November 1, 1964, 18-19, 36.

¹⁰⁴ Goth, "Christians Have a Moral Obligation to be Intelligent," 18-19.

¹⁰⁵ Goth, "Christians Have a Moral Obligation to be Intelligent," 19, 36.

¹⁰⁶ McLeod, *Religious Crisis*, 2, 99-100.

¹⁰⁷ UCA, CCF 1-7 "Memorial from the Hamilton Conference approved by the 19th General Council and referred to the Committee on Christian Faith." See

also CCF 1-10, N. Hillyer, “Revelation and the Authority of the Bible (Comment on the Memorial from Hamilton Conference),” [n/d].

¹⁰⁸ In particular, evangelicals have not agreed about the exact nature of the process by which God directed the biblical writers, nor have they agreed about whether that inspiration guaranteed the reliability of all of the statements of the Bible (a position usually called *inerrancy*), or only its teachings about faith and morals (excluding its teachings about history and science). For an example of such disagreements in the late twentieth century, see Mark Noll’s massive “partial list” of works debating these issues published by evangelicals between 1975 and 1982. Noll, “Evangelicals and the Study of the Bible,” in *Evangelicalism in Modern America*, ed. George Marsden (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), 115n39.

¹⁰⁹ Mark Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), 6, notes that “the evangelical community considers the Bible the very word of God,” and in addition, “most evangelicals emphasize that the Bible is the Word of God in a cognitive, propositional, factual sense.” It should be emphasized that the evangelical position described here is a *minimal* evangelical position: many evangelicals have historically gone further and affirmed the doctrine of *inerrancy* – the belief that the divine inspiration extends to all of the statements of Scripture and that therefore it is without error in everything it affirms, including in historical and scientific matters. For one of the most well known statements of this position see “The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 21, no. 4 (December 1978): 289-96.

¹¹⁰ There is strong evidence that many Canadian evangelicals inside and outside the United Church in this period regarded infallibility as an essential part of the Bible’s authority. The United Church Renewal Fellowship, an organization of evangelicals within the United Church formed in 1966, made biblical infallibility its central doctrinal tenet (see the discussion in chapter five). The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, an organization uniting many Canadian evangelical groups founded in 1964, had as its first doctrinal tenet, “The Holy Scriptures, as originally given by God, are divinely inspired, infallible, entirely trustworthy, and constitute the only supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.” John Stackhouse writes that one of the defining characteristics of evangelicalism in Canada has long been belief in an “utterly authoritative and infallible Bible.” (“The Emergence of a Fellowship: Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century,” *Church History* 60, no. 2 (June 1991): 249.)

¹¹¹ If one included as “evangelical” approaches that regarded Biblical teachings in matters of faith and morals as fallible, for example, there would be no difference in principle between “evangelical” and liberal approaches to the Bible and the qualifier “evangelical” would cease to be useful. In an attempt to clarify an evangelical understanding of Scripture, British evangelical thinker J.I. Packer made the closely reasoned case that evangelical approaches to the Bible rest on

presuppositions fundamentally different from the liberal and neo-orthodox approaches. See his *“Fundamentalism” and the Word of God*, 41-51.

¹¹² Most notably, several Committee members conflated an evangelical view of infallibility with “literalism” – the comparatively unusual belief that the Bible was devoid of symbolic or metaphorical modes of expression, such that every passage should be interpreted literally. Some examples of this identification appear below. See also the examples of the use of the term “literalism” in connection with the New Curriculum in chapter three.

¹¹³ UCA, CCF 1-10, D.D. Evans, “Modern Protestant Ideas of Revelation,” [1963], 1. UCA, Donald D. Evans biographical file, archives biographical form and attached curriculum vitae.

¹¹⁴ UCA, CCF 1-9, E.C. Blackman, “Draft Outline on the Authority of the Bible,” [1962], 15. UCA, Walkington, *United Church Ministers 1925-1980*, s.v. “Blackman, E. Cyril.”

¹¹⁵ UCA, CCF 1-11, D.M. Mathers, “The Development of Doctrine in the Church,” [n/d], 2. For more agreement on this point, see CCF 1-10, R.C. Chalmers, “Preliminary Statement (from a letter May 29, 1961),” 16; CCF 1-12, R.G. Nodwell, “The Authority of the Bible: Chapter I: Revelation and the Word of God (Initial Draft),” [1963], 4; CCF 1-12, R.G. Nodwell, “Report on First Section of Our Study of the Authority of the Bible,” (June 10, 1963), 2.

¹¹⁶ UCA, CCF 1-8, E.C. Blackman, “The Testimony of the Holy Spirit and the Word,” [1961], 1.

¹¹⁷ UCA, CCF 1-10, W.O. Fennell, “The Meaning of Revelation,” [1963], 6. UCA, William O. Fennell biographical file, curriculum vitae.

¹¹⁸ UCA, CCF 1-11, D.M. Mathers, “The Development of Doctrine in the Church,” [n/d], 2.

¹¹⁹ UCA, CCF 1-10, D.D. Evans, “Modern Protestant Ideas of Revelation,” [1963], 1.

¹²⁰ UCA, CCF 1-9, E.C. Blackman, “Draft Outline on the Authority of the Bible,” [1962], 37.

¹²¹ UCA, CCF 1-10, J.A. Davidson, “The Bible and Its Authority: Suggested Outline,” [1960], 1. UCA, J.A. Davidson biographical file, “Moderatorial nominee (1968) biographical sketch.”

¹²² UCA, CCF 1-8, E.C. Blackman, “The Testimony of the Holy Spirit and the Word,” [1961], 1.

¹²³ UCA, CCF 1-11, D.M. Mathers, “The Bible and its Authority: Questions and Answers,” [1965], 5, 7-10.

¹²⁴ UCA, CCF 1-10, W.O. Fennell, “The Meaning of Revelation,” [1963], 7.

¹²⁵ UCA, CCF 1-11, D.M. Mathers, “The Bible and its Authority: Questions and Answers,” [1965], 5.

¹²⁶ UCA, CCF 1-11, D.M. Mathers, “The Bible and its Authority: Questions and Answers,” [1965], 12.

¹²⁷ UCA, CCF 1-11, D.M. Mathers, “The Bible and its Authority: Questions and Answers,” [1965], 15.

¹²⁸ UCA, CCF 5-2, Minutes, December 6, 1965, 1-2.

¹²⁹ UCA, CCF 1-11, D.M. Mathers, “The Authority of the Bible,” [1966], 1.

¹³⁰ UCA, CCF 1-12, R.G. Nodwell, “Report on First Section of Our Study of the Authority of the Bible,” (June 10, 1963), 1-2; CCF 1-9, George Richardson, “Draft Outline on the Authority of the Bible: Section I – The Meaning of Revelation,” [n/d; between Nov 1962 and Jun 1963], 1.

¹³¹ UCA, CCF 1-9, R.C. Chalmers, “Comments on ‘Draft Outline of the Authority of the Bible’ by Professor E.C. Blackman,” [1962], 1-2; CCF 1-9, Pieter deJong, “Comments on the Manuscript of Professor E.C. Blackman ‘The Authority of the Bible’,” [1962], 2. UCA, Pieter deJong biographical file, archives biographical form.

¹³² For one member’s recognition that the Committee was divided between “Barthians” and those of other views, see UCA, CCF 1-9, Bruce McLeod, “Draft Outline on the Authority of the Bible by Professor E.C. Blackman: Comments on Section III by Bruce McLeod,” [1963], 1.

¹³³ UCA, CCF 6-3 Minutes, Apr. 18-19, 1966, 3.

¹³⁴ United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings*, 1966, “Revelation and Authority of the Bible,” 509-511.

¹³⁵ UCA, CCF 6-3 Minutes, Oct. 3, 1966, 1. CCF 6-3 Minutes, Nov. 14, 1966, 2. Examination of the minutes up to 11 March 1968 reveals no further discussion of the issue by the committee.

¹³⁶ United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings*, 1968, 311; UCA, CCF 6-3, Minutes, November 14, 1966, 1.

¹³⁷ The terms of reference referred to the classical creeds in general, but in practice the discussion of the Committee on Christian Faith focused almost entirely on the Apostles’ Creed, which was not only the one most commonly used but also the one proposed for the baptismal service.

¹³⁸ UCA, CCF 3-40, Hugh Rose, “The Place of the Classical Creeds in the Documents of the United Church,” [n/d; discussed by CCF, April 10, 1967.]

¹³⁹ UCA, CCF 6-3, Minutes, April 10, 1967, 1.

¹⁴⁰ United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings*, 1968, 313-314; UCA, CCF 3-40, Hugh Rose, “The Place of the Classical Creeds in the Documents of the United Church,” [n/d; discussed by CCF, April 10, 1967]; CCF 6-3, Minutes, April 10, 1967, 1; CCF 6-3, Minutes, February 13, 1967, 2.

¹⁴¹ “Don’t Make Us Recite the Apostles’ Creed,” *United Church Observer*, February 1, 1966, 10.

¹⁴² E. Gilmour Smith, Through Gothic Windows, *United Church Observer*, February 1, 1966, 38.

¹⁴³ C.G.D. Kilpatrick, “Archaisms in Religious Literature,” *United Church Observer*, March 1, 1966, 28.

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- ¹⁴⁵ UCA, CCF 6-3, Minutes, September 12, 1967, 1.
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- ¹⁴⁷ UCA, CCF 3-38, John Fullerton, "The Desirability of a New Creed," March 1967, 1-2.
- ¹⁴⁸ UCA, CCF 6-3, Minutes, December 12, 1966, 2. The words are those of the minutes reporting what Hord said, but since Hord was the secretary who recorded the minutes, they can be taken as an accurate representation of his point.
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CHAPTER 5

THE “NEW EVANGELISM” AND THE “NEW MORALITY,” 1962-1971

At the same time that the 1960s witnessed the emergence of a publicly non-evangelical theological identity for the United Church, the decade also saw the breakdown of the evangelical practices of evangelism and moral reform that had formed a prominent part of the church's identity since the 1930s. As was the case with the public emergence of non-evangelical theology, this change came about through a combination of long-term internal trends, medium-and-shorter-term international developments, and immediate catalysts. The long-term tensions that had developed between the modernist theological convictions of church leaders and their participation in evangelical practices, particularly in the case of evangelism, had already substantially weakened leaders' support for these practices by the end of the 1950s. In the medium term, the impact of new theological ideas from outside Canada, notably the ideas of Bonhoeffer, changed the thinking of some United Church leaders of the relationship between the church and the world. In the short term, these ideas were paired with other concerns in the popular books by Bishop Robinson and Pierre Berton to similar – but broader – effect. A number of other happenings, big and small, converged to sharpen the effects of these various developments in the United Church: the popular perception of a revolution in sexual mores, general political and social ferment, extensive activity by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association in Canada in the mid-1960s, and leadership changes at the Board of Evangelism and Social Service of the United Church in 1962-1964.¹

Together, these changes, long-term and short-term, inside and outside the church, Canadian and international, converged to produce a destabilization of the traditional practices of moral reform and evangelism. In earlier decades (as preceding chapters have shown) evangelism in the United Church typically meant large-scale campaigns, preaching, and much talk about securing decisions for Christ, or at least boosting church membership. In the 1960s, however, church leaders began to speak of a “new evangelism.” The new evangelism differed from the old in being more focused on local study groups and less focused on preaching and rallies, but more importantly, it replaced evangelistic preaching with listening to the world, jettisoned talk of conversion, and collapsed the meaning of the word “evangelism” itself into what had formerly been regarded as social action.

Moral reform changed nearly as drastically. Church leaders, especially on the Board of Evangelism and Social Service (BESS), had formerly conceived of the church as a “colony of heaven” with a mission to bring Canadian society in line with a set of fixed moral standards. These concepts, upon which the United Church had predicated its projects of moral reform in previous decades, fell into disfavour with prominent leaders in the 1960s. Hugh McLeod's recent study of the religious crisis of the 1960s in Western societies has pointed to a shift of attitudes among some church leaders in this period who began to sharply criticize the churches for what they saw as its many failings while simultaneously expressing their sympathy with “skeptics” outside the churches.² Although McLeod's study draws on a wide range of evidence from the United States, Western Europe, and Quebec, he has little to say about English Canadian

Protestantism. Nevertheless, this chapter argues that the same phenomenon was sharply visible in Canada as United Church leaders grew more negative in their assessment of the church and more positive in their assessment of the world. At the same time, the United Church was exposed to the “new morality”, which drew on the modern theory of situation ethics to argue that there were no fixed rules of morality other than the imperative to love others. In conjunction with currents of political and social radicalism in Western society, and particularly rapidly changing sexual mores, these changes paved the way for the United Church to liberalize its official positions on moral issues ranging from divorce to abortion, and even to lobby the federal government to follow suit.

In light of the breakdown of evangelical practices in the United Church, there was no longer any reason to continue to regard it as an evangelical denomination by 1970. Within one decade, and for the most part, within a few years between 1962 and 1966, the church’s leaders had displayed their non-evangelical beliefs in the New Curriculum and the New Creed, and now they had rejected evangelical practices as well. It is no surprise that in 1966, a small group of evangelicals within the United Church took the important step of formally organizing an evangelical voice within what could no longer be considered an evangelical denomination. This group, the United Church Renewal Fellowship, was organized in response to the departures from evangelism described in this and the preceding chapters. The first cries of the Fellowship were also the death knell of the evangelical identity of the United Church. Henceforth, the United Church was a clearly liberal denomination with a defined evangelical minority.

Currents of Change

It is not necessary here to reiterate in detail the growing tensions that characterized the late stages of the old paradigm that combined non-evangelical beliefs with evangelical practices.³ In short, church leaders such as William G. Berry, the associate secretary of the BESS in the 1950s, lacked the evangelical theology of conversion that undergirded the evangelism practiced by evangelical churches. Unlike evangelicals, who thought of evangelism as a way to encourage conversions that reconciled individual sinners to God, renovated their hearts, and determined their eternal destiny, United Church leaders did not think in such “otherworldly” terms. Instead, since the 1930s church leaders had conceived of evangelistic campaigns (such as the campaign for the Evangelization of Canadian Life, the Crusade for Christ and His Kingdom, and the National Evangelistic Mission) as ways to tap into the broadly evangelical sympathies of laypeople, strengthen religious commitment, and bring in members, with the ultimate goal of stimulating decidedly “this-worldly” moral and social transformation.⁴ To these leaders, evangelism was only useful insofar as it stimulated moral and social change; anything else they deemed ineffectual “pietism.” Over time, given this outlook, the emphasis on individual conversion grew fainter and the emphasis on social conversion grew stronger. By the late 1950s, the tension between the

traditional practice of evangelism and the expectations of church leaders were intense, and leaders such as Berry were questioning the value of personal evangelism altogether.

Alongside this long-term trend the changes in Protestant theology described in the previous chapter stimulated a revolution in the self-understanding of the church. Bonhoeffer spoke of a non-religious Christianity that rejected the idea of faith as something belonging to a religious compartment of life, and eschewed traditional religious language. With a little interpretation, these ideas lent themselves to a critique of traditional evangelism, especially for those already inclined to suspect it of fostering a private religion devoid of social concern. Bonhoeffer's reimagining of the church as a servant of the world also undercut the ideal held by United Church leaders of the church as a colony of heaven. Harvey Cox's "secular Christianity" took these ideas further by proposing the dissolving of the church into the secular world and identifying the kingdom of God with the emerging secular civilization. None of these ideas had much in common with the older models of evangelism, which sought to convert members of the world to bring them into the fellowship of the church, or of moral reform, which sought to exercise a heavenly influence by conforming the secular society to Christian values. But as seen above, Bonhoeffer and Cox's ideas won a hearing, and a following, among United Church leaders.

