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Lutheran Unity and Union in Canada (Part 1)

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SPECIAL REPORT

LUTHERAN UNITY AND UNION IN CANADA

(Part 1)

Introduction

In 1973 the Joint Commission on Inter-Lutheran Relationships adopted a "Plan of Action for Lutheran Union" in Canada. The plan called for the formation of consultation teams, spearheaded by church executives, to solicit input for the JCILR and to stimulate efforts toward local consensus. When the JCILR Steering Committee met to implement the resolutions of the meeting, the decision was made to use a questionnaire to test the attitudes of people toward Lutheran union. It was felt that the questionnaire might also pinpoint the geographic areas of inter-Lutheran tension. Since all of the seven Canadian Lutheran jurisdictional church conventions were being held in 1974, there was an opportunity of surveying almost all of the pastors and a lay representative from virtually every Lutheran congregation in Canada.

Consequently, a forum on Lutheran unity was scheduled at each of the conventions. Convention delegates had an opportunity, thereby, to hear and ask questions of church leaders of each of the three major Lutheran bodies in Canada. Opportunity was then given for delegates to indicate their feelings about church union and their concerns by responding to the questionnaire.

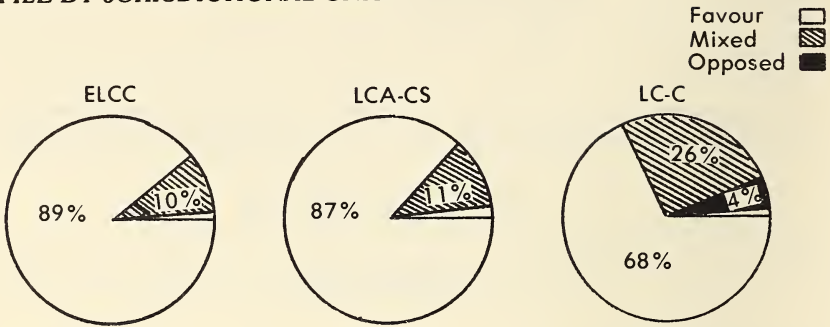
It is readily admitted that the use of such a questionnaire had shortcomings. Respondents may occasionally have put a different interpretation on a question than was intended. Also the fact that response to the questionnaire came immediately after the forums were held meant that the mood of the forums may be reflected to a degree.

Given these shortcomings, the questionnaire results still give the most representative and extensive survey of attitudes toward Lutheran union in Canada taken to date. The survey includes the response of 1107 persons. The three Lutheran bodies are reflected in the survey by approximately the same percentage that their size represents in the total picture of Lutheranism in Canada (ELCC - 314; LCA-CS - 420; LC-C - 373).

The analysis below reflects some of the information which has been gleaned from the responses to the questionnaire.

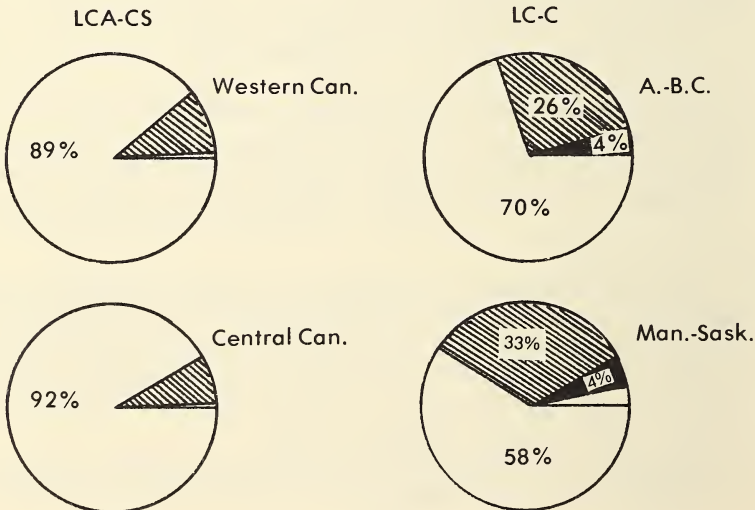
Attitudes Toward Union

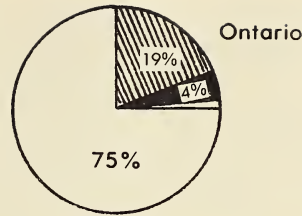
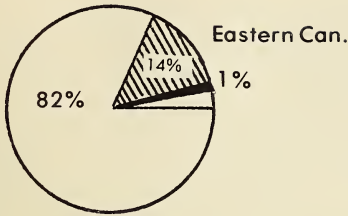
PROFILE BY JURISDICTIONAL UNIT



The graphs above indicate that, of the three Lutheran bodies, The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada shows the greatest support for a union of the churches (89%). Responses from the Lutheran Church in America-Canada Section and Lutheran Church-Canada show 87% and 68% respectively in favour of Lutheran union in Canada.

