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Charles Clayton Morrison and the United Church of Canada

One of the dreams underlying the formation of the United Church of Canada was the creation of a church which would have national dimensions, a national outlook, and national responsibilities. Its founders wanted a church which would mould the ethical standards of public and private life, give inspiration in the founding of national aspirations, and express the highest life of the people as a nation. There was no thought of political establishment, but there was a desire to create a Canadian church which would be, not simply a transplanting of European national churches into Canadian soil, but a church which was uniquely a product of the Canadian experience, a Canadian church for Canadians.

Few churchmen at the time appear to have been aware of the dangers in this conception of the church. It did not conflict with their ecumenical concerns, nor was their enthusiasm dampened by the fact that most national churches in the past had manifested a 'propensity for empty formalism, bland uniformity, social conformity and political conservatism.' Not until later did churchmen begin to realize that national churches have a predisposition to identify national expediency with the divine will and popular opinion with the voice of God. The optimism of the period and the desire for a national church which would serve the needs of a new and expanding country forced these dangers into the background of the discussion.

It was not until the 1930s, when several churches became locked in a life and death struggle with totalitarian dictatorships, that Christendom as a whole seriously began to re-examine the relationship of the church to the state and the nation. Marc Boegner, the president of the National Council of French Protestant Churches, raised the issue at the Oxford Conference in 1937, when he asked, 'Can we speak of a national church?' His answer to this question indicates the trend of thought voiced by many leading churchmen at this time. He said:

Let us admit that this kind of language leads to serious confusion of thought. It conceals the supranational character of the church; it implies an acquiescence in a parcelling out of the Body of Christ, added to that caused by doctrinal divisions, and it permits people to imagine that the unity of the church is based primarily upon nationality.¹

As Christian thinking became more and more influenced by the thought of the ecumenical movement, the national church was seen to be a barrier

1. E. E. Aubrey and others, *Church and Community* (Chicago: Willett, Clark, 1938), p. 5.

towards a supranational expression of the church's true character as the body of Christ. In its struggle with totalitarianism and rampant German nationalism the church also found itself so bound up with national interests and sentiments that it was difficult to speak a clear and effective 'No' against that which ultimately threatened its continued existence. Therefore, Marc Boegner pointed out to the delegates at the Oxford Conference that 'a national church does not avoid the dangers inherent in her situation unless ... the church safeguards her spiritual independence, not only with regard to the state, but also with regard to the nation, for public opinion may wish to exert a pressure upon the national church which is incompatible with the preservation of her independence.'²

In 1937 the relevance of these remarks to the Canadian situation was not as apparent as it was to that on the continent. But the willingness of the United Church of Canada, in times of national crisis, to define its role as a national morale builder was already apparent and might well have given the United Church delegates to the Oxford Conference cause for a reassessment of their church's position. The first person to raise this question in relationship to the United Church of Canada, however, was not a Canadian but an outside observer of the Canadian ecclesiastical scene, Dr. Charles Clayton Morrison. His comments on this particular aspect of the United Church of Canada and the reaction they produced are the main focus of this study.

On 5 February 1941, an editorial appeared in the *Christian Century*, entitled 'Canadian War Bonds for the Church.'³ The editorial explained how the United Church of Canada had launched a programme designed both to help the war effort and to liquidate the church's \$1,700,000 debt, accumulated during the depression years. 'Members are asked to buy bonds to that amount,' continued the editorial, 'and have them registered in the name of the church. The government gets the money now, and the church gets it seven and a half years hence when the bonds mature.' After explaining the project to its readers, the editorial made the following observations:

At such a time as this one would not want to express a criticism which would seem unsympathetic either with the patriotic motive of this plan or with the church's need of some method of taking care of its debt. But it is impossible not to observe the intimate connection thus established between the church, *as a church*, and the war program in which the government and the nation are involved. During recent years on both sides of the border there have been frequent and fervent expressions of a determination that the church should never again become a recruiting office, and this sentiment has by no means been confined to pacifists. There are those who hold that there are circumstances under which a Christian may properly fight but that under no circumstances may the church properly become an agency of the government for the enlistment of men or