In this situation John Robinson's *Honest to God* and Pierre Berton's *Comfortable Pew* were like flames to dry tinder. The strictly theological impact of these books has already been seen, but they also exerted a substantial influence on the understanding of the church's mission in society. *Honest to God* was the more theoretical of the two books, but it did have important practical implications. First of all, Bishop Robinson did his part to unsettle the idea of the church as a "colony of heaven." Robinson counseled the church to find its meaning in the workings of the secular world. Following Bonhoeffer, he argued that the church suffered from the "religious perversion" of seeking God by temporarily withdrawing from the world into a sacred space of worship and private devotion. Instead, said Robinson, the church needed to find God in "the common," in the midst of ordinary life in the secular world.⁵ In a related vein, Robinson wrote that when he saw debates between a Christian and a "humanist," his usual inclination was to side with the humanist, because the Christian was tied to an outmoded religious "orthodoxy."⁶ This general belief that the outside world was in some respect as good as or better than the church can for convenience be termed "externalism." In various forms externalism was a characteristic feature of the 1960s, and it reappears more than once in the following analysis. Suffice it to say that externalism entailed skepticism about the church-as-colony-of-heaven approach.

The second important contribution of *Honest to God* was in its promotion of what Robinson called "the new morality." Robinson pointed out that by doing away with the traditional idea of God (as he had attempted to do) one also did away with the traditional idea of morality. Only those who believed in a "God out there" (in Robinson's terminology) had any reason to believe in a set of universal

moral absolutes. The old morality saw God as a giver of unchanging moral laws, with the “classic mythological statement” of this view being the Biblical account of Moses receiving the stone tablets from God on Mount Sinai. But according to Robinson, the idea of God as lawgiver was tied to an outdated “supranaturalist ethic.” Robinson advanced two arguments against the traditional view. First, there was a moral “revolution” already underway in modern society whether the church liked it or not. If the churches opposed this revolution by holding on to the traditional morality, they ran the risk of becoming obsolete and being rejected by society along with that morality. Their views would only have currency with a “diminishing religious remnant.”⁷ Second, Robinson argued that Jesus did not teach the old morality: “The moral precepts of Jesus are not intended to be understood legalistically, as prescribing what all Christians must do, whatever the circumstances, and pronouncing certain courses of action universally right and others universally wrong.” Instead, wrote Robinson, Jesus’s ethical commands were “illustrations” or “parables” indicating possible applications of love in given situations and should not be taken “either as literal injunctions for any situation or as universal principles for every situation.”⁸ In short, there were no hard-and-fast rules of Christian morality.

In place of the old, absolute, law-based morality, Robinson proposed a new morality in which there would be no “universal norm,” only a commitment to “unconditional love” which could be flexibly applied in any given situation.⁹ Here Robinson drew on Tillich, but also on the work of American philosopher Joseph Fletcher, the pioneer of “situation ethics” (or situational ethics).¹⁰ In Robinson’s explanation, the new morality meant that “there can for the Christian be no ‘packaged’ moral judgments – for persons are more important even than ‘standards’.” In short, Robinson stated in a phrase of far-reaching significance, “Nothing can of itself always be labeled as ‘wrong’.” In practical terms, he explained, this meant that things like divorce or premarital sex could not be called “wrong or sinful in themselves.” They might be wrong in nearly all situations, but there could be exceptions, since the only fixed principle was that of love.¹¹ Robinson’s analysis had wide-ranging implications for the United Church’s positions on moral reform. Any moral reform program based on fixed moral principles like “adultery is wrong” or “abortion is wrong”, according to the new morality, lacked a Christian basis.

Berton’s *Comfortable Pew* promoted similar positions, although Berton’s concern was much less with theology and more with the social role he wanted the churches to play. Berton believed that the churches had fallen short of the “revolutionary” standard of early Christianity by becoming defenders of the social status quo; instead, the churches “ought to be making front-page headlines regularly by advocating what is absolutely counter to the general thrust of society.”¹² By no means did Berton simply want the church to ramp up its traditional moral reform efforts. He did want the church to take a more active role in transforming society, and so, in a limited sense, to act as a colony of heaven, but the key difference was that for Berton this meant adopting selected political

causes already dear to certain activist groups in the secular society. So far, the church had failed by lagging behind these activists:

In the great issues of our time, the voice of the Church, when it has been heard at all, has been weak, tardy, equivocal, and irrelevant. In those basic conflicts, which ought to be tormenting every Christian conscience – questions of war and peace, of racial brotherhood, of justice versus revenge, to name three – the Church has trailed far behind the atheists, the agnostics, the free thinkers, the journalists, the scientists, the social workers, and even, on occasion, the politicians. In other areas, the Church has simply stood aloof. It has for instance, virtually ignored the whole contemporary question of business morals, the tensions within industry and labour, the sexual revolution that has changed the attitudes of the Western world.¹³

In short, Berton had a list of favoured causes which he faulted the church for not supporting earlier or more enthusiastically. Here, like Robinson, Berton held to a kind of externalism in which those outside the church were consistently “ahead” of those inside the church in their thinking.

In particular, Berton sympathized with a generally left-leaning stream of political dissent that had been growing in Canada, as elsewhere in the West, since the early 1960s. The peace movement, for example, and the associated questioning of Canada’s role in the Cold War as an ally of the United States and the push for nuclear disarmament, had been gaining strength in Canada even before they were swelled by opposition to the Vietnam War.¹⁴ Berton clearly shared these concerns. He believed that the concept of a “just war” was a travesty of Christianity, and so he bemoaned the churches’ support for military action, not only in the First World War, but also in the Second World War and the Cold War. He deplored the fact that churchgoers were more likely than non-churchgoers to support the existence of nuclear weapons, and regarded the reluctance of the major Protestant churches to call for complete unilateral nuclear disarmament by the West as a moral failure of the first order. He singled out J.R. Mutchmor, former secretary of the United Church’s BESS, for particular criticism because he had sanctioned Canadian use of nuclear weapons under NATO. Thinking no doubt of the peace movement, Berton concluded that those outside the church had been more “Christian” in their attitudes towards war than those inside the church. Referring specifically to nuclear weapons, Berton wrote, “In this case, as in so many others, the atheists, agnostics, Unitarians, socialists, and scientists were all on record before the major organized Christian community.” His conclusion was that “the Church must get with the world, or it will surely perish.”¹⁵ He made similar points about the churches’ tardy involvement with the struggle for racial equality in the United States, and their lack of criticism of capitalist business practices, here too echoing other aspects of the growing political dissent on the left. About criticism of capitalism, for example, he wrote, “the journalists and the

trade unions have been well ahead of the major Protestant Churches in attempting to outline a course of conduct based on the Christian heritage. They have been perceptive where the Church has been myopic, bold where the Church has been timid, specific where the Church has been vague.”¹⁶

For all his desire to see the churches take a larger role in society along reformist lines, however, Berton did not want to see the churches ramp up their moral reform efforts. Here Berton seized on the new morality as a battering ram against the traditional moral positions of the United Church and churches like it. Echoing Robinson, he asked, rhetorically, “Can Christian morality be neatly tied up in the form of pre-packaged judgments? Can a code of absolutes, in which certain things are judged always to be wrong, truly form the basis of a Christian morality? Was this Christ’s intent? Did he really seek a morality in which inflexible rules of conduct over-rode all compassion for individual people, in which immutable regulations ran roughshod over human needs? ... Should the emphasis not be on love rather than on regulations?”¹⁷

Berton applied this new flexible approach exclusively in the realm of sexual morality and related issues (his approach was rather less flexible when it came to nuclear war or racism, for example). According to Berton, the old absolute prohibitions against premarital sex, divorce, abortion and the like were obsolete on two counts. First, as absolute moral rules, they were not compatible with the new morality. Second, they flew in the face of the “sexual revolution” that had already brought a new sexual permissiveness to be “accepted at all social and educational levels.” In the face of such developments, the church could not afford to maintain its “inflexible” position that “sex outside the marriage bed is a sin.” (Beneath such a position, Berton suspected, was a belief that “sex, even in the marital state, is slightly ugly, dirty, and probably sinful,” although he admitted that this was “scarcely the present view of any Christian church.”) Finally, he believed that the churches were dragging their feet in this area as they had with respect to other social issues. Sooner or later, he wrote, the Catholic church would accept birth control just as the Anglicans had eventually done. Similarly, the churches’ blanket condemnation of abortion, which they then saw as “a grave sin, akin to murder,” could not be upheld when they asked themselves whether “deformed, defective, crippled, or unwanted children ... shall be brought into the world at all.” Soon, he predicted (accurately, in the case of the United Church) the churches would be at the forefront of efforts to liberalize abortion laws.¹⁸ Clearly, then, Berton’s desire for increased social action by the churches did not mean that he hoped for a resurgence of traditional moral reform activity.

Many of the positive and even enthusiastic reactions of United Church leaders to both *Honest to God* and *Comfortable Pew* were presented in the previous chapter. Berton’s push for greater social activism, specifically, found favourable comment from some in the church. Those who disagreed with Berton’s comments on the social role of the church tended not to disagree with his prescription that the church take up social activism, but rather they protested that the church was already moving in this direction.¹⁹ At least one minister, W.G.

Onions of Oxford United Church, wrote that he had been trying to implement a moral approach like Berton's for years, and specifically welcomed Berton's "positive approach to sexual morality."²⁰ Imitation, however, was the sincerest form of flattery: in an apparent attempt to show they were as forward-thinking as the Anglicans, the BESS quickly commissioned their own book of outsiders criticizing the church (*Why the Sea Is Boiling Hot*, 1965). Complete with an article in which Berton reprised the arguments of *Comfortable Pew*, this collection focused on redefining the mission of the church in line with the criticisms of Berton and others who shared his basic approach.²¹ A significant element within the United Church, therefore, welcomed not only the theological ideas of Robinson and Berton, but also the implications of those ideas for the mission of the church in the world.²²

Alongside the impact of long-term developments, new theological currents, and the popular books by Robinson and Berton, one of the important factors in reorienting the United Church's practices in the 1960s was a change in the leadership of the BESS. William G. Berry, associate secretary of the BESS and former director of the National Evangelistic Mission, stepped down from the Board in August 1962 at the age of 60, leaving the busy travelling life of a BESS official for pastoral ministry at St. Paul's-Avenue Road United Church in Toronto. As was seen in chapter two, Berry had been a major figure in the Board's programs of evangelism and moral reform, so his departure was a significant milestone. A month later, the long-time secretary of the BESS, J.R. Mutchmor, was elected moderator of the church in 1962. The moderatorship capped his career as one of the foremost spokespersons of the United Church, and he retired from the BESS in June 1963 at the age of 71.²³ More even than Berry, Mutchmor had personified the old-paradigm approach of the BESS, so his departure was another important milestone. Within one year, the Board had lost its two most prominent leaders of the preceding decade.

Mutchmor was replaced as secretary of the BESS by a relatively unknown minister from Toronto, J.R. Hord.²⁴ Other personnel changes ensued in the next two years: Homer Lane, an associate secretary of the BESS who had been passed over for the job, left the Board, while sociologist Stewart Crysdale and minister Gordon K. Stewart joined as assistant secretaries. Hord only led the Board for five years, since he died suddenly of a heart attack in March 1968 at only 49 years of age, but his tenure at the BESS was a time of rapid change and a quick abandonment of the legacy of Mutchmor and Berry.²⁵ Indeed, Hord once quipped that the only thing he had in common with Mutchmor was their initials, "J.R."²⁶ While this was certainly an overstatement, Hord did preside over the dismantling of those evangelical practices of evangelism and moral reform that Mutchmor had championed.

While Mutchmor had been known for his opposition to gambling, alcohol, and sexual laxity, Hord became known primarily for his controversial political views, which some described as "left-wing, socialist opinions." Notably, Hord stirred controversy by opposing Canadian acquiescence in American foreign

policy (calling Prime Minister Lester Pearson “a puppy dog on LBJ’s leash”), setting up a fund to help American draft dodgers coming to Canada, and calling for higher taxes on corporations. Perhaps even more than Berton, Hord was sympathetic to the general political and social dissent of the 1960s, particularly that emanating from youth radicalism and the New Left.²⁷ Hord’s undelivered final address, written before his career was cut short by his early death, emphasized his admiration for the “hippie” movement and “the student radicals on the New Left.”²⁸ During his tenure, traditional emphases on evangelism and moral reform were replaced by a radical social and political program. This was evident in his listing of the major priorities of the BESS in 1965, for example, which did not mention evangelism, but did include his aim to “destroy” the “sacred cows” of “competition and the profit motive,” and bring about a government-guaranteed minimum standard of living, a universal right to university education, worker representation in industrial management, and a “war on poverty.”²⁹

At the same time, Hord and the BESS departed from the traditional positions on sex, divorce, and abortion. *United Church Observer* reporter Kenneth Bagnell wrote that once the BESS had “seemed, in the public mind at least, to be a bastion against the inroads of the secular world in matters of personal morality.” Under Hord’s leadership, however, the BESS appeared “to be trying to lead in re-interpretings [*sic*] of the church’s role in the changing world.” Now, “instead of moralizing on liquor consumption and working mothers,” the BESS was making “headlines with generally liberal positions on Viet Nam, abortion, divorce reform, medicare and other issues which reflect the changing emphasis coming over the entire church.”³⁰ In short, the personnel changes of 1962-1964 meant that the BESS that commissioned *Why the Sea Is Boiling Hot* was not the same BESS that had promoted evangelism and moral reform in the 1950s.

This newly altered BESS, and some other leaders in the United Church, heartily embraced Robinson and Berton’s views of the church’s role in society. The Board’s views on the “new evangelism” and the “new morality” are dealt with at appropriate points below. Here it is sufficient to note that the Board tended to agree with the externalism and critical attitude towards the church found in Robinson and Berton. Externalism, the view that there was as much or more good to be found outside the church than within it, was at odds with the older view of the church as a colony of heaven, but it resonated with the new BESS. Hord wrote that it was “always disastrous when the Church believes that it is a holy place, made up of holier-than-thou people, that it is in some way separate from, and better than, the world.”³¹ Ben Smillie, a United Church chaplain writing for the 1965 annual report of the BESS, simply stated that “We must stop looking at our church people as the good guys and the rest as bad.”³² Associate secretary of the Board Gordon K. Stewart observed that God might be at work precisely through those people who rejected or were antagonistic towards the church.³³ Such views were echoed in a *United Church Observer* editorial feature that said of some of

church's harshest non-Christian critics, "They may in their own way be serving the cause of Christ in our time better than we who profess devotion to it."³⁴

This externalism dovetailed naturally with the increasingly critical attitude BESS officials themselves had towards the church. Allen Spraggett, religion editor for the *Toronto Daily Star*, described the United Church as the church that more than any other had "an enormous capacity for self-criticism." "In no other church," he wrote, could one find "so many 'angry young men' who are openly impatient with the church's faults – its smug self-sufficiency, its intellectual obscurantism, its standpatism."³⁵ Such self-criticism could be seen in *Why the Sea Is Boiling Hot*, a publication of the BESS. The committee behind the book intentionally avoided disputing the criticisms leveled against the church by the various writers, which they had, after all, invited them to make.³⁶ Indeed, the harshest one-line criticisms were splashed across the back cover as a selling point. The concluding commentary chapters of the book, written by the BESS committee, did not disagree with any of the criticisms raised by the contributors, but echoed them and called for action to follow the implied recommendations. In some instances the committee went farther than the critics themselves in calling for change in the church.³⁷

Together, five currents of change combined to produce a reorientation of the United Church's mission in society in the 1960s. The slowly developing tensions between non-evangelical theology and evangelical practices reached the breaking point in that decade. The new liberalism coming out of Europe and the United States found listening ears among United Church leaders. Popular and critical books by John Robinson and Pierre Berton brought these ideas, together with the "new morality" and their own criticisms, more immediately to the attention of the United Church in 1962 and 1965. Finally, the retirement of the past giants of the BESS in 1962 and 1963 and the emergence of new, radical leaders, especially J.R. Hord, created a practical opening for change in the direction of the church's mission and promotion of the new ideas. In combination, these currents of change led to the rapid demise of the evangelical practices of evangelism and moral reform in the United Church in the 1960s. It is to this demise that this chapter now turns.

