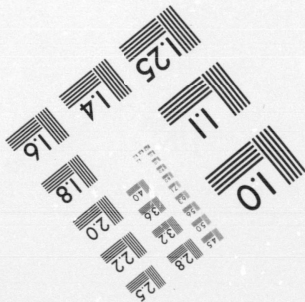
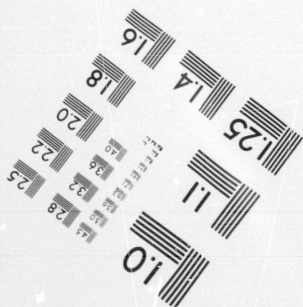
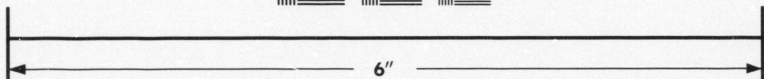
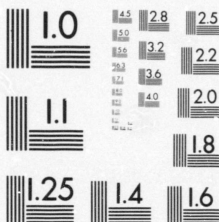


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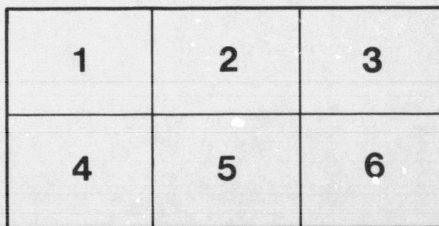
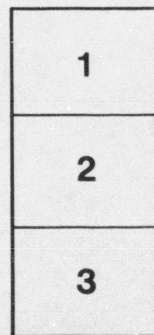
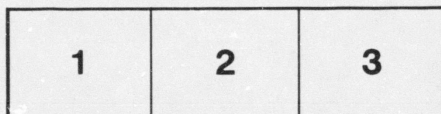
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The Church Union Question

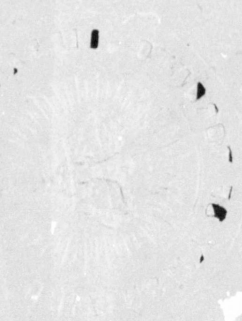


A Study of the
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The Federation Project discussed

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The Church Union Question

The blotting out of the Presbyterian Church in Canada by merging it in a new denomination is being seriously proposed to our people by the Union Committee. An organization of ministers, elders, laymen and women from all parts of Canada has been formed within the Presbyterian Church to oppose this suicidal policy, and to suggest what seems to us to be an infinitely better programme in the interests of the Kingdom of our Lord and Master. The Executive Committee of the organization issues this statement

We are in hearty sympathy with the ideal of true Christian unity and will labor to attain unto it. But we feel that the proposed organic union of three of the Canadian Churches would be a hindrance rather than a help to that end. The time is not ripe for any such movement, and the experience of Protestant Christianity is against it. Moreover, any union in Canada which would leave out such Churches as the Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran and others would be a very imperfect representative of the Protestantism of Canada. But we believe that a Federation of all the Protestant bodies in Canada could be easily formed on the pattern now so well wrought out in the United States. And we believe that such a Federation, while preserving to every Church its individuality and its inspirational history, would remedy any evils that exist, at home or abroad, from unwise denominational zeal, and we concentrate the united Protestant opinion of Canada upon the great social and moral questions of the day. Because we so believe we submit the following facts for your consideration in this crisis time :

The next twenty-five years will be the most critical period in the history of Canada. By the end of that time the nature of Canada's influence on the future history of the world will have been largely determined. Beyond all other agencies, the Churches, under the Headship of Christ, will be responsible for the moral condition into which the Dominion will have settled during this fateful quarter century, and that moral condition will decide whether or not our country is going to mould for God and righteousness the world that she will then be influencing immensely. Hence this is the most inopportune time in our history to thrust forward this explosive question of the organic union of certain of the Churches. Viewed in the most favorable light, the question is one that would inevitably involve years of debate and unsettlement, which, in a crisis time, would divert the attention and energies of the Churches from their supreme work of evangelization at home and abroad. That the union would be a protracted question is told us in so many words in the statement issued recently by the Joint Committee of the negotiating Churches, their closing words being:

“In the event of the negotiating Churches agreeing to unite on the basis herewith submitted, a number of matters will have to be considered, and many arrangements made for the carrying on of the work of the united Church before the union can be finally consummated.”

