1

The South African War as Prelude to the First World War

Gordon L. Heath

Carman Miller contends that studies of the Great War should take seriously the legacy of the South African War.[1] His argument is that while recent scholarship on the First World War is welcome, extensive, and innovative in its conclusions, most contemporary research into the First World War neglects to frame the war in the larger context of the South African War. In his own words, "The most striking feature of this expanded body of research and writing on . . . Canada's Great War experience is the dearth of references to the South African War that preceded it only 15 years before."[2] Miller claims that at least two reasons are behind this omission. First, scholars fail to "absorb and explore the implications of Carl Berger's thesis that imperialism was another form of Canadian nationalism" or to appreciate the broader contours of Canada in the British world.[3] The ardent imperialism that marked Canada's reaction to the South African War, it seems, is an embarrassment to those who see it as an inferior form of nationalism compared to the less-British-more-"Canadian" identity and autonomy that allegedly began after the Great War. Second, the disparity between the wars in regards

1. Miller, "Framing." The South African War has also been called the Boer War, or the Second Anglo-Boer War.

2. Ibid., 4.

3. Ibid.

to cost, casualties, and consequences has led to ignoring the impact of the South African War. How could a war that only had 7,000 troops participate in Africa be of any interest to those considering a war that saw over 600,000 Canadian troops sent to Europe, and how could a war that led to 270 Canadian casualties be of any interest to those analyzing a war with a casualty roll of over 61,000 dead and 173,000 injured? Miller's argument, however, is that the relatively small war fifteen years earlier in South Africa had a pervasive influence on the ways in which Canadians conceptualized, organized, and fought the war in Europe.

This chapter narrows the focus of Miller's research to concentrate exclusively on Canadian churches, and claims that the reactions of the churches to the Great War were a continuation of precedents established during the South African War, and the trajectories established during that smaller conflict were followed by the churches in the larger conflict.[4] Perhaps not surprisingly in light of Miller's observations, investigation of the Canadian churches and the First World War often ignores precedents established in the South African War. For this reason, such studies are missing vital links with a previous war that shaped the churches' wartime conceptions and practices. Of course, there were differences in degree, and sometimes in kind, among the denominational reactions, and there is a danger that "historical realities" can be distorted by trying to make "analogies" and identify "antecedents,"[5] but what is most striking are the continuities between wars. In fact, no study of the churches and the Great War can be complete without recognizing the legacy of reactions to the South African War.

The churches were prescient during the South African War. The conflict was Canada's first war as a nascent Dominion, and church leaders realized that precedents were being established. It was believed that whatever rights or patterns they established would be followed in Canada's next war,[6] and followed they were, but on a much grander

4. Miller includes the churches in his analysis, but his focus is more wide-ranging. "Churches" refers to Roman Catholics and the four largest Protestant denominations: Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian.

5. Miller, "Framing," 16.

6. "We are making history and establishing precedents, and every loyal Methodist should demand that our Church receive full rights, justice and recognition" ("Letter to Editor," *Wesleyan*, 28 March 1900, 5). Those concerned with precedents were quite right in their assumption that the war was a precedent-setting one. See Morton, *Military History*, 117–18.

scale. Before looking at those practical actions related to the churches' support, however, the following section will demonstrate how a number of assumptions undergirding support for the wars were strikingly similar throughout the two conflicts. While assumptions may be difficult to evaluate in terms of impact, "only the churches had the ideological resources to provide solace and comfort to the discouraged, the frightened, the despairing, and the mourning."[7] Assumptions also shaped the nature and extent of the churches' reaction to the First World War beyond just pastoral care. More specifically, assumptions related to nation, empire, and justice during the Great War were forged in Canada's first war only fifteen years earlier.

Not all assumptions were universally shared, however. For instance, while, generally speaking, English Protestants supported the wars and French Catholics were opposed, there were countless exceptions, nuances, and areas of dissent within such communions.[8] Neither Catholicism nor Protestantism was monolithic—and that reality needs to be kept in mind when examining larger patterns. That being said, even the divergence and dissonance within the two communions followed a similar pattern in 1914–1918 to that manifested earlier in the South African War.