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Christian Century*, 5 February 1941, pp. 12f.

resources for war. It is reported that the United Church of Canada recently invested in war bonds a large sum which had been received as a legacy. This is Canada's problem and the Canadian church will have to deal with it. No word of ours shall make their situation more difficult than it is. But in all sympathy one cannot help fearing that the involvement of the church in financing the war will, in the long run, weaken its Christian witness.⁴

In retrospect, this reads like a fair and sympathetic warning to the United Church by an outsider who had a great respect and concern for it.⁵ But to Canadians, at that time, it was like waving a red flag in front of a bull. Many Canadians resented the non-interventionist stand of the *Christian Century* and the personal leadership which Dr. Morrison has been giving to this cause in the United States since the outbreak of the war in 1939.⁶ They also resented his championing of the cause of a group of United Church ministers who, on 15 October 1939, had opposed the action of the sub-executive of the General Council in announcing the United Church's support of the government's declaration of war. In a manifesto entitled, 'A Witness Against the War,' they declared their conviction that the war was contrary to the mind of Christ and expressed their desire that it be known 'that at least some representatives of the Christian Churches disapproved and uttered their protest.'⁷ Because the pacifists were not prepared to press their convictions to the point of open rebellion, this incident was soon swept under the carpet. But before it disappeared from sight, Dr. Morrison had observed that 'this episode in Canadian Church life' was of more than 'passing moment.' He was convinced that it revealed to Americans, first of all, what was likely to happen in their country once war was declared. Secondly, it revealed to pacifists the

4. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

5. Harold E. Fey points out that 'when the United Church was being formed [Morrison] spoke in favour of union in several parts of the dominion - of which, incidentally, his father and mother were once citizens' (*Christian Century*, 16 March 1966, p. 327). Furthermore, some measure of his interest and enthusiasm for the United Church of Canada can be seen in his editorial at the time of Church Union. 'Put down,' he wrote, 'a new monumental date in ecclesiastical history - Wednesday, June 10, 1925. On that day took place the first large scale achievement of organic union of separate denominational families since the Protestant reformation ... The full meaning of the event cannot be interpreted at the present close range, nor in a single attempt. Its many-sided significance will appear in the unfolding of the new church's life and it will be the object of continued study and exposition for months and perhaps years to come' (*Christian Century*, 25 June 1925, p. 819). Elsewhere in the same issue he promised: 'From time to time the *Christian Century* will inform its readers of significant events and developments in the new order, in the belief that these Canadian Christians are opening a pathway of unimaginable significance for the whole church through the world' (*ibid.*, p. 837). Dr. Morrison was as good as his word, for no American periodical has so consistently informed its readership of the major events in the life and witness of the United Church of Canada.

6. Cf. Donald B. Meyer, *The Protestant Search for Political Realism, 1919-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), pp. 349 ff.

7. *United Church Observer*, 15 October 1939, p. 21.

nature of the forces arrayed against them and the sudden fury which these forces are capable of unleashing. Furthermore, it suggested the fact that 'when war comes church authorities still feel it expedient to establish their complete support of the state.'⁸ Consequently, he prophesied that 'when the history of the relation of the Christian church to this war is written, this document from the United Church of Canada will be given a chapter all to itself.'⁹ Because of remarks such as these, together with what many Canadians felt was his anti-British attitude, a reaction against Dr. Morrison and the *Christian Century* had set in long before 5 February 1941.

