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Thank You to our Friends: An Editorial

OUR first word in this issue must be a word of thanks for the reception that the *Journal* has received. On all sides, by letter and by word of mouth, our readers have expressed pleasure in the *Journal*, both for its format and its contents. We have had helpful criticism also, for which we are very grateful. We only wish we could print some of the observations made, as an indication of how we can be helped. But space forbids.

Now that the first number has indicated in a broad way the range of interests that we intend to cover and the level at which they will be handled, we trust that readers will be stimulated to contribute articles, in order to make the enterprise a co-operative one right across the country. We have already received one such article, which breaks new ground and at the same time takes issue with a writer in our first number. We are gratified at this early indication that the *Journal* is likely to fulfil its task of provoking thought and expression among Canadians. Biblical exposition on a high level will be particularly welcomed.

We desire especially to thank the six hundred and fifty subscribers and Colleges and other generous friends who gave backing to our venture when the *Journal* still lay in the future. We have done our best to justify their trust. Within three weeks after initial publication, we had another hundred subscribers. This response is most encouraging. We hope it will grow rapidly, in order to give the *Journal* a secure existence. There is a large field for us to get into—if only our friends will help us—for now we are supplying in the *Journal* a medium for thoughtful intercourse among all the Churches. May we not claim that all ministers and thoughtful laymen and laywomen ought to know what is being said in these pages? We offer our cordial appreciation to all who are helping us along.

The Revival of Confessionalism: An Editorial

ARE we witnessing in Canada something of a recoil from positive ecumenical endeavour? Is there a resurgence of confessionalism and denominationalism? There is evidence that these things are taking place. It could be argued that as churches we are moving along a plateau, one of many to be expected, in our quest for greater ecumenicity. Yet the image of the pla-

teau scarcely suggests the element of ambiguity in our situation. To be sure, in any spiritual and organic movement progress is inevitably modified by the need for re-evaluation and consolidation on the part of the constituent members, just as much as by the need for more concrete decisions and acts whereby the divinely given and existent unity is manifested. That there is a general response to the need for re-evaluation and consolidation cannot be denied. On the other hand, there are signs of increasing, not to say feverish, anxiety for the success of one's own denomination, for its strengthening and extension, for its exploitation of the present "church boom" in Canada. There is a flavour of opportunism about much denominational endeavour. Unless this aspect of resurgent denominationalism is sufficiently understood, appraised and controlled, the effective re-evaluation and consolidation of the obviously real advances that have been made in the area of ecumenical relations will be seriously endangered.

One of the direct consequences of the ecumenical movement has been the general consciousness of the central and essential place of the Church in the economy of God. We have come to see that the concept of the Church is not only the occasion for a bewildering diversity of opinions and convictions that demand clarification, but also that this concept conditions the whole structure of ecumenical theology. Ecclesiology cannot be treated as an addendum to the corpus of Christian belief, as though it were simply a question of order to be resolved on pragmatic grounds. It is not to be regarded as unfortunate that various denominations have set themselves to the task of exploring more fully and critically their own classical roots in order to recover not only their distinctive ingredients but also that which may provide a more hopeful starting point for fresh ecumenical insight and action. Not a few denominations have found through such exploration elements of the Church which have set aside or forgotten during the history of conflict and self-vindication, and which should be recovered because they are essential to the many-sided fulness of the Church as the Body of Christ in the world.

The revival of liturgical study and reform together with a renewed emphasis on common worship is in large measure an aspect of resurgent confessionalism that should facilitate rather than impede further ecumenical progress. The recovery of Biblical theology and objective preaching is another. The concern for the relationship between faith and culture, including awareness of the "non-theological" factors which activate denominationalism is yet another. One must also draw attention to the new insights into the nature of the sacraments and the role of tradition as formative elements in the life and shape of the Church. The revival of confessionalism should do something to challenge the persistent fallacy that strong churchmanship is the death of ecumenical concern and action. A "super-church" is of course no church at all. The road to the "coming great Church" must, among other things, recapitulate in humility and pain, the diverse roads along which

the denominations have travelled. This does not mean that full ecumenicity demands mere conformity to some alleged primitive church archetype from which in varying degrees we have all departed. It should mean that we may be granted by the Holy Spirit a new gift of unity in the future, when together we build the altar of a radical penitence. Confessionalism can mean such a healthy recapitulation. And a confessionalism that is not driven towards penitence must be regarded as a perverse confessionalism.

Yet there is evidence in our midst that the resurgence of confessionalism in our day leaves a great deal to be desired. Much of it appears to arise out of an anxiety to establish our churches solidly in a period of religious boom without sufficient understanding of what we are doing and why persons are responding. This anxiety is often supported by an inordinate pride in and complacency about the sufficient merits of our own denomination. Church extension sometimes bears all the bad marks of a competitive economy. It would be a tragedy if the churches encouraged and tempted by the obvious fascinations of a religious boom were to forget that that unity Christ wills and gives to the Church has nothing to do with the exigencies of the market for religion. It would be tragic indeed if the conscience about our unity in Jesus Christ is silenced in the eclat of expanding possibilities and opportunities for denominational free enterprise.

A rather special illustration of this situation is to be found in many of our universities. There is no doubt that denominational societies are in the ascendancy, while the Student Christian Movement, in some quarters, is suffering an eclipse. It cannot be doubted that the S.C.M. negatively perhaps, and positively has helped to draw attention to the centrality of the Church, and is a factor in promoting a rising confessionalism of a healthy character. But it should be a matter of concern that the denominational society may provide insulation against ecumenical encounter and a refuge for the like-minded. Yet one cannot deny that it also serves a most urgent need for definite instruction and pastoral care. The point is that these societies reflecting as they do the concerns of their sponsoring denominations need not be antithetical to the ecumenical movement. They like their parent churches can contribute positively through the provision of resources of the adequate knowledge of their respective Church traditions and positive churchmanship without which no genuine ecumenical encounter can take place. There is need in the Canadian Universities for the S.C.M. with its fine tradition of ecumenical concern and encounter and the denominational societies which should provide along with pastoral care the materials for effective and intelligent ecumenical fellowship. The destruction of one to the advantage of the other must have its sequel in ecumenical regression.

This limited example of the ambiguous character of the revival of confessionalism in Canada, may serve to sharpen the issues. We must be aware of it and take steps against those aspects of it which would drive us from the plateau to the cave.