The New Evangelism

In March 1965, J.W. Burbidge, a young United Church minister from Port Credit, Ontario wrote a lengthy letter to the *United Church Observer* in which he bluntly stated, "It is time that the Church stopped all this nonsense about evangelism." The "stress on evangelism" was "creating pious bigots," and evangelism itself, he wrote, was nothing more than "trying to manipulate people into believing." According to Burbidge, Jesus did not evangelize (indeed, he "stood up and challenged the pious, evangelizing, religious men of his day"), so neither should Christians. Instead, being a Christian meant "not evangelizing the

world, but rather participating in the suffering of God in the world” by rubbing shoulders with “crooked businessmen” and slum dwellers.³⁸

Not many United Church ministers or leaders would have gone as far as Burbidge in calling for the outright end of evangelism. Talk about evangelism was common in the pages of the *Observer* and the pronouncements of the BESS. Burbidge’s discontent with what he saw as the failings of evangelism, however, was widespread among United Church leaders in the 1960s. This could be seen in the many references in the *Observer* and the reports of the BESS to a “new evangelism.”³⁹ This new evangelism was embodied in the Board’s “National Project of Evangelism and Social Action” (NPESA) of the mid-1960s, as well as other activities of the Board. Unlike previous projects of evangelism, the NPESA did not use mass evangelism through preaching rallies or seek decisions for Christ. Indeed, it was not directed at converting those outside the church at all. Rather, its primary goal was to introduce the new evangelism to the United Church and build support for its new approach to the world.

This new evangelism, as expressed in the NPESA and other activities of the BESS, had four major characteristics that differed from the more evangelical approach of the old evangelism. First, it rested on a new church-world relationship. The older approach had taken for granted a sharp distinction between church and world; the essence of evangelism was the church preaching the gospel in order to bring people from the world into the church. According to J.R. Hord, in contrast, one of the aims of the NPESA was to erase the boundaries between the church and the world, to recast the church as part of the world.⁴⁰ Here the BESS followed the calls of Bonhoeffer, Cox, and Robinson for a non-religious, outward-looking Christianity that would lose itself in the secular world. Hord questioned what he saw as the old view, which expected clergy “to preach on behalf of a divine revelation given once-and-for-all to the saints,” with the result that “ministers tend to be dogmatic, to speak before we listen, to give authoritarian answers without knowing the full implications of the questions.”⁴¹ This attitude, of course, flew in the face of the externalism discussed above, which located much goodness in the outside world while focusing its criticism on the failings of the church. Gary Miedema’s masterful description of the Christian Pavilion designed by the mainline churches for Expo ’67, and the theological approaches behind it, poignantly illustrates the reluctance of these churches to forcefully preach an authoritative (and unambiguously Christian) gospel to “modern man.”⁴² Even more, following the attitudes of the new theologians and their popularizers, the new evangelism wanted the church to listen to the world rather than preach to it. Indeed, the BESS titled its annual report for 1965 “Listen to the World.” The small local study groups called for by the BESS as a primary vehicle for the new evangelism were not supposed to be groups of Christians discussing how they would evangelize the world, but rather were ideally supposed to include “agnostics” and “church critics” so that the Christians could listen to them.⁴³ This, too, was the goal of *Why the Sea Is Boiling Hot*. The BESS committee that wrote the last chapters of the book said that “the demand is made again and again by the

Church's critics that she must involve herself in the vital issues of the day." Again, it wrote, "Today, the whole world is watching the Christians to see whether they will use their power to become a relevant force in modern society or shy away from the challenge and become anachronistic." The church's options were to "take up the challenge or end with nothing."⁴⁴ In short, the church's job was to set its agenda based on what was "relevant" in the eyes of its critics. The first characteristic of the new evangelism, then, was a model in which the church learned from the world rather than the other way around.

Logically following from this, the second characteristic of the new evangelism was an emphasis on changing attitudes *within* the church. Hord wrote that one of the purposes of the NPESA was to promote the theology of Bonhoeffer, Robinson, and other liberal and radical thinkers more widely in the United Church.⁴⁵ One of the foremost concerns of the BESS was to make sure the church embraced the "prophetic boldness" of the new approach despite it being easier "to become die-hards proclaiming a gospel no longer relevant, suspicious of science, patient with outdated social evil and piously and exclusively other-worldly."⁴⁶ The obvious target of such concerns was an evangelical type of evangelism, which the BESS was anxious to avoid. *Why the Sea Is Boiling Hot* observed that much of the thinking of the United Church was "progressive, exciting, thought provoking and inspiring as well as soundly Christian," but warned, "At the same time, we have our bigots, ultra-conservatives and turners of the blind eye."⁴⁷ To counteract the attitudes of such "ultra-conservatives" and those who yearned for an "other-worldly" faith, and instill the preferred attitudes of the new evangelism, a major thrust of the NPESA was an effort to re-educate the people of the United Church. To this end, local church study groups were supposed to study *Why the Sea Is Boiling Hot* with a view towards embracing the ideas of the critics of the church and thus giving rise to "a New Evangelism designed to make firm the Church's brief and inadequate contacts with reality."⁴⁸ Similarly, the BESS commissioned a play called *Coffee House* for broadcast on national television. Its purpose, according to Hord, was "to jolt easy-going Christians out of their busy in-church preoccupation into meaningful service in the community."⁴⁹ Such efforts were directed not at converting the world, but at converting the church.

Another prong of this re-education strategy was a sociological study by assistant secretary of the BESS, Stewart Crysdale, *The Changing Church in Canada* (1965).⁵⁰ Like *Why the Sea Is Boiling Hot*, it was intended for study by local church groups as part of the NPESA.⁵¹ A full analysis of this complex study is not feasible here, but it may be briefly described. The book factually presented selected beliefs and attitudes of United Church people, based on what was intended to be a representative national survey of nearly 2000 persons. The message of the book, stated clearly in some places and existing as a subtext throughout, was that Canadian society was changing "radically" due to the effects of "industrialization" and "urbanization." Crysdale wrote that the church had to "interpret the Gospel in terms that are meaningful and helpful to people in contemporary society or become a relic of the past," and in the Canadian context,

contemporary society meant “urbanized society.” Furthermore, those people who were “highly urbanized” were more likely to “favour liberal theology” while those who were not tended to be “traditional in their beliefs.” Since “urbanism” (by which Crysdale meant a certain kind of lifestyle rather than residence in a city)⁵² was spreading, so too would liberal views. Even now, said Crysdale, traditional beliefs were the province of the old while the young were embracing liberalism. The implication was that liberalizing the church was a prerequisite for its survival. Finally, the book suggested that churches should see their mission as directed to “the needs of the community outside the church,” which Crysdale portrayed largely in terms of social service.⁵³ Together with *Why the Sea Is Boiling Hot* and the play *Coffee House*, then, *The Changing Church in Canada* was part of the second aspect of the new evangelism, which was the re-education of the church.

The third distinct characteristic of the new evangelism was its avoidance of the older type of evangelism in general and evangelical conversionism in particular. *Why the Sea Is Boiling Hot* allowed that mass evangelism could be used in the twentieth century, but noted that it had really been suited for “frontier life and the restless populations of the 19th Century.”⁵⁴ Robert S. Christie, another associate secretary of the BESS, similarly argued that the type of evangelism that focused on the “moment of decision” was particularly suited to eighteenth and nineteenth-century conditions that no longer existed. Indeed, he argued, “to call people to ‘accept Christ as Saviour’ today without helping them to relate their present decisions to the fulfillment of His ongoing purpose in our mid-twentieth century secular society is, in fact, one of the grave dangers for the church.” Modern evangelism meant that “the follower of Christ must understand the nature of his Christian discipleship in relation to the race revolution, the struggle for civil rights and economic justice, health and welfare needs, removal of prejudice, [and] elimination of corruption in private and public life.” If it did not focus on such concerns, evangelism became “an escape from reality.”⁵⁵

Underlying some of this eschewal of traditional evangelism was the almost complete eclipse of belief in conversion. To be sure, United Church leaders of earlier decades had already emptied conversion of most of its evangelical theological content, but they had continued to use the concept as a key part of evangelism. The new evangelists of the BESS, on the other hand, no longer talked about “decisions for Christ” or even the more amorphous “commitment to Christ.” In one of Allen Spraggett’s articles comparing Christian beliefs, the *Toronto Daily Star* writer interviewed Hord as a “liberal Protestant” for his views on salvation. For Hord, salvation meant “health of mind, body and soul.” He did say that “the United Church believes in conversion – a radical turning around from self to God,” that could be called “being born again.” Yet the rest of his comments tore down the evangelical view. He insisted that conversion was normally not “sudden” but “gradual,” and he even appeared to caution against sudden conversions because “troubled people may be converted to almost anything – to Hitler as well as Christ.” Instead, Hord said, “the normal Christian experience is a process of growth.” In addition, Hord implied that everyone,

converted or not, already had forgiveness from God as a present reality and lacked only awareness of that reality.⁵⁶

Similarly, R.B. Bater, a professor at St. Andrew's College in Saskatoon and member of the BESS, destabilized the evangelical doctrine of conversion on several fronts. First, he attacked it in partially caricatured form: "The notion that salvation takes place as a private transaction between God and my soul, causing me to become disaffected with this world (God's creation), and that what I do thereafter belongs not to the order of redemption but in the category of good works must be recognized for the tragic distortion of Christian faith that it is. It is closer to the ancient mystery religions and to Gnosticism than to Christianity and has the same religious appeal." He also disagreed with the idea that conversion was a single life-changing event; rather, even the Christian had a "daily need of conversion." Finally, wrote Bater, although one could not presume that all "pagans" or "humanists" were really believers, the New Testament taught that "often the 'orthodox' turns out to be a non-believer, and the humanist a Christ man."⁵⁷ He thus implied that conversion was unnecessary for at least some of those outside the church.

When asked about the meaning of the gospel in an interview with the *United Church Observer's* Kenneth Bagnell, BESS executives including Hord and associate secretary Gordon K. Stewart were unable to sum it up in, as Stewart said, "a nice little set of words." Neither mentioned conversion as part of the gospel.⁵⁸ When asked, "Is your goal to convert the world or to inspire it? To serve people or to win them?" Stewart answered, "It's to love and to testify to these people that God may convert." Pressed further on the issue by Bagnell, Stewart simply said Christians could act in the hope that "God will convert, but without the knowledge of how God may go about it." Then he questioned whether it was necessary to convert non-Christians to Christianity: "Let us not even assume that the Almighty necessarily accomplishes his will by bringing a person within the context of what we choose to label the Christian Church. I'm quite sure the Almighty was at work in Mahatma Gandhi's rejection of the Christian Church on the grounds of its racial prejudice."⁵⁹

This last point was echoed by a general trend away from belief in the necessity of conversion for non-Christians. A harbinger of this trend was the extension of "interdenominational" cooperation to non-Christian groups.⁶⁰ Ben Smillie, writing in the 1965 annual report of the BESS, suggested that non-Christians already had a "saving relationship to Christ"; they were just not conscious of it.⁶¹ By 1971, the *Observer* was saying the same thing, at least for some non-Christians. The editor wrote that the ecumenical movement was being extended to non-Christians, and suggested that while Christ might be "the Way" "for us", "God may speak to others of his children in his own way." He asked, "Is it possible that the Christian mission may be to bring conversion to some and for others, an awakening to the Truth they already have?"⁶² Thus, during the course of the 1960s, the last vestiges of an evangelical doctrine of conversion were abandoned by several prominent voices in the United Church. This final rejection

of conversionism and traditional evangelism in general was the third feature of the new evangelism.

The fourth and final feature of the new evangelism was the collapse of the concept of “evangelism” into what had previously been known as “social service” or “social action.” The new evangelism’s emphasis on social action as opposed to evangelism in the conventional sense has already been seen in the efforts of the BESS to re-educate the church. The very name of the National Project of Evangelism and Social Action also hinted at a change in emphasis from campaigns like the National Evangelistic Mission of the 1950s. Going beyond this, however, when some United Church leaders of the 1960s used the word “evangelism,” they actually meant “social action.” In doing this they were simply taking the developments of earlier decades, seen in the statements of leaders like William Berry in the 1950s, to their final conclusion. *Why the Sea Is Boiling Hot* provided some of the clearest examples of this development. In the terminology of the book, examples of “evangelism” could include setting up “community assistance programmes,” hosting “teen clubs,” providing counseling services, and establishing hostels for alcoholics.⁶³ All of these things would have been called “social service” in previous decades. Similarly, when the book urged local churches to establish projects in keeping with the “new evangelism,” the examples it gave were rounding up teenagers from malls to come to churches for “counseling and fellowship,” helping “divorced persons adjust to their new status in life,” and mortgaging church buildings to help boost the church’s central fund – none of which fit the understanding of evangelism common in the United Church before the 1960s.⁶⁴

Leaders of the BESS explained the thinking behind this redefinition. Hord, for example, said that the “older evangelism [had] emphasized faith as a private transaction between the human soul and God which resulted in personal victory over sin, despair and death.” But, he warned, “this traditional approach could easily become the ally of political obscurantism and social oppression.” The new “evangelism” had to be targeted instead at addressing the “secular hopes” of humanity, which meant doing things like eliminating the imbalance of wealth between nations.⁶⁵ Stewart explained that the fundamental purpose of evangelism was to “deal with the real problems of people,” by which he meant that the “gospel” had to be applied to “such things as the welfare state, better housing, [and] medicare.” Similarly, Hord wrote that one definition of evangelism was “to take hope to people,” which could mean “better housing” or “economic opportunity.”⁶⁶ In the new evangelism of the 1960s, the “social service” of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service had finally eclipsed its “evangelism.”

Some of the features of the new evangelism, such as the disappearance of conversion and the collapse of evangelism into social action, were simply the more advanced stages of developments that had already been visible in previous decades, particularly the 1950s. Other features, such as the reorientation of the relationship between the church and the world, were distinctly new. When combined, however, these features amounted to an “evangelism” that differed

sharply from the type of evangelism seen, with a high degree of consistency, in the National Evangelistic Mission of the 1950s, the Crusade for Christ and His Kingdom of the 1940s, and the campaign of the Joint Committee on the Evangelization of Canadian Life in the 1930s. While the evangelism practiced by the BESS in these decades, for the most part, could be accurately characterized as evangelical, the new evangelism of the 1960s could not.

Deciding What to Do with Billy Graham

The new evangelism amounted to the end of the official support of the evangelical practice of evangelism by the leaders of the United Church. At the same time, many of these leaders underscored their rejection of evangelical practice by rejecting the American evangelist Billy Graham. In many ways, support for Graham can be considered an indicator of support for the evangelical practice of evangelism. Graham's evangelistic "crusades," with their mass rallies, preaching, and focus on decisions for Christ, were a modern continuation of the tradition of evangelical revivalism that reached back into the eighteenth century and played such a large role in the history of the United Church and its antecedents. Although Graham was an American and a Baptist, his methods were popular in Canada, and he would typically not plan a crusade in a city unless there was broad interdenominational support. Indeed, the controversy that erupted in the United Church in the 1960s about whether or not to support Billy Graham was not about his nationality or his denomination, but rather about his evangelical theology and approach to evangelism, and more broadly, the place of evangelicalism in the United Church. The controversy revealed serious divisions within the leadership of the United Church. On the one side were many laypeople, and some mostly older leaders who still believed in the traditional practice of evangelism even though they themselves were not evangelicals. On the other side were mostly younger leaders, such as the proponents of the new evangelism who dominated the BESS, and a number of outspoken liberals.