ASSUMPTIONS

Nation-Building

By the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, the Protestant churches had an influence on English-Canadian society unlike any other institution, and as Phyllis Airhart and others have shown, the English Protestant churches had taken upon themselves the identity of nation-builders.[9] The Catholic Church shared a similar influence among French-speaking citizens in and outside of Quebec, as well as among

7. Bliss, "Methodist Church," 219.

8. For Protestant dissent during the South African War, see Miller, "English-Canadian Opposition." Stacey argues that the French willingness to fight for the Pope in 1868 illustrates how differently Quebecers saw the world. See Stacey, *Canada*, 7. Silver claims that there was a French Canadian imperialism, except that this imperialism saw its divine mission to be the preservation and promotion of Catholicism in North America and the world, a role that France had abandoned. See Silver, "Quebec Attitudes."

9. Airhart, "Ordering," 99.

English-speaking Catholics, and it too had a unique nation-building vision and identity.[10] Both Catholics and Protestants sought to shape the nation into their own image, oftentimes leading to conflict between the two Christian communities, and sometimes, as Mark McGowan has demonstrated, even between French and English-speaking Catholics, who had opposing national visions.[11] During the South African War, commitment to nation-building meant that the churches took it upon themselves to construct national and imperial ideals and identity through their services, sermons, organizations, and literature, as well as support—or criticize—the war effort in numerous ways. In regard to their vision for the nation, and their role in it, with few exceptions the churches in the First World War acted out of the same conceptual framework that they had fifteen years earlier. Of course, the churches' nation-building activities in regard to the war effort in Europe were on an unprecedented scale. Nevertheless, commitment to nation-building during the war in South Africa set a precedent for English-speaking Catholic and Protestant support for the Great War and French-Catholic opposition to the war, and also "set the stage" for future controversy between French and English-speaking Catholics.[12]

Empire

From the declaration of war in 1914 to the announcement of peace in 1918 the Protestant churches were avid supporters of a war effort framed in no small measure to defend the Empire.[13] Zeal for defending the Empire was not new, however, for Protestant support for the Empire mirrored the imperial zeal displayed during the South African War.[14] Nevertheless, Catholic support for an imperial war in Africa was divided between most French-speaking Catholics, who were opposed, and English-speaking Catholics, who were mainly supportive.[15] Positive com-

10. Silver, *French-Canadian Idea*; Silver, "Quebec Attitudes"; Perin, "Elaborating"; Fay, *Canadian Catholics*; Noll, *History*, ch. 10.

11. McGowan, "Rendering unto Caesar," 76.

12. Ibid., 75.

13. For instance, see Richards, "Propaganda"; Angus, "Living"; Fowler, "Keeping the Faith."

14. Heath, *Silver Lining*, ch. 4. For evidence of support for the Empire before the South African War, see Heath, "Nile Expedition."

15. McGowan, "Rendering unto Caesar," 72–76; McGowan, "Rally"; Brewer, "Antigonish."

mentary on the Empire among the churches reinforces Carl Berger's thesis that late nineteenth-century imperialism was one form of Canadian nationalism,[16] and illustrates Philip Buckner's observation that popular enthusiasm for Britishness, monarchy, and empire had not diminished in any significant way by 1914.[17] What needs to be kept in mind when exploring imperial identities and the churches, however, is that French Catholics and English Protestants often had different conceptions of empire,[18] and that English-speaking (Irish) Catholics differed from their French Catholic sisters and brothers due to the Irish identification with the imperial cause—something that can be dated back to their participation in the South African War.[19] Recent scholarship has noted that the imperial idea in the periphery was far from homogeneous; rather than being uniform it was imagined, elastic, and contested, often meaning "different things to different people,"[20] and this diversity of attitudes to empire applies to perspectives in the Canadian churches. Nevertheless, the general precedents for the churches support—or not—for the British Empire had been established in the South African War.

