

Keeping the Faith: The Presbyterian Press and the Great War

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In his book, *Our Glory and Our Grief: Torontonians and the Great War*, historian Ian Miller tells of the story of a funeral for Captain Robert Darling of the 48th Highlanders held at St. James' Presbyterian Church on Gerard Street in Toronto. The unit had sustained large losses at Second Ypres and had many Presbyterians in its ranks. Miller goes on to describe the church as being filled with 48th Highlander comrades, while the coffin was piped in and the royal flag of Scotland was front and centre at the lectern. The minister, Reverend Dr. Robertson comforted the grieving with the passage "Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." Recognizing Captain Darling's sacrifice, Robertson suggested, "He laid down his life when life was opening for him, holding everything he hoped for or could desire. I am not sure any of us would have it otherwise. It is good to die so. Death is not the worst thing that can happen to a man."¹ This message of comfort aimed at Presbyterians touched by the loss of young lives was not atypical of the Presbyterian response to the magnitude of death and destruction brought on by the Great War.

A study of the ideas expressed by a Canadian Protestant church on the issues of war and peace during the First World War, must inevitably address the questions raised in the influential article "The Methodist Church and World War I" written by Michael Bliss. The essay, which appeared in the *Canadian Historical Review* in 1968, argued that the Methodist Church turned away from the social gospel because "it was taken in by atrocity stories."² The Methodist Church, according to Bliss, accepted what he regards as "the paradox of fighting for peace"³ and did so because its leaders were misled about the nature and purposes of the war. The argument presented by Bliss and echoed in many subsequent studies of Canadian attitudes towards conflict⁴ was influenced by post-war

¹ As quoted in Ian Hugh Maclean Miller, *Our Glory and Our Grief: Torontonians and the Great War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002) 42-43.

² Michael Bliss, "The Methodist Church and World War I," *Canadian Historical Review* 49 (1968): 230.

³ Bliss 231.

⁴ Thomas Socknat's book *Witness Against War: Pacifism in Canada 1900-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987) is a survey of the Canadian pacifist movement. Socknat fully agrees with Michael Bliss concerning the contradictory nature of Christian pacifist ideals. He offers a brief assessment of the Protestant reaction to the Great War and suggests that many pre-war pacifists had come full circle, with the onset of the war they regarded peace as an end rather than a means (see p. 54). In order to explain this radical change in outlook by many pre-war Christian pacifists, Socknat relies heavily on the belief that traditional just war theory including justice and moderation in warfare was altered to reflect a crusading spirit which was fed by stories of German atrocities in Belgium and government-controlled war propaganda (see p. 50). Thus Socknat asserts the Great War began as an idealized fight for liberty but turned into a

revisionism about the origins and significance of the war reinforced by anti-war attitudes that developed during the 1960s.

More recently a new generation of historians have challenged this approach insisting with Fritz Fischer that Germany sought war in 1914 and pursued a policy designed to bring much of Europe under German control,⁵ precisely the view held by most Canadians between 1914 and 1918. A similar transformation of scholarly research on war-time atrocities has also challenged the revisionist consensus. Bliss's seminal article represents one of the very few examinations of the Canadian Protestant experience during the Great War. His approach raises some interesting questions about academic analysis of the church experience. He attempts to explain the Methodist transition from a pacifist position just prior to the war, to "critical acquiescence" at the outbreak of war, and finally, in 1915, to all out support for the war, which by then had become a crusade.

In light of recent scholarship which would suggest that while some atrocity stories were exaggerated others were underreported, Canadians who reacted to the sinking of the *Lusitania* and the use of poison gas at Second Ypres did not need "stories of German atrocities in Belgium and government controlled propaganda"⁶ to believe the war was a crusade against evil. Recent scholarship has established that their view of overall German behaviour in Belgium and Northern France was largely correct.⁷ Moreover, Bliss's assumption that Methodist support for the war represented a transformation in opinion during the course of 1914 and 1915 does not address the questions raised by Methodist support for the Boer War a little over a decade earlier. The very same sources cited and used as evidence in Bliss's argument overwhelmingly supported Canadian involvement in the South African conflict.⁸ Therefore is it not possible that Methodist support for the war was simply a continuation of a traditional belief in just war? Bliss determines that even the problems posed by the literal words of Christ such as "turn the other cheek" did

crusade to save Christendom. The identification of Germany as evil was a part of this movement. Socknat refers to the "church" in a very general sense when he questions "should the church, for instance, automatically endorse and defend the state at war? Or is its first priority to serve as a constant reminder of the moral basis of society, even if it runs counter to official policy?" (296).

⁵ Fritz Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1961).

⁶ Socknat 50.

⁷ See Helen McPhail, *The Long Silence: Civilian Life under the German Occupation of Northern France, 1914-1918* (London: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 1999) 180. This book describes forced labour of civilians in occupied Northern France. McPhail argues conditions in the labour camps such as lack of proper clothing in the winter, as well as meagre meals, and beatings with rifle butts meant hundreds died. Also see John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001) 234-235. Horne and Kramer discuss the Bryce Commission. The Bryce Commission led by Lord Bryce, former UK Ambassador to the United States, produced a report which investigated allegations of German atrocities in Belgium. The report had been discredited as over exaggerated and questioned because evidence from Belgian refugees was accepted at face value. Horne and Kramer establish that while the Bryce Commission exaggerated incidents of torture and rape amongst women and children (although this was never presented as factual in the report itself) the Bryce Commission report accurately portrayed German military behaviour and in some instances underestimated the number of civilian atrocities.

⁸ Gordon L. Heath, "A War With A Silver Lining: Canadian Protestant Churches and the South African War, 1899-1902," diss., Knox College, University of St. Michael's College, 2004, 39.

not deter the Methodists from their pro-war position. He also contends that if it were not for the fundamental Christian belief in eternal salvation, Canada, the profoundly Christian country that it was, would never have gotten through the horrendous years of war. In absolute fact this is probably true, but Bliss's tone suggests that eternal salvation was a convenient solution to help sustain Methodist support for the war, an oversimplification of basic Christian fundamentals.

This examination of the Presbyterian press between 1913 and 1919 attempts to avoid the use of temporal snobbery, that is the belief that our morality changes for the better simply by the passage of time, and examines the Presbyterian dialogue during the Great War in an effort to understand the beliefs and values that dominated Protestant life early in the twentieth century. The experience of the Presbyterian press demonstrates support for the war was a last resort after attempts to avert such a catastrophe had been exhausted. The Presbyterians also demonstrate what amounts to a consensus and belief in just war tradition, the providential nature of the British Empire and a strong Canada within the Empire. That is, a consistent set of beliefs which take the Presbyterians from the Boer War through to the Paris Peace Conference. This unwavering belief in just war tradition was complemented by a changing pattern in Presbyterian thought throughout the course of the Great War. This thought process mirrored the debates in the secular press and demonstrated a continuous need to reconcile the Christian spirit and war. Crusading language was often present in Presbyterian dialogue, however it did not suddenly just appear in 1915 after the reporting of atrocity stories, nor did it replace the just war values of liberty, truth and righteousness. Instead just war and crusading jargon were used continuously and interchangeably throughout the war. Opinion leaders who displayed a crusading spirit were at other times tempered by language which suggested moral restraint and a need to rectify injustice.