One matter may be instanced as having been discussed by these Committees, viz., that of the Superannuation and other Benevolent Funds of the uniting Churches. This is so immense a problem that even the Committees felt unable to see a solution of it, and hence they handled it only far enough to say that they would leave it over to be dealt with by the “United Church by such amalgamation or modifications of existing methods as may be found practicable.” True, they make some suggestions, but they are very vague and generally hedged by the convenient but unsatisfactory proviso “if practicable.” These Benevolent Funds, as well as the Colleges and other departments of the work are now heavily endowed on conditions made with the donors of gifts, and on this account and others, one can easily see what endless confusion would result from efforts made to throw them into some new form. We all know how difficult it is to re-arrange organizations and funds in any one denomination, and we wonder at the proposal of brethren who, knowing this, persist in asking us to face questions of amalgamation and re-adjustment in regard to the enormous interests of separate denominations hemmed in by all manner of antecedent regulations. This is not to impugn the honesty of these brethren, but it is to wonder at their judgment. Will our people allow them

selves to be thrust into this dense jungle of complicated problems at a time when their own work is going forward splendidly, and when that work is so greatly needed if this new land is to save herself and help save the world?

The one thing that would compel us at all hazards to take this step is a conviction that organic union of the Churches is the will of God. Some indeed have professed to read in our Lord's intercessory prayer in John 17, "that they all may be one," a clear intimation that all His disciples should be in one ecclesiastical organization. If that were the case, then those who hesitate about going into organic union would be plainly disloyal to the Master. But few believe that our Lord there enjoins, even by implication, what we call organic union.

Those who have given much study to this matter say that Christ would not express that desire and at the same time tell His disciples not to interfere with people who were doing Christlike work, even though they were not following with them. He seemed there to indicate that people could be doing the same work without being in the same company, and hence we are not to lament too much because Phillips Brooks and D. L. Moody, or the Archbishop of Canterbury and General Booth, were not in one organization. To have forced them into one organization and method would have spoiled their work and it is the work that is important. When Christ prayed that all believers might be one as He and the Father were one He did not pray for the abolition of individuality but for unity of aim and purpose and will. There are many who honestly believe the unity of aim in doing the will of God is more impressively manifested by the co-operation of men who belong to their chosen organizations than by the sometimes doubtful harmony of men who, though in one denomination, find it impossible to work together. There is much said about Church union in the interests of the foreign mission field, but most people know that harmony is not always conspicuous in fields where one denomination is supreme. And the same is true of our own country. It is an actual fact that there is often much more co-operation and less rivalry between two churches of different denominations in some of our own towns than between two Churches of the same body. Unity of spirit between the former is much more impressive for good than the lack of it between Churches that are nominally and outwardly one. For these historical reasons many believe in a variety to suit different kinds of people and they do not believe that Christ prayed for the organic and outward union of all believers in one fixed body.

And the best New Testament scholarship is against interpreting

the prayer of Christ as a prayer for organic union. No man living stood higher than the late Principal Marcus Dods, of Edinburgh, as a skilled master in New Testament exegesis, and we ask you to read the following extract from his great book on John, where, commenting on John 17th, 21st verse, he says,—“This text is often cited by those who seek to promote the union of the Churches. But we find that it belongs to a very different category and much higher region. That all Churches should be under similar government, should adopt the same creed, should use the same form of worship, even if possible, is not supremely desirable, but real unity of sentiment towards Christ and of zeal to promote His will is supremely desirable. Christ’s will is all embracing; the purposes of God are wide as the universe and can be fulfilled only by endless varieties of dispositions, functions, organizations and labors. We must expect that as time goes on men so far from being contracted into a narrow and monotonous uniformity, will exhibit increasing diversities of thought and of method, and will be more and more differentiated in all the outward respects. If the infinitely comprehensive purposes of God are to be fulfilled it must be so. But also if these purposes are to be fulfilled, all intelligent agents must be at one with God and must be so profoundly in sympathy with God’s mind as revealed in Christ, that however different one man’s work and methods may be from another’s, God’s will shall alike be carried out by both. If this will can be freely carried out by separate Churches, then outward separation is no great calamity. Only when outward separation leads one Church to despise or rival or hate another is it a calamity. But whether Churches abide separate or are incorporated in outward unity, the desirable thing is that they be one in Christ, that they have the same eagerness in his service, that they be as regiments of the one army, fighting a common foe and supporting one another, diverse in outward appearance, in method, in function, as artillery, infantry, cavalry and engineers or even as the army and navy of the same country, but fighting for one flag and one cause, and their very diversity more vividly exhibiting their real unity.”