Chapter two documented the support that Billy Graham received from many United Church ministers in the mid-1950s, despite the misgivings some had about his evangelical theology. In the 1960s, however, the question of whether to support Graham was more hotly contested. In 1963 the BESS decided that it would not officially endorse an anticipated Graham crusade in Canada, although individual conferences or presbyteries of the church were free to do so. This decision did not in itself differ from the stance the Board had taken in the 1950s, and although the chair of the committee that had made the decision said, "We do not feel we can identify ourselves with him officially," he also said, "We wish Graham well in his efforts," and "we recognize the worth of his cause." At the same time, however, it was reported in the press that liberal Board member Frank Morgan had moved a "motion of non-cooperation" with Graham, and that although Morgan had withdrawn the motion, he had said that "Billy's theology is 100 years out of date." Other members of the BESS said that Morgan probably

represented a minority viewpoint in the church, but there was still no official support for Graham.⁶⁷ Meanwhile, the Board's decision and Morgan's comments were spread across the country by a Canadian Press article that appeared in many newspapers, creating an impression that the United Church was opposed to Billy Graham.⁶⁸

Nevertheless, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association's (BGEA) Canadian evangelist, Leighton Ford, wrote to Graham expressing his belief that the decision of the BESS had been "misinterpreted" by the press, and in reality was based more on scheduling considerations than anything else. He thought there was still "strong support" from many United Church leaders for BGEA activity.⁶⁹ This view was borne out by the decision of the Maritime Conference of the United Church later that year to endorse a BGEA crusade in Atlantic Canada planned for 1964. This decision was reported along with comments from the moderator, J.R. Mutchmor, saying "We have had very happy relations with the Billy Graham Organization ... in every case where we have co-operated with them."⁷⁰

It seems that Mutchmor, who stepped down from his post at the helm of the BESS in 1963, made numerous efforts to affirm his support for Graham, perhaps in an attempt to counteract the impression created by the earlier decision of the BESS. In January 1964, Mutchmor unambiguously told the *Vancouver Province*, "I'm pro-Billy Graham. I think his organization does a good job."⁷¹ That same month, an article by Mutchmor appeared in *Decision* magazine, the official publication of the BGEA. Not only was this an implicit endorsement of Graham, but the article itself was a glowing defense of classically evangelical evangelism. Mutchmor spoke clearly about the necessity of conversion, "the greatest fact of life." Without conversion, he said, "there can be no faith; with it and from it, faith will grow. It comes when the believer has become conscious of his sin and need, and has repented, seeking God's help." The reality of sin and the necessity of repentance could not be glossed over, insisted Mutchmor. "Let us make it plain that the Gospel says quite clearly that each of us, in God's sight, is a sinner. Let us have the emphasis of Jesus; we need it. We are to repent and to believe." Having laid out this understanding of conversion, Mutchmor emphasized evangelism as the top priority of the church. If the apostle Paul were alive in the 1960s, asked Mutchmor, "would he not call for the proclaiming of the Gospel of the cross and resurrection of Christ with boldness, through every modern medium known to man?" Furthermore, Mutchmor's evangelism, unlike the emerging new evangelism, did not consist of listening to the world. Rather, evangelism was the "proclamation of the Gospel." It had to be bold and unequivocal: "Evangelism says Yes and it says No. It cannot be indifferent or lukewarm in its message."⁷² It is possible that Mutchmor was consciously or unconsciously playing to his audience, making him sound more evangelical in his views than he perhaps actually was. After all, he was a strong supporter of the New Curriculum. On the other hand, Mutchmor had always been a strong advocate of evangelical practices, including evangelism. Is it possible that at the end of his career, sensitive to developments in the United Church, Mutchmor was

intentionally stressing an evangelical view in an attempt to forestall his denomination's imminent abandonment of evangelism?

Despite Mutchmor's strong support, the United Church's relationship to Graham became the centre of a much hotter controversy in August 1965, when the *Observer* published a red-hot article by a United Church chaplain, Ben Smillie, titled "Let's Stop Backing Billy Graham." Smillie believed that Graham used the support of a few United Churches to give the public the false impression that the denomination was "on the Graham bandwagon." It was time for the United Church formally to distance itself from Graham, he said, since the evangelist's "literalist" theology left students with a "fundamentalist hangover" and helped "foster a caricature" of Christianity. Thankfully, Smillie wrote, the New Curriculum had been combating such outdated views, but Graham was threatening this. "The Graham group contradicts everything we are trying to accomplish through the New Curriculum," he wrote. "They are ventriloquists of the nineteenth century, trying to turn the clock back on theological and biblical scholarship."⁷³

Smillie took issue with various theological views he attributed to Graham. Graham and his organization promoted the ancient heresy of docetism, argued Smillie, because they portrayed Jesus "in such ridiculously divine language that there is no real humanity in him." Smillie also rejected Graham's view of the end of the world, which he thought encouraged "a sheep and goat division between good guys and bad guys" that was more reminiscent of "TV's *Bonanza*" than the Bible. According to Smillie, Graham and his associates also had an understanding of evangelism that emphasized "individual skin-saving," leaving a "truncated gospel" and neglecting "the corporate nature of salvation."⁷⁴

Smillie's main point of contention with Graham, however, was the evangelist's view of the Bible. Since Graham, Leighton Ford, and their associates did not accept the modernist view of the Bible as "composed partly of legend and myth and allegory," wrote Smillie, the evangelist was promoting "biblical ignorance." The result was that "Christians continue to hear the word of God ignorantly. They go on believing in clay-made man, a floating zoo, an amphibious-footed Jesus, a son of God who demonstrated his divinity as a home brew artist by turning water into wine and topped it with an ascension that looks like a Cape Kennedy blast-off." Smillie argued that by participating in Graham crusades, United Church ministers incurred "the guilt of association with literalist interpreters" and "fundamentalists."⁷⁵ Smillie's scathing attack on Graham found the attention of the secular press, which in at least one case published substantial excerpts for the general public.⁷⁶

Smillie's article on Graham sparked a major controversy in the United Church. It led to a "minor" drop in circulation for the *Observer* due to cancelled subscriptions, and resulted in a flood of letters that were still "pouring in" nearly half a year later.⁷⁷ Many laypeople wrote in supporting Graham and protesting Smillie's article. A man from Ottawa who had been a United Church member since union in 1925 wrote that he was "disgusted with the element that is

infiltrating the United Church in high places.”⁷⁸ A woman from Moncton expressed thanks that Smillie’s opinions were his own and not those of the United Church as a whole.⁷⁹ Other letter-writers described Smillie’s article as “a deplorable mistake” and “rude,” and yet others disputed his view of the Bible.⁸⁰ Another person from Ottawa wrote, “It has been a long time since I have been so incensed over any article in any publication as I am by that of Mr. Smillie ... it scares me to think that one day my own sons may meet him in university.”⁸¹ One writer said that Smillie’s article had removed any doubt about breaking her links with the United Church, and she asked that her subscription to the *Observer* be cancelled.⁸²

Several ministers also write in protesting Smillie’s article. One minister from Chatham wrote in saying that Smillie’s comments about an “amphibious-footed Jesus” who was a “home brew artist” were “blasphemous” and ridiculed the beliefs of millions of Christians.⁸³ Fifteen ministers from Vancouver put their names to a letter protesting the same “offensive” passage in Smillie’s article, and praising Graham as “a Christian leader of thought with profound convictions based upon a knowledge of the great theologians of the past and present.”⁸⁴ A minister from Toronto wrote that Smillie’s article “ought never to have been printed” since it was “cruel and unjust,” “rude and insolent,” and “seething with hatred against the Fundamentalists.” He added that he was personally writing to Graham to ask for his forgiveness for Smillie’s attack.⁸⁵ Prominent Pine Hill Divinity Hall professor R.C. Chalmers weighed in with a lengthy letter in which he praised Graham and denounced Smillie. In rebuttal to Smillie’s charge that Graham spoke of Jesus using “ridiculously divine language,” Chalmers wrote “Such ‘ridiculously divine language’ (I presume that Mr. Smillie means such terms as Christ, Lord, Son of God, etc.) is found in the New Testament, in the great creeds of Christendom, in the Basis of Union, in the Statement of Faith and the Catechism of the United Church, as well as in the New Curriculum.” Graham’s type of evangelism, said Chalmers, was in a tradition that included the apostles and John Wesley, it had “proven its worth,” and it had wide support in the United Church: “In nearly all Eastern Canada Crusades held in 1964, the largest group signing [decision] cards were United Church people.”⁸⁶ Some writers backed Graham even though they registered disagreements with his theology. A minister from British Columbia thought that it was possible to work with Graham without sharing all of his views.⁸⁷ Another writer thought that although Graham believed in some “faulty dogmas,” his message was worth supporting because it resonated with “the great mass of untutored people.”⁸⁸

Others supported Smillie in the debate. One woman found herself “very much in sympathy” with Smillie’s opinion of Graham.⁸⁹ Others wrote that Graham’s evangelism was outdated and needed to be replaced by a new kind of evangelism that would “meet the needs of this generation.”⁹⁰ A letter-writer from Burnaby, British Columbia said that the result of Graham’s preaching was “not salvation but psychosis.”⁹¹ Another writer from the same province offered “three cheers for Ben Smillie,” described Graham as “a fit candidate for the

psychiatrist's couch" and urged the readers of the *Observer* to "quit the double talk and come out on the side of sanity and good religion."⁹² Robert Bater, a professor of New Testament at St. Andrew's College, Smillie's institution, described Graham's message as "a nineteenth century pietistic caricature of the Gospel."⁹³

In particular, some found Graham's theology too hard to swallow. A.C. Forrest, editor of the *Observer*, was initially supportive of Graham, but this support was contingent on his belief that Graham was not really a "literalist." When he was unable to secure a repudiation of "literalism" from Graham, Forrest changed his position (at one point accusing Graham of teaching literalism because it brought in more money). Graham, for his part, pointed out that he interpreted some parts of the Bible literally and some parts figuratively, which did not satisfy those like Forrest who used "literalism" to mean an evangelical view of the Bible. The inquisition into Graham's "literalism" outlived the initial controversy, carrying on inconclusively in the pages of the *Observer* until the summer of 1966.⁹⁴

Meanwhile, other writers echoed Smillie's point that Graham's views were incompatible with what the United Church stood for, and in particular, the New Curriculum. A minister from Ontario asked "How can we continue to play on two pianos, one pounding out a literalist revival tune, while the other sounds the deep rich chords of the New Curriculum?"⁹⁵ Hord condemned Graham for both his theological and political views. "I am very dubious about supporting or encouraging support for the Billy Graham organization," he said in the *Observer*. "I think there is still value in the preaching mission on the small scale. But I think honesty compels us to say we cannot support Dr. Graham. The church can't ride two horses theologically – the New Curriculum and Billy Graham. I also have serious misgivings about his approach to social issues. It was to me disastrous when he blessed the U.S. war effort in Viet Nam. He's an arm of the status quo."⁹⁶ Liberal minister George Goth wrote, unsurprisingly, "I deplore his technique and his theology." The United Church was faced with a choice, Goth said: "Either we accept the New Curriculum and the theology of enlightened scholarship or we continue to pussyfoot in a cowardly way and to straddle the fence."⁹⁷ William Berry, who held Graham in "high regard" and thought it was "not Christian" for the *Observer* to have published an article attacking the evangelist, nevertheless wrote that, "I do not think in all honesty we can support the movement [Graham] represents." Graham was a "literalist," Berry said, and "the United Church should and must, if it is honest, reject literalism as a heresy."⁹⁸

These writers, significantly, were not willing to let the United Church continue to support a type of evangelism that was linked to an evangelical theology at odds with the modernist viewpoint of the New Curriculum. Although figures like Berry had had similar concerns in the 1950s, never before had they been so publicly debated in the United Church. The debate about Graham revealed three groups of people in the church. The first group, those of more

evangelical views, liked Graham's theology and supported his evangelism. The second group disagreed with at least some of Graham's theology but still saw his evangelism as worthwhile. These people, like the United Church leaders who supported Graham in the 1950s, were willing to accept evangelical practices while not accepting evangelical beliefs. The third group, the growing number of people who thought like Hord, repudiated both Graham's evangelical theology *and* his evangelism precisely because they were connected. In any event, the debate graphically revealed the presence of a group of people in the United Church who would no longer tolerate the uneasy compromise between modernist beliefs and evangelical practices.

Meanwhile, the various parts of the church still had to decide whether to participate in the BGEA campaigns planned for Canada for 1965, 1966 and 1967. The BGEA sought out support from the United Church as part of its policy of aiming for complete interdenominational cooperation, but the church's divisions were apparent.⁹⁹ In 1965, BGEA evangelist Leighton Ford evaluated United Church support for BGEA crusades in major Canadian cities and concluded that official support would not be offered (with the exception of some ministers) in Saskatoon, Ottawa, and Winnipeg, while official support had been offered in Calgary.¹⁰⁰ Victoria gave official support, while Vancouver did not.¹⁰¹ In some places, the attitude towards Graham of official United Church bodies had cooled since the 1950s. Though the Ottawa Council of Churches, with a United Church president and official representation from Ottawa Presbytery, had backed Graham in 1955, Ford noted in 1965 that the Council would "probably decline official support, on the basis of United and Anglican reluctance."¹⁰² At the same time, individual churches and ministers sometimes offered their support for Graham even when most of the United Church in their area did not.¹⁰³ Thus, the church was divided, though the lack of support for Graham from many official bodies was conspicuous.

Significantly, however, the participation of ordinary United Church people in BGEA crusades across Canada was consistently strong, often exceeding participation from any other denomination. As quoted above, R.C. Chalmers reported that at most stops of the 1964 Atlantic Canada crusade, United Church people made up the largest group registering decisions for Christ.¹⁰⁴ What about other crusades? Graham and his associates always ended their evangelistic services with a call for a response from attendees who were asked to come forward to show their decision for Christ. Those who came forward during a service, called inquirers by the BGEA, were met by trained local volunteers called counselors who asked them what decision they wanted to make and prayed with them. These counselors then filled out a "decision card" for each inquirer. The decision card recorded one of four responses: accepting Christ for the first time, seeking assurance of salvation, (re)dedicating oneself to Christ, or seeking restoration of a relationship with Christ. Fortunately for the purpose of this study, the decision card also was used to record the denomination and local church preferred by the inquirer. (Training materials for counselors warned them to

record the church preferred by the inquirer, not the counselor's own preference, even if the inquirer specified a "cult" as their preferred denomination.)¹⁰⁵

The resulting data on denominational preference of those coming forward at the BGEA's Canadian crusades, where available, show high levels of participation by United Church people. At the crusade conducted by Leighton Ford in Victoria in September 1965, the largest single group of inquirers (30 per cent) listed the United Church as their denomination. The Anglicans were the next biggest group at 18 per cent.¹⁰⁶ At another Ford crusade in Kitchener, Ontario, and surrounding region in the spring of 1966, United Church inquirers were in a near-tie with the Lutherans at 13 per cent (one person behind), slightly trailing the Baptists (19 per cent) and Mennonites (16 per cent). Despite the fourth-place showing, however, this was still a strong level of participation, since due to the Mennonite and German ethnic background of much of the local population, United Church adherents only made up about 15 per cent of the population of the Kitchener census metropolitan area.¹⁰⁷ Ford's Calgary crusade in the fall of 1966 also saw strong rates of United Church participation. At 18 per cent of inquirers, the United Church group was second only to the Baptists (20 per cent), and more than twice as large as the next biggest group, the Lutherans (8 per cent).¹⁰⁸