Presbyterianism is a reformed Protestant church which follows the teachings of John Calvin.⁹ Rather than depending on the intervention of a hierarchy of clergy like the pope or a priest, Presbyterians talk to God and can be forgiven directly. Calvin believed that everyone in the church, not just clergy, was responsible for the affairs of the church,¹⁰ which is governed by elders elected by members of the congregation.¹¹ A Presbyterian minister may help interpret secular issues such as war but it is up to individual church members to develop an understanding of such issues and reconcile their own views with their faith. The Presbyterian Church is a confessional church supported doctrinally by adherence to the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. This doctrinal standard, established by the English Parliament in 1647,¹² states: "it is lawful for Christians to accept and execute the office of a magistrate, when called thereunto: [. . .] they may

⁹ *Who We Are: Presbyterians in Canada*, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 2 Dec. 2003 <<http://www.presbyterian.ca/whoweare/incanada.html>>.

¹⁰ *Who We Are: Presbyterians in Canada*, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 2 Dec. 2003 <<http://www.presbyterian.ca/whoweare/incanada.html>>.

¹¹ *Who We Are: Our Church Government*, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 2 Dec. 2003 <<http://www.presbyterian.ca/whoweare/government.html>>.

¹² *Our Confession of Faith and Catechisms*, Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 14 July 2004 <<http://www.opc.org/documents/standards.html>>.

lawfully, now under the New Testament, wage war, upon just and necessary occasion.”¹³ Calvinist tradition holds that for a war to be just it must be fought in love and with the intention of peace.¹⁴ Presbyterians, according to the 1911 census, were the second largest Protestant denomination in Canada, at 15.5% of the total population.¹⁵ Presbyterians by contrast, made up 21.1% of the whole Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF).¹⁶

Of the four periodicals examined, the *Record*, a 28-page monthly based in Montreal, was the official organ of the General Assembly, to which the editor was responsible. Throughout the war years Ephraim Scott served as editor and his regular editorials provide a clear exposition of quasi-official church views. In addition to the official organ of the church there were independent papers. *The Presbyterian Witness*, a weekly published in Halifax, Nova Scotia, included editorials as well as stories republished from the British Presbyterian press. *The Presbyterian* and *The Westminster*, both produced by the same Toronto company were also significant publications.¹⁷ The first was a weekly which positioned itself as a more socially progressive paper than the *Record*, though it had a much smaller circulation¹⁸ and the second, a monthly magazine. Eventually war-time conditions made it necessary for these two publications to merge in January 1917.¹⁹

Early on in its history, the Presbyterian Church in Canada faced the challenge of reconciling war and faith at the time of the Boer War. Presbyterians at this time tied their belief in a just war with their belief in the providential nature of the British Empire. A recent doctoral dissertation by Gordon L. Heath examines the Canadian Protestant denominational press during the Boer War. Heath suggests that the Canadian churches viewed themselves as nation-builders within the British Empire, and therefore concludes that a threat to the Empire was both a threat to worldwide peace and a direct threat to Canada.²⁰

¹³ *The Westminster Confession of Faith (with Scripture Proofs)*, Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics, 15 July 2004 <http://www.reformed.org/documents/wcf_with_proofs/ch_XXIII.html>.

¹⁴ Donald K. McKim, “War and Peace In Calvin’s Theology,” *Peace, War and God’s Justice*, ed. Thomas D. Parker and Brian J. Fraser (Toronto: The United Church Publishing House, 1989) 58.

¹⁵ *5th Census of Canada, Vol II* (Ottawa: C. H. Parmelee, King’s Printer, 1913). In 1911 the total population of Canada was 7,206,643; of that number 15.5% or 1,115,324 were identified as Presbyterians. The breakdown by province or territory was: Alberta 66,351; British Columbia 82,125; Manitoba 103,621; New Brunswick 39,207; Nova Scotia 109,560; Ontario 524,603; Prince Edward Island 27,509; Quebec 64,125; Saskatchewan 96,564; Yukon Territory 1,603; and Northwest Territories 56.

¹⁶ Desmond Morton, *When Your Numbers Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House, 1993) 279.

¹⁷ Brian Fraser, *The Social Uplifters: Presbyterian Progressives and the Social Gospel in Canada, 1875-1915* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1988) 66. Fraser suggests that these publications “offered the church a wide range of reporting and commentary on religious and secular affairs in keeping with the Free Church tradition of the lordship of Christ over all human affairs” (66). Robert Haddow became the editor of the Westminster publications in 1903 replacing his former Knox College classmate James A. MacDonald.

¹⁸ Dr. John Johnston, personal interview, Aug. 2004.

¹⁹ John Thomas McNeill, *The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1875-1925* (Toronto: General Board, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1925) 200.

²⁰ Heath 171.

Heath suggests that the Presbyterians, like those of other Protestant denominations, believed that the fate of the Empire was tied up in events in South Africa. He notes that the *Presbyterian Record* stated in January 1900 that the war had been fought for “the integrity of the Empire, and through that for the best interests and peace of the world.”²¹ During the Boer War the Presbyterian press, like other Protestant journals, deliberately and publicly supported a war effort from a conviction that an examination of the evidence clearly proved that Britain was right and the Boers wrong. The belief that the maintenance of the British Empire was the key to the future of such a young nation as Canada heavily influenced the support of the Presbyterian press for the Boer War, but church leaders felt compelled to justify their support for the war in terms of just war traditions.²²

Between 1902 and 1914 the Presbyterian Church promoted the peaceful resolution of conflict but most Presbyterian press editors and contributors understood peace in the context of the preservation of the Empire for the well-being of Canada. Even one of the more pacifistic elements within the Presbyterian Church, the Westminster, British Columbia Presbytery, understood peace in the context of safeguarding the Empire.

In January 1913 the Westminster Presbytery transmitted a “Peace Manifesto” to Prime Minister Robert Borden, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, leader of the Liberal opposition, and the other Presbyteries of the Church in Canada.²³ The manifesto questioned the necessity of war and set out a three-step procedure to lessen the opportunity for war. The Presbytery concluded that Great Britain should exhaust every possibility to avoid war, but added that if war should occur Canada should be prepared to stand with the Empire.²⁴

The reaction to the Manifesto appears to have been mixed. The *Presbyterian* provided the only example of open debate on the document and the context in which it was written. While militarism and peace movements were all being discussed and debated in the *Presbyterian* the other periodicals of the denomination were surprisingly silent on the same issues. The *Witness* occasionally printed a relevant article or editorial, but a review of the *Record* for the year revealed no articles or editorials aimed at the debate over Canada’s naval role nor did it discuss “The Peace Manifesto.”

In February 1913 J. F. McCurdy, a Presbyterian who taught at University College, University of Toronto, suggested in the *Presbyterian* that it was about time an ecclesiastical body broke the rule and concerned itself with the affairs of the state.²⁵ Although the *Presbyterian* was the paper of the progressive or liberal pacifist wing of the church the manifesto was not without its critics among readers. On 10 April 1913 MacDougall Hay, a prominent Presbyterian minister in Elora, Ontario suggested that the manifesto was “foolish pacific[sic] propaganda.”²⁶ He believed Britain and the Empire to

²¹ As quoted in Heath, 174-175; “Peace Declaration,” *Westminster* 7 June 1902: 693; and “Another New Year,” *Presbyterian Record* [Montreal] Jan. 1900: 1-2.

²² For Full quote see Heath 53. Quoting “The Westminster and the War,” *Westminster* 9 Feb. 1901: 173.

²³ “Presbyterians and World Peace,” *Presbyterian* [Toronto] 30 Jan. 1913.

²⁴ “Presbyterians and World Peace.”

²⁵ J. F. McCurdy, “The Westminster Peace Declaration,” *Presbyterian* [Toronto] 6 Feb. 1913: 168.