Justice

Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier made it clear that he considered the cause to be one of justice when Canada's first contingent of 1,039 troops prepared to board the 425 foot *Sardinian* in Quebec City on Monday 30 October 1899. In the presence of the Governor General, the Premier of the province of Quebec, other civil and religious leaders, as well as 50,000 exuberant spectators, Laurier declared that "the cause for which you men of Canada are going to fight is the cause of justice, the cause of humanity, of civil rights and religious liberty. This is not a war of conquest. . . . The object is not to crush out the Dutch population, but to establish in that land . . . British sovereign law, to assure to all men of

16. Berger, *Sense of Power*. For other important works related to imperialism and nationalism in Canada, see Penlington, *Canada and Imperialism*; Page, "Canada"; Page, *Boer War*; Page, "Carl Berger"; Cole, "Imperialists"; Cook, "George R. Parkin."

17. Buckner, "Casting Daylight."

18. For a study of Canadian anti-imperial sentiment, see Miller, "English-Canadian Opposition"; Ostergaard, "Canadian Nationalism." For French-Canadian views of empire, see Silver, "Quebec Attitudes."

19. McGowan, "Rally," 3.

20. Bell, *Idea*, 7.

that country an equal share of liberty."[21] Protestants, as well as a number of English-speaking Catholics, echoed the Prime Minister's vision for the advancement of justice. The message in sermons, the press, church meetings, and special services was that the war was being waged for liberty and freedom for the Utlanders, for the "natives," for all of Africa, the world, and even ultimately for the Boers (although they did not appreciate it yet).[22] One gets a glimpse of this grand vision in announcements of the ending of the war. For instance, the *Christian Guardian* declared: "It will be interesting to our readers to know the general outlook for international peace. It is brighter now than at any time in the previous history of the world."[23] After initial hesitations, the English-speaking Catholic papers the *Register*, *Casket*, *Record*, and *Freeman* echoed the same conviction that the cause was just and peace would be advanced by a British victory.[24] French Catholics were not as convinced as their non-French coreligionists, and the question of the justice of the cause in Africa remained a point of tension among Catholics.

The social gospel impulse was an important component to the churches' (especially the Methodist) mandate to better the nation and the world,[25] and John Webster Grant has noted how church support for the war effort against the Central Powers in Europe was, in part, a reflection of the social gospel impulse within the churches. In fact, a victory for the Entente Powers was considered to be critical for the future peace and justice of the nations:

> Enthusiastic support for the [First World War] did not distract interest from social concerns. On the contrary, wholehearted support rested on the conviction that tremendous moral and social issues were at stake. The war provided an occasion for applying the social message of the churches both as law and as gospel. On the one hand, its prosecution demanded a total dedication of the self that fitted well with the current emphasis on national conversion, and indeed churchmen experienced some exhilaration in being able to press their calls for self-discipline on a public made responsive by crisis. On the other hand, its successful con-

21. As quoted in Page, *Boer War*, 13.
22. Heath, *Silver Lining*, ch. 2.
23. "The Outlook in the War against War," *Christian Guardian*, 11 June 1902, 369.
24. McGowan, "Rally," 16.
25. Allen, *Religion*.

> clusion seemed to promise the age of peace and plenty to which social gospellers had long looked forward.[26]

However, the reaction of the churches to the South African War indicates that fusion of war and the social gospel agenda was made over a decade before the First World War. Such hope in the efficacy of war predates the postwar optimism of the Great War in 1918, and the language surrounding the war in South Africa was no less optimistic that the victory would bring lasting peace and the spread of justice. With such lofty expectations for the future, Protestants and various Catholics felt confident that their support for the war in South Africa had been justified, and that same confidence in the efficacy of war was carried over into the crusade against Germany.

ACTIONS

While the churches shared much in common in regards to the South African War and the First World War in the area of assumptions, there were also practical aspects to the responses of the churches in the First World War that bear remarkable resemblance to the activities of the churches during the South African War. This is not to claim that all activities were exactly the same, for there were, at times, important differences. Nevertheless, the pattern and trajectory of conduct for the First World War was most definitely shaped during the South African War.

