

PART TWO

Our Common Faith

CHAPTER I

"THE SPIRIT OF UNITY"

The Church, formed by the union of the "Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational Churches in Canada," and named "The United Church of Canada," came into existence as the realization of a vision, the consummation of a devout desire, and the issue of a well-defined historical movement. These are set forth, with full knowledge, by Professor McNeil in his notable volume entitled "The Presbyterian Church in Canada." That Church, in its unified form, and its separate existence dating from 1875, was the outcome of faith and prayer, and heroic endeavor. But it was not regarded by its founders or leaders as the goal, to which the Head of the Church was guiding His people. The eyes of believing and enlightened men in the Presbyterian Church were fixed upon a richer union and a larger fellowship.

Men of lofty Christian idealism in the Methodist and Congregational Churches were moved by the same inspiration, and prayed and worked for the prevalence of the spirit of unity among all who acknowledged Christ as Saviour and Lord, and for the creation of a church, in which that Spirit

would find visible and organic expression. Such a Church, combining in one full volume, streams that had hitherto flowed separately, came into being in June, 1925, and was inaugurated in a service of Holy Communion, in which the Presence of the Lord and the Power of the Spirit were singularly manifest. Those, who rejoiced in this Union, however, did not believe that even so great an achievement was the highest and best that God has in store for His people in Canada. Their gaze was still fixed on a further goal.

The General Introduction to the Basis of Union declares plainly that the policy of The United Church shall be "to foster the Spirit of Unity in the hope that this sentiment of unity may in due time take shape in a Church, which may fittingly be described as "national," Canada a nation—the Canadian people gathered into the unity of a national church—toward such a goal, distant though it may be. The United Church is one significant step

GENERAL

1. The name of the Church formed by the union of the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Congregational Churches in Canada, shall be "The United Church of Canada."
2. It shall be the policy of The United Church to foster the spirit of unity in the hope that this sentiment of unity may in due time, so far as Canada is concerned, take shape in a Church which may fittingly be described as national.

DOCTRINE

We, the representatives of the Presbyterian, the Methodist, and the Congregational branches of the Church of Christ in Canada, do

hereby set forth the substance of the Christian faith, as commonly held among us. In doing so, we build upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone. We affirm our belief in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the primary source and ultimate standard of Christian faith and life. We acknowledge the teaching of the great creeds of the ancient Church. We further maintain our allegiance to the evangelical doctrines of the Reformation, as set forth in common in the doctrinal standards adopted by the Presbyterian Church in Canada, by the Congregational Union of Ontario and Quebec, and by the Methodist Church. We present the accompanying statement as a brief summary of our common faith and commend it to the studious attention of the members and adherents of the negotiating Churches, as in substance agreeable to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures.

INTRODUCTION TO THE STATEMENT OF DOCTRINE: "THE SUBSTANCE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH"

The United Church as a living branch of the universal Church of Christ shares in the great missionary enterprise, which has for its nearer horizon the Dominion of Canada, and for its farther field the nations of mankind. It is incumbent, therefore, on the Church to make clear to itself the contents of its Gospel message, and to declare them to all whom it approaches with its ministrations, in a manner as full and clear and persuasive as possible. The doctrinal part of the Basis of Union is an attempt to discharge this duty with the utmost simplicity and sincerity. In the paragraph, which serves as a preamble to the statement, certain of its characteristics are set forth.

I

THE PURPOSE OF THE STATEMENT

Let it be well understood that it does not contain, and does not profess to furnish a system of theology. It contains, indeed, the essential Christian verities, and does desire to give them sufficient expression. But it is not drawn up after the fashion of a treatise on systematic theology; and it avoids the elaboration of those Confessions, which belong to what we may call the Scholastic Period of Protestantism. The purpose of the statement is, in the language of the preamble, "to set forth the substance of the Christian faith," and it is presented to the members and adherents of The United Church, as "a brief summary of our common faith." In other words, the Church, in these twenty articles, seeks to be positive and constructive in its presentation of Christian truth. It avoids technicalities. It is studiously non-polemical and non-controversial. It endeavors to grasp and to utter the essential and universal elements of the Christian faith.