The percent of respondents who had mixed feelings about a united Lutheran Church were inversely proportionate in size to the first category. About 26% of LC-C respondents, 11% of LCA-CS and 10% of ELCC had mixed feelings. In addition, 4% of the LC-C questionnaires registered persons who were opposed to union.



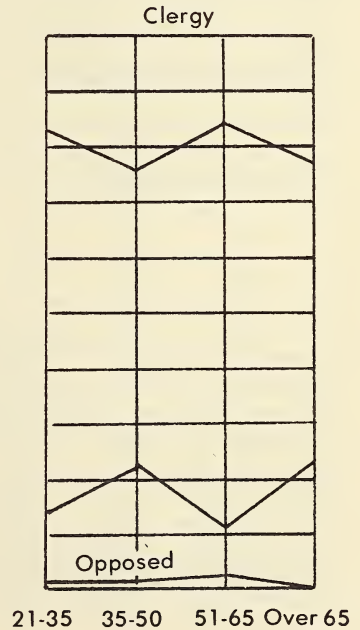
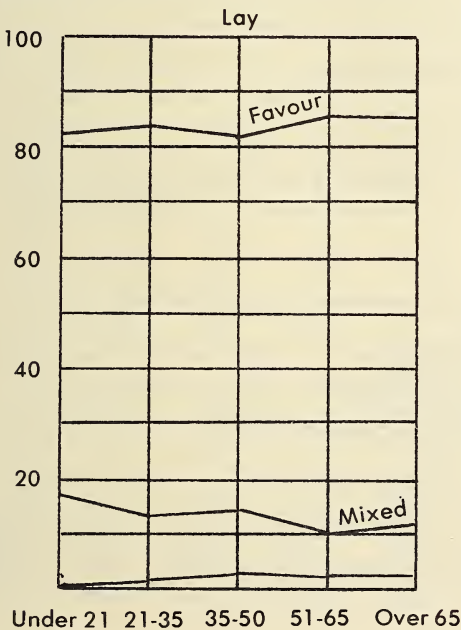


Regionally, the Central Canada Synod (geographically Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario) is the most favourably inclined of the LCA Synods in Canada (92%). The Western Canada Synod and the Eastern Canada Synod are somewhat less favourable to Lutheran union at 90% and 82% respectively.

Although each of the LC-C Districts has a lower percentage of respondents which favour union than any of the LCA Synods, the Ontario District ranks highest in favouring union (75%). The Alberta and British Columbia District and the Manitoba and Saskatchewan District rank lower in this category with 70% and 58% respectively. In the case of the latter District, negative reaction to a forum speaker may have affected the questionnaire results.

Again the mixed feelings category is inversely proportionate in size to the above. Respondents who were negative to union registered at 4% in each of the LC-C Districts and 1% in the Eastern Canada Synod of the LCA.

PROFILE BY AGE



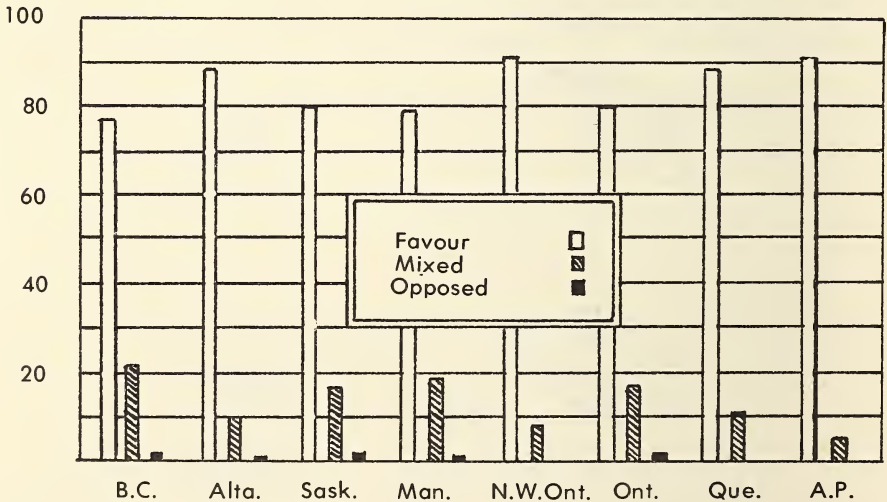
The graphs above indicate that the respondents in the 51-65 age bracket were most favourably inclined to a union of the churches (87% of the lay, 86% of the clergy). About 22% of the respondents fell into this category. The group which registered the least favourable inclination to union was in the 36-50 age bracket (82% of the lay, 77% of the clergy). The latter represented 41% of the respondents. It is significant that the difference between those most favourably inclined and those least favourably inclined was less than 10% and that even in the latter category the percentage of those who favoured union was almost 80%.

