

Introduction

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CANADIAN CHURCHES HAD AN influence on society unlike any other institution at the beginning of the twentieth century, and Protestant and Catholic leaders and organizations were committed to shaping national identity in the decades following Confederation.¹ There were challenges to overcome in the new nation, as well as competition between Christian communions; however, optimism best describes the overall ethos of the churches. Increased coordination and cooperation among Protestants was achieved through church unions, home mission work was expanding, immigrants were being assimilated into the nation, and the ongoing Christianizing (whether Catholic or Protestant) of Canada seemed to be proceeding apace. In 1911 there were just over seven million Canadians. There were 2,833,000 Catholics comprising 39.3 percent of the Canadian population. The Methodists, Presbyterians, Anglicans, and Baptists were the largest and most influential Protestant denominations at that time, with 1,079,000 Methodists, 1,115,000 Presbyterians, 1,043,000 Anglicans, and 382,000 Baptists for a total of 50.6 percent of the Canadian population.² Lutherans were just over 3 percent of the population, with numerous other Christian groups hovering around 1 percent or less.³ The optimism of those years can be seen in the churches' publications. For instance, *Westminster's* "Canada in the Twentieth Century" expressed the expectations and hopes of many when it sur-

1. For instance, see Airhart, "Ordering a Nation"; Fay, *History of Canadian Catholics*; Noll, *History of Christianity*, ch. 10; McGowan, "Rendering unto Caesar."

2. Semple, *Lord's Dominion*, 182.

3. Wright, "Protestant Tradition," 141.

mised that there could be up to seventy to eighty million Canadians by the end of the new century.⁴ With similar optimism the *Canadian Epworth Era* listed the many reasons for pride in Canada: development of natural resources, population increases, cultivated prairies, prosperity, and loyal bonds with Britain. With all of these exciting developments, it concluded, “May we not reasonably expect this Dominion to become one of the greatest countries in the world? Let us seek to do all we can to make it so.”⁵

There was optimism as well in regards to international relations. Developments in international arbitration that emerged from the First Hague Conference (1899) and the Second Hague Conference (1907) fueled expectations that differences between imperial powers could be resolved through nonviolent means. Growing tensions in Europe were noted in the months before the war, and were commented on in church papers, synods, presbyteries, and the like, but Canadian church leaders and congregants entered the summer of 1914 with little inkling of the unmitigated disaster looming just over the horizon, and were unprepared when they found themselves at war on 4 August 1914.

Canada’s military was also unprepared for the war, its relatively small number of soldiers and officers mainly under-trained and over-confident.⁶ In its previous war in 1899–1902, Canada had sent over seven thousand troops to fight alongside the British and other colonial troops against the Boers in South Africa. While the war in Africa did reveal deficiencies in Canada’s military, as well as foster tensions between English and French Canadians over support for imperial wars, it did little to burden the economy of the nation as a whole. The war in Europe, on the other hand, rapidly militarized all aspects of Canadian life as “total war” became a grim reality. The Canadian Expeditionary

4. “Canada in the Twentieth Century,” *Westminster*, 5 January 1901, 8.

5. “Dominion Day,” *Canadian Epworth Era*, July 1900, 209. For similar sentiment, see Rev. W. E. Norton, “The Attitude of the Church towards the Political Life of the Country,” *Canadian Baptist*, 20 December 1900, 802; “Our Canadian Future,” *Westminster*, 23 June 1900, 723–24; Rev. James S. Ross, “Canada—Its Extent and Its Resources,” *Pleasant Hours*, 30 June 1900, 103; “Canada since Confederation,” *Onward*, 9 November 1901, 353; “Greater Canada,” *Canadian Churchman*, 13 February 1902, 101; “1900,” *Canadian Churchman*, 4 January 1900, 4–5; “Canada’s Growth,” *Westminster*, 4 January 1902, 7; “Our Country,” *Onward*, 18 August 1900, 259; “Our Own Country Best,” *Pleasant Hours*, 21 June 1902, 100.