Such a statement is designed to serve such ends as the following: (a) To provide, as its name indicates, a doctrinal basis for union. It is true that agreement in respect of certain intellectual ideas does not of itself guarantee union, or even conduce to it. The ultimate source of Unity is not accessible to the intellect. But it is also true that serious divergence in the intellectual apprehension of Christianity would make the union of Christians in one organized

society difficult, if not impossible. And it is true, likewise, that agreement in such apprehension will make the path to Union much more direct, if it does not even render organic union a matter of duty. When, accordingly, the Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches began to negotiate regarding union, the deepest and most searching questions, they asked of one another, concerned the doctrinal positions, which they severally occupied. The considered result, reached after years of deeply earnest and prayerful deliberation, was that these three communions were at one in the essentials of the faith, and that such intellectual differences as existed did not warrant, still less demand, their existence as separate communities, witnessing in some measure against one another, and tending constantly to controversy and competition.

(b) To provide a document which could be effectively used in teaching. Nothing can be so important for the well being of a church as its growth in knowledge, i.e., in a believing apprehension of the great saving truths, by which it lives. Such growth is fostered by many influences, far more than can be enumerated. Parents are to introduce their children to the precious facts of the Christian Salvation. Fellow believers are to be in constant communication with one another, as to their common heritage in the wonders of Divine redeeming love. It is, however, the duty of the organized society to provide help for its members in such a work of edification. Such help is offered

in the document before us. Each article contains some aspect of faith or duty, and may readily be used as a topic for study and discussion in a class, or as theme of discourse in the pulpit. The attention of ministers is specially directed to these articles, as providing subjects for a consecutive exposition of the central truths of our holy religion. Ministers are needlessly afraid of Christian doctrine, as though congregations preferred disquisitions on "topics of the day" to the presentation of the eternal values. The fact is probably quite the reverse. People readily tire of the subjects, which are served up to them daily in the Press. They come to church, burdened with care and sorrow, thrilling with hope or fear, keenly aware of the ultimate problems of life and the immemorial needs of man. They desire a sure word of promise. They want to know the truth regarding God and man and the issues of life. They are seeking for a Gospel, which shall irradiate the experiences of every day, and dispel the terrors of death, and send rays of hope into the dimness of that which lies beyond the grave. Let ministers bravely address themselves to great themes, and they will meet with appreciation and glad response.

(c) To serve as our church's testimony to the world: There can be no doubt that we are being challenged to say what we believe. And we are bound to meet the challenge. Our statement of our faith may be adversely criticized in one interest or another. Modernist and Fundamentalist may "rage furiously together." Our part is to speak

out truly and fearlessly; and employ the old motto of the earls marischal of Scotland—"they say; what say they? let them say." Plain and vigorous testimony may offend many; but it will never hurt the church, that is brave enough to bear it. What have we to tell the men of our generation regarding God, and His ways with men, His redeeming work for them, and His claims upon them? The answer to this question is contained, briefly and summarily, but sufficiently, in this document. We are not offering a theory. We are describing an experience, and bearing a witness. This is the faith, which The United Church is maintaining as its sacred trust, and is seeking to vindicate by word and by deed.

Let it be further noted that this doctrinal statement makes no claim to infallibility or finality. The substance or essence of the Christian faith is here, communicated to believing men by the Word and Spirit of God, and received by them in loyalty and humility. But the form of human speech in which they convey their message to the church and the world has the imperfection, which must belong to all efforts to express in forms of human thought, and language, meanings that are eternal, and divine. Creed revision is the inherent right, and the continual duty, of a living Church. This is our "Confession of Faith." We are conscious of limitations and inadequacies in the intellectual form of our statement. It will be the duty of those who come after us to find a more fitting intellectual expression for the unchanging and inexhaustible

truth of the Gospel. We have sought, humbly and earnestly, to serve our own generation; and now we hand on the result of our toil, with prayer and hope, to the generation following.

II

THE FOUNDATION OF THE FAITH

The United Church is not tied to the traditions of the past, and does not exact from its members and office bearers adhesion to forms of thought, which, however serviceable in an older day, no longer avail to express the mind of the living church. The United Church has no speculative theories to announce, however attractive these might be to the modern investigator; nor does it set forth any new doctrine, however confidently it might be supported by argument. It goes back through the ages, and builds "upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets." That is to say, it has no elements in its faith other than those, which lie within the glorious fact, which is Jesus Christ Himself. Prophets in the Old Testament were filled with a great hope, whose fulfilment lay beyond their vision. The fulfilment came in the Person and Work of Jesus, the Messiah of Israel, the Saviour of Men. Apostles in the New Testament are men, to whom Jesus Christ has been made known in personal experience. Their function, appointed them by God, who has also endowed them by His Spirit for its discharge, is to be the interpreters of

Christ for the Church, and His witnesses for the whole world. In short, The United Church stands for New Testament Christianity. The fabric of its faith was reared by men divinely called and inspired; its "chief corner stone" is "Jesus Christ Himself." This is Christianity, historic and catholic, the "faith of our fathers," and our faith. No subsequent theological or philosophic construction must be allowed to deface or deform it, either by addition or by subtracton.