Press

First, the denominational press was used for nation-building and supporting both war efforts. The role of newspapers in the formation of public opinion is widely recognized. For instance, the New Journalism was linked to the New Imperialism, and John A. Hobson, one of the most prominent late-Victorian opponents of imperialism, was concerned about the power of the press in promoting it.[27] John Bourinot claimed that the influence of the press played a critical role in educating the "masses" about the key issues of the day.[28] Denis Judd and other contemporary historians have also noted how influential the press was

26. Grant, *Canadian Era*, 114.
27. Hobson, *Imperialism*, 216–17 (page citation is from the reprint edition).
28. Bourinot, *Intellectual Development*, 83.

in swaying public opinion during wartime.[29] Paula Krebs goes so far as to argue that the press actually created the spontaneous outburst of imperial fervor during the South African War.[30] While there were limits to what influence the press could have on its readers, the press did have the power to set agendas, mobilize, stereotype, confer status, manipulate, socialize, and legitimize,[31] and that power of the press extended to the denominational newspapers. John MacKenzie has noted how in Britain there was no pressing need for government agencies to be involved in imperial propaganda, for a number of non-governmental agencies were enthusiastically doing it for them.[32] MacKenzie was not necessarily referring to Christian denominations, but the extent to which late-Victorian denominational newspapers supported and promoted imperialism is one clear example of such voluntary promotion of the Empire.

Heath has identified how the Canadian Protestant denominational press was used extensively in a nation-building role during the war years 1899–1902, and McGowan has noted a similar response of the Irish Catholic press to the war.[33] In the same way, the religious press during the Great War was active in shaping its constituency's attitudes—whether pro or con—to empire, war, national identity, and civic responsibility.

Pulpit, Property, Services, and Structures

Second, the Protestant churches during the South African War were ardent supporters of the war effort, and as the war progressed so were a number of English-speaking Catholics. Sermons extolled the virtues of the cause and celebrated victories, churches collected donations for the Patriotic Fund, governing bodies declared their loyalty, and troops were sent off or welcomed home at church social functions.

29. Judd and Surridge, *Boer War*, ch. 19; Harrington, "Pictorial Journalism."

30. Krebs, *Gender*, 2.

31. Rutherford, *Victorian Authority*, 7–8.

32. MacKenzie, *Propaganda*, 2–3.

33. Heath, "Forming"; Heath, *Silver Lining*, xxiv–xxv; McGowan, "Rally," 16. Research is needed on a survey of the French-language Catholic press and nation-building during the South African War.

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SERMON

— BY THE —

REV. F. G. SCOTT

—ON THE OCCASION OF THE—

Departure of the 2nd(special service)Battalion of the Royal Canadian Regiment

—FOR—

SOUTH AFRICA

CATHEDRAL OF THE HOLY TRINITY, QUEBEC, SUNDAY, OCTOBER 29th, 1899.

"The Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms, and He shall thrust out the enemy from before thee."—Deuteronomy XXXIII-27.

These words are taken from the blessing wherewith Moses blessed the children of Israel before his death. The great patriot had led the people successfully from the land of captivity and through the weary deserts of Sinai, and now on the borders of the Promised Land the call comes to him to lay

The first page of Rev. F. G. Scott's Sermon in *The Mitre* of November 1899. Image taken by Gordon L. Heath, of the copy in Anglican Church of Canada General Synod Archives, Toronto, Ontario.

The Anglican Church even promoted a Day of Humble Supplication on 11 February 1900 as a response to the dismal performance of the imperial troops in South Africa.[34] The churches' bolstering of the war effort against Germany and the Central Powers was all consuming—at least for those that supported the war effort—and the use of pulpit, property, services, and structures in support of the war effort followed the precedents established in the South African War. Methodist pulpits were deemed to be the "best recruiting stations in the first year of the war."[35] Besides support from the pulpit on Sunday morning, Protestant ministers or Catholic priests who supported the war effort preached sermons at troop sendoffs, troop returns, church meetings, and military parades. Special services were planned for the sole purpose of recruiting or fund raising. Special services were also called for repentance and supplication to God for victory, or for celebrating the end of the war. Wartime prayers were produced, printed, and circulated. Church bodies such as the Methodist Army and Navy Board took pains to get ministers to identify possible recruits in the churches,[36] and church leaders such as Catholic bishop Michael Fallon of the Diocese of London, Ontario, used their prominent positions to exhort the faithful to support the war.[37] As McGowan and Simon Jolivet indicate in chapters that follow, Catholic attitudes to the war were complex and often fragmented. However, this general description fits well with most Protestant and English-speaking Catholic experiences.