6. Morton, *Military History*, 131.

Force (CEF) grew to be a potent fighting force; Canada eventually sent close to 620,000 troops (roughly 8 percent of the Canadian population) and experienced 60,000 dead and 173,000 injured.⁷

While there were a number of factors that contributed to the outbreak of war, it was the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, along with his wife Sophie, at Sarajevo, Serbia, on 28 June 1914 that set in motion the decisions that culminated in multiple declarations of war. Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia on 28 July 1914 to punish it for its complicity in the shooting. Germany declared war on Russia on 1 August 1914 in support of its ally Austria-Hungary. Anticipating hostilities with France (a Russian ally), Germany declared war on France a few days later and invaded Belgium on the way to Paris. Britain gave Germany an ultimatum to withdraw from neutral Belgium, and when this was ignored declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914. With that declaration of war Canada was automatically at war in a conflict that belligerents optimistically believed would be over by Christmas. Major powers joined the fray in the coming years: the Ottoman Turks entered the war on the side of Germany and Austria-Hungary on 28 October 1914, Italy declared war on Germany and Austria-Hungary on 23 May 1915 as did the United States on 6 April 1917. The Central Powers of Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman Empire were at war eventually with over twenty-five nations that comprised the Entente Powers. Wracked by revolution, Russia sued for peace in 1917 and signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918. However, after an exhaustive and near fatal struggle, the Entente Powers prevailed over the Central Powers by late 1918.

The war was waged in Europe, Africa, and Asia, as well as in the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans, but for Britain and Canada the Western Front was the critical theatre of operations. Repeated attempts to break through the trenches on the Western Front in order to return to a war of mobility led to horrific casualties, and the static war of attrition became a living nightmare. Modern machine guns, artillery, poison gas, and barbed wire took a grim toll; for instance, the first day of the Battle of the Somme (1916) saw close to 20,000 British dead and 35,000 wounded. By the end of the six month battle, there were approximately one million casualties on both sides. Canadian participation in battles at Ypres, Vimy, and elsewhere led to similar shocking rates of casualties.

7. Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts*, 481.

For instance, at the Battle of Passchendaele, 1917, the CEF experienced 15,000 casualties in one month.⁸ The overall cost of human life during the entire war was staggering: over eight million dead and twenty-one million wounded, out of sixty-five million mobilized.⁹ The rate of deaths for the entire war was an average of 6,000 soldiers a day.¹⁰ The war has been portrayed as the “opening of an age of catastrophe”¹¹ and the beginning of the “bloodiest century in modern history.”¹² The implications of the war defy description in this short summary. Suffice it to say that not only did the Ottoman genocide of Armenian Christians (over one million deaths) set in motion a disturbing precedent for the treatment of minorities mimicked in subsequent conflicts, the war also directly contributed to the outbreak and spread of the Spanish Influenza (fifty to one hundred million deaths), the Second World War (sixty to eighty million deaths), the Cold War, and the post-colonial breakup of European empires.

Research on Canada and the war is extensive, with the energies of historians being expended for decades on this iconic nation-building war. Such histories have focused on domestic politics, economics and industry, battles and the performance of Canadian troops, and the impact of the war on Canada both during and after the conflagration.¹³ Most accounts, however, either ignore outright or merely mention in passing the churches and the war. While this exclusion may reflect the contemporary marginalization of the churches from Canadian public life and national identity, it certainly does not do justice to the remarkable influence of the wartime churches nor to the religious identity of the young Dominion. Increasingly, scholars of religion in Canada are noting the important role religion has played in public life,¹⁴ and this volume continues that trajectory of highlighting the churches’ national vision(s) and support for the war effort, or—in the case of Mennonites, Quakers,

8. Copp, “Military Effort,” 54.

9. Bourne, “Total War I,” 137. Figures of casualties vary considerably.

10. Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts*, 479.

11. Stevenson, *1914-1918*, 503.

12. Ferguson, *War of the World*, xxxiv.

13. Morton and Granatstein, *Marching to Armageddon*; Morton, *Military History*; Morton, *Fight or Pay*; Morton, *Number’s Up*; Mackenzie, *First World War*; Miller, *Our Glory*; Vance, *Maple Leaf Empire*; Winegard, *King and Kanata*; Cook, *At the Sharp End*; Cook, *Shock Troops*.

14. For instance, see Van Die, *Religion and Public Life*; Miedema, *For Canada’s Sake*; Heath and Wilson, *Baptists and Public Life*.

French Catholics, and individual dissenters—the difficulties faced when religious convictions and ethnic identities clashed with Canadian war aims. Of course, at some time in the future there needs to be a synthesis of various denominational accounts into a unified work on the churches and the war as a whole.