The most detailed extant records are those of the combined Billy Graham-Leighton Ford crusade in Vancouver and the lower mainland area of British Columbia in the summer of 1965. Here, as in Victoria, the largest group of inquirers came from the United Church with 21 per cent, ahead of the Baptists at 17 per cent. For the Vancouver crusade, data on the type of decision made and on the affiliation of counselors are also available. These data show that there were no major differences between the types of decisions made by United Church inquirers and those from other groups, although United Church inquirers were slightly more likely to make a decision to accept Christ for the first time than inquirers from any other group. More significantly, the data on counselor affiliation show that although 21 per cent of the people coming forward were from the United Church, only 5 per cent of the counselors were from a United Church background. The ratio of counselors to inquirers was lower for the United Church than for any other group except the Anglicans, while the number of counselors provided by several much smaller evangelical groups exceeded the number provided by the United Church. The Pentecostals, for example, provided more than twice as many counselors as the United Church even though only 4 per cent of the inquirers were Pentecostal. In the absence of specific data, it is reasonable to assume that ministers and local lay leaders were more likely than the average churchgoer to volunteer to be counselors, since the position required a certain level of biblical knowledge and comfort in discussing spiritual matters with strangers. If this assumption holds true, the wide gap between United Church inquirers (21 per cent of all inquirers) and United Church counselors (5 per cent of all inquirers) suggests that the enthusiasm of United Church people in general for BGEA crusades was not matched by their local leaders.¹⁰⁹

A sturdier basis for the same conclusion can be found in other data from the Vancouver crusade. For the purposes of analysis, the BGEA considered three denominational groupings. “Group I” consisted of only the United Church and the Anglicans. “Group II” was made up of the distinctly evangelical denominations, and everyone else (such as Presbyterians and Greek Orthodox) fell into “Group III.” Using the data on local church preference supplied by inquirers, the BGEA found that fully 73 per cent of Group I inquirers identified with local churches that had chosen *not* to officially support the crusade, compared to 29 per cent of Group II inquirers and 42 per cent of Group III inquirers. In other words, nearly three-quarters of the inquirers of United or Anglican background identified with congregations that did not support the crusade, a far higher proportion than was true for other churches. This result demonstrates that in the United Church (and the Anglican Church) popular support for Graham’s crusade far outstripped official support from local church leaders.¹¹⁰

Similarly, the crusade data showed that United and Anglican ministers were far less likely than other ministers to follow up with inquirers who were referred to them by the BGEA. (Using church preference given by inquirers, the BGEA contacted ministers of the indicated church or denomination so that a minister could follow-up with the inquirers from their group, and then asked ministers to return a form reporting their follow-up attempts.) Distinguishing between “adequate” follow-up (a letter, phone call, or visit) and “inadequate” follow-up (no contact with inquirer or form not returned to BGEA), the BGEA found that Group I ministers were the least likely to provide adequate follow-up. Only 53 per cent of inquirers referred to United or Anglican ministers received adequate follow-up, compared to 75 per cent of inquirers referred to evangelical ministers and 65 per cent of inquirers referred to other ministers. Put another way, United and Anglican ministers were significantly less likely to follow up on contacts referred to them by Graham’s organization than ministers from other denominations.¹¹¹ These data reinforce the conclusion that despite strong participation by United Church people in Graham’s crusades, many local United Church leaders preferred not to get involved with the BGEA.

Like the new evangelism, the reluctance of many United Church leaders at the national and local levels to support the evangelism of the BGEA was a sign of the end of the official promotion of the evangelical practice of evangelism in the United Church. Unlike previous generations of leaders, who were generally willing to support traditional types of mass evangelism despite their own modernist views, new leaders like Hord believed that traditional evangelism and the modernist theology were incompatible. As he said, the United Church could not “ride two horses theologically – the New Curriculum and Billy Graham.” This is not to say that the ordinary people of the United Church rejected Graham; the evidence shows exactly the opposite. Traditional mass evangelism, even with unmistakably evangelical content, even delivered with an American accent, even from a Southern Baptist, was still undeniably popular among the rank and file of the United Church. Nevertheless, a significant element of the leadership of the

church, from local ministers in Vancouver to Board of Evangelism and Social Service officers in Toronto, were steering the church in a much different direction. As they did so, the traditional evangelical practice of evangelism, once a major part of the United Church, receded into the past.¹¹²

The New Morality

In 1963, in his last report as the head of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service, J.R. Mutchmor summed up his view on the moral message of the United Church for the larger society: "I believe we must take a stronger stand against waste and profligacy, against gambling, drunkenness and sex orgies; against salacious and obscene literature."¹¹³ Mutchmor's sentiments were typical of the type of moral reform practiced by the United Church in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, which saw the church as a "colony of heaven" seeking to conform society to a moral vision made up of fixed positions on a host of moral issues. During the course of the 1960s, such uncompromising stances on traditional moral reform issues became a thing of the past. Just as there were several reasons for the collapse of traditional evangelism, so too there were several reasons for the collapse of traditional moral reform. As seen in the preceding chapter, the modernist view of the Bible held by most United Church leaders could not countenance an unchanging Scriptural basis for morality. As at least one member of the Committee on Christian Faith had argued, the Bible was not an objective revelation from God, and it could therefore not be used as an infallible moral guide.¹¹⁴ The long-term tendency of United Church theology, therefore, ruled out the use of the Bible as a moral standard. Nancy Christie has also argued that the thinking of the Commission on Marriage and Divorce in the 1950s showed a greater openness to a more liberal view of sex, in part because of the influence of modern individualism,¹¹⁵ although, as shown in chapter two, this did not immediately lead to any change in the church's rule that sex had to be confined to marriage.¹¹⁶ In the following decade, the externalism and criticism of the church associated with the new theology of the 1960s undermined the self-confidence of the church as a good institution reforming a bad world, and exhorted the church to listen to the world lest it become obsolete. The corollary of this new theology was the "new morality" that questioned the very idea of moral absolutes, particularly in sexuality, love, and marriage. Thus, in the 1960s, under the pressure of the sexual revolution, the United Church rapidly abandoned its traditional moral stances.

The new morality was welcomed in some quarters of the United Church. It received some favourable attention from the BESS under Hord's leadership (something that would have been scarcely imaginable with Mutchmor in charge). Associate secretary G.B. Mather explained and endorsed the "new morality" for readers of the Board's annual report in 1967, as did former moderator and "unrepentant liberal" Ernest Howse.¹¹⁷ Hord applied the new thinking to the mission of the BESS. "For too long," he said, in an apparent swipe at his

predecessor, “the churches have used their power against such things as the opening of liquor outlets. Churchmen have to realize today that people are rebelling against the imposition of narrow views or puritanical morals.”¹¹⁸ The official statement of the Board on the subject cautioned against a total rebellion against moral standards, but otherwise spoke approvingly of situational ethics and Robinson’s views.¹¹⁹ Mervyn Dickinson, director of a counseling service for three Toronto churches, was a vocal supporter of the new morality outside the BESS. Echoing Fletcher, Robinson, and Berton, Dickinson explained that “God does not solve moral dilemmas for us by telling us in advance what is right and wrong behavior. He simply calls us to follow Christ’s lead into every human situation by seeking to respond lovingly to other persons.”¹²⁰ For these church leaders, the new morality was the approach best suited to an emerging new age.

Not everyone, of course, welcomed the new morality. William Berry, who had helped Mutchmor chastise a previous generation of Canadians for their moral laxity, was one opponent of the new approach. In one of Allen Spraggett’s *Toronto Daily Star* series contrasting the views of different Christians, William Berry ostensibly represented the “liberal Protestant” position on “Christian morals.” Interestingly, far from supporting the new morality, Berry took more or less the same view as the Anglican representing the evangelical position. Berry agreed with the new morality’s contention that the key element of Christian morality was “agape” (unselfish love). But he insisted that “the source of morality is the Old and New Testaments.” Against the new morality’s disavowal of fixed moral rules, Berry argued that “letting your conscience be your guide in moral matters is pointless. You can educate your conscience to [approve] anything.... Let the New Testament be your guide, not your conscience.” In contrast to those who wanted to bend moral rules, Berry said, “The 10 Commandments have never been abrogated, although they are conditioned by the love taught in the New Testament.”¹²¹ Although Berry was opposed to a “literalist” view of the Bible, as seen in his opinion of Billy Graham, he had no difficulty using the Bible as a source of absolute morality. In this he exemplified the old paradigm’s coupling of non-evangelical theology with an evangelical approach to moral reform.

Despite the opposition of older leaders like Berry, the new morality came to influence the mainstream of the United Church leadership. This could be seen in the retiring moderatorial address of the relatively conservative Wilfred C. Lockhart in 1968. Lockhart’s attitude was one of cautious acceptance. He could not support a total abandonment of all moral rules, since the experience of the past had shown, for example, “that honesty is basic to sound living, that no enduring society can be built on promiscuity, [and] that one does not steal.” But he also agreed with the basic premise of the new morality, which was that “Jesus did not attempt to lay down rules that would hold good for all under all situations.”¹²²

More significant than such statements, however, were the actions of the United Church in liberalizing many of its moral stances in the 1960s. These changes showed that although the new morality had by no means won the church outright, it had, together with the new theology and the general trend of society,

contributed deeply to altering the moral understanding of the denomination's leaders. It is neither necessary nor possible to discuss here all of the thousand questionings and alterations that in the 1960s modified the official stance, public image, or practice of the United Church on issues ranging from censorship to homosexuality to drinking to divorce.¹²³ It is instructive, however, briefly to examine significant debates that took place in the moral thinking of the United Church about sex and abortion. In both debates, at least some prominent church leaders rejected a traditional rule-based approach in favour of a more flexible or liberalized stance.

Up until the 1960s, the official position of the United Church was that sex had to be limited to the context of marriage; premarital or extramarital sex was considered immoral.¹²⁴ In 1965 the BESS opened the door to a looser position in an official statement on moral issues. The Board still condemned an overemphasis on the "erotic element" of love over the general context of "Christian love (agape)" and "sexual promiscuity resulting in illegitimate births and venereal disease." In a short but highly significant phrase, however, the Board wrote not that marriage was the *only* permissible context for sex, but rather that "chastity before and fidelity in marriage reflects the *fullest* expression of Christian morality" (emphasis added).¹²⁵ In essence, this subtle shift made the new morality's position that there were always exceptions to moral rules official policy. A later report of the BESS reprinted an address by a British Methodist official arguing that "chastity" should no longer be defined as "abstinence before marriage and fidelity within" but rather more flexibly as "responsible sexual behaviour."¹²⁶ Similarly, in 1965 Toronto counseling director Mervyn Dickinson was quoted in the *Toronto Daily Star* promoting a new morality view of sex. "Some premarital sexual relationships may be more loving, more constructive, and holier in the sight of God than the empty, sterile, automatic and destructive sexual relationships which sometimes take place within marriage," he said. "One cannot simply dismiss in an easy way non-marital sexual relationships as being at all times nothing more than evil." According to the article, Dickinson believed that in some cases an extramarital affair could be "a beautiful and constructive relationship."¹²⁷ The story resulted in "irate" phone calls to Dickinson and church headquarters. Though the *Observer* claimed that Dickinson's views had been misrepresented by "incompetent reporting," his supposed clarification in the church magazine repeated the same basic conviction that "Christians are not called to live by rules, but with the freedom and responsibility God has given us."¹²⁸

Not all prominent voices in the church agreed with the loosening of sexual boundaries, of course. The *Observer's* own editorial position was that the "Christian standard" was still "chastity before marriage and fidelity within marriage."¹²⁹ Nevertheless, statements like Dickinson's affected the image of the church in the minds of its members. A man who had been an elder since church union in 1925 wrote to the BESS saying to say "I am really concerned about our United Church." He wanted to know the "stand of the United Church" on "the New Morality." "Surely the United Church does not stand for young people being

sexually intimate before being married?” he asked.¹³⁰ At least one minister, as expressed in his letter to the *Observer*, believed that “some recent pronouncements concerning new attitudes toward sexual morality” had “embarrassed many ministers and lay people” and threatened the “public image of The United Church of Canada.”¹³¹ Even though the shift by some prominent voices towards the new morality was contested, it did colour general perception of the church as a whole.

An equally significant and perhaps more controversial shift occurred in the 1960s in the United Church’s official position on abortion. While the old paradigm’s moral reform had equated abortion and infanticide, and regarded both as “abhorrent to the Christian conscience,” church leaders progressively abandoned this position between 1966 and 1971.¹³² An early, though minor, change came in 1960, when a report of the Commission on Christian Marriage and Divorce allowed that “if, in the judgment of reputable medical authorities, the continuation of pregnancy seriously endangers the physical or mental health of the mother, therapeutic abortion may be necessary.” There is no indication that the Commission wished to substantially change the church’s opposition to abortion with this heavily qualified statement, however, since it also reiterated that “Christian conscience cannot approve abortion, either as a means of limiting or spacing one’s family, or as relief to an unmarried mother, because it involves the destruction of a human life.” Furthermore, the official recommendations of the Commission that were formally approved by the General Council of 1960 were silent on the subject of abortion.¹³³ The report of the Commission, therefore, opened the door to further liberalization, but in itself, it did not amount to a major change in the church’s position.

The more significant changes came in 1966 and 1971. In 1966 the BESS spearheaded an effort to secure not only the General Council’s official approval of the position that had been suggested by the Commission in 1960, but the adoption of a policy calling on the federal government to change the Criminal Code’s provisions against abortion. The Board believed that the Criminal Code created an “impression that abortion is wrong and even murderous, in all circumstances,” (an idea anathema to the new morality) and an “air of secrecy and guilt surrounding abortion.” The BESS succeeded in its effort, and the General Council approved a recommendation stating that the Criminal Code should be amended “to permit therapeutic abortion, when continuance of pregnancy is likely to endanger the mother’s life or seriously impair her physical or mental health,” provided that the abortion was approved by a Therapeutic Abortion Committee, preferably made up of between three and five doctors.¹³⁴

Then, in 1971 the General Council went even further by stating that abortion was justifiable for a range of medical and social reasons, that the decision could be made between a woman and her doctor only, that hospital facilities for performing abortions should be expanded, and that all references to abortion should be removed from the Criminal Code. While the BESS was again the driving force behind this change, its original slightly more moderate resolution

(which suggested consultation with the father and limiting abortions to fetuses not viable outside the womb) was superseded by the more radical position brought forward from the floor by “an ad hoc committee of doctors.”¹³⁵ In any event, the decision essentially removed all of the church’s prohibitions against abortion, and if implemented by the government, in the words of the *Observer*, would leave abortion with “no more legal restriction than an appendectomy.”¹³⁶

Both the 1966 decision and the 1971 decision were more liberal than the laws at the times they were passed, so the church was “ahead” of the world on this issue. Indeed, under Hord’s leadership, the BESS actively lobbied the federal government to loosen the restrictions on abortion. Significantly, Hord was already lobbying the government to change the laws in March 1966, six months before the General Council approved the stance recommended by his Board. Hord wrote to the then Minister of Justice, Lucien Cardin, drawing his attention to the BESS’s belief that abortion laws should be liberalized, and offering to have a “formal delegation” from the United Church make their case before the House of Commons Health and Welfare Committee.¹³⁷ Two years later, Hord and other representatives from the BESS did appear before the Committee where they pointed to the church’s 1960 and 1966 statements to argue that the grounds for abortion should be widened and that the opposite view was wrong.¹³⁸ In 1967, Cardin’s successor on the Justice portfolio, Pierre Trudeau, introduced a bill adopting substantially the same position that the General Council had endorsed in 1966, and this became law in 1969.¹³⁹ Nevertheless, as explained above, the General Council of 1971 again called on the government for further liberalization.