John Webster Grant claims that the churches (especially the Methodist) in the First World War "lacked a clearly defined tradition of the proper roles of church and state."[38] Grant's error is obvious when examined in light of the churches' experience in the South African War, for the response of the churches to this war provided clear precedents and traditions that informed their response to the war in 1914. Grant is partially correct in his appraisal of the churches' reaction to the Great War, however, for their participation—such as recruiting from the pulpit—evolved beyond traditional roles, penetrating every aspect of church life beyond anything experienced during the South African War.

34. Heath, *Silver Lining*, 64–69; Heath, "Sin in the Camp."
35. Bliss, "Methodist Church," 217. See also Davidson, "Preaching."
36. Bliss, "Methodist Church," 217–18.
37. Ciani, "Imperialist Irishman."
38. Grant, *Canadian Era*, 114.

It should be noted that these activities of the churches contributed to the construction of two identities. First, H. V. Nelles argues in *The Art of Nation-Building* that the commemoration of Quebec's Tercentenary in 1908 was "an act of self-invention."[39] It was an opportunity where various parties remembered the past, but also negotiated to shape the future. It was a time when a particular vision of Canada was being "made." In a similar way, through their many public services, symbols, and sermons during the two wars, the churches sought to shape a yet "unmade" Canada to fit their particular national vision. Second, while the vigorous support for both wars shown by Irish (and other) English-speaking Catholics alienated them from French-speaking Catholics, such support played an important role in demonstrating to Protestants that Catholics were loyal Canadians too.[40]

Chaplains

Third, a number of the chaplains involved in the war effort in Europe gained experience in South Africa, and lessons learned in the South African War were often drawn upon by chaplains in the Great War.[41] The selection and sending of chaplains with the contingents to South Africa failed to change the "improvised nature" of the way Canadian chaplains were appointed—that would not end until the First World War.[42] However, the churches' ardent patriotism, and active fights to make certain that chaplains traveled with the contingents, did ensure that the government took into account the churches' particular wishes when it made plans for its contingents. The churches active campaigning and participation also led to the permanent inclusion of a chaplain with every contingent, something that in previous decades had not been the government's policy.[43] Consequently, when war broke out in 1914, the expectation was that chaplains would be assigned to the contingents.

Denominational competition for chaplain postings and key leadership positions marked the opening months of the Great War (much

39. Nelles, *Nation-Building*, 12.

40. McGowan, "Rendering unto Caesar," 76.

41. Miller also notes this; see Miller, "Framing," 8–9.

42. Duff Crerar argues that improvisation marked the selection of Canadian chaplains from the 1860s to the First World War. See Crerar, *Padres*, 4.

43. Crerar notes that after 1900 the chaplain's office was "here to stay." See ibid., 22.

like during the South African War).[44] Clerics with South African experience were often favored in the selection of chaplains.[45] John Almond, an Anglican chaplain with the First Contingent to South Africa, served as a chaplain in the First World War and eventually became the head of the chaplains and was responsible for numerous reforms to the chaplaincy service.[46] Along with Almond were a number of chaplains who were veterans from the war in Africa "whose experience informed their subsequent war service."[47] Methods used in South Africa were deemed by some to be directly applicable to the war in Europe.[48] This assumption held true in the case of Father O'Leary, a Catholic chaplain with the first contingent to South Africa. His down-to-earth approach, lack of concern for his own safety, and living with the troops at the front led to his becoming a "living legend" and the "prototype Canadian chaplain."[49] However, there was no precedent established for the crisis of faith among soldiers generated by the despair and carnage of the trenches in Europe: Canadian chaplains in the Great War had to face an unprecedented disaster.[50]

Rhetoric

Fourth, Miller notes how much of the rhetoric and literary representations during the South African War were echoed in the First World War. Church commentary during the war in Africa idealized soldiering and inculcated imperialism even among the churches' youth.[51] The idea of a "good soldier" and "good Christian" that dated back to the Crimean War was invoked,[52] and the Christian character of the British troops emphasized. Analogies were made between good soldiers of Jesus Christ and good soldiers of the Queen.[53] Conversely, church commentary on the