The neglect of the war is striking among scholars of religion. Denominational histories pay scant attention to it.¹⁵ Surprisingly, there has been no doctoral dissertation focused solely on the churches and the war and only one monograph on the churches and the First World War.¹⁶ That monograph, Duff Crerar's *Padres in No Man's Land*, however, focuses exclusively on chaplains. Nonetheless, various Master's theses and journal articles document a range of issues related to the churches and war; for instance, imperial identity, support for the war, conscription, dissent, the home front, the impact of the war, and the postwar period are treated in varying depth.¹⁷ The authors of this volume provide a detailed summary of various Christian traditions and the war, both synthesizing and furthering previous research. However, readers will quickly note that some chapters that should be included in this volume are not. Perhaps the most obvious omission is a chapter on Eastern Orthodoxy and the war. The eastern European origins of many Orthodox in Canada meant that a significant number were from regions that belonged to the Central Powers. During the war there was concern expressed that those communities could be sympathetic to the Central Powers and subversive to the Canadian war effort.¹⁸ Other areas of interest that need to be pursued in the coming years are dissident communities or individuals, church publications for children,¹⁹ smaller denominations or movements such as the Salvation Army and Pentecostals, and the attitudes of French Catholics outside of Quebec to the war.

15. For instance, see Carrington, *Anglican Church*, 252; Renfree, *Heritage and Horizon*, 210–11; Moir, *Enduring Witness*, 207–12; Fay, *History of Canadian Catholics*, 172–75. For a noteworthy exception, see Semple, *Lord's Dominion*, 395–403.

16. It should also be noted that there has been no doctoral dissertation that has focused on the churches and the Second World War. Faulkner's dissertation, "For Christian Civilization," only partly covers the Second World War years (1939–1942).

17. For a comprehensive survey of research on Canadian churches and war, see Heath, "Canadian Churches."

18. Boudreau, "Enemy Alien Problem."

19. For an example of imperialism in church children's publications during an earlier war, see Heath, "Prepared to do."

The chapters in this volume both deepen our understanding and break new ground in regards to our knowledge of the churches and the war. Gordon L. Heath situates the churches' responses to the Great War in the larger context of Canada's participation in the South African War. He demonstrates how the reactions of the churches to the Great War were a continuation of precedents established during the war in Africa, and the trajectories established during that smaller conflict were followed by the churches in the larger conflict. Studies that investigate the Canadian churches and the First World War often ignore such precedents, and for this reason, they are missing vital links with a previous war that shaped the churches' wartime conceptions and practices. In fact, Heath argues, no study of the churches and the Great War can be complete without recognizing the legacy of reactions to the South African War.

What can be lost in the discussion of Canadian Catholics and the war is the reality that the Catholic Church was much more than just its French Canadian majority. In his chapter, Mark McGowan details the struggle of English-speaking Catholics to achieve a level of respectability in Canada among their Protestant neighbors. It is well known that the Great War ripped Canada apart along linguistic, ethnic, and class lines, but little has been written on the troubled situation of English-speaking Catholics who were torn between their linguistic and cultural ties to English-speaking Protestant Canada on the one hand, and their religious ties to French Canada on the other. In the period leading up to the war, English-speaking Catholics had improved their material conditions in Canada, advanced in their political status, and had increasingly become more comfortable in identifying themselves with the patriotic aspirations of other English-speaking Canadians and the international questions relating to the British Empire. Despite ongoing Protestant prejudice and French-Catholic opposition, this identification with English Canada led to widespread support for the war among English-speaking Catholics.

Simon Jolivet demonstrates how the events of the war forced the Catholic authorities in Quebec to adapt to the new reality. After 1916, public opinion in Quebec grew increasingly suspicious of the government's decisions and the episcopate had to revise its traditional position of unreserved loyalty to the British crown and Empire. Feeling betrayed by the Canadian Government and Sir Robert Borden, Quebec Bishops, such as Cardinal Louis-Nazaire Bégin and Montreal's Archbishop Paul

Bruchési, felt they had little choice but to support their parishioners and even some of their own priests who publicly condemned the government. In 1918, some of their own influential priests, such as Canon Philippe Perrier and Canon Lionel Groulx, asked their brethren not to fill out the National Register created by Prime Minister Borden and encouraged them to oppose conscription. However, Jolivet notes that the Acadian or Franco-Ontarian episcopate did not always mirror attitudes emanating from Quebec, an indication of how the war contributed to tensions and divisions among French-speaking Catholics.

The Methodist Church of Canada's response to the First World War has received the lion's share of attention from Canadian historians, and, as David Marshall argues, there was no uniform response to the war on the part of the Methodist Church. There were no easy or straightforward answers to the complicated and urgent questions posed by wartime, such as the relationship between the Christian faith and war, the use of violence and resort to killing, the reasons for and significance of sacrifice, the meaning of death, and the nature of the afterlife. Within Methodism, there was a range of experiences and perspectives and, in many cases, religious beliefs and practices changed or were fluid depending on the particular circumstances being faced in the chaos of the war. Some Methodists questioned the existence of a loving and merciful God as a result of the terrible carnage of the war and others were critical of the Methodist Church's identification with the cause of the war. On the other hand, the Christian notion of salvation through sacrifice as a way to understand the terrible toll of the war offered a powerful note of consolation.