This is now the generally accepted view of the famous text and hence there seems nothing in history or Scripture that especially urges us to accomplish organic union. In addition to this it might be helpful to many to have on the general question, the opinions of men who have for years given special study to the life and work of the Church. We might quote from many such, but will give only the following from that most eminent New Testament scholar, Professor James Denney, who says:

“The standing criticism of the Church’s unity is by no means so serious. It is a sin and a scandal, undoubtedly, when Christians

are divided from one another by unchristian tempers—when, either as individuals, or as communities, they regard each other with suspicion, jealousy or dislike—when they treat each other as rivals, whose interest is to cut each other out of neutral markets, instead of as allies whose primary duty is to combine under the same Leader against a common foe. It is unhappily true that such unchristian tempers do prevail. They break the unity of the body of Christ, and are a sin which nothing can excuse. It is a scandal when those who call Jesus Lord unchurch each other. But the criticism of the Church by those who have none but the Papal idea of unity in their minds is beside the mark. It is not a sin that while some English Christians are Episcopalian, others are Congregational, Presbyterian or Methodist. The unity of the Church is not to be achieved by gathering all these into what the law would recognize as one entite morale; they may be one in the only sense which the New Testament cares for without having one and the same legal constitution. They may be one in the unity of spirit, one in the same participation in the same supernatural life, without being one in organization. The body of Christ in the New Testament is vitally one; all the members in it live in each other, co-operate with each other, share each other's joys and sorrows; but there is no such thing in the New Testament as one all inclusive Christian corporation. Varieties of organizations are the necessary counterpart to the unity of the Spirit; the unity is shown to be real and effective in proportion as it subdues all these varieties to itself, knitting men through them and over them in brotherly love to each other, and in devotion to the common ends of the gospel."

From the discussions that have taken place in the church courts and the press it seems that two lines of argument are being followed—the one theoretical, the other practical.

If these two were only kept distinct in the minds of all, the first steps towards an intelligent decision would be taken.

THE THEORETICAL QUESTION.

This question is, what form did the Master intend His Church to assume?

The Roman Catholic Church has always held that the ideal Church must be one in organization, before it can be one in spirit.

Protestantism has always held that the Church is primarily a spiritual fellowship, and the form it assumes is a secondary thing; it may be one in spirit though diverse in organization.

The present movement in Canada for one organization rests very largely on the papal idea, and is a grave menace in its more unreasoning manifestations to the best interests of the Church of Christ. Freedom is the very essence of Protestantism.

The Convenor of our section of the Union Committee boldly asserts that the Protestant view was not even considered in the Committee during its five years of work. He claims that the St. John assembly in 1904 settled the question of principle and all the Committee had to do was to consider ways and means of bringing about Organic Union.

It is now only beginning to dawn on the great mass of our people that the Union Committee jumped to a conclusion, on purely theoretical considerations, and has since been trying to draw the Church after it.

And the conclusion to which they jumped is every day being more and more discredited.

It is not a self-evident fact that the papal view is the only possible view. There may have been some excuse for such a conclusion years ago, but there is none now. In recent years much light has been thrown on the New Testament and the Early Church, with the result that the world's greatest scholars are practically unanimous in their opinion that the Papal view is Pagan in origin and materialistic in outlook. They hold most emphatically that the Church never has been and never was intended to be one in organization; that freedom in organization is a necessary counterpart of the freedom of the Spirit. Lindsay in "The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries," makes this abundantly clear, and Dr. Denney in his preface to Barry's "Church Reform," says: "It is not a mark of the weakness of Christianity, but of its immense power to stimulate human nature on all sides, and to adapt itself to all varieties of circumstances, that it has produced such distinct types of teaching as we see even in the New Testament and such varieties of organization as diversify the history of the Church from the earliest times to our own." And again, "The blind pursuit of incorporating unions on the basis of identity in creed and Church orders, must sooner or later come to an end."

The claim so often advanced by advocates of the proposed union that, "It is the duty of Churches to unite wherever union is possible," has no warrant in fact, and is unsupported by any scholar of the first rank in modern times who is not shut up to the papal view of the Church. It is much nearer the truth from a merely theoretical standpoint to say, "It is the duty of every denomination to maintain its own identity unless there are the strongest possible reasons for its being merged in another organization," or in Dr. Denney's words, "varieties of organization are the necessary counterpart of unity of spirit."

THE PRACTICAL QUESTION.

