

Voices from the Front: Canada's Presbyterian Padres and the Great War

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Canadian military chaplains, or padres, as they are called, preached a message of consolation and prophecy with an urgency born of pre-war convictions heightened by wartime experience. Most, though not all, found in the Great War's pain, sacrifice, grief, and ultimate victory, the vindication of their version of the Canadian "national gospel," and assiduously gathered and proclaimed the lessons they had learned overseas to their own denominations back home. Canadian Protestant padres, in the middle of 1918, under their Director, Colonel John Almond, pieced together the sum of their experiences in "The Chaplain's Message to the Canadian Churches." Presbyterians played a central role in gathering and compiling responses to the questionnaires sent out by Almond's Assistant Directors (see Appendix), and wrote several parts of the final version. Though the "Message" fell afoul of ecclesiastical conservatism and the reactionary climate of the nation in 1918-1919 (which also exposed the decay of chaplain wartime consensus), the individual responses which have come to light reveal a telling picture of how the war's darkest experiences nevertheless gave the padres an urgent sense of the reforms which would be needed, based on what their troops told them overseas, to give the church a chance with the returned men. Yet the result must have been a tremendous disappointment, for their clarion call to reform organization, culture, doctrine and traditions was ignored, suppressed or damned with faint praise, the latter perhaps being the dominant note among home-front Presbyterians. At the same time, the responses which have survived document the seeds of dissent and discord which compromised the one measure most padres had hoped would realize the main lesson of the war: Church Union.

Though Roman Catholics refused the invitation to join the 1918 survey, representatives of all the Protestant churches provided lengthy responses to the one-page survey of a dozen questions, which probed for answers to whether or not the church had failed its men before the war and asked how they could be won back afterwards. Harry Kent, Almond's Presbyterian adjutant, collected the responses from his denomination's chaplains, and passed them on to senior Presbyterian padres tasked with writing parts of the intended "Message." Kent took the responses back to Chaplain Headquarters, where they lingered until rediscovery in the 1980s in the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) records in the National Archives of Canada.¹ George Kilpatrick, A. D. Cornett, and Clarence Mackinnon drafted the Introduction, Conclusion and several passages on theology, while Mackinnon composed the entire section on Education.

¹ The story of these papers, religious documents found not in the Presbyterian Archives but in the military records of the CEF, is paralleled by the number of other times military information on chaplains has been found in religious archives and religious material found in military records. Not so in the case of the Presbyterians, however, who in an act of tragic improvidence (at least for historians) disposed of all their wartime records stored at Knox College in the 1920s. The entire story of "The Chaplains' Message" has been described in Duff Crerar, *Padres in No Man's Land*, 2nd ed. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014) 201-8.

Other Presbyterians, some with impeccable front-line service, such as A. M. Gordon, Senior Chaplain of the 4th Canadian Division (by 1918 Kilpatrick was Senior Chaplain of the 3rd), joined in with their own conclusions, which they had been sharing with the home church for several years. Gordon had been hand-picked by Sam Hughes at Valcartier in 1914, mostly on the basis of his paternity, for Principal Daniel M. Gordon, of Queen's University, had played an active role as chaplain to the Winnipeg Rifles at Batoche in 1885. Alexander made a number of observations to both his father and George C. Pidgeon, summarized in September 1918, after a long conversation in Flanders with Edmund Oliver, a hospital chaplain, head of the Khaki University at the Canadian Corps, and Principal of the Presbyterian seminary at the University of Saskatchewan.²