As early as 11 October 1939, Walter G. Challis of Greenwood, B.C., had written to the *Century* saying: 'Sir, I want you to stop sending your paper to me as I feel that, now my country is at war, I would be a traitor to her and to all ideals of righteousness and truth by admitting such false, biased stuff into my home.'¹⁰ The Reverend J. C. Cochrane, superintendent of Home Missions for Northern Ontario, also cancelled his subscription on 25 October 1939, saying: 'I take this method of uttering my protest against the unfair and unfounded statements in some of the articles you have published recently concerning European affairs ... What I object to is your utter lack of the spirit of fair play in an ostensibly Christian publication. You have never lost an opportunity, to pin something on British imperialism. That together with your smug complacency regarding the purity of every American motive, took a good deal of grace to endure, but some of the recent articles you have published might be characterized as going beyond the bounds of decency ...'¹¹ The most extreme reaction at this time came from N. A. MacEachern, editor of Presbyterian Publications in Toronto. 'Sir: Allow me to congratulate you on your editorial, "Not America's War" ... It is a striking achievement. In it you at once reach the height of stupid insincerity and the depth of insincere stupidity.'¹² With reactions such as these it was apparent that many Canadians were in no mood to receive any advice or observations from Dr. Morrison with the consideration they might merit. Consequently, his remarks on the war bonds programme touched off a great storm of protest all across the country.

Shortly after the 5 February 1941 issue of the *Christian Century* appeared in Canada, the sub-executive of the General Council received a communication from the Press Censorship Committee at Ottawa asking the United Church whether in its opinion the editorial was detrimental to the effort of the United Church to secure war savings certificates and what the view of the church was towards the utterances of the publication as a whole. After considering the matter the sub-executive informed the Press Censorship Committee that it repudiated 'the views expressed by the *Christian Century*

8. *Christian Century*, 15 November 1939, p. 1399.

9. *Ibid.*, 8 November 1939, p. 1364.

10. *Ibid.*, 11 October 1939, p. 1243.

11. *Ibid.*, 25 October 1939, p. 1309.

12. *Ibid.*, 13 December 1939, p. 1548.

relative to the United Church and its war effort' but did not think it advisable 'at the present time that any steps be taken to ban the *Christian Century*.'¹³

While this reply seemed to satisfy the Press Censorship Committee, it was by no means the end of the matter. On 6 March 1941 the *Winnipeg Free Press* ran an editorial entitled 'Conflicts in U.S. Opinion,' which openly attacked Dr. Morrison for being against the Empire.¹⁴ Nine days later a further attack appeared in the *United Church Observer*, entitled 'Premature Obituary for Lycidas.' After commenting on the 'magnificent leadership in the field of religious thought' which Dr. Morrison had given, the article declared that 'he no longer has anything to say to us that we care to hear!' And it suggested that 'henceforth, the leadership of the *Christian Century*, for Canadian Christians at least, and we suspect for many American Christians as well, is over.'¹⁵ 'Many Canadian subscribers,' the article continued, 'have cancelled their subscriptions; some have refused to receive the paper from the post office; still others who take it will not read it.' The reason given for these reactions was that 'Dr. Morrison has, in the opinion of most Canadians who followed his work, lost his right to be seriously considered when he deals with the moral issues of the war.' Therefore, the article concluded, 'weep for Lycidas ... and for the passing of spiritual leadership from a man of mighty parts afflicted with myopia! Weep for Lycidas! American Christianity may never see his peer again.'¹⁶

Not all, however, were prepared to be as charitable with Dr. Morrison. The Rev. Robert Harvey of Minnedosa, Manitoba, for example, criticized the author of the 'Premature Obituary for Lycidas' for magnifying Dr. Morrison into a monumental figure. Mr. Harvey was quite convinced that Dr. Morrison was merely a 'bitter and petty propagandist.'¹⁷ Dr. R. B. Y. Scott also believed that Dr. Morrison's *Christian Century* often distorted the news and misrepresented its tone by omitting pertinent information.¹⁸ The most virulent attack on Dr. Morrison, however, came from the Rev. H. D. Ranns of Swift Current, Saskatchewan. In a letter published by the *Winnipeg Free Press* on 22 March 1941,¹⁹ Ranns agreed with the *Free Press* editorial of

13. *The Year Book of the United Church of Canada* (1941), p. 11.