In the opinion of the best modern scholars, from the nature of

the Church and other theoretical considerations, it is the duty of the Christian Church to maintain the utmost freedom of organization. In other words denominations have their reason for existence in the very nature of the Church. But the practical question is: "Would a new denomination such as the Union Committee proposes to form, be more effective than the three negotiating Churches, federated so as to work harmoniously?" It is purely practical and can only be faced intelligently after a serious study of facts. And what facts have the Union Committee placed before the Church? Not one.

We have had many wholly baseless promises of great accessions of spiritual power, and wonderful economies of men and money, but no statistics have been collected, no careful study has been made of the real situation, and of the result of similar movements. Until that is done, until we have some reasonable idea as to what requires to be done and what it is hoped will be accomplished by any new reorganization of our forces, how can a practical question be even considered intelligently? Until that is done, it is the duty of every Christian who wishes to be guided by intelligence to oppose with all his might the present attempt to obliterate the three negotiating Churches in favor of a wholly new and untried organization, produced in utter disregard of actual conditions and modern intellectual needs.

There are three practical arguments used in favor of organic union.

1. The evident leading of the Spirit toward a better understanding and more Christian relations among the different denominations.

2. The existence of overlapping and wasteful methods in the present order of things.

3. The necessity of the most rigid economy of men and money in face of the great and pressing need at home and abroad.

But these three practical reasons tell even more strongly in favor of Federation, for;

1. The unity of the Spirit can be manifested more strongly amid varieties of organization than with one organization. What we need is to recognize that we are regiments in one army, not opposing forces. No general would think to strengthen his army by the obliteration of his regiments.

2. To stop overlapping and waste only needs a Christian spirit and common sense, systematically applied and this can be done by a well considered plan of Federation.

3. Federation, by maintaining the momentum of the present denominations and gaining the new impetus of a better spirit, will secure more men and more money and continue a more effective

force for the evangelization of the world than organic union.

There are many other practical considerations which tell against the organic union now proposed.

(a) It would be a union without precedent in the whole history of the Christian Church. The unions which have taken place so far have been between churches of the same creed and polity and name, with only some one point of difference. This is the first time in all history when a proposal has been made to start a new denomination, new in name, new in creed, new in polity, in the place of two or more other denominations. There have been, and are, many cases of Federation from which we can learn, and by which we can be helped in our desire to make the best of the Christian forces at our disposal.

(b) Recent organic unions have not warranted our proceeding lightly in that direction. The union which produced the United Free Church in Scotland has given Scotland a Church not much larger and very little more effective than the old Free Church, making its normal growth, would have been by this time. So that it has practically meant the exchange of the U. P. Church for the present Free Church. The Church of Scotland discovered years ago that her dead churches were situated where they held the field alone. It is only in winter, the season of deadness, that all the trees are alike.

(c) This organic union would sacrifice the world-wide affiliations of the negotiating and other Churches. Federation would retain them, with all the momentum of centuries of history, and thus lay hold on British and other immigrants much more effectively.

(d) This organic union would produce a huge unwieldy organization, where there is danger that officialism would run rampant, and spiritual power would be overridden. Federation, by retaining reasonable-sized bodies within a larger whole, would make for democracy and spirituality.

(e) The Presbyterian Church in Canada and the Methodist Church, two of the Churches now negotiating, are different in many ways, and would only weaken each other, if thrown indiscriminately together, as it is proposed to do. If Federated with each other, and with others, each retaining its own identity, the united strength of all could be better secured for the world at large.

(f) Federation leaves conditions such that time may be taken to decide, calmly and intelligently, what the present guiding of the Churches by the Holy Spirit means. Organic union closes the door on any such calm and careful waiting for the guidance of the Spirit and shuts the existing Churches up forever to one line of action. This is surely neither faith nor wisdom.

(g) Organic union of the three negotiating Churches destroys three Churches only to make a fourth, as there can be no cordial

union if it is to be handled as it is in the Presbyterian Church, and the members of these Churches coming in from abroad will set up their own forms here. Federation saves the existing Churches and secures all that organic union could without its terrible upheaval of existing conditions.

SOCIAL SERVICE.

In view of the call of the Church to larger social service it is important to note what Prof. Rauschenbusch states in his epoch-making book "Christianity and the Social Crisis." On page 185 he says:

"When Christianity was embodied in an all-absorbing and all-dominating ecclesiastical organization, its social effectiveness was crippled. Its ethical influence was lowered and vitiated. Its fraternal helpfulness was largely absorbed by the clerical machine. Its organizing ability was spent on strengthening its own organization. Its influence on the state was used to secure benefits for itself rather than for the people."