Gordon echoed the widely publicized view of Donald Hankey, author of *A Student in Arms*, whose praise of the “unconscious Christianity” of the British fighting man offered an optimistic view of the possibilities of capturing these men for the post-war Church.³ Gordon agreed with his view that, though the men were ignorant, even contemptuous of dogma, moralism, Sabbatarianism and denominationalism, still they showed compassion, tenderness, and sympathy for their comrades and civilians who were victims of war which exceeded the petty charities of the home front. Though fond of their liquor, cards and crude jokes, they lived and died like the militant martyrs of old. The only way Gordon could see churches getting these heroes back was to retrain ministers to be men of practical affairs, experienced apprentices of trades and industry and fully aware of the financial needs of working men and veterans. Gordon declared the legendary days of sending students as summer missionaries to prairie parishes obsolete, and called for churches to put their money and time into helping veterans cope with wounds, bereavement, sickness and hard times they and their families would face on demobilization. Although he agreed with Oliver that Church Union among Congregationalists, Methodists and Presbyterians was one desirable way of mobilizing for this post-war campaign, he denied the value of organic, monolithic Union, as it would demand of too many Presbyterians the loss of traditions, doctrine and polity which had been their markers of identity. Far better, he argued, for a voluntary spirit and cooperative federation of the denominations (including Rome) such as he witnessed at the Front.⁴



Photo of Alexander M. Gordon courtesy Queen's University Archives, A. M. Gordon fonds.

² Edmund Oliver to his wife Rita, 21 March 1918, E. H. Oliver papers, University of Saskatchewan Archives.

³ The literature on the Canadian social gospel as the application of Christianity to life by the majority of Canadian churches is well covered by a wide variety of books since Richard Allen's seminal book, *The Social Passion* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971). The most recent study, edited by Gordon Heath and covering most Christian Churches in Canada in the Great War, is *Canadian Churches and the First World War* (Eugene OR: Pickwick, 2014). The British literature around the faith of the Great War soldier in the British Expeditionary Force and Dominion Armies is based on the work of Gordon Heath, Michael Snape and Linda Parker, to name the leading scholars of a generation of historical work beginning in the late 1990s. See Edward Madigan and Michael Snape, eds., *Clergy in Khaki: New Perspectives on British Army Chaplaincy in the First World War* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013).

⁴ A. M. Gordon to D. M. Gordon and G. C. Pidgeon, 22 May 1918, D. M. Gordon fonds, Box 2, “Correspondence 1918” file, Queen's University Archives, Kingston, ON.

Though not all would have agreed with the old salt Gordon, about how Church Union would best be accomplished, most of the twenty-seven other Presbyterians who responded to the questionnaire otherwise agreed with him.⁵ All echoed his assessment of the heroic and admirable qualities of the soldier, though none were blind to his faults. The nation and its churches, they stated, owed a deep debt of obligation to the troops, who deserved better than pre-war churches had done for them. The soldiers and home-front laity were almost never blamed in these surveys for any of the problems they saw in the churches, despite their tendency to shirk regular attendance and pursue secular pleasures, especially on Sundays. Most of the Presbyterian padres expressed deep bonds with the men based on their own experience: ten of the twenty-seven had seen service in the line, three as stretcher-bearers before they were commissioned padres, and two more had served earlier in the war as combat officers.⁶ The rest had months of service accumulated in hospitals and camps in Britain and France, with forestry, engineering, and railway units, and Casualty Clearing Stations. They had worked closely with dying men, and had witnessed them calling on their faith, and experienced their gratitude and devotion during the late nights and long hours in the wards.

For the twenty-seven who did reply, their response to the question of whether or not the church had failed the men of Canada was brutal, opening a floodgate of criticism and advice. Though four stoutly defended the church, the rest pointed out that while the churches might have encouraged the general altruism of some to volunteer for overseas service, the rest had little knowledge or interest in the pre-war churches' message, social life or reform agenda. While padre W. H. Muncaster wryly wrote, "God still uses mothers", twenty others saw their church as a failure in teaching Christian doctrine, evangelism, and knowledge of the Bible. They estimated that three out of every four soldiers were completely out of touch with church and clergy before they came overseas. While many agreed with J. O. Watts that soldiers viewed Jesus Christ with awe and respect, the men reported that church life fell far short of His teaching or example. Twenty-three of the Presbyterian chaplains declared the soldiers held to a Christian ethic of brotherhood and performed heroically unselfish and ethically Christian acts, but men who were willing to be loyal to Jesus were unmoved by the churches' patent inability to play a substantial lead in social issues of justice, poverty, education and family life. Many without hesitation endorsed the example of Jesus, but most equally and realistically stated that they were unable and unwilling to live the life of holiness and ethically pure standards that churches taught were based upon Christ's standards.⁷