14. Cf. R. Cook, *The Politics of John W. Daffoe and the Free Press* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), pp. 272-76.

15. There were many Americans who did not share Dr. Morrison's opinions and who looked to Reinhold Niebuhr for leadership in interpreting the stance which American churchmen ought to take in relation to the war. Partly out of frustration with the position of Dr. Morrison and the *Christian Century*, Niebuhr, John C. Bennett, and others launched a rival journal, *Christianity and Crisis*. Its first issue appeared five days after Morrison's editorial on the United Church's war savings plan. Cf. Ray H. Abrams, 'The Churches and the Clergy in World War II,' *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 256 (March, 1948), 122 ff., for a discussion of Dr. Morrison's views and his controversy with Reinhold Niebuhr.

16. *Observer*, 15 March 1941, p. 18.

17. *Ibid.*, 1 May 1941, p. 17.

18. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 11.

19. This letter was reprinted in the *Christian Century*, 30 April 1941, p. 596.

6 March that the *Century* was 'subversive of everything for which Canada stands at the present moment in world affairs.' He went on to suggest that if the Press Censorship Committee refused to take official action against this journal, then Canadian clergymen ought 'to institute an unofficial one.' Mr. Ranns indicated that he had already taken the lead in this matter; but he was still troubled to see this publication in public libraries where 'exposed to uncritical readings it may quite well do harm to our cause.' This letter was not the first attack on the *Christian Century* by Mr. Ranns. As early as 6 December 1939, he was accusing Dr. Morrison of giving expression to his 'spleen against everything British.' 'If the *Christian Century* is "friendly" (as you say) to Great Britain,' continued Ranns, 'a Canadian can only echo, "God save us from our friends!"'²⁰

From these reactions it might appear that Canadian churchmen were solidly opposed to Dr. Morrison and of one mind concerning both the war savings issue and the United Church's support of Canada's war effort. Indeed it must have appeared this way to the American delegates who attended the first North American Ecumenical Conference, which was held in Toronto on 3-5 June 1941. Though it was not on the agenda, the war issue came to occupy a considerable amount of attention. Dr. Sisco, the general secretary of the United Church of Canada, made his church's position quite clear to the delegates at the conference. He said:

There is a moral issue at stake in this conflict the outcome of which will affect civilization for generations to come. For if Hitler and his legions have their way, Christianity in Europe will be driven underground and this American continent will have to orient its life toward militarism in apprehension of the future. The issue is moral in that it is a struggle to maintain if possible an order of society which promises free course to the gospel of Christ and holds out renewed hope for an international order based on the sanctity of law and approximating justice. It is for that reason that the Christian Churches in Canada have given their moral support to the Canadian government.²¹

Not all the churchmen in Canada were hawks, however, nor did they all share the conviction that Dr. Morrison had nothing to say to Canada or the Canadian church. Many agreed with the Rev. J. W. A. Nicholson of Halifax, Nova Scotia, that the *Christian Century* was 'probably the finest religious magazine in the English tongue.'²² There were also many who shared Dr. Morrison's apprehensions concerning the ultimate effects of the war savings certificates campaign. The Rev. Claude de Mestral of Eglise Béthanie in Montreal, for example, saw the campaign as an 'endeavor of our church to make money out of the war.' The Rev. Thomas M. Beveridge also thought that through this campaign the church was 'making itself the tool of the

20. *Ibid.*, 6 December 1939, p. 514.

21. *Christianity and Crisis*, 30 June 1941, p. 8.