And on page 193, after discussing the interacting influence of Church and State, he adds: "It seems likely that if the Christian Churches had remained democratic and self-governing organizations, the spirit of Christian democracy would have been perpetuated, intensified and practically trained among them, and would have turned with greater vigor and efficiency to all moral and social tasks lying about the Church."

And a noted writer in a recent issue of the Homiletic Review says:

"The Church should instruct its members regarding opportunities and methods of social reform, and, wherever practicable, bring its federated strength to bear in the interest of particular measures for the public good. There are plans for industrial peace and justice and human uplift concerning which the Churches might conceivably agree."

These writers evidently see the value of independent but federated churches in facing the task of social service. And it seems reasonably certain that if in Canada we enter upon a premature organic union movement, we shall have to forego the more important religious and social tasks for which free but federated churches would leave us time and strength. And it is also reasonably clear that immigrants who have learned in older lands to distrust "the clerical machine" would not be drawn to religious work if they find us too busy at perfecting "an all-dominating ecclesiastical organization" to attend to our proper duties in the interests of the people.

FEDERATION.

Federation is now being tried, with encouraging success in the United States, by federating all existing evangelical denomina-

tions. While it is not possible to draft a complete plan without consultation with the other churches, the following suggestions are made:

In Canada what is needed is first of all a cordial understanding among all the churches that are all parts of one great whole, and the success of each is vital to the best interests of all the others.

Then a central committee representing every Church that will agree to co-operate in any measure should be appointed as a standing committee.

This committee should have power to deal with all matters on which all are agreed to co-operate. All cases of agreements between any members of the Federation should be submitted to the whole committee, and cases of difference adjudged by them, thus providing as far as possible an impartial tribunal.

Where churches agree to combine small groups of their respective people into one union church, all such agreements should be reported to the central committee; and recorded by them. When change of status occurs, a complete report, giving all the facts should be made to all the Churches.

Where there is only room for one Church, establish a union church in affiliation with one of the federated bodies, to retain the field until the central committee shall decide to alter the status.

All committees which have to do with social and moral reform, legislation, etc., should work in close association.

The details of such a scheme can easily be worked out, with the help furnished by similar experiments in Great Britain and the United States. It should be remembered that the increasing influx of immigrants is rapidly curing the very conditions which it is creating. The communities which are now mere scattered families are being built into strong communities, each able to maintain two or more strong churches. It will only be a matter of time when the worst evils of overlapping will be cured by what is now causing it, and a scheme which will carry the Churches beyond the interval when overlapping is likely to be excessive is all that is required.

If Federation should make it evident that two or more of the federated churches should be merged into one, the door would still be open, and the ground prepared by the better understanding of all the issues, which time alone can bring. In view of the similar conditions existing in the United States and Canada, we ask your careful consideration to the following points under this general head:

At meetings of our General Assembly and elsewhere some who seem to have determined that this organic union must take place at all hazards have stated that those who advocated Federation are opposed to the whole

idea of Christian unity, and have accused those who advocated Federation as seeking to cover up their opposition to union by a subterfuge. An accusation of that kind does not seem to us to emanate from the Spirit of Christ; but we let that pass and observe that some advocates of church union in other lands look on Federation as a necessary precedent to the goal they have in view, Dr. Ecob in the *Homiletic Review* for June, declares that he has given his whole ministry to the work of achieving church union, but declares that those who advocate organic union have made a serious mistake in not seeing that Federation must precede. And so he takes hope from the movement for Federation in the United States in these words:

"We observe that federation, the logical and invariable prelude to union, is well under way. The colonies of this country did not at first form a union, but a federation. The colonies were jealous of their autonomy, as now the denominations are possessed by the same jealousy. The colonies were proud of their individual history and achievements, precisely as are the denominations to-day. Questions of funded interests, and the rights and privileges of the larger bodies in relation with the smaller, were involved in union. In a word, union was not then historically ripe. They could not unite, but they could federate. They could move up close beside each other and share in many common dangers and benefits, while the autonomy of each remained intact. Federation was the prophet and forerunner of union. During federation, union was steadily reaching its roots deeper and wider in the soil and throwing out its branches and bearing fruits which were foretastes and prophecies of the full harvest. Precisely this historic process is going on before our eyes among the Protestant denominations. He who runs may read. Federation has become a church household word. When eighteen denominations, representing thirty millions of communicants, can get together in convention and amicably consider the most vital questions of practical Christianity, we are quite justified in thinking that federation is fulfilling its historic mission, and is preparing us all for the fruition of union."