Not surprisingly, the far-reaching changes to the church’s official stance on abortion provoked dissent. A young woman, a former member, wrote the moderator saying that the church’s stance on abortion had shattered her faith in the church. “I now simply cannot enter the doors of any United Church without thinking it is ‘a house that condones murder’,” she wrote, “so I don’t go to church or support it now. But, needless to say, I am very unhappy.”¹⁴⁰ Many letters came in to the *Observer* and the BESS protesting the 1971 decision in particular. Writers said they were “ashamed” of the decision, that the General Council had approved “the destruction of human life,” and that the United Church was losing its grounding in “Christian ethics.”¹⁴¹ Even the *Observer* protested the church’s 1971 stance in favour of unrestricted abortion. Pointing to the “fantastic increase” in the number of abortions in Canada since legalization (from 4 a day in 1969 to 79 a day in 1971), an editorial said that the United Church had to “accept some responsibility” for the fact that “abortion [was] fast becoming socially and morally acceptable, even a substitute for birth control.”¹⁴²

The responses of BESS officials show that they were not convinced by such protests, but instead reiterated the new morality theme that abortion was not a black-and-white issue. W. Clarke MacDonald, Hord’s successor as secretary of the BESS, told one upset letter-writer that abortion was “not a simple issue to which there is a simple answer.”¹⁴³ Associate secretary A.G.A. McCurdy reassured another angry letter-writer that the church was not in favour of

“abortion on demand” but simply believed that whether or not abortion was justified depended on the situation.¹⁴⁴ When one United Church minister, David Burns of Zion United Church in Kitchener, Ontario, tried to convince the BESS that abortion was wrong, McCurdy dismissed him in a letter to a third person as having “conservative and literalist” views that led him to see “the Church as the instrument of setting forth all issues in black and white and in a simplistic way ... exhorting people to choose the white.”¹⁴⁵ Because they held a situational view of ethics, these officials were not susceptible to arguments condemning abortion as inherently wrong.

Ultimately, the shift in moral attitudes among many United Church leaders in the 1960s was derived from several sources. The long-standing modernist theological attitude of most leaders was one factor. As the Committee on Christian Faith’s studies of the authority of the Bible and the creeds showed, modernist leaders rejected both the Bible and traditional statements of faith as sources of binding authority over the beliefs of the modern church. The logical corollary of this, as some recognized, was that there was also no reason to accept Biblical or traditional moral strictures as binding rules for the present. The new theology, and its progeny the new morality, simply popularized this conclusion and provided a respectable contemporary theological justification for abandoning traditional moral rules. By the mid-1960s, therefore, most United Church leaders lacked a theological justification for upholding rules against premarital sex or abortion, but had a current, fashionable theological justification for abandoning the idea of absolute moral rules altogether. Thus, the whole structure of traditional moral reform was already on the verge of collapse when the social shift in sexual mores gave it a push. Indeed, when it came to abortion, the official policy of the United Church had foreshadowed the official policy of the whole society (as Pierre Berton had hoped). Rather than continuing Mutchmor’s rearguard action against changing sexual standards, the church, particularly through the BESS, had embraced Berton’s call to lead the way to social “progress.”

Those ministers and lay people who continued to believe in absolute moral standards and the church’s mission as a heavenly influence in society, however, were left behind by these changes. Shortly after the General Council’s decision in 1971 to lift the restrictions on abortion, one minister expressed his bewilderment at where the church was going:

I feel that the really tragic thing that has happened is that we have here a far from isolated example of the fact that secular society has moved and our Church has seconded the motion. This is a far cry from the role that my Church trained and asked me to play, the role of being a prophetic voice within a corps of people that God called to be the conscience of society. If the time ever comes for me to separate myself from The United Church (a distinct possibility) it will not be because I shall have left my Church, but because my church will have left me.¹⁴⁶

His comments were directed specifically at the abortion decision because he believed that life was “especially sacrosanct,” but they were equally applicable to the experience of those United Church people who continued to support the traditional moral reform stances of the church. For better or for worse, however, just as the old evangelism had been replaced by the new evangelism, so too had the old morality been replaced by the new one.

The United Church Renewal Fellowship

As has been seen in this and preceding chapters, the far-reaching changes to the beliefs and practices of the United Church in the 1960s were opposed by many of those in the church who held evangelical views. In 1966 a small group of these evangelicals met and formed what an *Observer* article called, with some exaggeration, “the first organized rebellion” in the history of the denomination: the United Church Renewal Fellowship (UCRF). The UCRF held its first annual meeting in November 1966, and by early 1968 it had about 250 members across the country, mostly concentrated in Ontario.¹⁴⁷ Although its leaders included both lay people and ministers, most of its support was reportedly with the laity.¹⁴⁸ Any United Church member willing to subscribe to the 1925 Basis of Union, plus an evangelical statement about the Bible; to “pray and work” for the goals of the Fellowship; and to pay an annual membership fee of three dollars, could become a member of the UCRF.¹⁴⁹ The Fellowship put out a modest publication called *The Small Voice* and formed local chapters which met for prayer, Bible study, and mutual encouragement.¹⁵⁰ It also hoped to encourage a large number of candidates with “an evangelical vision” to enter the ministry.¹⁵¹

Significantly, the UCRF was defined by itself and others as an “evangelical” body within the United Church. The Fellowship’s constitution defined it as “an association of evangelical Christians of the United Church of Canada.” The constitution further constructed the Fellowship as a united front of evangelical opinion within the church, since it specified that the group would “not deliberately publish or distribute literature on controversial matters of faith, which might cause a division of thought and purpose among evangelical Christians.”¹⁵² In 1968, the Evangelical United Brethren (EUB), a small denomination with roots primarily in communities of German heritage, joined the United Church. The editor of the EUB’s magazine, *The Canadian Evangel*, J. Henry Getz, wrote an article for *The Small Voice* in which he estimated that the majority of EUB members were “evangelical” and were therefore happy to hear about the existence of the “evangelical” UCRF.¹⁵³ The term “evangelical” had not only been appropriated for the Fellowship by its supporters, however, since the BESS’s associate secretary, Gordon K. Stewart, described the Fellowship as “a small body of persons with a conservative and evangelical outlook.”¹⁵⁴ The application of this term to the UCRF as a mark of distinction from the rest of the United Church was a potent sign that by the late 1960s neither the Fellowship’s supporters nor figures like Stewart considered the United Church to be an evangelical denomination.

Furthermore, the UCRF justified its existence in terms of the absence of an evangelical presence in the United Church at the official level. An editorial in *The Small Voice* explained that the UCRF was needed to provide an “alternate witness” other than “the one which most people [were] getting” from the church’s leadership. So far, the efforts of evangelically-minded people to “bring about renewal ... through the organizations and courts of the church” had been “fruitless.” For those who were happy with the direction of the United Church in the late 1960s, who were “satisfied with the United Church, its present image and message as found in [its] publications and vocal spokesmen” the Fellowship had “nothing to offer.”¹⁵⁵ A profile of the group in the *Observer* by one of its members, Newfoundland minister J. Berkley Reynolds, explained the group’s main concerns with the state of the church: “a drift to humanism and liberal theology,” the New Curriculum, the loss of members and ministers to other denominations, and the lack of “real evangelism” from the BESS.¹⁵⁶

The publications and statements of the group show that their two main emphases were promoting an evangelical view of the Bible and an evangelical type of evangelism in the United Church. The first concern was illustrated clearly by the faith commitment required of members. In addition to requiring agreement (not merely the “essential agreement” that was required of ministers) with the Basis of Union, the UCRF’s constitution specified that members had to agree with an additional article of belief about the Bible. Significantly, this article went beyond the Basis of Union in specifying a carefully defined evangelical view of the Bible: “The canon of Holy Scripture ... is God’s objective revelation in word written, given by divine inspiration (God-breathed) and as such, is entirely trustworthy, and therefore is ‘the only infallible rule of faith and life.’”¹⁵⁷ An editorial in *The Small Voice* explained that the United Church suffered from “neo-orthodox and liberal theology” which saw “the scriptures as coloured versions of the message which God revealed to the world” and therefore undermined “acceptance of what is written.” This view, according to the editorial, ultimately led to the “New Morality,” and denial of essential elements of Christianity like the role of Jesus as “the only mediator between God and man,” the necessity of the atonement, and eventually everything supernatural in the Bible including “the existence of the personal God.” The Fellowship’s insistence on an additional article of faith was meant to rule out any attempt “to twist the orthodox meaning of biblical authority.”¹⁵⁸

At the same time, the UCRF aimed to stimulate evangelism and “missionary endeavour.”¹⁵⁹ A letter sent out to United Church ministers by the Fellowship’s chair, Ontario farmer Lloyd G. Cumming, showed that the group wanted to restore the priority of evangelism over social action. Conversion was the “only solution to the complex problems of these confusing times,” he wrote. If “the proclamation of the gospel” was given first priority, argued Cummings, “increased activity in the areas of human need which seem to be of primary importance to so many in our Church today” would follow.¹⁶⁰ The UCRF, of course, understood evangelism, and in fact the whole “ministry of the church,” in

evangelical terms as bringing “men and women to a personal relationship to Jesus Christ.”¹⁶¹ The Fellowship’s general goal of restoring an evangelical perspective in the United Church, therefore, focused on the two areas where most church leaders of the 1960s were arguably furthest from evangelical belief and practice.

Reaction to the formation of the UCRF, as seen in letters to the *Observer*, was divided. Interestingly, all of the ministers who wrote in on the subject were opposed to the organization, while all the laypeople who wrote were in favour. One minister from Toronto said the UCRF was too strict in its doctrinal requirements and worried that it would cause a split in the church.¹⁶² Another minister described its position as “sheer conservatism that blindly defends the status quo.”¹⁶³ A third observed that its members were over 40 years behind the times and hoped that they would “catch up to the Holy Spirit and find where it is today.” Yet another fretted about the group’s “incipient fundamentalism” and called their understanding of scripture “not only theologically obsolete but morally dangerous.”¹⁶⁴ Arthur Organ compared them to the first-century “Judaizers” who had wanted all converts to Christianity to adopt the traditions of Judaism.¹⁶⁵ Professor Cyril Blackman of Emmanuel College wrote saying that the UCRF might have a “salutary” effect in the church, but he showed his basic disagreement with the positions of the group by gently putting forward the standard modernist view that the Bible needed to be reinterpreted for the present, that it was a human document that contained errors and contradictions, and that it could not be equated with God’s revelation.¹⁶⁶ W.G. Onions wrote a stormier letter that concluded with “Reformers? Renewal? Bah!”¹⁶⁷ In the eyes of a substantial number of ministers represented by these writers, the evangelicalism of the UCRF represented a misguided or even dangerous throwback to an earlier, more ignorant time.

The laypeople who wrote in saw things differently. One woman connected her support for the UCRF with her opposition to the content of the New Curriculum.¹⁶⁸ Another woman wrote saying she was glad there are some who had the “gumption” to “stick by their guns, namely, the basic truths from the Bible.”¹⁶⁹ A writer from Calgary welcomed the Fellowship as “the best possible news for the majority of people” in the United Church.¹⁷⁰ A lay graduate of Victoria College wrote saying it was “wonderful to know that there are others who are sick unto death of the thinly disguised Unitarianism of the Howses and Goths of the United Church.”¹⁷¹ These writers were clearly pleased to hear dissent raised against the predominant direction of the church in the 1960s. For such people, the UCRF may have represented the only connection to a quickly fading image of the United Church in previous decades.

The subsequent history of the UCRF and other evangelical movements within the United Church is, of course, beyond the purview of this study (though it is worth noting that the UCRF and similar movements remained minority voices in the United Church and struggled with the loss of their membership base to other churches for the remainder of the century).¹⁷² Nor is it possible here to gauge accurately the level of support for the UCRF among United Church people.

Nevertheless, the formation and identity of the UCRF, as well as the reaction to it, were a significant confirmation that the United Church had ceased to be an evangelical church in the eyes of its leaders and people. By emphasizing an evangelical approach to the Bible and an evangelical view of evangelism, the Fellowship identified the New Curriculum and the new evangelism as two of the reasons for its emergence. More importantly, by identifying itself explicitly as an “evangelical” resistance movement within the larger church, and being recognized as such by others, the UCRF became a visible witness to the fact that the leadership and general direction of the United Church were not evangelical.

Conclusion

The period between 1962 and 1971 marked the end of evangelical practices of evangelism and moral reform in the United Church. Church leaders replaced the old reliance on conversion-oriented, preaching-focused campaign evangelism with a “new evangelism” that disposed of conversionism, tried to change the church more than the world, and collapsed the meaning of the word evangelism itself into social action. Many of the moral reform positions of previous decades were also modified or abandoned in keeping with the situational ethics of the “new morality.” Both changes were made despite the ongoing support of a substantial part of the church for these evangelical practices. Most notably, by rejecting the evangelical revivalism of Billy Graham, United Church leaders were contradicting the attitudes of the large numbers of their people who participated in his crusades despite the opposition of their ministers.

The abandonment of evangelical practices by the church’s leadership had multiple causes. The first cause lay in the long-term tension between the modernist worldview of most church leaders and their support for evangelical practices. This tension had roots reaching at least as far back as the 1930s, but by the 1950s it had significantly weakened the basis for continuing the traditional approaches to evangelism and moral reform. The second factor militating against evangelical practices in the United Church was the arrival in the church of the new theology popularized by Robinson and, with some modifications, by Berton. Its externalism and criticism of the church, welcomed by many ministers, swept away the older view of the church’s mission as a colony of heaven in the world, and its concomitant new morality called into question a moral reform programme consisting of rule-based morality, especially in the area of sex and reproduction. Closely tied to this last point, a third factor was the shift in sexual mores in the larger society, which occurred just as the factors already mentioned had called the church’s teachings in this area into question. Finally, a rapid reorientation in the practices of the church was made possible by the personnel changes in the Board of Evangelism and Social Service in 1962-1964. These changes sidelined J.R. Mutchmor and William Berry, the leading proponents of evangelical practices in the 1950s, and brought the younger, more radical J.R. Hord and his like-minded

associates into a position from which they had more influence over the mission of the church than any other leaders.

The resulting loss of evangelical practices completed the other half of the picture begun by the public display of non-evangelical beliefs in the New Curriculum controversy, the New Creed, and other changes of the 1960s. In short, these combined changes spelled the end of the evangelical identity of the United Church. This largely accomplished fact was powerfully highlighted in 1966 by the formation of the United Church Renewal Fellowship, which defined itself as an alternative evangelical voice within the denomination. The self-description of the Fellowship and the reaction of others tacitly recognized the newly minted non-evangelical identity of the United Church. By the time the General Council of 1971 gave its blessing to unrestricted abortion, it was already clear that the United Church had ceased to be an evangelical denomination.

¹ For a summary of the “sexual revolution” in Canada in this period, see Doug Oram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby-Boom Generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), ch. 10. Oram also addresses the general social and political ferment of the period as it related to the baby-boom generation, particularly in chs. 7-11. On the general cultural changes sweeping the Western world in the 1960s, see Marwick, *The Sixties*.

² See, for example, McLeod, *Religious Crisis*, 83-84, 92.

³ Readers are referred to chapter two for more information.

⁴ This is not to imply, of course, that evangelicals were not interested in moral and social transformation. The key point is that for evangelicals, while these were often welcome and expected results of evangelism, they were not the ultimate goals of evangelism.

⁵ John A.T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 84-87, 100.

⁶ Robinson, 8.

⁷ Robinson, 105-7, 109-110, 113.

⁸ Robinson, 110-111.

⁹ Robinson, 113-115.

¹⁰ Robinson, 116-119. Robinson used Joseph Fletcher, “The New Look in Christian Ethics,” *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, 62 (October 1959), 7-18. Fletcher later published the longer work *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966).

¹¹ Robinson, 109, 118, 120.

¹² Berton, *Comfortable Pew*, 94.

¹³ Berton, *Comfortable Pew*, 30.

¹⁴ Oram, *Born at the Right Time*, 164-166, 170.

¹⁵ Berton, *Comfortable Pew*, 29-42, 85.

¹⁶ Berton, *Comfortable Pew*, 43-49, 51, 53; see especially p. 95.

¹⁷ Berton, *Comfortable Pew*, 66.