22. *Christian Century*, 4 September 1940, p. 1086.

state.²³ A group who signed themselves 'church students' questioned whether 'the church, the divine instrument of God on earth and the Body of Christ, should so actively participate in the evil of war.' What they feared was that the church might lose the trust of many Christians and non-Christians alike, as was the case in the first world war. 'By linking church and state in such a war effort,' they continued, 'we feel that the church is compromising its authority and abandoning its mission.'²⁴

Dr. Charles Hubert Heustis of Edmonton, Alberta, was perhaps the most incisive critic of the official policy amongst those who spoke out on this issue. Although retired, Dr. Heustis had spoken up in 1939 when he was convinced that the sub-executive had no right to reinterpret the mind of the church without calling a special session of the General Council. In a letter to the *Observer*, he declared that 'the General Council of 1938 [which had declared that 'war is contrary to the mind of Christ' and that 'we absolutely reject war because war rejects love'] should be called to a special session. The dilemma must be faced. It must tell the government it cannot support the participation of Canada in the war or it must repudiate the resolution of 1938.'²⁵

His voice had gone unheard in 1939 but, having maintained such a position at that time, it was not surprising that he spoke out again on the war savings issue in 1941. In a letter to the *Christian Century* he wrote:

Our church leaders are now in full cry in support of this scheme. The presidents of the ten conferences, without exception, endorse it, some of them even finding in the plan a fine spiritual inspiration to sacrifice for God and native land. What is most evident in these letters of endorsement is that the critical faculty has been quite submerged by emotional stress induced by specious propaganda which we are meeting here on every hand. These men, one may suppose, were hearty supporters of the many resolutions passed in recent years by the General Council of the church which rejected war 'as contrary to the mind of Christ'. Reason has abdicated. This war is different ...

Up to this point, Dr. Heustis was obviously reiterating his previous stand, but he had been doing his homework on the war savings plan and discovered some information which up to this point had not been made public, for obvious reasons.

There is one sinister aspect of the scheme which has been given little publicity. Representatives of the church who are 'selling' the plan to members and adherents were asked why cannot the appeal for liquidation of the debt be made directly to the people in the prosperous times into which the country is moving, based simply on their loyalty to Christ and His church. The reply is, 'The government will not permit such an appeal. They demand such exchange for the prosecution of the war.'

In a footnote, later added to the letter, Dr. Heustis informed his readers that the United Church's solicitors had advised him there was nothing in

23. *Observer*, 15 April 1941, p. 11.

24. *Ibid.*, 1 May 1941, p. 18.

25. *Ibid.*, 15 November 1939, p. 16.

the government's policy preventing the church from putting on a campaign for funds in connection with its own work. What was not permitted was to make any appeal to the public for war charity funds without government permission. Dr. Heustis' remark regarding this new information was: 'This, of course, makes the action of the church even more deplorable. It did not have to link up its appeal with assistance of the state in the prosecution of the war.'

His letter concludes:

Of course the plan will go over so far as the campaign is concerned. It is quite possible the objective will be reached. But I venture to prophecy that when the war is over and they stand in the midst of the infinite evil it has caused, the leaders of the United Church will look back with dismay and bewilderment upon their conduct today.²⁶

Many United Church ministers were bewildered by this sort of criticism, and their bewilderment is reflected in a letter to the *Christian Century* from Rev. James G. Gorwill of Trinity United Church, Gravenhurst, Ontario. Commenting on Dr. Heustis' letter, he agreed that 'nobody will give the highest Christian loyalty to a church that subordinated its appeal to national claims.' But as far as he was concerned, 'it passes understanding how a minister of a church can content himself with mere condemnation of his church's policy or find satisfaction in a failure of the church to achieve what it sets out to do.' The unkindest cut of all, however, was the fact that Dr. Heustis had published his critical letter in an American journal. It is always a 'shabby piece of strategy,' wrote Gorwill, 'for a Canadian to attack his Canadian church through the columns of an American paper.'²⁷ This, of course, was not the real issue at stake. It was whether or not the church had in fact subordinated its appeal to national claims. The leaders of the United Church were quite convinced that such a subordination had not taken place.