Chaplain V. G. Rae went to the heart of the matter. What soldiers had against churches was the tedious, ritualistic and utterly censorious side of Canadian Christianity. The church offered little but boring Sunday services, and, as James Faulds agreed, almost every soldier despised the way that the darling of pre-war reformers, the Lord's Day Act, had ruined their fun

⁵ Chaplain Service Records, RG9IIIc15, Volume 4663, Questionnaire file, Library and Archives Canada, passim. One of the explanations for the relatively low number of Presbyterian responses came out of the large proportion still in service in the Canadian Corps: the remainder became so busy in the weeks before and during the battle of Amiens that they never completed or sent back their returns.

⁶ Responses by F. G. Forster, J. H. White, J. J. McCaskill, George Pringle, A. J. MacDonald, V. G. Rae, J. O. Watts, A. D. Cornett, J. A. Petrie, and J. S. Miller. As privates in the Canadian Army Medical Corps see the responses of James Faulds, H. H. MacFarlane and A. M. McColl.

⁷ R. M. Campbell, James Faulds, D. W. Christie, G. G. D. Kilpatrick, J. Whillans. See also D. W. Christie, in *Presbyterian and Westminster*, 27 June 1918, and Faulds, *The Presbyterian*, 7 September 1916; also Whillans *Presbyterian and Westminster*, 6 September 1917.

on Sundays. They detested the Women’s Christian Temperance Union and its refusal to send cigarettes or playing cards overseas. D. W. Christie noted that the men found their own lodges and clubs far more welcoming than church associations, and rejected the church for making most of their “non-sins sinful.” George Pringle, after months with the 43rd Battalion at the front, wanted more frank sexual education to be done by the churches. While churchmen and women demanded holiness, ministers and elders seemed more devoted to keeping the class structure intact. Men felt alienated by a church which increasingly catered to women and children and blamed men for most of society’s ills. Muncaster put it most bluntly: “The men are sick of liturgy and sick of Sankey,” the composer whose songs characterized the evangelistic and revivalist work of home-front, often female, church-folk.⁸ Many were disgusted by dreamy, effeminate clergy who were elitist, impractical, sentimental and preoccupied with old doctrinal and personal spats to the detriment of the needy and hurting. E. H. Oliver told of how a sergeant, recovering from an attack gone badly wrong, had gotten his men killed in a suicidal bombing attack which ended in savage bayonet fighting. His men were an entirely “rough lot,” yet he prayed they were, despite their wicked lives and curses on their dying lips, in heaven, and he wanted to know if God wanted them there, too, for they were the best chums he had ever known. Oliver mused how the average minister would have handled that question back home, or could handle it in future. To that end, padres H. R. Pickup, D. W. Christie, J. H. White, E. H. Burgess, J. A. Beatty and several more demanded that every seminarian have one year of inner-city or slum parish work to offset their years with books, and see how the underclass lived.⁹

The padres were clear that many of the church’s theological standards were beyond the ken and interest of most military men. J. O. Watts looked on the bright side: honest ignorance was easier to dispel than prejudices poisoned by bad dogma—for Presbyterians, this meant asking daring questions about the venerated Westminster Standards, the Long Catechism and quarterly communion season. While W. F. McConnell (later a bastion of Presbyterian loyalism during the post-war Church Union crisis) and S. J. M. Compton lamented the liberalizing theological drift before the war most, like V. G. Rae, were eager to rewrite and streamline the old creed in more modern terms.¹⁰ E. H. Oliver wrote that he had, in six months of harrowing hospital work around the Passchendaele offensive, never had a soldier turn aside his