¹⁸ Berton, *Comfortable Pew*, 54-63, 66, 106.

¹⁹ See, for example, PB 280A, file “Ministers Respond NC+R 1965,” Allen Spraggett, “The Church Must Answer Back,” *Toronto Daily Star*, May 1, 1965; PB 266-4, W.H. McDannold to Berton, March 10, 1965.

²⁰ PB 266-10, W.G. Onions to Berton, January 25, 1965.

²¹ *Why the Sea is Boiling Hot* (Toronto: Board of Evangelism and Social Service, 1965).

²² This point is consistent with Oram, *Born at the Right Time*, 174, which notes that the Canadian political and religious establishments in the early 1960s were widely receptive to proposals for reform.

²³ BESS AR 1963, vii-xii, 57.

²⁴ UCA, J.R. Hord biographical file, “Ilderton Native Selected to Take Key Church Post,” *London Free Press*, September 20, 1962.

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- ²⁵ UCA, J.R. Hord biographical file, "Death Stills Voice of Reform," *Hamilton Spectator*, March 2, 1968.
- ²⁶ Kenneth Bagnell, "The View from the Firing Line," *United Church Observer*, September 1, 1967, 15.
- ²⁷ Kenneth Bagnell, "The View From the Firing Line," *United Church Observer*, September 1967, 12-13; BESS AR 1967, centre spread, viii; "Excerpts from the Final (Uncompleted) Address of the Rev. J.R. Hord," *United Church Observer*, April 1, 1968, 11. On youth radicalism and the New Left in Canada generally, see Ooram, *Born at the Right Time*, ch. 9.
- ²⁸ "Excerpts from the Final (Uncompleted) Address of the Rev. J.R. Hord," *United Church Observer*, April 1, 1968, 11; UCA, J.R. Hord biographical file, "Death Stills Voice of Reform," *Hamilton Spectator*, March 2, 1968.
- ²⁹ BESS AR 1965, 11-12.
- ³⁰ Kenneth Bagnell, "The View From the Firing Line," *United Church Observer*, September 1967, 15.
- ³¹ BESS AR 1965, 105.
- ³² BESS AR 1965, 38.
- ³³ Kenneth Bagnell, "What's All This So-Called New Evangelism?" *United Church Observer*, April 15, 1966, 40.
- ³⁴ "Tough Guys," editorial, *United Church Observer*, March 15, 1965, 11.
- ³⁵ BGCA, BGEA, col. 360, reel 41, scrapbook 281, Allen Spraggett, "A Look at the United Church," *Toronto Daily Star*, September 19, 1964.
- ³⁶ Ernest Marshall Howse, foreword, *Why the Sea is Boiling Hot* (Toronto: Board of Evangelism and Social Service, 1965), vi.
- ³⁷ See, for example, "The Simmering Church," *Why the Sea is Boiling Hot*, 40-44.
- ³⁸ J.W. Burbidge, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, March 1, 1965, 2. Burbidge was also a supporter of the New Creed, although he had hoped it would be more radical. "A Creed," *United Church Observer*, February 1, 1969, 18, 30.
- ³⁹ See, for example, Kenneth Bagnell, "What's All This So-Called New Evangelism?" *United Church Observer*, April 15, 1966, 16; BESS AR 1967, centre spread, xii-xiii.
- ⁴⁰ BESS AR 1965, 106.
- ⁴¹ BESS AR 1965, 8.
- ⁴² Miedema, *For Canada's Sake*, 161-177. The contrasts between the mainline pavilion and the "Sermons from Science" pavilion, with its more clearly evangelical approach, were telling (see pp. 177-192).
- ⁴³ Kenneth Bagnell, "What's All This So-Called New Evangelism?" *United Church Observer*, April 15, 1966, 16.
- ⁴⁴ "The Time Has Come," *Why the Sea Is Boiling Hot*, 58, 60.
- ⁴⁵ BESS AR 1967, centre spread, iii-iv.
- ⁴⁶ "The Hope of the Gospel," *Why the Sea Is Boiling Hot*, 49.

⁴⁷ “The Time Has Come,” *Why the Sea Is Boiling Hot*, 59.

⁴⁸ *Why the Sea Is Boiling Hot*, vi-vii, 44-45, 63-64; BESS AR 1965, centre spread, xviii.

⁴⁹ “‘Coffee House’ on TV,” *United Church Observer*, April 15, 1966, 31.

⁵⁰ Stewart Crysedale, *The Changing Church in Canada: Beliefs and Social Attitudes of United Church People* (Toronto: Board of Evangelism and Social Service, 1965).

⁵¹ BESS AR 1965, centre spread, xviii.

⁵² Crysedale defined urbanism as “openness to new ideas, heterogeneity in relations, a high rate of personal interaction, rationality in reaching decisions,” and it implied “a pluralistic system of authority, high exposure to mass and other media of communication, specialization in work and high mobility rates.” Crysedale, 25.

⁵³ Many of these ideas recur in various places in the study, but for key passages see Crysedale, 21, 23-24, 30, 35-36, 84-88.

⁵⁴ “Canadian Christians and Revolution,” *Why the Sea Is Boiling Hot*, 53.

⁵⁵ BESS AR 1967, centre spread, xii-xiii.

⁵⁶ UCA, BCE-NC 273-21, Allen Spraggett, “Salvation: It means many things to many faiths,” *Toronto Daily Star*, September 5, 1964. A similar point was made in more detail by I.C. Holter in a letter denouncing Billy Graham. I.C. Holter, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, November 1, 1965, 6.

⁵⁷ BESS AR 1967, 20-22.

⁵⁸ Kenneth Bagnell, “What’s All This So-Called New Evangelism?” *United Church Observer*, April 15, 1966, 17-18.

⁵⁹ Kenneth Bagnell, “What’s All This So-Called New Evangelism?” *United Church Observer*, April 15, 1966, 40.

⁶⁰ BESS AR 1965, 16.

⁶¹ BESS AR 1965, 38.

⁶² “Do Non-Christians Know Christ?” editorial, *United Church Observer*, April 1971, 10.

⁶³ “Canadian Christians and Revolution,” *Why the Sea Is Boiling Hot*, 53.

⁶⁴ “The Time Has Come,” *Why the Sea Is Boiling Hot*, 62.

⁶⁵ BESS AR 1965, 6-7.

⁶⁶ Kenneth Bagnell, “What’s All This So-Called New Evangelism?” *United Church Observer*, April 15, 1966, 16-17.

⁶⁷ BGCA, BGEA, col. 360, reel 41, scrapbook 281, “United Church Won’t Back Graham Crusade,” *Globe and Mail*, February 23, 1963.

⁶⁸ See, for example, BGCA, BGEA, col. 360, reel 41, scrapbook 281, “Won’t Stand with Crusade,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, February 26, 1963; “Church Body Won’t Back Billy Graham,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, February 23, 1963; “Church Takes Graham Stand,” *Chatham News*, February 23, 1963; “No Official Support for Billy Graham,” *Sudbury Star*, February 23, 1963.

⁶⁹ BGCA, BGEA, col. 17, 143-91, Ford to Graham [May 1963].

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- ⁷⁰ BGCA, BGEA, col. 360, reel 41, scrapbook 281, "Endorse Graham Crusade," *Telegraph-Journal, St. John, N.B.*, June 7, 1963; see also BGCA, BGEA, col. 17, 143-91, Victor B. Nelson to Graham, June 17, 1963.
- ⁷¹ BGCA, BGEA, col. 360, reel 41, scrapbook 281, "Mutchmor Lauds Graham for Religious Influence," *Vancouver Province*, January 29, 1964.
- ⁷² J.R. Mutchmor, "Evangelism in Encounter," *Decision*, January 1964.
- ⁷³ Ben Smillie, "Let's Stop Backing Billy Graham," *United Church Observer*, August 1965, 17.
- ⁷⁴ Ben Smillie, "Let's Stop Backing Billy Graham," *United Church Observer*, August 1965, 17.
- ⁷⁵ Ben Smillie, "Let's Stop Backing Billy Graham," *United Church Observer*, August 1965, 17-18.
- ⁷⁶ See, for example, BCGA, BGEA, col. 17, 143-105, "Graham: 'Ventriloquist of Nineteenth Century'," *Vancouver Sun*, August 5, 1965.
- ⁷⁷ "Crisis at Presbyterian Life?" *United Church Observer*, November 15, 1965, 7; Editor's Observations, *United Church Observer*, January 1, 1966, 7.
- ⁷⁸ William Earl Tuck, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, September 1, 1965, 2.
- ⁷⁹ Janet Skinner, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, September 1, 1965, 8.
- ⁸⁰ Christina Gilmour, G. Fred Morrison, Janet L. Armstrong, Helen M. Olden, letters to the editor, *United Church Observer*, September 15, 1965, 26-28.
- ⁸¹ Walter C. Frewen, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, September 15, 1965, 27.
- ⁸² H. Glen Greenleese, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, September 15, 1965, 27.
- ⁸³ J.L. Vinet, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, September 1, 1965, 2.
- ⁸⁴ Hugh M. Irwin et al., letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, September 15, 1965, 2.
- ⁸⁵ Rupert Evans and family, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, September 15, 1965, 28.
- ⁸⁶ R.C. Chalmers, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, September 15, 1965, 26.
- ⁸⁷ R. Gracey, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, September 1, 1965, 4, 8.
- ⁸⁸ Douglas J. Wilson, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, September 15, 1965, 26-27.
- ⁸⁹ Mildred Burrows, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, September 1, 1965, 2, 4.
- ⁹⁰ Dale and Marjorie Perkins, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, September 15, 1965, 27.

⁹¹ I.C. Holter, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, November 1, 1965, 6.

⁹² Ian Halter, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, October 1, 1965, 2.

⁹³ B. Robert Bater, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, January 15, 1966, 2. For more general support for Smillie, see Donald E. Willmott, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, October 1, 1965, 2, 4; E.W. Adams, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, October 1, 1965, 4.

⁹⁴ Editor's observations, *United Church Observer*, August 1965, 7; G.S. Gordon, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, September 1, 1965, 2; "Waffling," editorial, *United Church Observer*, November 15, 1965, 11; letters to the editor, *United Church Observer*, December 15, 1965, 2; M.T. Fisher, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, January 1, 1966, 2; Billy Graham, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, January 15, 1966, 2; Harold Jantz, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, June 1, 1966, 4; "Back to Billy Graham," *United Church Observer*, June 15, 1966, 4-5; "Billy Graham in Reply," *United Church Observer*, July 1, 1966, 10-13.

⁹⁵ Hanns [sic] F. Skoutajan, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, September 1, 1965, 8.

⁹⁶ Kenneth Bagnell, "What's All This So-Called New Evangelism?" *United Church Observer*, April 15, 1966, 16.

⁹⁷ George W. Goth, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, September 15, 1965, 28.

⁹⁸ W.G. Berry, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, November 1, 1965, 6.

⁹⁹ BGCA, BGEA, col. 17, 143-91, Memo: Leighton Ford to Bob Root, Norman Pell, Victor Nelson, Walter Smyth, Re.: British Columbia Crusade, July 7, 1964, 6.

¹⁰⁰ BGCA, BGEA, col. 17, 52-21, "Survey of Proposed Centers," (enclosed in Leighton Ford to Walter Smyth, December 6, 1965).

¹⁰¹ BGCA, BGEA, col. 17, 143-91, Ford to Graham, April 9, 1964; Memo: Leighton Ford to Bob Root, Norman Pell, Victor Nelson, Walter Smyth, Re.: British Columbia Crusade, July 7, 1964, 5.

¹⁰² BGCA, BGEA, Willis Graham Haymaker papers, 1-31, Lester Randall, Secretary, Ottawa Council of Churches, to Rev. D.C. Percy, Vice-Chairman Billy Graham Toronto Committee, Toronto Bible College, May 28, 1955; "The Visit of Dr. Billy Graham to Ottawa," n/d; BGCA, BGEA, col. 17, 52-21, "Survey of Proposed Centers," (enclosed in Leighton Ford to Walter Smyth, December 6, 1965).

¹⁰³ BGCA, BGEA, col. 17, 52-38, "Leighton Ford Grand Valley Crusade Bulletin, April 1966," 4; BGCA, BGEA, col. 17, 52-28, "Church Bulletin News, Leighton Ford Greater Calgary Crusade," no. 7, July 1966; BGCA, BGEA, col. 17, 52-28, "Leighton Ford Grand Valley Crusade Executive," n.d.; BGCA,

BGEA, col. 17, 143-91, Ford to Graham, April 9, 1964; BGCA, BGEA, col. 17, 143-110, Fred A. Lang to Graham, February 10, 1966; 143-111, Lang to Walter Smyth, June 28, 1966; Minutes of the Exploratory Committee Meeting, June 22, 1966; BGCA, BGEA, col. 16, 1967 Procedure Books, Billy Graham Centennial Winnipeg Crusade, May 28-June 4, "Centennial Crusade, Winnipeg, Sunday May 28, 1967" [pamphlet], 3.

¹⁰⁴ R.C. Chalmers, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, September 15, 1965, 26.

¹⁰⁵ Graham's crusades were using this approach in the 1950s, though the type of decision information recorded for the 1960s crusades in Canada indicates that this same basic approach was still being used in these later crusades. See the training materials for the 1950 Toronto crusade in BGCA, Navigators, col. 7, 4-1, especially "Billy Graham Toronto Crusade: Instructions for Counsellors" for Graham's general approach, and for some of the most detailed Canadian data on "decisions," including the four decision options, see BGCA, BGEA, col. 17, 143-108, "Leighton Ford – Billy Graham Crusade, Vancouver 1965," enclosed in Ronald C. Brown to Walter Smyth, December 15, 1966.

¹⁰⁶ BGCA, BGEA, col. 17, 143-109, "Crusade Commitment Summary: Leighton Ford Victoria B.C. Crusade."

¹⁰⁷ BGCA, BGEA, col. 17, 52-38, "Crusade Commitment Summary – Leighton Ford Grand Valley Crusade (Kitchener, Ontario, Canada), April 24 – May 8, 1966"; Statistics Canada, *Census of Canada*, 1961.

¹⁰⁸ BGCA, BGEA, col. 17, 52-28, "Crusade Commitment Summary – Greater Calgary, September 18-October 2, 1966."

¹⁰⁹ BGCA, BGEA, col. 17, 143-108, "Leighton Ford – Billy Graham Crusade, Vancouver 1965," enclosed in Ronald C. Brown to Walter Smyth, December 15, 1966. Another possible explanation is that the BGEA was less likely to approve United Church people as counselors. This is unlikely, however, given the demonstrated eagerness of the BGEA to secure official and unofficial support from all denominations, including the United Church. Moreover, in a letter to a United Church minister, Ford wrote that the BGEA was seeking counselors from all denominations. BGCA, BGEA, col. 17, 143-91, Ford to W. Edgar Mullen, May 1964.

¹¹⁰ BGCA, BGEA, col. 17, 143-108, "Leighton Ford – Billy Graham Crusade, Vancouver 1965."

¹¹¹ BGCA, BGEA, col. 17, 143-108, "Leighton Ford – Billy Graham Crusade, Vancouver 1965."

¹¹² Callum Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Harlow, England: Pearson, 2006), 230-231, makes brief reference to Graham's reception in Britain in 1966, but focuses on his reception by skeptical youths and critical media, not his reception by church leaders.

¹¹³ BESS AR 1963, 45.

¹¹⁴ UCA, CCF 1-10, W.O. Fennell, “The Meaning of Revelation,” [1963], 7.

¹¹⁵ Christie, “Sacred Sex,” 364-367. This element of Christie’s argument is compatible with the general thrust of this chapter. The argument made here, however, places greater emphasis on the context of long and short-term theological developments, especially the “new morality,” that allowed United Church leaders to accept changing social mores.