44. For the most extensive discussion of Canada's chaplains during the Great War, see ibid.

45. Ibid., 33.

46. Ibid., ch. 3.

47. Miller, "Framing," 8.

48. Crerar, *Padres*, 31.

49. Miller, "Framing," 9.

50. Marshall, "Methodism Embattled"; Crerar, *Padres*, 146–60.

51. Heath, "Prepared."

52. Anderson, "Christian Militarism."

53. J. W. Weeks, "Soldiership," *Canadian Baptist*, 25 January 1900, 662–63.

Boers had often been venomous and virulent. They were cast as "incorrigibly ignorant" in their attack on the British Empire, "incurably perfidious" in diplomacy, "mercilessly cruel" to natives, "treacherous foes" due to their violations of the rules of warfare,[54] and were the "craftiest, most hypocritical, most dishonest, most untruthful, cruelest, most ignorant, most overbearing, most immoral, and stupidest race of white people in the world."[55] Contributing to the negative images of the Boers were accounts of their alleged atrocities, and the headlines underscored the brutality.[56] These accounts of alleged savagery were published throughout the entire course of the war, with the criticisms after 1900 noting a shift in Boer tactics to an unorthodox guerrilla campaign against British occupation.[57] While the use of such rhetoric was carried over into the churches' discourse in the First World War, the unprecedented horrors of the Great War eventually made the Boer conflict seem like a small, noble, heroic, "gentleman's war."[58]

The portrayal of the "other" in the religious press during the First World War mirrored general patterns in society at large, and was marked by rhetoric that often dehumanized and demonized the enemy. The rhetoric was initially framed in traditional "just war" language, but, as atrocity accounts surfaced and the war dragged on interminably, the language shifted to that of a crusade.[59] Canadians were angered by the actions of Germany depicted in atrocity accounts, and those accounts—oft-reiterated in the churches' press and pulpits—both contributed to

54. "The Boer Character," *Onward*, 31 March 1900, 97.

55. "Truth about the Boers," *Onward*, 29 March 1900, 95.

56. "Boer Atrocities," *Onward*, 16 December 1899, 405; Julian Ralph, "Treachery and Cruelty of the Boers," *Onward*, 9 June 1900, 178; "Condemned by Boer Evidence," *Canadian Baptist*, 20 February 1902, 16.

57. For instance, see "Flags of Truce," *Onward*, 21 April 1900, 128; "A Blot upon Civilization," *Onward*, 15 December 1900, 402; "De Wet's Savagery," *Onward*, 16 March 1901, 85; "Violations of the Rules of War," *Christian Guardian*, 28 March 1900, 201; "British Refugees," *Methodist Magazine and Review*, July 1900, 87; "De Wet's Savagery," *Methodist Magazine and Review*, February 1900, 190–91; "South Africa," *Westminster*, 11 January 1902, 52–53; Thos. G. Shearman, "What the Boer Government Is," *Presbyterian Witness*, 30 March 1900, 70; "Stories of the Humanity and Inhumanity of the Boers," *Canadian Baptist*, 5 April 1900, 215; "Guerrilla Warfare Unchristian," *Canadian Baptist*, 14 November 1901, 736; "Boer Brutality," *Canadian Church Magazine and Mission News*, January 1901, 3; "Barbarity of Boers," *Canadian Churchman*, 8 March 1900, 148.

58. Fuller, *Gentleman's War*, 5–6.

59. MacDonald, "Just War to Crusade."

and perpetuated negative images of Germans. For instance, in a sermon preached by Rev. J. R. H. Warren, Anglican rector of St. Matthew's Church, Toronto, the Kaiser was portrayed to be the "enemy of Christian civilization, and was himself utterly unscrupulous as to the methods he would employ to gain his ends. No means seem too foul for him to use. Devastation and destruction everywhere mark his path. Like another Attila he harries the land."[60] As for Germany's ally, the Ottoman Turks, accounts of atrocities against the Armenians in Ottoman territory went beyond describing the events to both constructing and confirming an image of the "terrible Turk" that was common in the West.[61] Turkish rule had made "no single vital contribution" to the "raising of the standard of life" in any marked way; their only "original contribution" to civilization being the "harem."[62] The end of Turkish rule, consequently, was considered to be a boon to all within and outside the borders of the Ottoman Empire.[63] While this rhetoric was indeed harsh, as Miller notes, it also had a history: "In the decade and more before the Great War the Boer War's influence on military and civilian language, perceptions, assumptions and expectations of warfare appears obvious; it constituted an arsenal of well tested notions and language that Great War leaders did not hesitate to employ to advance their claims."[64] In similar manner, the churches' creation of myths and construction of history, its idealization of war and soldiering, and its demonizing of the enemy in the First World War demonstrated striking continuities with the depiction of the previous conflict a decade and a half earlier.