Dr. Morrison, however, in his report on the tenth General Council of the United Church of Canada, still insisted that this matter was one of the most basic problems facing the United Church. In an editorial entitled 'Where Union Is Strength,' he noted the great influence of the United Church on its national community and pointed out how this exposed the church to the insidious perils which lurk in too close an alliance with the state. 'The practice of opening the General Council with a pledge of allegiance, not to Jesus Christ the head of the church, but to King George VI, the head of the state, is,' he suggested, 'symbolic of a trend which disturbs some of the more thoughtful church leaders.' Indications of this sort, together with the war bonds campaign, Dr. Morrison said, 'raised the question whether the United Church were not yoking itself unequally with the secular power.'²⁸ Having had the first and the last word and apparently having made little impression on the

26. *Christian Century*, 5 March 1941, p. 329.

27. *Ibid.*, 19 November 1941, pp. 1444f.

28. *Ibid.*, 30 September 1942, p. 1175.

leaders of the United Church, Dr. Morrison dropped the subject and the controversy was forgotten.

Unlike the United States, Canada has not had a number of distinguished foreign observers who have published critical observations concerning its religious life and institutions. Dr. Morrison's editorials concerning the United Church's war savings campaign can hardly be classed with those of de Tocqueville concerning religion in the United States. However, his observations do represent the view of an outsider who had a deep knowledge and respect for the United Church of Canada. No American journal has consistently carried so much news about the work and witness of the United Church, and few American journals have been used so consistently as a medium for the expression of views by Canadian churchmen.

The extent and intensity of the Canadian reaction to the *Christian Century's* criticisms indicates the degree of seriousness with which many Canadian churchmen viewed the opinions of this journal, at least until 1939. Dr. Morrison's interest in the social gospel, the ecumenical movement, the outlawry of war; his courageous grappling with the social issues of the day and his intuitive sense of the significant trends of his time, to which he was convinced the Christian gospel had something to say, made him a significant voice to numerous Canadian churchmen who looked to the *Christian Century* for leadership.

As the second world war loomed larger on the horizon and then eventually became a reality, the fact that Dr. Morrison had opposed the participation of the United States in the League of Nations and that he believed, until December 1941, that the United States could and should be kept out of the war, meant he was unable to give any theological or moral leadership to Canadians in the agonizing transition from the pacifism of the twenties and thirties to the tragic necessities of belligerency in the forties. For this leadership Canadian churchmen began to look increasingly in the direction of Reinhold Niebuhr, whose Christian realism provided a more viable basis for dealing with the moral issues of the Christian's involvement in the war.

In this period Canadian churchmen seemed to be divided into three groups. There were the belligerents who were prepared to beat the drum and harangue their co-religionists into a war fever, as in the first world war, and at the other extreme were the pacifists. But both of these groups among the Canadian clergy were relatively small. The vast majority found themselves somewhere in the middle, aware of the great tragedy in which they were called to participate, but morally committed to the quest for justice through the meeting of power with power.

For this group, Dr. Morrison's advocacy of the non-intervention of the United States in the war became, not only a sentimental and unrealistic posture, but also one which had dangerous implications both for the future of the allied cause and for the relationship between the American and Canadian clergy and churches. Dr. Silcox pointed to these dimensions of the problem

in an article which appeared in the 11 August 1941 issue of *Christianity and Crisis*. He wrote:

There is one thing that causes great anxiety to those of us who are the children of the church ... the published utterances of too many American religious leaders and the official side-stepping declarations of some of the Church courts have been, to put it mildly, sentimental, unrealistic, and quite unworthy of the great moral traditions of the mighty republic. Thus at the very moment when the American and Canadian peoples are drawing so closely together, when the hope of ecumenicity has taken hold of the church folk on the North American continent, there is a real danger that the religious leadership of the two countries may draw apart with devastating consequences.²⁹

Against this background, it becomes apparent why this issue engendered such an intense reaction among United Church clergymen. No quarrels are as intense as family quarrels, and this was a family quarrel in which one of the members, to whom many had looked for leadership, had adopted a position which threatened to destroy the family's relationships, not only with their American relatives, but also within the Canadian branch of the family where among the pacifists Dr. Morrison's voice was still heeded. In this context, therefore, it is not surprising that the full thrust and significance of Dr. Morrison's critical remarks concerning the United Church of Canada could not be heard, let alone considered worthy of second thoughts and careful reflection.