¹¹⁶ See the Commission’s strong reaffirmation of this view at the outset of their report: “Pre-marital chastity, and fidelity within marriage, are necessary for both men and women in order to assure healthy and wholesome family life and social order. Promiscuity and adultery not only undermine the social order but corrode the personal relationships and spiritual integrity of those who resort to these sexual self-indulgences.” Commission on Christian Marriage and Divorce, *Toward a Christian Understanding of Sex, Love, [and] Marriage* ([Toronto]: Board of Christian Education, United Church of Canada, [1960]), 1.

¹¹⁷ BESS AR 1967, 116-120.

¹¹⁸ UCA, J.R. Hord biographical file, Ken Bagnell, “Ray Hord – The United Church’s Great Dissenter,” *Star Weekly Magazine*, January 27, 1968.

¹¹⁹ BESS AR 1965, centre spread, xix-xx.

¹²⁰ BGCA, BGEA, col. 360, reel 41, scrapbook 282, Allen Spraggett, “What IS the New Morality?” *Toronto Daily Star*, June 12, 1965.

¹²¹ UCA, BCE-NC 273-21, Allen Spraggett, “3 Churchmen speak out on Christian morals,” *Toronto Daily Star*, September 18, 1964.

¹²² Wilfred C. Lockhart, “Ferment,” *United Church Observer*, October 1, 1968, 9.

¹²³ For a taste of the questionings, debates and changes taking place around censorship see W.G. Berry and Bruce McLeod, “Censorship,” *United Church Observer*, February 1, 1966, 24-27; on homosexuality, see BGCA, BGEA, col. 360, reel 41, scrapbook 282, Allen Spraggett, “What IS the New Morality?” *Toronto Daily Star*, June 12, 1965; “Accept Homosexuals, But Don’t Approve Homosexual Acts,” editorial, *United Church Observer*, December 1971, 11; on drinking, see “The United Church Is A Drinking Church,” *United Church Observer*, January 1972, 16-19; ¹²³ on divorce, see United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings*, 1966, 56-57, 162-3.

¹²⁴ See, for example, United Church, Commission on Christian Marriage and Divorce, *Toward A Christian Understanding of Sex, Love, and Marriage* (Toronto: Board of Christian Education, 1960), 7-9 and more generally, the church’s views on sexual morality described in chapters 1 and 2.

¹²⁵ BESS AR 1965, xx-xxi (centre pages).

¹²⁶ BESS AR 1967, 122.

¹²⁷ BGCA, BGEA, col. 360, reel 41, scrapbook 282, Allen Spraggett, “What IS the New Morality?” *Toronto Daily Star*, June 12, 1965.

¹²⁸ See the editorial note below the letter from M.A. Johnson, *United Church Observer*, August 1965, 4, and “Dickinson on ‘Love’” *United Church Observer*, June 15, 1965, 5.

¹²⁹ “Youth and Sex,” editorial, *United Church Observer*, October 15, 1965, 11.

¹³⁰ UCA, BESS 50-146, Norman Stafford to Charles Forsythe, May 8, 1969.

¹³¹ M.A. Johnson, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, August 1965, 4.

¹³² BESS AR 1936/1937, “Voluntary Parenthood,” 57-58.

¹³³ Commission on Christian Marriage and Divorce, *Toward a Christian Understanding of Sex, Love, [and] Marriage* ([Toronto]: Board of Christian Education, United Church of Canada, [1960]), 17, recommendations, 61-65.

¹³⁴ United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings*, 1966, 56, 161-2.

¹³⁵ “Abortion Ruled Up to Woman and Doctor,” *United Church Observer*, March 1971, 21; UCA, BESS 39-3, GKS [Gordon K. Stewart] to G. Campbell Wadsworth, April 19, 1971.

¹³⁶ A.C. Forrest and Patricia Clarke, “Abortion: The United Church’s Official Position Should Be Changed,” editorial, *United Church Observer*, February 1972, 10.

¹³⁷ UCA, BESS 39-4, Hord to Lucien Cardin, Mar. 7, 1966.

¹³⁸ UCA, BESS 39-4, Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence, Standing Committee on Health and Welfare, House of Commons, February 6, 1968.

¹³⁹ The support of the United Church and the Anglicans for this bill merits one of the few mentions of Canadian Protestantism in McLeod, *Religious Crisis*, 216-217.

¹⁴⁰ UCA, BESS 39-3, Elizabeth D. Brown to A.B.B. Moore, April 21, 1971.

¹⁴¹ Letters to the editor, *United Church Observer*, April 1971, 2, 5; UCA, BESS 39-3, Margaret Copas to “Moderator”, July 27, 1971; BESS 39-3, (Mrs.) Ralph Manshreck to “Moderator”, August 13, 1971; BESS 39-3, Denny Handler to Archie McCurtie [*sic*], November 1, 1971.

¹⁴² A.C. Forrest and Patricia Clarke, “Abortion: The United Church’s Official Position Should Be Changed,” editorial, *United Church Observer*, February 1972, 10-11.

¹⁴³ UCA, BESS 39-3, W. Clarke MacDonald to Copas, July 30, 1971.

¹⁴⁴ UCA, BESS 39-3, A.G.A. McCurdy to Manshreck, September 7, 1971. See also BESS 39-3, GKS [Gordon K. Stewart] to G. Campbell Wadsworth, April 19, 1971, for a similar point.

¹⁴⁵ UCA, BESS 39-3, McCurdy to Wilena Brown, December 21, 1971; see also Brown to McCurdy and “Ruth”, December 14, 1971.

¹⁴⁶ UCA, BESS 39-3, C. Daniel Matheson, sermon, Westboro United Church, February 7, 1971.

¹⁴⁷ UCA, BESS 71-3, "Prayer Letter for Renewal," Vol. 1 No. 2, January 1967; J. Berkley Reynolds, "The Hot New Fight... For the Good Old Faith," *United Church Observer*, February 15, 1968, 12.

¹⁴⁸ UCA, BESS 71-3, "United Church Renewal Fellowship," *Small Voice*, Winter 1968, inside back cover; and J. Berkley Reynolds, "The Hot New Fight... For the Good Old Faith," *United Church Observer*, February 15, 1968, 13.

¹⁴⁹ UCA, BESS 71-3, "Constitution of the United Church Renewal Fellowship"; "Application for Membership."

¹⁵⁰ See, for example, UCA, BESS 71-3, "Words of Welcome," *Small Voice*, Winter 1968, 1.

¹⁵¹ UCA, BESS 71-3, "A Call to Prayer," *Small Voice*, Autumn 1967, back inside cover; BESS 71-3, "A Call to Prayer," *Small Voice*, Winter 1968, back inside cover.

¹⁵² UCA, BESS 71-3, "Constitution of the United Church Renewal Fellowship."

¹⁵³ UCA, BESS 71-3, J. Henry Getz, "Greetings," *Small Voice*, Winter 1968, 1-2. See also J. Berkley Reynolds, "The Hot New Fight... For the Good Old Faith," *United Church Observer*, February 15, 1968, 14-15 and BESS 71-3, "Words of Welcome," *Small Voice*, Winter 1968, 1.

¹⁵⁴ UCA, BESS 71-3, GKS [Gordon K. Stewart] to Axel C. Rekken, January 5, 1971.

¹⁵⁵ UCA, BESS 71-3, Editorial, *Small Voice*, Autumn 1967, 1-2.

¹⁵⁶ J. Berkley Reynolds, "The Hot New Fight... For the Good Old Faith," *United Church Observer*, February 15, 1968, 12-14.

¹⁵⁷ UCA, BESS 71-3, "Constitution of the United Church Renewal Fellowship." Where the Basis of Union said that the Bible was a "record" of God's revelation, the UCRF constitution specified that it *was* "God's objective revelation," and where the Basis of Union said that the Bible "contain[ed] the only infallible rule of faith and life," the UCRF constitution specified that the Bible *was* "the only infallible rule of faith and life."

¹⁵⁸ UCA, BESS 71-3, Editorial, *Small Voice*, Winter 1968, 2-3.

¹⁵⁹ UCA, BESS 71-3, "Constitution of the United Church Renewal Fellowship."

¹⁶⁰ UCA, BESS 71-3, Lloyd G. Cumming to "United Church Minister," January 2, 1970.

¹⁶¹ UCA, BESS 71-3, Editorial, *Small Voice*, Autumn 1967, 1.

¹⁶² R.E. Gosse, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, March 15, 1968, 2.

¹⁶³ John B. McTavish, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, March 15, 1968, 2.

¹⁶⁴ George W. Sanders, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, April 1, 1968, 2.

¹⁶⁵ Arthur Organ, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, April 1, 1968, 2, 4.

¹⁶⁶ E.C. Blackman, "Backtalk on Renewal Fellowship," *United Church Observer*, April 1, 1968, 38-9.

¹⁶⁷ W.G. Onions, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, April 1, 1968, 4.

¹⁶⁸ Mrs. Irwin Myall, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, March 15, 1968, 2.

¹⁶⁹ Mary E. Durant, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, March 15, 1968, 2.

¹⁷⁰ F. Lett, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, April 1, 1968, 2.

¹⁷¹ Derwyn Foley, letter to the editor, *United Church Observer*, April 1, 1968, 2.

¹⁷² For an overview of the state of the "conservative" groups in the United Church at the beginning of the twenty-first century, see Mike Milne, "Mellowing of the Right," *United Church Observer*, June 2007, 22-23.

CONCLUSION

Understanding the fate of evangelicalism in the United Church requires the recognition of a multi-step, non-linear process. The first step in this process was the rise of modernist beliefs in the Methodist and Presbyterian churches during the first heyday of liberalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹ The introduction of modernist ideas in the late nineteenth century was tolerated by evangelical church leaders, who were optimistic about the capacity of their flexible evangelical creed to absorb the new thinking. Indeed, until the early twentieth century, evangelicalism continued to be the dominant creed of these churches as elements of modernism were either assimilated or contained. Many of the modernist ideas, however, were fundamentally incompatible with evangelical ideas of biblical authority and the ancient supernatural elements of Christianity assumed by the evangelical worldview. The advance of modernism among the intellectual and clerical leaders of these denominations, therefore, was simultaneously a retreat of evangelicalism.

Between roughly 1900 and 1930, modernism assumed a position of dominance in Canada's Methodist and Presbyterian churches. Although some leaders who still held to evangelical beliefs were belatedly alarmed by this trend, their attachment to optimistic doctrinal tolerance, together with the now well established precedents shielding professors and ministers from doctrinal tests, prevented them from leading openly anti-modernist evangelical factions in their denominations. Combined with the distraction of the consuming debates over church union in the early part of the century, these factors prevented a fundamentalist-modernist controversy like the ones seen in several American denominations. In the immediate aftermath of church union in 1925, liberal modernists held the reigns of power in the new United Church.

This study has picked up the story of the United Church in the 1930s, the decade at the heart of the debate between conflicting schools of historical interpretation of Canadian religion. As described in the introduction, some historians have interpreted the 1930s as a last gasp of evangelicalism in the United Church, while others have argued that the decade saw the return of the robust evangelical core of the denomination to its normal place of dominance.² This study offers a third interpretation. There was certainly a revival of personal evangelism in the 1930s, evidenced by the United Church's enthusiastic participation in the campaigns of the Joint Committee for the Evangelization of Canadian Life and production of a "Statement on Evangelism," but there was not a revival of evangelical beliefs among church leaders behind these phenomena. Instead, the promotion of evangelism was on the one hand a strategic response to the Depression, international political crises, and the rise of totalitarianism, and on the other hand, part of a wider international theological shift influenced by the rise of neo-orthodoxy.

In fact, despite the evangelical look of the 1930s with its fervent evangelism and "return to theology," behind the scenes United Church leaders tenaciously held on to the modernist beliefs that had become dominant earlier in the century. Nothing illustrated this more clearly than the drafting of the church's

1940 Statement of Faith. In keeping with their modernist beliefs, the theological elite that crafted the Statement carefully and systematically removed elements of evangelical orthodoxy from the Basis of Union to produce the Statement – yet they avoided openly promoting these modernist beliefs, preferring to simply remove evangelical ones. The combination of this “quiet” modernism with the promotion of evangelical institutional practices by church leaders in the 1930s was the second step in the story of evangelicalism in the United Church.

While the 1930s cannot be taken as a period in which the United Church fully returned to evangelicalism, neither can they be rightfully interpreted as a last gasp of evangelicalism on the road to secularization. To the contrary, the odd synthesis of evangelical institutional practices and non-evangelical beliefs crafted by church leaders in the 1930s continued with astonishing consistency and resilience into the late 1950s. Evangelistic campaigns sponsored by the United Church in the postwar period, such as the Crusade for Christ and His Kingdom in the 1940s and the National Evangelistic Mission in the 1950s, were remarkably similar to the campaigns of the 1930s, and if anything, more successful. Programs of moral reform and Christian education in the 1940s and 1950s followed closely the pattern of the 1930s. In short, the 1930s paradigm continued unabated into the 1950s.

By the 1950s, however, there were signs of wear. The strange marriage of evangelical institutional practices and evangelical beliefs proved increasingly hard to hold together. There was an inherent mismatch between the practice of mass evangelism, born as it was in the fires of revival with the aim of winning souls, and the use to which it was put by leaders like William Berry, who simply wanted to prod church members into social activism. At the same time, the long-term project of developing a new Christian education curriculum, started in 1952, was underway. Since it was being crafted by leaders with modernist assumptions and a goal of “enlightening” church members, as each year passed it drew closer to permanently ending the quiet modernism of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s.

In the 1960s the paradigm of the 1930s was suddenly torn apart on all sides. A startling convergence of factors brought about a massive reorientation of the United Church and the demise of its evangelical identity, the third and final step in the story of evangelicalism in the United Church. These factors combined to produce an inescapable display of the modernist beliefs of church leaders, coupled with their dismantling of evangelical practices, in a short period of time. A brief summary of the events of the mid-1960s bears this out. Between 1963 and 1966, the Board of Evangelism and Social Service rejected a decades-old history of mass evangelism, the old evangelical Christian education curricula were displaced by the frankly modernist New Curriculum, the moderator repeatedly reminded the church by his statements that he was an “unrepentant liberal,” Pierre Berton castigated the churches in *The Comfortable Pew*, J.R. Hord convinced the General Council and lobbied the federal government to allow abortion, and evangelicals within the church took the unprecedented step of forming an organized opposition. These were just some of the more notable changes of those

four years. The twin pillars of the paradigm embraced by United Church leaders in the 1930s – prominent official promotion of evangelical institutional practices and avoidance of public advocacy of non-evangelical beliefs – were both toppled by these changes. In their place, United Church leaders adopted a consistently modernist, and indeed, liberal, orientation. By the end of the decade, the actions and statements of church leaders, reinforced by other voices inside and outside the denomination, and the exodus of evangelical members, had redefined the United Church as a clearly non-evangelical church.

There were still many people in the United Church in the 1960s, particularly among the laity, who held evangelical beliefs or were at least responsive to evangelical practices like the evangelism of Billy Graham. But while to the casual observer the United Church before the 1960s appeared to be an evangelical church, after the 1960s this was no longer so. In the same way, while it was quite possible to be a content evangelical in the United Church in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, from 1960 on those evangelicals who remained in the denomination – many did not – found it increasingly uncomfortable. The modernism which had already dominated the thinking of church leaders in the early decades of the twentieth century had finally permeated the whole structure of the church after the long period of persistence of evangelical elements. The leaders of the 1960s took modernism to its logical conclusion and set a new course for the United Church, a course that it has been following away from its evangelical past ever since.

¹ This summary of trends up to 1930 relies primarily on Gauvreau, *The Evangelical Century*; Van Die, *An Evangelical Mind*; and Masters, *Protestant Church Colleges in Canada*.

² For the former interpretation see Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith*, 227. For the latter interpretation, see Christie and Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity*, chapter 7.

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