²⁶ MacDougall Hay “Justifiable War,” letter, *Presbyterian* [Toronto] 10 Apr. 1913.

be morally right in the context of the naval race, and that these morals should be upheld by the manhood of the nation and not depend on a court which would not necessarily be infallible in judgment.²⁷ A second correspondent, Lieutenant-Colonel J. B. Mitchell, stated it was, “the most wishy-washy, meaningless conglomeration of words without practical ideas that has been drawn up for some time.”²⁸

The affairs of the nation in 1913 were focused primarily on the Canadian naval debate between a Conservative government proposal to provide a \$35 million contribution to Britain for more Dreadnoughts and the Liberal policy of further developing the enlarged Canadian navy that the Liberals had established in 1910. The *Presbyterian* disagreed with both sides, arguing in favour of international peace and disarmament.²⁹ Again this issue was hotly debated in the *Presbyterian*, briefly mentioned in the *Witness* and not mentioned at all in the *Record*.

In the matter of the naval debate, letters to the editor reveal a division of opinion on Canada’s role in the Empire. As early as 1913 rationalization of support for Britain in a potential war was evident even amongst readers of the *Presbyterian*:

The fate of Canada is irrevocably bound up with that of the Empire. Were the empire to cease to be there would be no more a Canadian land or a Canadian people. Such a defenceless land, such a defenceless people would be too rich a plum.³⁰

William Mayhew of Toronto, by contrast, wrote:

I am a Briton through and through, but as I see my duty as a Christian citizen in this country I ought to do all in my power to keep Canada out of the tangles that the old land is in with nations far from us in distance and in ideals.³¹

In the months leading up to the outbreak of the First World War many Presbyterians, prompted by the issuance of the Peace Manifesto, openly debated the role of their country in Imperial military affairs, the growth of militarism in general and the role of the church in promoting peace. The discussion in the *Presbyterian* press in 1913 demonstrates that there was a desire to avoid war, yet there was a general consensus on a strong Canada within the Empire and a willingness to go to war for a just cause.

On 1 August 1914, as Europe descended into war, Canadian Prime Minister Robert Borden telegraphed the British government to declare “a common resolve to put forth every effort [. . .] to ensure the integrity and maintain the honour of the Empire.”

²⁷ Hay “Justifiable War.”

²⁸ Fraser, *The Social Uplifters* 157.

²⁹ Fraser, *The Social Uplifters* 158.

³⁰ J. M. Wallace, “The Peace Manifesto,” letter, *Presbyterian* [Halifax, NS] 27 Mar. 1913.

³¹ William Mayhew, “Moral Elements in the Naval Question,” letter, *Presbyterian* [Toronto] 1 May 1913.

Prime Minister Borden also offered “a considerable force for service abroad.”³² The Presbyterian press offered immediate support of the war effort and presented a quasi-official position on the front page of the *Record* in early September. Ephraim Scott described the great question as being a choice between peace at all costs and the idea of fighting for peace:

The great question is whether a considerable part of the human race is to be crushed under the Power of a cruel and inhuman military despotism; or whether the arm of the oppressor shall be broken, and the world come out more fully than ever before into the larger freedom, hoped and promised long, with sword and spear reforged to plough and pruning hook.³³

As early as September 1914 the *Record* had established that there was no paradox in fighting for peace, this war was just. The state of war had been declared by a civil government, after all other options had failed, and was aimed at restoring a just peace. Scott also proposed an imagery of soldiers serving God, suggesting this war was also a religious one. He referred to the soldiers as “bearing their cross of toil and suffering for a redemption of the race; and that her cause is in full harmony with that greater Redemption, once purchased by Cross and suffering and death for men.”³⁴

The periodical of the socially progressive leaders of the denomination, the *Presbyterian* supported the cause but with a call for reflection and restraint. The lead editorial in the 13 August 1914 edition suggested to Presbyterians to be wary of the tide of patriotism as it may be discovered that all participants are guilty.³⁵ This restraint was reinforced when the editor, Robert Haddow, proposed the war was a fight between good and evil. The Germans had been “led by evil counsellors,”³⁶ making a distinction between the German people and the German military caste.

Prior to the atrocity stories of 1915, Presbyterian editorials demonstrate that the British Empire meant security and freedom for Canadians. At the same time other editors guarded against the unchristian action of being swept up by either pacifist or patriotic zeal. The complicated question posed by the fact the war was being fought against a fellow Christian nation was not avoided. It was understood that individual faith was the most important element in the war. While it was presumed one side in the war was right and the other wrong, an individual Christian’s position on the war was not the only determining factor in one’s hope for an everlasting life. Robert Haddow suggested,

For some of the official acts of the German army it is impossible to find adequate excuse. The burning of Louvain, the dropping of bombs among the sleeping inhabitants of Antwerp, without warning or opportunity for non-combatants to take refuge [. . .]. But we must not allow ourselves to

³² G. W. Nicholson, *The Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-1919* (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1962) 5-6.

³³ Ephraim Scott, “The War and Duty’s Call,” *Presbyterian Record* [Montreal] Sept. 1914: 385.

³⁴ Scott, “The War and Duty’s Call” 387.

³⁵ Robert Haddow, “In Time of War,” editorial, *Presbyterian* [Toronto] 13 Aug. 1914: 1.

³⁶ Haddow, “In Time of War” 1.

be driven by the one-sided stories we read to the conclusion that the Germans are a barbarous and unfeeling people [. . .]. Even in those armies for whose defeat our brothers are fighting and we are praying, there are thousands who in all the personal relations of life are at least as gentle-hearted as ourselves [. . .]. That there are among the ranks of those we call ‘the enemy’ many who are really our brethren in Christ Jesus. How strange when those who have met as enemies upon the battlefield meet again, among the great multitude of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples and tongues, before the throne of God!³⁷

In November 1914, Charles W. Gordon, a notable leader and liberal evangelical, contributed an article to the *Presbyterian* titled “Canada’s Duty.” Gordon, famous throughout the British Empire as the author Ralph Connor, could find no excuses for the Prussian military caste, and he was forthright in his explanation of why war was the only answer to German militarism:

For this enterprise the Kaiser believes himself God anointed and God appointed. With him to-day stand the haughty aristocracy of Prussia and all the war caste of Germany, and behind them, united in a mad and deluded enthusiasm, stand as yet the German people to a man. Victory for the Allies, therefore, means the dethronement of the Kaiser and his military brood, the annihilation of the war caste and the smashing of the war machine. No peace is possible. Two sets of principles are locked in death grips—Force as an empire builder against the Will of a free people.³⁸

Gordon believed the actions of the German government strongly reflected the increasingly popular teachings of Treitschke and Bernhardi.³⁹ This, combined with a statement issued by the Christian churches in Germany which suggested a web of conspiracy levelled against Germany,⁴⁰ indicated that notions of German superiority severely hampered the ability for Christianity to flourish. This understanding of the situation, evident as early as October 1914, suggests that not only was the war just but it was being fought in defence of Christianity. Thus ideas of just war and crusade were used together. In some cases they are used interchangeably, the war was being fought both as a last resort and tragic necessity as well as in defence of Christianity. This is apparent again in the *Record*:

³⁷ “Thinking the Best,” *Presbyterian* [Toronto] 10 Sept. 1914.

³⁸ “Canada’s Duty,” *Presbyterian* [Toronto] 12 Nov. 1914: 438.

³⁹ Heinrich von Treitschke, 1834-1896, official historian of the Prussian state, was a fervent German nationalist and anti-Semite. General Friedrich von Bernhardi, 1849-1930, was the author of *Germany and the Next War* which advocated expansionism for Germany. His phrase “world power or decline” was much quoted.