In the other three age groups, those 21-35, representing 23% of the respondents, showed 84% favoured union (85% of the lay, 84% of the clergy); those under 21, representing 2% of the respondents, indicated 83% favoured union; those over 65, representing 8% of the respondents, revealed 81% in favour of union (85% of the lay, 77% of the clergy). It should be noted that the under 21 age bracket, which represents the major portion of the church, was under-represented in this survey. However, if the under 21 surveyed reflect their age bracket adequately, the final percentage results of the survey would not be altered appreciably.

The percentages of those who have mixed feelings about union seem to be determined inversely by the fluctuation in the line which reflects favour of union. This is particularly evident in the clergy graph where somewhat greater fluctuation is apparent. In the 35-50 and over 65 age clergy groups where the portion in favour of union dips down to 77%, those with mixed feelings increase to about 22%. In the other two age groups where the portion in favour of union is about 85%, those with mixed feelings drop in about the same proportion.

Those who are opposed to Lutheran union make up less than 2% of the various age groups.

PROFILE BY GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION



When the respondents from a particular province or region are taken as a group, there is no significant regional difference in the percentages of those who favour union. However, there are some interesting details which emerge as the regional data is broken down according to church body.

The British Columbia and Alberta results reveal that the support for union in the ELCC is at about the same level in these provinces (98% and 96% respectively). In the case of the LCA-CS and LC-C, however, there is a marked difference. Only 77% of the LCA-CS are in favour of union in British Columbia compared with 93% in Alberta. For the LC-C, it is 60% and 79% for the two provinces.

The ELCC support for union from Saskatchewan and Manitoba is considerably lower than in British Columbia and Alberta (Saskatchewan - 85%; Manitoba - 82%). LCA-CS responses from these two provinces showed the opposite to be true (Saskatchewan - 93%; Manitoba - 90%). LC-C responses for Saskatchewan and Manitoba registered 63% and 54% respectively in favour of union. The comment above about the Manitoba and Saskatchewan District reaction to the forum needs to be kept in mind.

It should be noted that the picture from Northwestern Ontario (Thunder Bay area) is incomplete. It reflects responses only from LCA-CS and ELCC. LC-C, which constitutes the major Lutheran strength in the area, is not registered because that area is served by the Minnesota North District of the Missouri Synod. The survey was taken only at Canadian jurisdictional conventions.

Greater Ontario registered unanimous approval of union by the ELCC respondents, LCA-CS registered 82% in favour, and LC-C showed 75% in favour of union. Some LC-C responses would again be omitted since the SELC and English Districts of the Missouri Synod have some congregations in this area.

Quebec, the area with the smallest Lutheran population, also reflects no LC-C response. The survey showed 89% of the respondents in favour of Lutheran union in Canada. The Atlantic Provinces, which have no LC-C congregations, showed themselves 91% in favour of union.

Mixed feelings about union are inversely proportionate to the percentage of respondents who favour union. Opposition to union is registered primarily by LC-C respondents at 3% in British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan and 4% in Manitoba and Ontario.

Brief Analysis

The survey shows that there are a considerable number of people, particularly within Lutheran Church-Canada, who have mixed feelings about Lutheran union. Yet the overwhelming majority of Lutherans (82%) favour union of the churches and only a very small number (less than 2%) actually oppose the union of Canadian Lutherans. The survey results would appear to constitute a mandate of the JCILR to proceed with its task of moving toward a unification of Canadian Lutheranism.

As might be expected, Lutheran Church-Canada (Missouri Synod) respondents constituted the bulk of those who have mixed feelings about or are opposed to

Lutheran union in Canada. This church body has not experienced a merger, as has been the case with the other two. Also, its history of participation in cooperative Lutheran work is relatively short. Finally, there is the reality of Missouri's own theological struggles. All of these factors probably contribute to a lower level of commitment to the goal of a union of the Lutherans in Canada. In spite of this, almost 70% of Lutheran Church-Canada favours union and less than 5% oppose it.

These figures include the reading from the Manitoba and Saskatchewan District. The reading of this District is somewhat puzzling because, though it registered a low commitment to Lutheran union, it has a record of considerable openness to cooperative Lutheran work.

The survey shows that there is no appreciable difference by age grouping of those who favour union of the churches. Nor does any significant difference appear when respondents from a particular province or area are analyzed. The survey does not appear to support the contention that Western Canada is more committed to Lutheran union than Eastern Canada.

Part 1 of this SPECIAL REPORT focuses only on the attitudes toward Lutheran union. Parts 2 and 3 will focus on areas of tension which the respondents felt existed in Canadian Lutheranism and how serious they perceived them to be.

NJT