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UNITY AND UNION

1975 may prove to have been the year when Christian unity achieved a breakthrough. This is undoubtedly the Century of Ecumenism, which was launched in the early decades from the missionary movement of the Protestant Churches, and hailed by Archbishop Temple as "the great new fact of our era". So it is. It has recovered the biblical dynamic between mission and unity; it has helped us re-think church history in irenic mood and so attain a more Christian balance ("overcoming history by history"); it has now drawn both Orthodoxy and Rome into its orbit; and it has provided the younger churches of the Third World with a forum in which to press their demands for equality and partnership.

More recently, ecumenism has suffered from a bad press. One reason is the inevitable logic of accepting the younger churches as partners—they have to help write the agenda, and that means a different set of "things to do" than we older

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churches imagined. So we have *liberation* as their interpretation of salvation, and we don't quite understand it, or like it. Another reason for the ambiguity about ecumenism lies deeper. It involves the "model" of unity which has obtained since the first WCC assembly at Amsterdam. This tends to assume that unity, union and "organic union" are identical, and all involve a common polity and administration, an organizational oneness. Now this has indeed been debated from assembly to assembly (the Canadian Council of Churches made a signal contribution to Evanston on "order and organization" for example). But the burden of proof seemed to rest with those who questioned this model. To be sure, the protesters usually went to the other extreme, so emphasizing "spiritual" unity as to make *every* form of institutional grouping (including both congregation and presbytery) superfluous. The Presbyterian Church in Canada has been sorely tempted to take that route, to develop a simplistic anti-ecumenical stance as if this were the sole logic of the decision of 1925.

It is good to notice that the WCC itself is exploring the model of unity with care and depth. "Organic union" is recognized as an apt description of that "mystical union of Christ with believers" which theologians both East and West always held as the essence of faith. The Holy Spirit effects a union among believers and with their Head that reflects (and results from) the hypostatic union between God and man in Jesus Christ. That bit of classical theology needs to be heard again as the basis of whatever else we say about Christian unity. For one thing, it underlines the strange fact that because of the Incarnation, the Spirit's work is not simply "spiritual". Christian "spirituality" is formed and informed by the incarnate Logos: its "logic" is structured in imitation of his. Therefore you cannot talk about "faith" and then ask how it is "embodied", as if these are separate questions. There may well be a dynamic relationship between the mystery of our union with Christ-and-brethren, and the various ecclesial forms which this brotherhood takes on its journey through time and space. But this is not separable into two distinct entities, as the spiritualizers maintain. It's a package deal. The package is being studied under the suggestive term "conciliarity" these days (see the WCC reports of the theological conferences at Salamanca and Accra). No one word is quite apt: "federalism" suggests too loose a connection (it involves little commitment, little risk); conciliarity recalls us to the complex history of the Ecumenical Councils, to the hard struggle to maintain and express the unity given by the Spirit. It seems to be on the right track.

Canada 1975 is not an auspicious site for ecumenism. The Anglican-United conversations have failed. Donald Ray, general secretary of the UCC, told the Anglican General Synod that his church would continue to work for the Christian unity but was not interested in "playing word games about union and unity". And yet he may be wrong in this stance. Perhaps the UCC has been wrong to insist all these years that only "organic union" of an institutional sort would do, while the Presbyterians have been equally wrong to hide behind some docetic form of spiritual unity. Therefore both of us may

continued on page 9

SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT PREACHING

There is a tradition that in Presbyterian churches preaching is taken more seriously by both minister and congregation than in some other denominations. Also that it is kept more closely related to the Scriptures, the preacher's task being seen as an exposition of some part of the biblical message rather than a religious address on a topic that has happened during the past week and made its appeal to him. The same tradition held that the sermon should be prepared with care. How seriously this tradition is maintained today only a comprehensive visitation of our churches could determine. But there are indications here and there that under the pressures and influences of our time it shows signs at least of wavering.

There is the demand of some congregations for sermons that will be pleasant and popular. They do not want on Sunday morning to be made to grapple with issues that set them thinking in unaccustomed channels. A familiar platitude with fresh illustrations is much more acceptable. These are the people who tell the minister that they get much more out of his children's story than from his sermon, unaware that they are confessing a willingness to remain on a childish level of intelligence in their response to the gospel. This is not what Jesus meant when he spoke of being like children in our response to God. He had no intention of encouraging a childish evasion of serious thinking.