⁴⁰ “Churchmen Pro and Con,” 22 Oct. 1914: 368.

To the last her (Britain's) leaders sought by every honourable means to preserve peace. Their words are worthy to be written in letters of gold. But all their effort was in vain, and Britain had to draw the sword for truth and freedom [. . .]. Her flag is made up of the blended crosses of St. Andrew, St. Patrick and St. George, massed symbol of the Christian faith and she can fling that flag to the breeze at the head of her legions as they march to war against oppression and wrong, with the consciousness that its symbolism is not dishonoured [. . .].⁴¹

The Presbyterian press stressed that the Empire best represented and secured Christian values such as truth, righteousness and liberty. These types of editorials also demonstrate the importance and belief that the Empire was Christian in its foundations and traditions.

The use of crusading jargon still did not deter contributors to the Presbyterian periodicals from addressing the difficulties of fighting a Christian nation. *Presbyterian* contributor Marshall P. Talling stated:

The Germans are praying for the victory and so are the British. Both sides cannot have it, so what is the use of their praying? [. . .] Both sides cannot have victory; but both sides can win the thing that God wants them to enjoy—His larger Kingdom, and life forevermore. That is the important matter.⁴²

Talling's emphasis was on the over-riding importance of individual faith. Again, participation in the war would not be the only matter of judgment. It was possible that both a British believer and German believer could be saved. On the issue of the war an individual might be wrong but if faithful, that person could still be saved.

It was not lost on Presbyterians that scripture, taken literally, would suggest that Christian values might only support a pacifist position. Presbyterian periodicals took up this challenge and debated the interpretation of Christ's words. The May 1915 edition of the *Record* asked these pertinent questions:

The soldier trains on Sunday in the highest ideals of love to God, and trains on Monday to shoot, to kill. He hears on Sunday—"Love your enemies;" and on Monday—"Charge." Are these consistent? Does the one who bids the former approve the latter? Would Christ, if on earth, commend this war? The question simply is—"Does Christ approve." Most of us will have no difficulty in deciding that He cannot approve the selfish aggression of Germany, in forcing war. But does He approve our men when they train and fight to hinder evil, to right wrong, to save the life of our Empire and of the world?

Who can know the mind of Christ, save as declared, and yet some points may be noted as gathering around this question. (1) All such commands

⁴¹ Scott, "The War and Duty's Call," 1914.

⁴² Marshall P. Talling, "War-Difficulties About Prayer," *Presbyterian* [Toronto] 8 Apr. 1915.

as—“Love your enemies”—refer to attitude of mind and heart; to the aim, the motive with which men do what seems the duty of life, even though it be the duty of stopping evil and death, by stopping the life that is wrongfully causing that evil and death [. . .].

The Sunday service in the Church and the Monday service in the trench are one, and upon the man, not the place, depends the character of both.⁴³

The Lord’s injunction to “Love your enemies” was often discussed in Presbyterian sermons and periodicals. An article entitled the “Perils of War,” in the November 1915 issue of the *Presbyterian*, concluded “it is right that we should hate wrongdoing and cruelty wherever they appear [. . .]. But if we are to be true to Christ we must not allow our hatred for the evil action to extend even to the person who is guilty of it.”⁴⁴ The article argued that Christians could resolve apparent contradictions of a just war through prayer “we should pray also that God’s help and comfort may be given to those who have to suffer among our adversaries as well as among ourselves.”⁴⁵

The belief in eternal salvation is, for believers, one of the most important aspects of Christianity. All Christians recognize that at some point they must reconcile their faith and death. The war put death front and centre in the minds of many Christians. As a result the Presbyterian periodicals addressed the Christian concept of immortality, usually the domain of Easter Sunday services, more often. In light of the first Canadian casualties at the front, the September 1915 *Presbyterian* addressed the issue of death in a forthright manner. The editorial understood the apprehensions young people would have in reconciling death, “it is rather the thought of leaving the good earth with its affections and delights and abandoning the plans and ambitions which one had formed. But these are false alarms.”⁴⁶

Ephraim Scott, the same *Record* editor who insisted emphatically that Britain was a symbol of the Christian faith marching to war against oppression and wrong, balanced the appeal for military resolve in 1916, with profound sympathy for the mounting numbers of families grieving the loss in battle of their loved ones:

But the price! The price! How little those can realize who have not paid that price! The price of victory? What is it? Go ask the wife whose husband’s home-coming when his work was done made bright the day with hope and the evening with that hope fulfilled; but whose days and evenings alike are shadowed now, for that strong step will be heard no more. Ask the children who wonder why daddy does not come, and who are beginning to realize with a nameless dread that he will not come again. Ask the father and mother whose son, perhaps an only one, in whom

⁴³ “Khaki at Church,” *Presbyterian Record* [Montreal] May 1915: 194.

⁴⁴ “Perils of War,” *Presbyterian* [Toronto] Nov. 1915,

⁴⁵ “Perils of War.”

⁴⁶ Robert Haddow, “Why Fear Death,” editorial, *Presbyterian* [Toronto] 9 Sept. 1915: 246.

centred the love and hopes of the home, lies “somewhere” in an unknown grave. All these know something of the price.⁴⁷

The idea that the war was a campaign in support of Christianity and that German militarism was a threat to Christianity continued to be debated in 1916. An editorial in the *Record* entitled “Germany’s Wanderings” discussed Germany’s journey away from Christianity under the influence of Prussian nationalism and militarism.⁴⁸ The *Witness* stated, “We shall think of the time before the war broke out—of the general unrest, of the nations armed to the teeth, of the lowering of moral and spiritual ideals, of the gradual break from Christianity on the part of Germany.”⁴⁹ The theme of German militarism as the enemy of Christ was also developed in the lecture delivered by Principal Gandier at the opening of Knox College and reprinted in the *Presbyterian* in September 1916:

The German militarists are doomed to failure because they are fighting against those things for which Jesus Christ stands in human history. Their conception of the Kingdom and of the methods by which it comes are pagan and false; and, not only has this perverted their morals, it has destroyed their moral discernment.⁵⁰

Gandier cited the German historian Treitschke’s philosophy of the state’s moral duty to safeguard its power, because there is nothing higher than the state in the history of the world. He noted that Treitschke’s lectures were filled with German students, suggesting the growing threat to Christianity from within Germany.⁵¹ Gandier was not alone in his belief that the teachings of many educators in Germany posed a great danger to Christianity. Although the exact date during the war is unknown similar fears were found in the handwritten notes of Charles W. Gordon.⁵²

For Canadian Presbyterians the notion that teachings in Germany represented anti-Christian values was very real. While the Presbyterian periodicals spent much of war-time underscoring that God was the highest power, the most important element in the destiny of the world, Germans were being taught that there was no higher power than the authority of the state.

As 1917 began, the Presbyterian periodicals were filled with reactions to President Woodrow Wilson’s peace proposals, including the problems that would arise from a premature peace without a clear allied victory. The *Record* continued to describe

⁴⁷ “Victory and its Price,” *Presbyterian Record* [Montreal] Sept. 1916.

⁴⁸ Ephraim Scott, “Germany’s Wanderings,” editorial, *Presbyterian Record* [Montreal] Sept. 1916.

⁴⁹ “The Sword on the Wall,” *United Free Church of Scotland Record, Presbyterian Witness* [Halifax, NS] 8 July 1916.

⁵⁰ Principal Gandier, “The Challenge of this War to the Church,” *Presbyterian* [Toronto] 5 Oct. 1916: 273.

⁵¹ Gandier 275.