Stuart Macdonald focuses on the Presbyterian Church in Canada and its reaction to the war. He traces the widespread support for the nation, Britain, and Empire during the war, as well as noting an evolution in the discourse from the war being a "just war" to the war being understood as a "holy war." The war was most often portrayed as neither a political or economic contest nor a scramble for colonies or empire; rather, it was deemed to be an apocalyptic struggle between good and evil. Macdonald notes how Presbyterians raised issues with the government such as venereal disease or temperance, but never challenged the core issue of the war itself. Despite their yearly declarations of independence and a covenanting tradition that affirmed an independence from the state, Canadian Presbyterians made little distinction between their

loyalty to King Jesus and their loyalty to the King of Great Britain and the Empire.

Melissa Davidson notes that by 1916 Anglicans made up roughly 40 percent of the CEF.²⁰ Given their pre-war population, as many as 12 to 16 percent of all Canadian Anglicans were in uniform by the fall of 1916. Davidson identifies the near universal support for the war, and argues that the war, for Anglicans, was neither a just war fought for political reasons nor a holy war fought because God had ordained it, but a righteous war fought in defence of Christian values and civilization and understood as part of Britain's imperial mission. She also details the enormous impact the war had on the denomination; Anglican families faced widespread dislocation from fathers and husbands, local churches and parishes suffered from lack of men and workers, theological colleges and seminaries were barely attended, and numerous bishops and societies also expressed difficulties caused by a lack of workers and/or funds.

The support of Baptists for the war effort, Michael Haykin and Ian Clary argue, was primarily rooted in support for the unjustly invaded nation of Belgium as well as loyalty to their "motherland," Britain. Accounts of German atrocities confirmed and reinforced their initial outrage. Haykin and Clary's examination of Baptists primarily—but not exclusively—in central Canada indicates that Baptist support was widespread, and was bolstered by the preaching of T. T. Shields, the well-known pastor of Jarvis Street Baptist Church in Toronto. They do note that while Baptist leadership officially supported conscription, there were some Baptists, such as students at McMaster University, who objected to conscription because they did not want to abandon traditional liberal principles by enforcing compulsory military service. Haykin and Clary also detail the cost of the war on the churches, such as the departure of men overseas leading to churches without pastors.

Most Lutherans in Canada were a part of ethnic churches that were self-consciously German, Icelandic, Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish, or Danish, and Norm Threinen details how, as the war progressed, these Lutherans were increasingly viewed with suspicion and treated harshly by both government and citizens. Anti-German sentiment was particularly strong in areas where there was a high concentration of Germans,

20. Up until 1955 what we today call the Anglican Church was called the Church of England in Canada. For simplicity and ease of identification, the modern title "Anglican" is used throughout this volume.

such as Berlin, Ontario (renamed Kitchener during the war). Threinen describes how the war forced a Canadianization of the Lutheran churches. It played a direct role in leading the Lutheran bodies in Canada to cooperate in support of certain vital ministries, and, in the process, raising their awareness of their Canadian identity. The closure of church schools during the Great War was a severe blow to German Lutheran communities in terms of their identity, but led to an increased English-Canadian content in classes. The need to make statements that disagreed with the opinions of the leadership of their church's parent body in Germany led Canadian Lutherans to become aware that they were not merely a northern branch of North American Lutheranism; they had an identity that was uniquely Canadian.

Robynne Healey demonstrates how the years preceding the First World War, as well as the war itself, were a turning point for the Religious Society of Friends. Canadian Quakers, alongside Quakers around the world, began to take an active position for peace and against war, seeking to understand and ameliorate the underlying causes of armed conflict. The war was also pivotal for Canadian Mennonites. While they remained committed to the separation of their communities from mainstream Canadian society in this period, the war brought disparate Mennonite groups together in cooperation. Representatives from a number of Mennonite groups joined together to establish the Non-Resistant Relief Organization (NRRO), and Mennonites spearheaded the founding of the Conference of Historic Peace Churches. Nevertheless, ethnic identity separated the war experience of Quakers and Mennonites. Amidst the rhetoric of patriotism, ethnic nationalism, and anti-Germanism of the First World War, pacifist Mennonites were considered dirty shirkers, potential spies, and unfit as "true" Canadians. Quakers, on the other hand, were respected as people of conscience and conviction.