III

THE SOURCE AND THE STANDARD OF FAITH

Jesus Christ, the living Lord, is the object of saving faith; and He, as a Person, is its substance and its foundation. Therefore, in the highest sense, He is the source of faith wherever it is present and active; and He is the standard, by which the thought and life of individuals and of the Church are to be tested and determined. Jesus Christ, however, did not come into the world as an accident or an apparition. He came as the consummation of a redeeming work of God in the history of Israel, as Himself the divine agent of redemption, and as at once the Founder and the Life of the fellowship of believers. The record of that long divine process, which began in the dawn of Israel's history, and reached its climax in the formation of the Christian Church, is found in the Scriptures of the Old and

New Testaments. They are unique as Christianity itself is unique; and they are indispensable and authoritative, in their account of how Christianity came to be, and of what Christianity is, as the guide and inspiration of faith and life. The United Church accordingly expresses its belief "in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the primary source and ultimate standard of Christian faith and life." Christianity is the religion of a Book, only because it is, in its very essence, the religion of a Person. The Scriptures derive their unity, their meaning, and their value, by and through the presence of Christ in them. They are precious to us, and they command our reverence and obedience, because we find Christ in them, Saviour and Lord, Way and Truth and Life, All in all; and because God speaks to us in them, and finds us through them, and by them leads us to Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith.

IV

THE CONTINUITY OF FAITH

Christianity, from the day of Pentecost to this day, has been a continuous experience of God's saving work in Christ. Through this experience, the Christian Church came into being; and by this experience, it has continued to exist, through all the successive generations. There has been an evangelical succession throughout the ages, leading onward from the Apostles to our own day and

generation. We are the heirs of that great spiritual heritage, to which our predecessors, in the knowledge of Christ, have made by their faith and life, continuous and increasing contribution.

It may, therefore, be fairly demanded of The United Church that it should definitely relate itself to that mighty past. Does it share the experience of the people of God in the ages past? Does it keep the faith, by which they lived, and in which they died? The same question may be put in another way: How is The United Church related to the Creeds, which the Church has drawn up from time to time, and which have been the means, whereby the Church has made plain to itself its faith in Christ, and has made confession of that faith before man? It would not be a fair answer to that question, for a modern church simply to repeat the language of the creeds, or even to adopt one of them as its own.

Such action would not be intelligent, and could scarcely be sincere. A church which claims to stand in the evangelical succession, must be loyal to that substance of the faith, which is the abiding essence of Christianity, and which found expression, age after age, in the great creeds of the universal church. This loyalty, moreover, must not be a mere lip service. The church must be prepared, when need arises, to give utterance to its faith, in the language and the forms of present-day experience and reflection, and to show that, in these, it has conserved all that is vital and per-

manent in the creeds of the past. To this twofold demand, The United Church responds in the document we are studying. In the preamble, the church claims to be true to the faith, of which the creeds are the storehouse and the defence. And in the articles, which follow, it claims to be conserving, and maintaining, the great verities, to which the creeds bear historic witness.

V

HISTORICAL REFERENCE

At this point, the teacher will probably desire to insert some historical reference to the creeds of Christendom. A full statement here is, of course, impossible. (A few of the leading works on the subject are named in the appendix to these pages.) The creeds, to which he will probably desire to refer are as follows.

(a) *Creeds of the Ancient Church.* These creeds were called forth mainly by views regarding the Person of Christ and His redemptive work, which believers felt to be subversive of the faith by which they lived. (1) *The Apostles' Creed.* For example: One such error cast doubts upon the historic nature of Christ's life on earth, and tended to make Him a mythical figure, like the so-called "Saviours" of the "mystery religions," which were numerous in the early centuries of our era, and were rivals of Christianity in its first appeal to the Gentile world. The Church recognized in this view of its Lord's

Person, a serious challenge. If Christianity is resolved into a myth, it will vanish like a cloud. Accordingly the church met such mythological interpretations of its faith by statements of the Fact of Christ, in which the Christian Salvation is presented as an historic achievement, wrought by God in actual events and deeds. Such statements were expansions of the Baptismal Formula. Their brief phrases, and intense significance, made them most suitable for the instruction of candidates for Holy Baptism. They could also be set to music, and sung in the course of public worship; and they served admirably as witness to the world of the bed rock of truth, on which the Church stood fast. The most famous of these statements is that which we know as the "Apostles' Creed," which was modelled on one still older, and only received its final form in the Seventh Century. It stands foursquare against all attempts, allegorizing or idealizing, to set aside the historic nature of Christianity. It has retained its place throughout the ages, as the most ancient, and the best beloved, of all the symbols of the Church's loyalty to her Lord.