I can remember one glaring instance of the kind of preaching which results when the minister succumbs to this pressure. The sermon began with a text, Jesus' parable about the man who discovered a treasure in a field and, selling all his possessions, bought the field. But at once the second half of the text in which Jesus makes his rather costly point was discarded and the preacher embarked on the theme of "unexpected surprises". We then had a succession of stories about people who had made unexpected discoveries, stories which had nothing to do with any element of Christian truth but gave the preacher an opportunity to display his story-telling ability. The original meaning of the parable was never discussed.

There was no continuity of thought in the sermon as a whole. One came away with the feeling of having been cheated—also concerned that preaching of that kind would drive out of the church the serious-minded people whom we so desperately need. We have no commission to be popular or to amuse our congregations. It is a subtle temptation but one which, when the preacher gives way to it, soon debases the mentality of the congregation.

An equally serious pressure that many ministers feel is the lack of time for study and sermon preparation. A survey of graduates three years out of seminary, made by the United Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., a few years ago, showed that only a small percentage had managed to establish a consistent and effective program of study. Once free of seminary assignments they floundered in establishing studies that would undergird their ministries. As a result they were living from hand to mouth in their preaching. Part of the problem was a failure to transfer the nocturnal study habits of

seminary to the mornings of the manse and, letting their mornings slip away, they found the remainder of the day filled with other duties. Nothing shows more quickly in a man's preaching than the way he spends his time and the company he keeps through books when he is closed in his study. A layman once remarked, "I like to see the wheels go round when a man is preaching." The wheels in our brains soon stop going round when we no longer tackle the books of major theologians, historians etc. An old doctor, the son of a theological professor, made this comment on a recently departed pastor of his village church, "He told us all he knew in his first year and then just kept repeating it each year after."

I have been surprised how reluctant many ministers are to make themselves unavailable for at least three hours each morning. Perhaps they fear their people will resent it. Then let them explain publicly how essential those protected hours are to the effectiveness of their ministry. Behind closed doors and taking no phone calls they are working intensively for their congregation and their community. It is a mistake to leave our people uninformed about what is necessary in a really Christian ministry. They see the minister on Sunday morning but often have no idea of what he is doing for the remainder of the week. They need also to be reminded how necessary it is to his health that he have one day each week completely free of them.

Perhaps it is the slow-down of the mind that results from disorganized study habits that accounts for one of the commonest weaknesses in sermons, the lack of an orderly line of thought. The preacher proceeds from point one to point four as though each one were connected with the preceding one, but the listener is left puzzled, trying to discover the connection. Even as a teen-ager I found this disconcerting. Not yet knowing the ministry from within I attributed the confusion to my obtuseness. But since then I have become familiar with the tendency of preachers to dump into a sermon the collection of thoughts they have had in the last six days, numbering them usually from one to three, most likely with a text tacked on in front that has only a remote relation to any of them. And even though they start with the text the points which they extract from it may be devoid of any real connection with each other.

Preaching from notes and never writing out a sermon in full can encourage careless habits of thought and speech. I have to confess that I tried this method in the first year and a half of my ministry. I found it an intolerable strain for two reasons: I did not quite know that I was going to say before I spoke and afterwards I did not know what I had said. Fortunately the village congregation gave me no encouragement in all that time. Not one person told me that anything I had said had been helpful. When I then began to prepare every sermon with care, and to write it in full however I might preach it, within a month I had my encouragement. Some years later visiting with a minister of another persuasion, we got into a discussion of methods of preparation. He asked me concerning mine and I described what I did, but he seemed a little reluctant to disclose his practice. I suggested perhaps he preferred to use only notes. "No" he said, "when I go

into the pulpit I have only a slip of paper with the text written on it. I write nothing. I choose a text early in the week and turn it over in my mind all week as I go about my work". "But you have to preach also on Sunday evening", I said, "Don't you find it difficult holding two sermons in your mind at the same time?" To this he answered that he didn't start thinking about the second sermon until he got the first one off his chest on Sunday morning!

The only Presbyterian parallel to this extravagance of which I have heard is the minister who informed his congregation one Sunday morning that he was not going to preach to them the sermon that he had prepared during the week. In the bath that morning he had thought of a better one! The old Presbyterian tradition tends to make our people suspicious about the effectiveness of the operation of the Holy Spirit in the narrow space between bath time and church time on Sunday morning.