⁵² University of Manitoba, Archives and Special Collections, Charles W. Gordon Fonds, MSS 56, Box 29, Folder 10, 13 May 2005
<http://www.umanitoba.ca/libraries/units/archives/canada_war/gordon/Website/Box%2029/Folder%2010-Sermons_and_Notes_Wa-JtoZ/thumbnails.shtml>.

the war in terms of the defense of basic principles and the triumph of freedom over tyranny:

What issues hang upon it? It is not merely a question of victory or defeat for one nation or another. It means freedom or bondage to the world. Were tyranny to triumph, it would mean the human race turned backwards for centuries; for the ideals of this despotism are those for which in a cruder form the world began to emerge centuries ago.⁵³

The *Record* insisted that no matter how long and bloody the struggle was it was fought for principles, and in terms of peace those principles had to be realized. Charles W. Gordon was yet another prominent Presbyterian to suggest that peace without victory would be foolish. In a January 1917 speech to the Empire Club of Toronto Gordon addressed the issue:

Our claim is that a peace without victory is an impossibility, an absolute impossibility, because a peace without victory is insecure [. . .] but it is not worth while fighting for an additional day for more glory. Nor do we fight for revenge. I do not even think France wants to fight another day in revenge for the great outrage wrought upon her by Germany some 40 years ago. But, gentlemen, we must look facts in the face. We cannot disregard the great, outstanding, stupendous fact of the injuries done to unoffending small nations. You may forget Belgium but you cannot change its face today. [. . .] Her little homesteads are desolated and empty of women and of children, many of whom have been outraged and slain. I have talked to them and know the truth of what I say. And although many of the tales which have been circulated may be untrue, there is no tale of outrage, however horrible, that has not been paralleled in actual fact. [. . .]

We must have from them some definite evidence, first, that they no longer cherish the pan-German dream of world-empire over-riding all rights of nations. Could we but obtain some definite proof of such change of heart we would be willing to talk peace right away, and oh, how gladly, for we loathe this war, those men on the front line trenches loathe it, loathe it with all their hearts and souls. We are not warriors. We are home-loving citizens who want to get home, but first we are men of honour and men of sense, and honour demands and sense compels us to stay at our posts until our work is done, until victory is achieved, until peace is secure.⁵⁴

In addition to his unwavering belief in a secure peace, Gordon dismissed the exaggeration of certain atrocities from Belgium, suggesting that others were under-reported. It would

⁵³ "The New Year," *Presbyterian Record* [Montreal] Jan. 1917.

⁵⁴ Charles W. Gordon, "Address to Empire Club of Toronto," 25 Jan. 1917, University of Manitoba, Archives and Special Collections, Charles W. Gordon Fonds, MSS 56, Box 29, Folder 14, 13 June 2005 <http://www.umanitoba.ca/libraries/units/archives/canada_war/gordon/Website/Box%2029/Folder14-Addresses_War/EmpireClubToronto_1917-Jan-25_pg06.shtml>.

seem Gordon understood the context in which he spoke, he knew what was at stake and knowing that, fully believed justice would have to be served if this war were to be a righteous one.

As the secular papers began to call attention to new issues, the Presbyterian periodicals addressed these same questions. Death, conscription and premature peace were discussed because the secular press in 1916 and 1917 emphasized these subjects. From the outbreak of war the Presbyterian press were consistent in defending the justice and righteousness of the cause. Time and again they believed in the need to defend Christian values such as liberty and the need to fight evil, be it in the form of German atrocities, German militarism or German nationalism. Throughout the long struggle the Presbyterian journals above all attempted to assist their readers in reconciling their faith and war, where the teachings of the denomination or Christianity in general were put to the test by the conflict, the papers attempted to address these issues. Presbyterian periodicals did not shrink from either the agony of death or its magnitude.

The renewed interest in the hope of eternal life inspired by the conflict continued to be addressed. In the Easter 1917 edition of the *Witness* the need for Christians to reconcile death as a basic reality of Christianity was restated:

If death closed forever the drama of our earthly existence, then such words as honour, love, patriotism, truth, freedom, duty would be meaningless terms and there could be no warrant to throw our lives away for any such empty shadows. It is because we believe that the earthly life is but a brief moment of our existence and that what we call death is the portal of life which is life indeed, that we are reconciled to give up our loved ones to die in a just and holy cause.⁵⁵

The notion that eternal salvation was the reward for a faithful life lived brought comfort to many Christians at home in Canada. The belief in immortality, in the Christian sense, provided comfort and hope to many believers. For those historians who would conclude that emphasis on immortality was discussed so as to sustain the war effort, Presbyterians clarified that these messages of hope were for believers only. In the August 1917 edition of the *Presbyterian Record* Ephraim Scott stated:

A recent sermon “somewhere in Canada,” had as one of its leading thoughts in substance, this, that soldiers at the front, by their bravery and unselfish sacrifice are saved.

While no words can do justice to the heroism and self-denial of the men who have risked and sacrificed so much, yet the attempt to glorify their self-denial by such teaching as the above, is wrong in itself and can only be evil in its results. Such teaching takes no account of a man’s past or present or future attitude towards God.

⁵⁵ “Easter and the War,” *Presbyterian Witness* [Halifax, NS] 7 Apr. 1917: 4.

Many soldiers are Christians. They know their own unworthiness. They know whom they have believed. They trust not to their own sacrifice but to the sacrifice of Christ. But many of them, splendid men, are not Christians and do not claim to be, and to lead even one of these to rest in slightest upon any other foundation, instead of pointing him to Christ as his only hope and trust does that soldier an infinite wrong.⁵⁶

The country could not come to rely on the fact it was a nominally Christian nation in order to get through the war. It was not simply sacrifice that was rewarded with eternal salvation but a soldier's true faith in God that brought him home.

Again and again during the course of 1917 several Presbyterian sources outlined the proposals for peace, acknowledged the desire for peace and an end to war. They emphatically refused to accept terms that did not ensure the security of the Empire and a lasting peace for the world that could be achieved only through the elimination of Germany's anti-Christian militarism. In August 1917 the *Record* commented:

One fact is that it is a case of victory or death. Germany is fighting for world supremacy. The Allies are fighting for world liberty. These principles cannot live together [. . .]. The war is not merely a conflict between nations, but between right and wrong, between God and the Adversary, between the Kingdom of light and the Kingdom of darkness.

A fact that only a few people even yet have realized is the extent to which departure from God was a part of the more than forty years' preparation of Germany for this war. His Word had largely ceased to be the "Word of God." The Gospel of Right had gradually given way to the Gospel of Might, sinful man to the superman.⁵⁷

As a profoundly Christian country, many Canadians found the notion of the state as supreme and the utmost power unsettling. The anti-Christian teachings of the Prussian military caste not only appeared as a threat to Christendom itself, but were perhaps an indication that the German people were unable to freely practice Christianity in a way that Canadian Presbyterians understood.

As the debates over mandatory service continued in the Canadian secular press throughout 1917, Presbyterians wholeheartedly embraced the idea of conscription in their periodicals and in a resolution of the General Assembly:

The Assembly desires to express its approval of every legitimate effort to rouse the laggards among the youth of Canada to a consciousness of duty and to enroll those who are available as soldiers in a great crusade for the world's freedom.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ "False Teaching," *Presbyterian Record* [Montreal] Aug. 1917: 226.

⁵⁷ "Three Years of War," *Presbyterian Record* [Montreal] Aug. 1917.

⁵⁸ *Acts and Proceedings of the Forty-Third General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada* (1917): 37.