(2) *The Nicene Creed.* Another error in the early church sought to reduce the place and rank of the Redeemer to that of a second or subordinate God. To the modern mind this theory makes no appeal. But to the Greek of the third and fourth centuries, it was specious and attractive. Greek religious thought had come to conceive of God as separate from this world of space and time by an immeasur-

able gulf. It was much occupied, accordingly, with the problem of how this gulf was to be crossed, and connection established between God and the world. This was supposed to be accomplished by the existence of intermediate beings, crossing the void, as by a kind of gleaming bridge. Such imaginary beings are supposed to be immeasurably superior to man; but at the same time, they were immeasurably inferior to God, who exists in the infinite distance as the Sole Deity. This theory was "in the air" in these centuries; and its application to the Person of Christ was almost inevitable. Accordingly, we find Christ regarded, in the system known as Arianism, as a glorious and wonderful being, to whom the honorific titles, used in the Scriptures, may not improperly be applied. In this way, the demand of Greek thought, and the instincts of Christian feeling, might, it was hoped, be alike satisfied, and Christianity with ease and swiftness be established as the religion of the Empire.

The scheme seemed feasible; and, by a clever manipulation of texts, it might be made to appear as scriptural. It had, however, one damning defect. However high the rank attributed to Christ, it was still no more than that of a demi-God, a kind of being, whom polytheists could regard as divine, but whom monotheists could not worship as God. Those who were experiencing the Christian salvation could not regard its mediator as a *mere step toward God*. He must be in *the fullest sense one with God*. The Christian mind might not be able

to refute its opponents; but it was absolutely convinced that Christ and the Father are one, as the twofold source of the Salvation, in the possession of which the believing heart rejoiced. This conviction of faith found its voice in Athanasius, who declared, with deep insight, that in contending against Arianism, Christians were fighting for their all. To displace Christ from His equality with the Father, was to make the Christian salvation impossible, and to destroy Christianity as a religion.

This was the position taken in 325 A.D. by the famous council of Nicea, and stated with redundant emphasis in their famous creed. The key-word of that creed is the epithet "Homousios," applied to Christ in His relation to the Father and usually rendered "the same in substance." Debate may be held as to the meaning of the Greek word *ousia* or the Latin word *substantia*. But there is no doubt whatever as to the significance, which believers in all ages have attached to it, and the value they have put upon it. They have used it to express their belief that Christ, the Redeemer, is as divine as the Father; that, in worshipping Him, they are not turning away from God, but are honoring the Father; and that their faith rests in the Father and the Son as one in essence and in power. The God of the Christian is not the Greek "Absolute," unknowable, unapproachable, with whom no communion is possible, but the heavenly Father, who was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, who is perfectly revealed in the Son, and who, with the

Son makes His abode in the believing heart. So unphilosophical and unspeculative, so intensely practical and experiential, is the Nicene Creed, in its central affirmation. Therefore, the Christian Church in all its branches adheres to it; and in its apprehension of the Glory of the Redeemer, as Very God of Very God, The United Church humbly and loyally concurs.

(3) *The Creed of Chalcedon.* Logic is always easier than life. What is grasped in experience as a unity, is often separated by logic into irreconcilable elements. So it was, after the Nicene Creed had vindicated the true God-head of the Redeemer, that theologians found it hard, by any logical process, to reconcile with it His perfect humanity. The long, weary, embittered controversy cannot be traced here. In the end, at Chalcedon, in 451 A.D., the church declared the essential points of the Christian faith to be (a) The true Godhead of the Redeemer, (b) His perfect manhood, (c) the Unity of His Person. These are securely fixed in Scripture and in experience; and in them Christian thought finds its inexhaustible contents, and a horizon that is definite and yet boundless.