The problem, however, was not simply Dr. Morrison's stance on the war or the fear of an irreparable breach between the American and Canadian clergy. The whole controversy was confused by the fact that most Canadian clergymen did not understand what Dr. Morrison was saying, because their conception of the relationship between church and state was quite different. The part which Dr. Morrison was later to play in the founding of 'Protestants and Other Americans United for Separation of Church and State' indicates that he was for the radical separation of church and state.³⁰ Most United Churchmen, on the other hand, did not assume such a radical position.³¹ Their Scots-Calvinist background did not encourage them to interpret the separation of church and state in terms which precluded the possibilities of 'co-operation' with the state in matters of mutual concern, whether in the area of social welfare or in the

29. *Christianity and Crisis*, 11 August 1941, p. 4.

30. Cf. the tribute of Glen L. Archer, Executive Director of the P.O.A.U., on the occasion of Dr. Morrison's 90th birthday (*Christian Century*, 2 December 1964, p. 1487). Morrison made his position quite clear in 1933 when he wrote: 'The doctrine of separation of church and state is one of the hard-won achievements of modern civilization. It embodies a principle as precious to the church as it is practically beneficial to the state. Every attempt to re-establish the church in any form of political alliance with the state must meet with our disapprobation' (*The Social Gospel and the Christian Cultus* [New York: Harper, 1933], p. 114).

31. Cf. John S. Moir, *Church and State in Canada West* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959), p. 81, for a discussion of the background of the Canadian attitude towards the separation of church and state.

pursuit of freedom and justice on the international level. Therefore, both in their support of the government's war effort and in their war savings campaign, they were convinced they were co-operating with the state in matters of mutual concern and were in no way forfeiting their freedom and independence as a church. With such divergent presuppositions, the exchange between Dr. Morrison and the defenders of the United Church was bound to be less than satisfactory.

Despite all these factors which led to misunderstanding and controversy, the question still remains: Had Dr. Morrison put his finger on a problem which the United Church of Canada ought to have considered? As one leafs through the published records of the Church, one begins to see that the problem was not simply a matter of formal church-state relations, but rather an informal identification of the church, in the minds of many of the church's leaders, with the hopes and aspirations of the nation and a deep desire to justify the work and witness of this new church in terms of these hopes and aspirations.

An illustration of this fact can be seen in the reports of Dr. R. B. Cochrane to the Board of Home Missions. In the depression decade he was saying:

Notwithstanding all these difficulties of the past four years, the simple fact is that the Church in Canada never in all our country's history more abundantly justified her existence than she has in these times of testing ... It has become very clear, that the United Church of Canada seems to have been brought into being for just such an hour ... Our Church has taken the place of leadership in the performing of two great national services in 1932. She has first of all helped to keep up the morale of the Canadian people by keeping vivid the sense of God. — Besides this — the church through men and women filled with the love of their Master, has led in personal service which has given this generation an evidence of what practical Christian service means such as has never been known before.³²

Ten years later he was saying much the same thing, only this time it was related to the new situation in which the nation found itself. In his report for 1941, he wrote:

At a time when our nation is fighting beside the Motherland for the preservation of democracy, freedom of worship, freedom of culture and freedom of citizenship, our church has the privilege of doing its share to safeguard these sacred ideals in our Canadian life ...³³

Feeling that the importance of this role was not being fully appreciated in higher government circles, Dr. Cochrane continued:

The vital service being rendered by the church to the nation in time of war has not been recognized by our Canadian Government as fully as it ought to have been. There is evidence, however, that at long last, those in charge of public affairs in

32. *United Church Yearbook* (1933), p. 135.

