

## The United Church Loses Interest in Evangelism

At the time of the union in 1925, the Methodists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians had a total of 540 workers overseas. The new denomination was committed to the commission "to make disciples of all nations." This was the spirit also of the UC's Women's Missionary Society and the Boards of Foreign and World Missions.

### Universalism

By 1977 the old missionary fervour had gone, however. The number of missionaries had dwindled to 119. Dialogue with persons of other faiths had become the slogan. An *Observer* article commented that sharing our faith now means "that we acknowledge joyfully, probably without trying, that others who may know nothing or little of Jesus of Nazareth may know the Christ, and may enrich our knowledge of Him. A devout Zoroastrian teaches us something of Christ? Yes. That's it."

Since we live now in a global village, in the age of mass communications, technology, widespread knowledge, we must have a different attitude to the religions of mankind than in bygone generations, says *The Observer*. We must work toward an attitude of mutual acceptance between Christian and non-Christian.

Former moderator Dr. N. Bruce McLeod said the church "will fulfill its mission not by turning Hindus and Muslims into Christians, but by standing with Muslims and Hindus and helping them to live together in love." He also questioned whether Christian missionaries should even go out to convert people from other faiths.

Rev. Clifford Elliott, minister of the Bloor Street UC, Toronto, is also a Universalist. He advocates cooperation between Christians and believers from other faiths. Elliott wrote, "Hindus attest to having 'found Christ' in their own traditions and experience. Are Christians to say they are mistaken?"

Rev. Lois Wilson, past president of the Canadian Council of Churches, past moderator of the UC, and one of the 7 presidents of the World Council of Churches, believes that Christianity and other world faiths are committed to seek jointly for a new community. This search "will mean reciprocal invitations to Christmas eve communion and to Ramadan or Pongal. It will mean a sharpened sense of sharing a common future together, or not at all."

If the Gospel is not unique; why send missionaries? The mission of the Church has then turned into a baptized development agency, promoting justice in Third World Countries.

### Endicott

One of the UC's most controversial figures is probably Dr. James Endicott, former missionary to China. He supported the communist revolution of 1944. During the

Korean war he accused the Americans of having used germ warfare and the Canadian government of complicity. He was almost unanimously scorned for his charges. Endicott regarded the church as hopelessly reactionary. He believed communism was "a liberator" of the people. He thought there was a scientific basis for the revolution in Marxism, and that this was closely related to the teachings of the Bible. "There came a time when I sat down with my communist friends and looked through a concordance for God's concern for the poor and God's condemnation of the rich," he said.

He resigned from the mission and ministry in 1946. His letter from Shanghai included this statement, "I now feel called to take an active part in the struggle for human betterment in the field of the social and political movements, areas that are considered unsuitable for ministers to be active in unless, possibly they happen to be on the `right side.'" In 1952 the UC dissociated itself from the Canadian Peace Congress and from the statements made by Dr. James Endicott.

The tide has now turned. The drift leftward in the church has led to Endicott's rehabilitation. In 1982 the General Council apologized to him and affirmed his prophetic role as a peacemaker. The UC changed and not Endicott. In an interview he said, "I will be content when the church comes to terms with the findings of modern science regarding the nature of capitalism. "In 1982 he still preached frequently and encouraged peace movements. He did not look for the heavenly Jerusalem. This world was to become it. He confessed, "I believe in a Christ-like world; I know of nothing better and I will be content with nothing less."

### **Charles Templeton**

Charles Templeton was for some years Canada's flamboyant, effective, persuasive and famed evangelist. In 1945 he was the enthusiastic director of Toronto's Youth for Christ. From 1950 to 1955 he conducted great preaching missions under the auspices of the Board of Evangelism and Social Services of the UC. Many young people were converted under his ministry. Years ago I met an evangelical Baptist seminarian who had come to know Christ during a Templeton crusade.

Templeton lost his evangelical convictions. He publically confessed his misgivings about his own faith. In 1958 he left the ministry to work for CBC. In 1969 he confessed he no longer believed in a life after death. "You live on in deeds done and in your progeny." Jesus was the superlative man. The church in Canada had, in his opinion, by and large outlived its usefulness.

Templeton made a great name for himself in the secular world. He is the world's gain and the church's loss. What a tragic turn-about.

### **Billy Graham**

After the Templeton years the mood changed. The support for crusades waned; their effectiveness and propriety questioned. When Dr. Billy Graham came to Canada to hold

a centennial crusade for a "national spiritual awakening," the UC was sorely divided whether or not to pledge support.

Rev. Ben Smillie, a university chaplain, charged, "the Graham group contradicts everything we are trying to accomplish through the New Curriculum. "Rev. Bill Phipps of Trinity UC, Toronto, said Graham's Gospel "is what the mass of non-churched think Christianity is. I say it isn't. I say he's selling the gospel down the drain."

Others were of a different opinion. They called for a strong endorsement. Ben Smillie was accused of a "sour grapes" attitude. A minister in Regina sent a telegram to the *Observer* commenting that Dr. Graham had "done more to promote the cause of Christ than most of his critics."

### **Padre of the Pubs**

The UC tried various evangelism methods. A unique experiment was the Toronto night club mission of the late Rev. Arthur Parkman, who devoted himself full time to visit beverage rooms to listen to people and counsel. He became known as the "padre of the pubs. "This evangelistic type of ministry became a recognized appointment within the UC.

### **McClure**

Dr. Bob McClure, a veteran medical missionary, former moderator, is well known for his unselfish work and devotion to the suffering and the needy. He specialized in orthopaedics and leprosy. He worked in China, spent four years with the Arabs in the Gaza strip, and headed the Ratlam Christian Hospital in India for 14 years. There he performed over a thousand operations a year, "ranging from brain surgery to wart removals."

Dr. McClure describes himself as a "foxhole Christian, not an office Christian." His views are controversial - to say the least. He favours abortion for those who want them. He said, "... if a fetus is an unwanted child, I would rather see it not born. And I say this after having done many abortions."

He does not believe in the bodily resurrection. Resurrection is the continuation of the spirit from generation to generation. He views the UC as a "big umbrella to include everyone with different religious thoughts and shade." His creed is simple, "the God I worship is the God of love; and second, the God I worship is the God and Father of all men."

Theology was never his strongest point, though he was the spiritual leader of the largest Protestant church in Canada. Once he attended, as vice president of the Christian Medical Association of India, a special meeting of medical missionaries and theologians in Germany to study the theology of medical missions. He saw no need for such a gathering. He described it as "being all bunk."

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