(4) *The Athanasian Creed.* This is the latest of the creeds of the ancient church. Athanasius was not its author, though its teaching develops His thought. It bears the stamp of Augustine's mind, though it belongs to a period long subsequent to him, probably early in the ninth century. It marks the end of the long struggle of the Christian mind to

repel the tendency, referred to above, to reduce the divinity of Christ to a grade lower than that of the Father, and that of the Spirit, by consequence, to a grade lower still; and it gives final utterance to the Christian faith that the great Agent in redemption is a being not less divine than the Father, and that the Spirit, as the operative power of God in Salvation, belongs in like manner to the same realm of Godhead. These Three—Father, Son and Spirit—are comprehended in what the believer means, when he takes on his lips the great name of God. They are, therefore, One, as they are the one only source of the Christian salvation. This is not a matter of speculation, but of revelation. It is thus God makes Himself known; and it is thus Christian experience apprehends Him, and the Christian soul enters into communion with him. The conception of God as tri-une is not a burden laid upon faith, by an alien metaphysic, but is a demand of faith, which will not suffer itself to be denied the sole security of its inheritance.

(b) *The Evangelical Doctrines of the Reformation.* The Reformation did not originate in a criticism of dogma. It was, essentially, a revival of religion. The Reformers did not repudiate the creeds of the ancient church. They were, in fact, strenuous defenders of the doctrines embodied in these creeds. They were, however, profoundly convinced that the Roman Church had failed to maintain and perpetuate the doctrines of grace, which are set forth in the New Testament, and

constitute the very essence of Christianity. Their criticism, accordingly, was directed mainly to the conditions, under which the Christian Salvation becomes the possession of believers.

In their opinion, the mediæval church had interposed a vast and elaborate machinery between the soul and God, so that the salvation which is God's free gift to faith becomes an uncertain boon, administered by the priesthood, and bestowed as climax of a long process of legal obedience. Briefly, the Reformers regarded the mediæval church as having fallen from the primitive and scriptural faith to the lower levels of legalism and ceremonialism. Their aim was to recall believers to the simplicity that is in Christ, and to proclaim to a sinful world that great salvation, which cost God the blood of His own Son, and which, in all its fulness, is offered, without money and without price, to the reception of humble faith. This conviction, they believed to have full scriptural authority; and this Gospel they saw exemplified in saved lives, and sealed in martyr deaths. Their beliefs and their blessed experiences, they embodied in creeds, and confessions and catechisms. The contents of these great sixteenth century documents are in substantial harmony with one another, whatever be the church or nation from which they emanate—German, or French, or Swiss, or English, or Scottish. They are *scriptural*, based on the actual teachings of the Bible. They are *catholic*, embodying and reaffirming the dogmas formulated in the creeds of the ancient

church. They are *evangelical*, proclaiming the freedom of the Gospel, and the priesthood of believers. They are *Protestant*, in that they repudiate the mediæval doctrine of the church as the institute of salvation, and of the priesthood as in any sense mediatorial.

In the seventeenth century, the churches of the Reformation became unhappily divided on many points both of doctrine and of polity. Men, who were wholly at one in their opposition to Rome, and in their hold of the saving truths of the Gospel, became estranged from one another, by holding divergent views on such topics as the decrees of God, the universality of the atonement, the nature and efficacy of Divine grace. The question of episcopacy, as opposed to presbytery, introduced further divisions, which were also tragically accentuated by political strife. The evangelical fellowship of the great age of the Reformation was broken. Lutheranism, Calvinism, Arminianism, became arrayed against one another, in ever-widening divergence, and ever-deepening hostility. Sects began to abound. Scholastic orthodoxy laid its deadening influence on living churches, and was followed by the twofold result of *pietism*, with its tendency to subjectivity and emotionalism, and *rationalism*, destroying the very roots of religion in the human soul. The intellectual warfare of the time produced many treatises of immense erudition and high systematic ability. Doctrinal standards also were framed, learned, devout, and sincere. But

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the value of these documents belongs to the age that produced them. They take their place in the history of Christian doctrine. The modern mind cannot neglect their study, without imperilling its own advance in constructive thought. But they are unsuited to be expressions of the living faith of the Church. Their intellectual forms are not those, which are fitted for the confessional purpose of later generations of believers.

Our Basis of Union, accordingly, makes little direct use of them. It ascends from them to the "evangelical doctrines of the Reformation," which are held in common by the three uniting churches, and are contained in their standards. These doctrines are set forth in our Basis constructively. Controversial and polemical statements are carefully avoided.

Our church is confronting the men of this present day and generation. It sets aside controversies which have lost their significance, and formulæ which have been long disused. It desires, as being "put in trust with the Gospel," to declare, simply and clearly, the great central verities, which are contained in the Holy Scriptures, and have been tested in the evangelical experience of two thousand years.