The *Witness* also came out in support of conscription after hearing Major Andrew Macphail, a physician who would in 1918 become Sir Andrew Macphail, the former editor of McGill's *University Magazine* and the founder and first editor of the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, explain how the Canadian Expeditionary Force was desperately in need of reinforcements because of the sheer volume of casualties at the front.⁵⁹ "Canada must not retire from the conflict until the monstrous ogre of Prussian militarism is laid helpless in the dust."⁶⁰ The *Record* added to the conscription argument and put it into a Christian context:

Is it right to fight? Yes, it is right to fight wrong. "Resist the devil" is a command of Scripture, and he is in all wrong. Wrong is of varied kinds, and each kind has to be fought after its kind.

The first line trenches of Canada's liberty are in France and Flanders. Our liberties are there most easily and surely maintained. If lost there they could not be maintained here. If youth and strength that shares the safety of our country will not take its share of responsibility for maintaining that safety, then the only thing, as with all other national burdens, as with taxation, etc., is that it should be compelled to take its share.⁶¹

The Church's decision to support conscription did not mean that it had abandoned the quest to persuade the faithful that eternal salvation was found through Jesus Christ.

The news media in 1918 continued to report on the Military Service Act which came into force after the victory of the Unionist Government in December 1917. These reports included news of draftees reporting for military service and "the campaign to catch defaulters."⁶² The 30 March 1918 edition of the *Globe* told Canadians of the disruption and mayhem caused by members of a mob in Quebec City allegedly trying to destroy exemption records.⁶³ The beginning of the last German offensive of the war in March 1918 was also discussed. Although it had originally been decided that men would be exempt from mandatory service to work on farms, the Canadian Prime Minister Borden decided that given the renewed threat of a German victory the need of the army was greater. This decision sparked intense debate.⁶⁴ It was in this environment of war-weariness that the Presbyterian press came to discuss such issues as the length of the war and the need to examine individual sin and the righteousness of the conflict.

The implementation of mandatory service raised the issue of conscientious objectors, most of whom based their refusal to serve on the words of Christ. Editors of

⁵⁹ "The Tragedy of Delay," *Presbyterian Witness* [Halifax, NS] 1 Dec. 1917.

⁶⁰ "The Tragedy of Delay."

⁶¹ "Save, Give, Fight, Pray," *Presbyterian Record* [Toronto] Dec. 1917: 357.

⁶² Miller 163.

⁶³ "Quebec Mob Quelled by Soldiers", *Globe* [Toronto] 30 Mar. 1918: 1.

⁶⁴ Miller 177.

the *Presbyterian and Westminster* clarified the Presbyterian position on Christian based conscientious objection in a 21 March 1918 editorial:

In a war like the present, it is extremely difficult for the so-called “conscientious objector” to maintain his ground. Whatever interpretation may be given of the injunction to “turn the other cheek,” however it may be possible to argue in favour of submission rather than opposition to violence when one’s own person and rights are concerned, it is surely impossible to make out a case for non-resistance on Christian grounds when we are dealing with the defence of others. And the latter is really the fundamental issue for the British people in the present war.⁶⁵

In 1918 the *Presbyterian and Westminster* suggested that whatever interpretations were given to the literal words of Jesus, it was the higher Christian duty to defend others, which was the fundamental reason why Britain and her allies had gone to war. Those who chose to support the war did not do it in spite of the words of Christ, quite the reverse. Presbyterians, after careful analysis of the meaning and context of those words, believed they were obliged to support the war.

The notion that war was not an accident and had a purpose led Presbyterians to question why, if they were on the side of God and right, did the bloody battles and their accompanying death and destruction continue? In response the denominational press continued to emphasize the righteousness of the cause, that no person could know God’s plan, and reiterated the key distinction between being on the side of God, as the Allies hoped they were, and the arrogant belief that God was on the Allied side. Presbyterians like all Christians in peacetime or wartime hoped they were doing right by God. The unwillingness to state that God was on the Allied side recognized that Presbyterians knew there was a chance they were wrong. The *Record* commented, “the result is entirely in His hands, and that result, being in His hands, must be a right one. And yet, on the whole, is He not less considered than any other important factor in this great world struggle?”⁶⁶ The *Presbyterian and Westminster* stated:

The fact is, God belongs neither to Germany nor to the Allies. He stands for righteousness and truth in the earth. We cannot hope to bring Him over to our side. All that we can do and the best that we can do is to come over to His side. Great as German atrocities have been, our hope of Divine aid must rest eventually not on their unrighteousness, but on our own righteousness.⁶⁷

The frequent discussion about the righteousness of the allied role in the conflict was perhaps an indication that Presbyterians were becoming weary of the prolonged battles and unrelenting death and sorrow. At this time when the average Presbyterian was sick of

⁶⁵ “Christianity and War,” editorial, *Presbyterian and Westminster* [Toronto] 21 Mar. 1918.

⁶⁶ “God on War,” *Presbyterian Record* Apr. 1918: 4.

⁶⁷ “On Which Side is God To-Day?,” *Presbyterian and Westminster* [Toronto] 18 July 1918.

the conflict and destruction, the denominational press stepped in to assure that the fatigue would not lend its readers to support an insecure and early peace.

In order to demonstrate the just nature of the allied role in the war, the *Presbyterian and Westminster* used a memorandum written by Prince Lichnowsky, the former German Ambassador to Britain, to remind readers that Britain did its utmost to prevent the war and that the war was forced upon the Allies:

The question which Christian people ought to be most concerned about in connection with the war is the question of right and wrong. Are we justified in the sight of God for taking part in this terrible conflict? Is the responsibility for launching this devastating curse upon the world ours or our enemy's? As President Lincoln said, what matters is not so much to be sure that God is on our side as to be sure that we are on God's side.⁶⁸

In March 1918 the editor of the *Witness* warned readers to "Stand Fast" and addressed the war-weariness experienced on the home front in the context of reaffirming the righteousness of the conflict, restating the threat posed to Christianity by German militarism and cautioning against a premature peace:

A general war weariness, in which all the nations are sharing, is creeping over our people, affecting to some extent the resolution of some and inclining them to considerations of peace on almost any terms. There is danger of the morale of the nation weakening as the effects of the war at home become more accentuated [. . .].

That which was right three years ago is not wrong today. A duty which was imperative when a small nation was ruthlessly ravaged by a powerful and unprincipled military organization and the liberties of the whole world threatened, is no less a duty today when this same infamous sea of war-lords continue to struggle for the domination of the world [. . .].

[. . .] it is pre-eminently a struggle between the forces of truth and right on the one side, and the powers of falsehood, tyranny and ambition on the other. Not only our liberty but our civilization and our Christianity are in peril [. . .].⁶⁹

In an effort to curb the growing fatigue with the war and its effects, the denominational press denounced any notion of a peace that was negotiated before the principles for which so many Canadians and Presbyterians went to war were met. The June 1918 *Record* forcefully restated its well-established position that peace without victory would be wrong:

⁶⁸ "The Breakers of the Peace," *Presbyterian and Westminster* [Toronto] 11 Apr. 1918.

⁶⁹ "Stand Fast," *Presbyterian Witness* [Halifax, NS] 9 Mar. 1918: 4.