These thoughts only skim the surface of a large subject. There are more serious problems to be uncovered: the problems ministers face in dealing honestly with Scripture in the late 20th century, the problems many have in finding the point of connection between the Scriptures and the burning issues of our time, the problems of some who find themselves locked into a religious world that seems irrelevant to the actual world of 1975. All point to the necessity that if we are to stay alive as preachers we must at least in some degree become the theologians who will be willing week by week to let every aspect of their ministry come under the critical scrutiny of the gospel.

James D. Smart

AS OTHERS SEE US *dept.*

"a Presbyterian is someone who always looks cheerful, because whatever happens, they've expected something much worse."

Margaret Lawrence, *The Diviners*

UNBELIEF: A CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCHES?

Religious and spiritual life in Quebec has not been spared by the turmoils that have shaken the whole life of this Province. Where do we stand now?

Generally speaking—but can one still pretend to speak meaningfully in such a way?—certain trends can be felt pertaining to religious life. To be positive, there is first of all a certain *renewal* of spiritual life. Let us mention the various charismatic movements within and without the established churches, the growing number of house cell communities (*communautés de base*) now overtly welcomed in the church policy of St. Jérôme by Bishop Hubst, and the undeniable attraction exerted by currents of thought and action such as that of Jean Vanier...However, this trend involves a minority of people.

Secondly, within the churches, catholic or protestant, there is a pronounced effort to bring about an "*aggiornamento*", founded on a will to return to the source of the Gospel and sometimes on an irresolute attempt to "catch up" with the surrounding world, its problems and modes of living. This current touches the bulk of church goers but not all.

Simultaneously, there is a serious *drop* of religious practice. This phenomenon common to most churches is more noticeable in Quebec where the catholic church has seen its attendance rate in Greater Montreal drop from 61.2% in 1961 to 23 - 30% in 1972 (as divulged by a diocesan study kept in the closet nearly two years). These figures certainly need some refinements, but they undoubtedly illustrate the fact that Quebec is in a post-christianity era since the quiet revolution. Christians are in minority!

This drop is connected with the increasing attitude of *unbelief*—if not disbelief—in our present society. This tendency, among others, manifests itself by a rejection of institutions and established churches, by a certain wave of agnosticism vis-à-vis the existing civil authorities to which little or no leadership and credibility is granted. In such a climate the "spirit of the day" seems to claim: take advantage of whatever you can lay your hands on. This is exemplified by the numerous scandals in all segments of society probably caused by a lack of collective ethical perspectives giving root to a coherent society project.

This probably constitutes the greatest challenge to the churches. How will they react in order to be relevant to the milieu?

There appears little chance to see the various denominational lines regain strength or be in a position to meet the challenge. Too partial and narrow an approach!

The "official" Oecuménical drive in Quebec seems to have reached a certain concordat status compared to that of a few years ago. Presently it offers no living alternative. Contacts have polarized greatly on french-english relations remaining on the shallow language problem and bypassing important social issues. Most of all, these contacts have had few roots at the base. The dormant project of a common oecumenical center provides an illustration of the moderate interest and church involvement.

While the times are calling for imagination, risk, breakthroughs, one can observe a *recrudescence of fundamentalist tendencies* on all sides—from Pentecostalism to Catholic integrism. This fact seems connected with the society crisis where values, perspectives, answers are ambiguous and precarious. In facing a moving and annoying world, fundamentalism brings its neat, authoritarian, secure, if not Manichean outlook. Conflicts and problems are privatized and reduced to individual scale. It is a step, but bypasses all the complex socio-political dimensions of life in a technological society. It lacks perspective.

Labor-management tensions, to mention just one, can certainly not be solved at the individual level.

If the question of unbelief—if not disbelief—is linked, as we think to a crisis of society, it is urgent for the churches to come to grips with the bringing about of a new society, based on renewed collective ethics, condition for a new "social contract", only through which meaningful individual life-projects will insert themselves. For we feel it is not only the carpet that is slipping but the very floor of society itself.

In the field of producing new alternatives for society, too few prophetic lights lead us. People such as Grand'maison, Dumont, Vanier certainly do not fill the whole horizon.

Whether one is for or against it, one not need to look further in order to account for the growing audience of the Parti Québécois. It lies in the fact that this party is, in Quebec, the only constituted body to present a *global project* for this society based on a future perspective, on a new awareness of human dignity and on a meaningful, individual and collective stand.

What about the churches?

Let us hope that while confronted with the withering of their ecclesial tissue they will not react as sects, retreat and shrink on their "religious" objective, but rather that they will witness, even as a significant minority, to the lordship of Christ over the whole mundane reality. Churches will have to look for answers relevant to the whole of society. By this we mean a new social contract.

The celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Presbyterian Church in Canada and of the 50th anniversary of the United Church of Canada, is a proper occasion to remind ourselves that in the Bible memory (*anamnesis*) is eschatological, and that to celebrate and remember means to project oneself into the future. The Kingdom of God inaugurates and anticipates in Jesus-Christ and through him, in his Messianic community, the Church.

Let us celebrate, certainly yes, but not as "blasés" and battered veterans, but as people invited to a Feast, to a renewed Baptism...that of the Children of God, going forward in a sea of weeds.

Soli Deo Gloria!

Jean Porret - Pierre Goldberger

EVER ON SUNDAY?

It was a unique event. Yet sanctuary seemed the same as on previous Sunday Mornings. The regulars went to their usual places, others found the empty spaces. The front pews did seem fuller and an extra bouquet flanked an uncovered Communion table. It seemed a bit strange to see candles (carefully arranged next to the small home-baked loaf and common cup), especially ones of different sizes—two tapers and a regular-length one. Only the tapers were burning.

Then the processional began the opening Psalm of praise. As the theme of the service unfolded I had a sense, not so much of solemnity (in spite of the presence of communion elements!) as of celebration. That seemed appropriate enough when the Scriptures and their interpretation focussed on the subject of marriage. Surely the people of God have much to rejoice in as they ponder their relationship to God in terms of bride to groom. And that model is practical too. The congregation as extended family is composed of families, of marriages that need renewing.

But what's happening now? Why is that young couple kneeling before the minister at the Table? Can it really be that we are illustrating the sermon with an actual—with a wedding!! Surely they've arrived on the wrong day? Or perhaps these younger ministers are getting overly dramatic? But that's not how it's coming across. Rather, it's like a baptism set in the context of a worship service, in the context of the worshipping community. We are family, God's family signifying that the centrality of our life is in Christ.

Of course this is *where* marriage should begin, but it is also *when* the wedding should take place. It is so simple and obvious why didn't we think of it before? We the believing community are the ones to witness the making of the vows before God—and to pledge our prayers and our joy. Ah yes, the kiss of joy instead of the kiss of peace! And the symbolic lighting of one larger candle, the brighter flame, when two are united in Christ.

Now I see how appropriate it is to celebrate Christ's love in the holy eucharist. An *agape* love from the Crucified one to us is the undercurrent that feeds all loving! So we move forward to receive from these God's servants the one loaf and the one cup. As they have received so they will share.

It is over now. The final "Joyful, joyful we adore Thee" still rings through my being. But it's not time to exit. The flow of the congregation is to the Church Hall with its buffet spread—contributions from just about everyone. Even we who have been away for the last month or so of preparation, have been warmly invited to join in the festivities.

This has been quite a revelation (no, that's not too strong a term). Here is a new style of celebration that has been formed by deep theological reflection and concerned discipleship. It exemplifies the centrality of grace—God is the giver. But it also cuts through the shallowness of current conventions. There is no "bride's side" or "groom's side", nor the

separation of "the invited" from "others who have come to see" (with the latter at the back in "the court of the Gentiles"). We are not obligated to give gifts nor does the bride's family bear the financial load alone. Those who give, give and the whole community brings the meal. Here is witness to concern for a world in which some do not spend hundreds of dollars on romantic frills while countless thousands wallow in poverty. The glorification of the individual has been replaced by the caring community to the mission of their Lord.

Will this become the norm? Hardly! But where there is a couple willing to "do" theology and a congregation ready to be the context, it might just happen again—even on Sunday!

Art van Seters

continued from page 2

have to reconsider our vocabulary, our assumptions, our model of unity. In that task, the coming WCC assembly at Nairobi should help greatly. For it should enable us to begin a realistic comparison of the models of organic and conciliar unity (recognizing the ambiguous meaning of both terms), and to do so in a new setting: the Third World and the agenda of liberation from every sort of selfishness and evil.

At Nairobi the theme will be: *Jesus Christ frees and unites!* Such a convergence of unity with liberation should help us all in the ceaseless task of hearing the Old Story in its contemporary language. If "Jesus means freedom" then our model of unity must measure this good and proper extension of our "missionary movement". We took the Gospel to the ends of the earth; and now we must learn to live with the strange new world created by its impact.