And as practically illustrating what can be done by Federation without the inevitable trouble that would ensue on a forced organic union, a recent religious paper in the United States notes this as a result from the action of the Home Mission Committee of the Federal Council of the Churches:

"There has often been bitter complaint of the overlapping of effort in the home mission field through the crowding of an undue number of churches into a single small community. This joint committee set about getting definite facts both as to overlapping in some places and as to utter overlooking of others. For this purpose it made a careful study of Colorado as a typical Western

State. Statistics were sought directly from the field, and these were compared with those gathered by other investigators.

It appeared that nearly 78 per cent. of the money from home-missionary treasuries goes to the nine largest towns and cities and 11 per cent. more to places having only one church. It is possible that in the large and fast-growing communities churches may be multiplied too much in certain sections, but only about 11 per cent. of the money goes to small places having more than a single church. There may be, and doubtless are, some evils to be remedied in overlapping; but they seem to be not so serious as they have sometimes been represented to be.

On the other hand, the revelations as to neglected sections were a great surprise. It was found that 133 places with populations exceeding one hundred and fifty were without Protestant churches, and one hundred of them also without a Catholic church. Some of them were not without saloons and other evil resorts. Four hundred and twenty-eight places with post-offices had no churches. Whole communities are without adequate church work; at least eighteen out of sixty may be so classed, and one county has but a single church.

The outcome of the investigation was the recommendation by the committee that the officers of the various societies allot the unoccupied fields so that the responsibility for each shall rest definitely on some denomination, and a recommendation that applications for aid be refused when coming from places already fully served and where promise of growth is not such as to demand new churches. The recommendations have met general approval, and there is a prospect of effective co-operation in such efforts as among Indians, immigrants, Spanish-speaking fields, mining and lumber camps, and the congested parts of great cities. Such systematic combination in study and labor will be a long step toward meeting the crying need of many sadly neglected sections of our land."

PROTEST.

Finally we desire to protest most solemnly and earnestly against the way in which some sections of our Church are trying to force the rest into organic union.

Every year at the General Assembly we have been asked to allow negotiations to proceed, that a fair chance might be given to find out what could be done and that due respect might be paid to the other Churches. Now we are told that in granting this request, the Church was approving of union.

We were promised year after year, that no binding steps would be taken until the people had had the fullest chance to discuss and express their opinion on all matters involved. This year the matter is settled, practically, by being sent down to Presbyteries, in terms

of the Barrier Act. This means that if a majority of the Presbyteries do not reverse the action of this Assembly, the Assembly of 1911 can legislate the Presbyterian Church out of existence, without even consulting the people. This may be due to lack of consideration, rather than to deliberate intention, but it is very serious.

Apart from the moral complexion of such action, it has a legal bearing of great importance. The best legal authorities in Canada hold that the use of the Barrier Act at this stage is unconstitutional. Those who persist in forcing forward the movement by such means are putting themselves in a position similar to that which almost wrecked the United Free Church of Scotland.

Scores of men at every Assembly have been unsuspectingly allowing themselves to be led forward by abstaining from voting or voting in favor of the committee's report on the ground that it was of little significance as the people would pass on it. The same thing is likely to happen in Presbyteries. But, judging by the past, such a course is dangerous in the extreme. If this matter is allowed to pass through Presbyteries unchecked, the question of union *per se* will never come to the people. What will come is this: The people will be told that six Assemblies have passed in favor of union (which is not strictly true), and that a certain number of Presbyteries have also passed favorably on the matter. They will then be asked, at least by implication, "Do you feel so strongly on this matter as to desire to reverse the action of the Courts of the Church?" The people will not really and independently face the question of union, but will be merely passing on the action of Church Courts.

Every man who does not believe in this organic union should make his opinion felt now in Presbytery. If he does not, he is misleading the Church and doing injustice to all concerned. And having made this protest, which reserves to us the right of taking such steps as may be necessary in the event of this organic union being pressed through under present proceedings, we respectfully remind Presbyteries that this organic union proposal, being sent down under the Barrier Act, must be expressly approved or rejected. Any Presbytery which rejects the proposal, may, thereafter, express its opinion in favor of some other course of action, if it feels so disposed.

The mandate seems to have gone forth from the Union Committee: "This union must and shall be brought about." It is for every man who does not believe in ecclesiastical tyranny to show that he is not ready to submit to such dictation from any man or group of men in any church.

We send out this statement under a profound sense of duty and pray that the Holy Spirit may guide us all in the present crisis,

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