Hence it follows that any suggestion to cease warring against that evil—so long as it remains—is wrong. To be at peace with evil-doing is to share in that evil-doing. To consent with a thief or a murderer is to assume complicity in his guilt. To cease fighting the German wrong, while that wrong remains, is to be partner in the wrong. In “pacifism” we become shares with Germany in her guilt. Such pacifism is a crime against humanity and against God.⁷⁰

In the Presbyterian view, the Allies recognized that good did not necessarily triumph over evil quickly or easily. The long, costly struggle was part of God’s plan. Presbyterians continued to remind themselves that they could not know God’s intentions but victory helped them reconcile the deaths of good people in cause of the ultimate moral triumph. The end of the war raised other questions about death, such as why some men died so close to the end of hostilities and why others survived. Through the medium of the periodical, church leaders tried to address these new questions. The *Witness* provided the following words of wisdom in December 1918:

If His way for some of our boys was that they should finish their work in a few brief and strenuous days, and for others that they should go on to the end of the struggle and then join their brave companions on the other side, we cannot question either His wisdom or His love. He hath done all things well.⁷¹

The failure of nations to be dominated by the spirit of Christ was examined in the *Witness* in December 1918. The focus was not the secular nature of Germany but rather the failure of nominally Christian nations to put Christ above militarism:

The very contrast between the spirit of Christmas and that spirit by which the war-loving leaders of Prussian militarism were animated in their assault upon the rights and liberties of free nations should make a deep impression upon every thoughtful mind. We have had an appalling exhibition of the fruits of selfishness, greed and ambition in the world. The present war would have been an impossibility if all the great nations—even the nominally Christian nations—had been dominated by the spirit of Christ.⁷²

The Presbyterian press believed that never again should any country put state authority or nationalism as the supreme power, as nothing was greater than God. Even the rise of secularism at home had to be kept in check in order to avoid the rise of narrow nationalism and other anti-Christian behaviour.

⁷⁰ “Three War Questions,” *Presbyterian Record* June 1918.

⁷¹ “In the Wilderness,” *Presbyterian Witness* [Halifax, NS] 7 Dec. 1918: 4.

⁷² George S. Carson, “The Christmas Message,” editorial, *Presbyterian Witness* [Halifax, NS] 21 Dec. 1918: 4.

Thousands of Canadians had died fighting the evil criminals of the German military caste. In January 1919 the *Globe* reported that the final casualty figures for Canada were 220,182 with deaths numbered at 60,383.⁷³ As the months went on, more soldiers returned home and the country began to reflect on the past four years. Death and its role within Christianity continued to be a major topic of Presbyterian discussion. Perhaps one of the most poignant messages appeared in the February 1919 edition of the *Witness*, in George S. Carson's editorial "Who Are the Dead." He brought a simple faith to those Christian soldiers returning from war and those Christian families watching all but their own loved ones return:

In the face of these solemn and indubitable facts, it is well that we should revise our conceptions of death and see how far the popular imagination is in accord with reality. We speak of those who have fallen on the field of battle as dead, and we associate with this term the idea of loss—not ours alone, but theirs. We think of the brilliant and happy future that was before some of these men in life, and we find it hard to overcome the feeling of regret that they had not been spared to see the end of the war, to share in the joy of victory and to take their part in the building up of a new and better order of things in the world. In the popular mind the dead are those who have dropped out of the great throbbing life of the world and who lie sleeping in lonely graves "where poppies grow" [. . .]. But this is not the conception of death which has come to us through Christ and His apostles. To our Lord the unseen world was as real and as full of life as that in which we live. He Himself had come from it and was soon to return. He spoke of the heavenly abiding-places and of the holy and happy fellowship of those who dwell in them. He talked to His disciples of His departure as we would speak of a journey and a brief absence from home. To Him there was but one life, though some provinces of it were veiled from human eyes; and He passed beyond our vision that we might better grasp the reality of His continued presence with us.⁷⁴

The thousands of deaths that had to be reconciled were, for Presbyterians, deaths in the name of a just cause. Now that the war was over justice and security had to be ensured. The first few months of 1919 saw the slow progress and frequent conflicts among Allied leaders of the Paris Peace Conference detailed in the papers. "Disarmament Essential" and "Milder Terms for Germans: Fear that Bolshevism May Spring from Harshness"⁷⁵ were among the stories in the *Globe*. Beginning in March 1919 a series of columns called "The Making of Peace" appeared in the *Globe*. This coverage tells us that the secular press in Canada was concerned about Germany's lack of sincerity in terms of demilitarization⁷⁶ and the rise of Bolshevism in parts of Germany such as Bavaria.⁷⁷

⁷³ "Total Canadian Casualties 220,182," *Globe* [Toronto] 4 Jan. 1919: 1.

⁷⁴ George S. Carson, "Who are the Dead?," editorial, *Presbyterian Witness* [Halifax, NS] 8 Feb. 1919: 4.

⁷⁵ "Disarmament Essential," *Globe* [Toronto] 1 Mar. 1919: 1.

⁷⁶ "The Making of Peace," *Globe* [Toronto] 12 Feb. 1919: 1.

Upon the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in June 1919 the *Globe*'s banner headline quoted Psalm 147:13-14 "For He Hath strengthened the bars of thy gates [. . .] He maketh Peace in they borders."⁷⁸ The headline suggests that the *Globe* recognized the profound Judeo-Christian character of Canadian society and the comfort brought to Canadian society by God who ultimately brings security, peace and order to a chaotic world. The same edition reported that uncertainty about the treaty remained: "Peace has come to the warring world—the peace of the sword. Germany has signed under compulsion, and only by compulsion will she carry out the agreement [. . .]."⁷⁹ The debates over the severity of the terms to be imposed on Germany provided the backdrop for denominational writing in 1919.

The ideals of the Paris Peace Conference were dealt with in the 20 February 1919 issue of the *Presbyterian and Westminister*:

Among the men who went to war and those who gave their sons were many thousands whose conviction was that in that great conflict, involving such stupendous sacrifice, they were really fighting against war. The military spirit that takes delight in battle, that seeks to dominate other men by force, that has no regard for any rights but its own, they believed to be incarnated chiefly in Germany, and they were convinced that in order to banish that spirit from the world it was necessary, first of all, that Germany be thoroughly defeated. Victory was not so much an end in itself as a means to an end, the great end being the establishment of a new order to which violence would be replaced by injustice and war by peace.

The war has been fought and won. Germany has been defeated. The task which now confronts the Allied statesmen is to see that all the effort and sacrifice has not been made in vain, that the causes which have produced war in the past are, as far as possible, removed [. . .].⁸⁰

For the editorial staff at the *Witness*, forgiveness could be countenanced only after Germany repented:

The unforgiving spirit which persists in remembering past deeds, and refuses to take account of a new state of mind and character is indeed immoral, because it refuses to look at things as they are. But immoral also, not less dangerously immoral, is the refusal resolutely to face the fact that the wrongdoer is still a wrong-doer, and for various selfish reasons coming to terms of peace with him. The judgments of God are according to truth, and those of righteous men must be so likewise. There is no virtue, but rather immorality, in shutting our eyes to facts.

⁷⁷ "Bolshevism....," *Globe* [Toronto] 9 Apr. 1919: 1.

⁷⁸ "For He Hath Strengthened....," *Globe* [Toronto] 30 June 1919: 1.

⁷⁹ "For He Hath Strengthened..." 1.

⁸⁰ "What Did We Fight For?," *Presbyterian and Westminister* [Toronto] 20 Feb. 1919.

Germany, for her own sake, as well as for the security of the nations which she has wronged, must be made to expiate her crimes; and she must bring forth the fruits of repentance before she is again admitted into the fellowship of peace-loving nations.⁸¹

Presbyterian leaders understood the war as a struggle fought for a just cause, against an evil enemy and in support of Christian values. Their initial reaction to the war was measured support for a just war fought in defence of Belgium and the honour of the Empire to which they belonged. As the nature of the Empire's enemy became evident through the burning of Louvain, the sinking of the *Lusitania* and the use of poison gas at Ypres, Presbyterians sought to understand how a Christian country could commit such acts. Evidence of the influence of anti-Christian secularist and nationalist teachings in Germany was discussed as was the formal statement of the German churches on the origins of the war, a statement that suggested Christians in Germany had been misled about the origins of the conflict. The repeated discussion of death in the Christian context as well as the analysis of the threat posed by the Prussian military caste to Christianity reveal that Presbyterians had a clear understanding of why the war was being fought and its consequences.