While the Protestant churches in the First World War imitated much of the rhetoric occurring in English Canada, one noteworthy exception is that of the response to the conscription crisis in 1917. The political battles related to the passage of Military Service Act (MSA) on 29

60. Rev. J. R. H. Warren, "The Duty of the Hour," *Canadian Churchman*, 8 July 1915, 425–26.

61. For instance, see "The Doom of Turkey," *Presbyterian Witness*, 10 April 1915, 1; "After Three Years of War," *Montreal Churchman*, August 1917, 1; "Missionary Notes," *The Missionary Outlook*, July 1918, 146; "Missionary Notes," *The Missionary Outlook*, March 1916, 50.

62. James Endicott, "Ought the Turkish Rule in Europe to Be Ended?" *Christian Guardian*, 24 January 1917, 7.

63. For further discussion of commentary on Turkish rule, see Heath, "Thor and Allah."

64. Miller, "Framing."

August 1917, and the debates surrounding the 17 December 1917 federal election and Union Government, made "all the stops to be pulled and the flood tide of Anglo-Saxon racism to be unleashed."[65] J. L. Granatstein and J. M. Hitsman claim "no single issue has done more to muddy the political waters or to destroy the unity of the nation" than conscription, and Elizabeth Armstrong declares it "seemed that the end had come" to the unique Canadian experiment of fusing two races into one.[66] What made the matter so dangerous for the fledgling nation were the shrill denunciations of Quebec emanating from English Canada that further stoked the passions of an already enflamed populace in that province. The Protestant religious press, however, denounced harsh polemics and advocated conciliation with Catholics in Quebec.[67] Yet even this conciliatory response had its roots in the Boer War, for in that earlier conflict the Protestant churches had been faced with growing hostility on the part of English Canada over what it deemed an unpatriotic lack of support for the war among French Catholics—hostility that boiled over into violence in Montreal in 1900.[68] The religious press, however, avoided and condemned harsh polemics while warning that hostility would drive a wedge between Canada's two founding peoples and possibly even destroy the fledgling nation.[69]

CONCLUSION

What had the churches learned from the experience of the South African War? For those opposed to the war, it had been an unwelcome reminder of Canada's British imperial identity and obligations—what was there to learn, except to hope that it never happened again? For those who were supportive, the war in Africa had cost little, relatively speaking, and seemed to contribute much in the way of justice and national glory—what was there to learn, except to simply to repeat what had been done before? However, in a global conflagration that was unprecedented in scale and catastrophic in impact, those same assumptions, commitments, and activities were amplified far beyond the experience of the churches in the

65. Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 76. For a summary of other violent reactions, or threats of violence, see Armstrong, *Crisis*, 179–81.

66. Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 264; Armstrong, *Crisis*, 161.

67. Heath, "Conscription Crisis."

68. Miller, *Painting*, 443–44; Miller, "Flag Riot."

69. Heath, *Silver Lining*, 82–86.

South African War. And in the decades after the Great War the churches had difficult questions to answer about the wisdom of such unqualified and total support, or lack thereof. Such questions then needed to be asked, however, in the larger context of the precedents established during the South African War, for the assumptions and actions that directly shaped the churches' response to the war in Europe were forged during the earlier conflict in Africa. Of course, there were differences in degree, and sometimes in kind, among the denominational reactions, but what is most striking are the continuities between the wars. Even the wartime divisions between French and English-speaking Catholics, as well as between French Catholics and Protestants, were mirror images. In fact, no study of the churches and the Great War can be complete without recognizing the legacy of the churches' reactions to the South African War.

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