Duff Crerar details the ministry that chaplains carried out under hellish conditions at the front and debilitating political intrigue in the rear. He identifies the role that Rev. John Almond played in bringing much-needed reform to the Chaplaincy Service, and argues that many Canadian Great War chaplains came home from the war with high hopes for a church-led revolution in public life, one in which they would play a leading role. Yet victory did not bring vindication. Joining up as individuals, they served together in the CEF, where their branch sought to give meaning and purpose to the brutality, chaos, and pain of war.

Coming home, Crerar asserts, they found themselves alone again, individuals left by demobilization serving congregations, alienated and divided, that were often unwilling to take on the postwar mission the chaplains envisioned overseas. They also faced many returning soldiers whose faith had been shattered by the horrors of the war.

Lucille Marr focuses on the essential role played by the churches in supporting and shaping women's contributions to the war effort from the home front, and how women's involvement in religion gave them space to fulfill and expand their roles. Two religious communities—Canadian Anglicans and Ontario Swiss (or Old) Mennonites—serve as case studies to illustrate the extremes in Canadian church women's experiences on the home front. Women were actively involved in the churches, and they provided the majority of members. As “civic cheerleaders” and “official mourners” on the one hand, and as carriers of the “banner of nonconformity” for the “pacifist few” on the other, Anglican and Mennonite women provided stability in their respective faith communities. This chapter demonstrates how they often offered parallel contributions, while at other times they came into conflict as they fostered the particular convictions of their denominations.

No aspect of Canadian life was untouched by the war, and the churches' experience was no exception. The war eventually impinged on every facet of the churches' life related to identity, ministry, and aspirations. As for identity, those who supported the war had no need to prove to anyone that they were “true” Canadians, while conscientious objectors such as Quakers and Mennonites, or those who opposed conscription such as French Catholics, faced derision, violence, or even arrest for their alleged lack of patriotism. German Lutherans encountered hostility even when they supported the war effort. As a result, the process of Canadianization was relatively seamless for some denominations, while in other cases it was contested, forced, and divisive. In regard to ministry, there was no escaping the seemingly insatiable demands of total war: the pastoral responsibilities to soldiers and their families swelled as the war dragged on and the casualty list grew longer, the shortage of men for leadership put myriad stresses on local parishes and theological schools, and the theological issues raised by a God who allowed such horrors to continue year after year gnawed at faith in a benevolent God. In regard to aspirations, the war's supporters believed the war to be fought for high ideals such as righteousness, freedom, civilization, and an end to geno-

cide.²¹ While there were excesses—such as recruitment from pulpits, the discourse of holy war, and even jingoistic support for empire—the churches’ support was just as often nuanced and critical, shaped by either the classic just war paradigm of just cause (*jus ad bellum*) and just means (*jus in bello*) or pacifism’s outright rejection of violence. For those church leaders imbued with the often radical ideals of the social gospel, the war was not only a defense of justice in Europe, but also an opportunity to apply a more radical approach to state control of industry—or morals, in the case of prohibition—for the Christianization of the nation. It was anticipated that the sacrifice of sons and wealth would lead to a renewed and reinvigorated Christianity and nation, and the “war to end all wars” would usher in a new world order.

The war led neither to a reinvigorated faith nor to peace. While there was no precipitous postwar decline in numbers of Sunday worshippers and the formation of Forward Movements indicates a degree of optimism among church-goers, the faith of countless soldiers had died or been crippled in the trenches. Parish life in the following decade was adversely impacted by the doubts and despair of those who had suffered trauma during the war, and leaders—some more radical than others—realized the need to adjust to the complexities of the modern world if Christianity was to remain relevant. Denominations also experienced divisions, for wartime disagreements were neither easily nor readily forgotten in the postwar years. International peace was also elusive, with civil war and military conflicts continuing unabated into the 1920s. The Treaty of Versailles (1919), a product of the victor nations at the Paris Peace Conference, was not a permanent solution, nor was the formation of the League of Nations (1919). The interwar period was marked by a reconsideration of support for war, and at the outbreak of the Second World War the churches had been sobered by their postwar experience. Consequently, naive optimism surrounding the efficacy of war had vanished and those who supported the war against Hitler did so believing it to be a “messy but necessary job.”²²

21. In regards to waging war to end genocide, see Heath, “Thor and Allah.”

22. Wright, “The Canadian Protestant Tradition,” 188.

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