JEAN PHILIPPE MCLENNAN III WANTS DD

My dear friends and readers of *ARC*:

This letter is an appeal to every honest man and woman with a sense of justice and fair play. I need your help and support to get a DD. Why, you may ask, do I want a DD? Au contraire, mes amis, why not? I have perceived that this thing is much sought after and desired greatly by many. It must then be a good thing. Why then should I not have it? Have I not given much to the Presbyterian Church in sponsoring this modest journal for over two years? Who else would do it? It was only because no Presbyterian would touch it that the editors turned to me, a catholic (small "c"), in desperation. And I, kind and generous to a fault, gave in.

But enough of this. Let me explain why I must appeal to you, dear readers. It is a long story. When I first perceived that this DD was sought by so many, I decided that I must have one, since it appeared to be of some value. But I did not know (nor do I yet) what these letters meant and I thought it best, since I was going to get a DD, that I should discover what it stood for. I turned first to my editors. While I simply asked an innocent question about the meaning of DD, they seemed to guess my intentions, whereupon they turned pale, grew uneasy, and refused to discuss the matter any further with me.

Of course, this did not trouble me. I have ways of getting information. My special research team is always ready and willing to help. It is that same happy group of former Glasgow dock workers that I have used for other delicate jobs, and Presbyterians all. They are, however, a trifle overzealous and so upon my request to find out the meaning of DD they immediately kidnapped an unfortunate Presbyterian possessor of this honour and began to interrogate him. The poor man pleaded total ignorance as to the meaning or significance of these letters. He said that he did not even know why it had been offered to him; but, since life had offered him little enough, he took it. I believe that the poor man must have been telling the truth and so, when his congregation refused to pay any ransom for him, he was released.

I quickly gave up trying to discover what the letters DD meant and tried to discover why these letters were awarded to people. But again I ran into difficulty. No one would give me a straight answer. Some said that the trick was to stay alive long enough and a DD would eventually come. Others said that it was like a parole; you got it for good behaviour, that is, not angering the principal or faculty. Still others said that it had to do with being a convenor or secretary of a board. But I reject all these foolish ideas. No respectable college would give an honour for such reasons.

Having reached a dead end, I decided to employ the direct approach—ask the colleges to give me a DD. After careful study of the financial reports of the colleges, I selected one and put in a telephone call to the principal. I said that I was Jean Philippe McLennan III. There was a long pause. I

said that I was the patron of ARC. There was an even longer pause. Then I was asked if I might not have the wrong number. Not at all, said I, it was my intention to apply for a DD. I cannot repeat the lengthy reply to my mild request but it finished by telling me that such an honour must be earned. Fine, said I, how much? Name your price. I am prepared to pay well. At this, the person on the other end hung up. But I am well prepared to deal with such things. First you are polite, then you are firm. I called my party back on the telephone. My words were few. I told the party on the other end that either I get a DD or I will buy the college in question and turn it into a Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise.

My dear readers, I beg your assistance in persuading the colleges to see reason. It is not fair that they withhold this honour from me. You must convince them, unless of course you like Kentucky Fried Chicken . . .

Jean Philippe McLennan III

in this volume ...

Our lead article comes from a familiar and honored name, James D. Smart. Sometime minister of Rosedale Church, Toronto, editor of the church school curriculum (Westminster Press, UPUSA) which revolutionized C.E. in our time, professor of biblical interpretation at Union Seminary, N.Y.—his constant theme has been the interpretation of scripture, with special relevance to its function in church proclamation (see his *The strange silence of the Bible in the Church*, Westminster '70). His thoughts on preaching reflect his latest writing (handed to us in manuscript last month!) in "retirement".

The article by Pierre Goldberger and Jean Porret is a response to our last issue on Quebec by two of the young ministers participating in the Zone Francophone. This effort involves both Presbyterian and United Church clergy in Montreal and represents their attempt at cooperation in the specialized area of francophone protestantism. Their thinking suggests the deep theology which underlies their assessment of the contemporary situation.

As we launch this third volume of *ARC* we are happy to have survived this long..the fate of "little magazines" is notoriously certain. We think we have enough funding for this volume (one lives 'from day to day...') but more subscribers would mean more space for content, so talk us up to your friends, or enemies.

The second issue in this volume (January '76) will be devoted to *theological education*; it will feature the address of James McCord of Princeton to the centennial at Presbyterian College, Montreal. If anyone wishes to order a special number of copies (at 35¢ per copy or 3 for \$1.00) advise us soon and we will print extra copies to meet the demand. The title of his article is "Theological education in the service of the church".

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