33. *United Church Yearbook* (1941), p. 120.

our country are beginning to appreciate the importance of the message and ministry of the Christian Church in these difficult and anxious days.

Then, quoting with approval the words of the Hon. J. L. Ralston, minister of Defence, to the effect that 'the Church and its members have key positions in the production of morale,' Dr. Cochrane summed up the United Church's contribution in these words:

The United Church of Canada, the largest Protestant Church in our country ... has been able to lead in doing an essential war service throughout the Dominion. When one looks back over the last decade, with its depression, drought and war, it is not hard to believe that our Church was brought into being for such a time as this!⁸⁴

It was to this type of not-so-subtle identification of the Church with the 'higher life of Canada' and to the attempt to justify its work and witness in terms of the national aspirations of the Canadian people that Dr. Morrison was pointing. The problem with this identification was that, while it did not prevent the Church from challenging the government on the issue of sending shiploads of beer to Canadian troops overseas when they were improperly equipped, it nevertheless dulled its sensitivity to many more critical issues. It meant, for example, that it did not radically challenge the attitude of many Canadians, which was reflected in the *Halifax Herald* when it devoted a full column editorial in 12-point type to the remarks of the Rev. J. A. MacGlashen, D.D., of Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, who stated:

The stand of the misguided ministers who proclaim their opposition to war was not only untimely but entirely at variance with the attitude of the overwhelming majority of Christian people of Canada, who realize that the British empire and France are fighting to save Christianity itself. In the light of the grave seriousness of the situation confronting Britain and her allies, it is hardly a virtue to hold patience with arrant traitors to the highest cause on earth and in heaven. Let them be taken out at dawn and shot like other traitors!

In the same editorial, the remarks of Mr. Murdock A. MacPherson, K.C., former attorney general of Saskatchewan, were also quoted with approval. He had said:

It is hard to be reasonable with a clergyman who on the issue of war hesitates, equivocates and talks in riddles, when we realize that this war is being fought between the avowed God-fearing states, with the very right of religious freedom in the balance.⁸⁵

Efforts were made on behalf of conscientious objectors, but no efforts were made to challenge this sort of attitude. The leaders of the Church were active in the formation of the Canadian Conference of Christians and Jews, in order to counteract the anti-Semitic propaganda of such movements as the *Achat*

34. *United Church Yearbook* (1942), p. 123-24.

35. *Christian Century*, 6 December 1939, p. 1492.

chez nous.³⁶ But when the Jehovah's Witnesses were banned,³⁷ few were disposed to agree with a writer to the *Observer*, who suggested that this was a case of religious persecution 'for the offence listed in Acts 17:7.'³⁸ Most agreed with 'Roman Collar,' who said in his regular column in the *Observer*: 'The banning of Jehovah's Witnesses was logically, socially, religiously and politically inevitable. The surprise is that it didn't come sooner.'³⁹

Dr. Morrison was pointing to these blinkers which identification with national aspirations had placed upon the Church, and to some of the negative implications involved in the dream of the founders that the United Church of Canada would be a 'national church with a national mission.'⁴⁰ The events which prompted his remarks have long since faded from memory, but the problem to which he pointed is still with the church in Canada. Whether it will be considered, as the United Church stands on the threshold of further realizing its founders' dreams in an organic union with the Anglican Church of Canada, remains to be seen.

36. Cf. *Christian Century*, 3 April 1940, p. 461; W. Kirkconnell, *Canada, Europe and Hitler* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 160f.

37. The minister of Justice, Ernest Lapointe, introduced an order-in-council banning the Jehovah's Witnesses on 4 July 1940. Cf. D. Manwaring, *Render Unto Caesar* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962) and M. Cole, *Jehovah's Witnesses* (New York: Vantage Press, 1957).

38. *Observer*, 14 September 1940, p. 16.

39. *Ibid.*, 15 August 1941, p. 14.

40. Cf. *The Basis of Union*.