The news of the loss of so many Canadian soldiers at Second Ypres in April 1915 led to the first detailed discussions of the significance of death in the Christian tradition. The Christian belief that death is the door to eternal salvation, for those who believed in Christ and repented their sins, was a comfort to many readers dealing with the large loss of life. The Protestant emphasis on the resurrection, the belief that one's life should prepare a person for death and a more rewarding life with Christ liberated from sin, was a message of hope for many Presbyterian believers. The Presbyterian Church also struggled with the problem of God's role in a war which seemed to have no end. The distinction was made between God being on the side of the Allies and the Allies believing they were on God's side. Church leaders also emphasized that individual faith in God and salvation through Jesus Christ was not dependent on the results of the war.

Presbyterian editors and authors defended their opposition to a premature peace by re-emphasizing the reasons why Presbyterians went to war in the first place. The Presbyterian idea of the meaning of the war was also re-emphasized during the conscription debate. Towards the end of 1917 and into 1918, when the Military Service Act was implemented as a direct result of a victory for the Unionist government in December 1917, the idea that the war was being fought for Christian values was reinforced. With the rise of conscientious objectors, mostly on religious grounds, the Presbyterian press emphasized that going to war for a just cause was acceptable within the teachings of Christianity. The debate on conscription also led to renewed discussion of the responsibility of the individual and the importance of decisions on faith made by individual Christians. Ultimately what was in one's heart would be the basis of God's judgment.

As the war continued on well into 1918, the Presbyterian papers focused on the growing problem of war-weariness. The temptation to give in to demands for a premature

⁸¹ George S. Carson, "In the Hour of Victory," editorial, *Presbyterian Witness* [Halifax, NS] 23 Nov. 1918: 4.

peace was countered by reminders that the war was righteous and was fought against evil on behalf of Christian values. Throughout the last phase of the war, Presbyterians were consistently told that eternal salvation came to those who were faithful. For believers, the losses were softened by a firm belief that their loved ones, if they had been faithful to Christ, were in a better place.

The coming of peace saw the Presbyterian denominational press reflect on the war and engage in a debate over the terms of a future peace. The majority of Presbyterian contributors reiterated their belief in the righteousness of the cause using the achievement of victory to demonstrate that, as hoped, the Allies were on the side of right.

In addition to bringing messages of comfort and hope, the Presbyterian papers were also cautionary in tone. The popularity of secularist teachings both in Germany and at home was thought to be indicative of anti-Christian behaviour. The war had taught Presbyterians the evils of putting the state above God. The Presbyterian leaders strove to ensure that Canadians remembered that the reasons for going to war were legitimate and justice was served. In this vein the significance of a just and lasting peace was emphasized, and the notions and importance of individual sin and repentance as well as the need to punish the enemy and the degree of severity were debated.

Not only did the Presbyterian publications present their ideas in a forthright manner, they attempted to address many of the tests to their faith presented by the long and bloody nature of the war. The complexity of the views of the Presbyterian leaders, whether clergy or layman, were evident in the articles, editorials and letters to the editor presented in the four denominational publications. While the *Record*, with its emphatic editor Ephraim Scott, stood firm on the Christian values and just reasons for going to war, other publications offered more open debate. The *Witness* remained fairly steadfast in its support for the war but did provide its readers with some varied opinion on the war and the possibility of peace. The *Presbyterian* presented the most open debate on the subjects of war and peace, militarism and pacifism, as well as the need for a national as well as an imperial outlook. The differing nature of the periodicals is evidence of the complex nature of the church but also the intricate character of the Christian faith as practiced by Canadian Presbyterians. Any analysis that would suggest the Christian response to the war in Canada was a result of government propaganda, does not take into account evidence of German atrocities, which was all many Presbyterians needed in order to understand the evil nature of the enemy. Emphasis placed on the literal words of Christ to prove that war was “criminal and unchristian” fails to recognize the context of scripture as interpreted by many of the faithful.

The nature of Presbyterian theology was evident throughout the war through the emphasis on individual faith. No matter how wonderful the character of an individual soldier, unless that individual had faith in his heart there would not be everlasting life. The Presbyterians consistently emphasized the importance of individual faith to the extent that it was clear that even enemy soldiers would achieve eternal life if they had faith and good intent in their hearts. Presbyterians understood that fighting a Christian enemy was not necessarily a fight against individual Germans who might indeed be true to God, but rather against German militarism and the Prussian leadership who represented evil. Presbyterians did not have to struggle with the paradox of fighting for peace for they understood that war was the only means to obtain peace consistent with Christian principles when evil threatened their world. War was not the most heinous thing

in their Christian universe for there were times and instances where “war was never wrong when it was against wrong.” Truth and honour were more important than peace.

It was not blind patriotic fervour that led the majority of Presbyterians to reject Christian pacifism in support of the Great War. Rather it was their consistent belief in the righteousness and justness of the cause. Presbyterians were cautioned to be mindful of becoming fanatical one way or another and forgetting their basic faith relationship with God.

Suggestions that a pacifist view especially towards a war against evil and on behalf of Christian values, was “more Christian” fails to recognize that fighting for liberty and righteousness is completely compatible with Christianity. In fact, many Presbyterian leaders clearly believed that what was not sensible was the belief that war was the worst thing that could happen. For Presbyterians submission by a modern-day democracy to a militaristic despot was a far greater error. C. S. Lewis, one of the most prolific Christian writers of the twentieth century and a veteran of the Great War, emphasizes this point when he suggests “The question is whether war is the greatest evil in the world, so that any state of affairs which might result from submission is certainly preferable.”⁸² According to their press, Presbyterians during the Great War believed that a Europe dominated by an autocratic and militaristic despot was more evil than war itself.

Most of the Presbyterian discourse was about understanding the war within the framework of Christian principles. The Presbyterians tackled tough faith issues and were able to reconcile the war and their faith in a way which was compatible with deeply-held Christian beliefs. The more secularized views of today should not colour our understanding of the faith of our forefathers. There is room for both the pacifist and just war tradition within Christianity, as indeed there was within the confessional structure of the Presbyterian Church. The suggestion that pacifism is the only true Christian position, and that support for war—as in the case of the majority of Presbyterian church members between 1914 and 1918—compromises Christian ideals, ignores fundamental tenets of Christianity. It assumes that war is so morally reprehensible in any and all circumstances that any alternative is preferable. It also assumes that Christians are indeed so worldly that they consider death the ultimate tragedy.

Presbyterian churches across Canada are filled with bronze memorial plaques, rolls of honour and stained glass windows commemorating the members of their respective congregations who gave their lives in the Great War. These memorials are precious, admired and integral parts of the Church and its history, and reflect an understanding and belief in the Christian values for which the war was waged. Today, many Presbyterians regard these memorials as symbols of futility and waste. In fact some would even suggest that these symbols only romanticize and disguise the true horror of war. But this is a presentist perspective and the evidence in this paper would propose otherwise. Presbyterians who erected these commemorations were only following the next logical steps in their deeply-felt belief in the causes of the war. Presbyterian men who fought for the defence of the weak, for liberty and righteousness, against the evils of German militarism, in the defence of Christianity, deserved recognition.

⁸² C. S. Lewis, *Compelling Reason* 9.