Photo of Edmund H. Oliver courtesy Saskatoon Public Library Local History Room [Photo ID: lh-1494].

offer of prayer, but never had a soldier been able to remember any passage of scripture that could give them hope and relief, either. The padres realized that, at the front there was little place for the modernist studies of the seminary: the troops had no interest in analyzing religious experience in academic terms, though many officers were agnostic or rank skeptics. Oliver, despite his advanced liberal and modernistic views insisted on a vital conversion experience, and strong faith in both the Incarnation of Christ

⁸ W. H. Muncaster’s response.

⁹ H. R. Pickup’s, D. W. Christie’s, J. H. White’s, E. H. Burgess’s, S. J. Compton’s, and J. A. Beattie’s responses.

¹⁰ The debate was summarized by R. B. Taylor, Principal of Queen’s University and one of Hughes’s appointments as chaplain overseas, see *Presbyterian and Westminster*, 5 July 1917, 11-12, 43-44.

and His Atonement as central to the regeneration of soldiers and their preparation for post-war church life. The future separation of modernistic studies and revivalism had not yet come for these padres, though the contrast in loyalties to ancient standards and beliefs which would split the churches in future were already lying inchoate in their opinions.

The men, though alienated by the home church and clergy, nevertheless had grown to respect and heed their padres, reported the chaplains. Most soldiers overseas, they said, could not comprehend how their spiritual experiences could ever be understood by those at home. J. O.



Rev. James Whillans at a Chaplain Service Coffee Stall, Hill 70, August 1917. Photo courtesy Library and Archives Canada [Photo ID: PA-003085].

Watts asked how men who faced death overseas could ever have any sympathy with what distressed and worried church folk back home. Most had little time for denominational differences and rivalries. While one padre railed against Roman and Anglican exclusivity, almost all the rest declared that denominational differences had created no difficulties between padres at work, even though the Roman Catholic Church flatly rejected any talk of cooperative worship or church union.¹¹ Before the dark face of battle even these divides broke down, as Protestants offered prayer with dying Catholics and Catholics offered compassion and blessing to dying Christians of other communions. One chaplain gave the example of western towns with six churches and

no hospital, or communion refused to visitors from other denominations, which created a stumbling block to the troops even before they got to the front. Fortunately, noted A. D. Cornett, the troops overseas simply ignored the divisions, even as hide-bound officers (which to some padres were a greater curse than the war itself) insisted on separate parades.

The best chaplains in the world, they declared, could not get men back to church or keep them in them without radical changes back home. Most wanted more lay participation in worship and some type of liturgy (the troops had not been averse to basic liturgical practices, such as responses, and other practices which Presbyterians associated with Anglicanism or Catholicism).¹² Quarterly communion, said sixteen chaplains, had to give way to monthly, and the unspoken or even overt proclamation that communicants needed to be morally perfect defeated the purpose of the ordinance. Four added that superstition about communion needed to be countered by better teaching. In this the padres may have been facing the fundamental challenge of all soldiers overseas: how to approach communion with blood on their hands. Soldiers of all the Allied nations struggled with the demands to fight and kill, or intend to kill, and the exhortations of their chaplains to come to communion. The more articulate and skeptical soldiers had often challenged the padres with the ethics of Christian military service and the ease with which the padres had condoned their men's military obligations, even in a war depicted as a crusade.¹³ Combined with the prejudice of soldiers against hypocrisy, even chaplains who had

¹¹ A. H. Denoon's response.

¹² See responses by James Faulds, J. H. White and H. H. MacFarlane.

¹³ The fundamental contradiction between Christian love and repeated killing on demand remained the greatest objection soldiers offered to their chaplains in all British and Dominion armies. Most chaplains, however they tried to link the just war criteria and the British Empire's role in the war, were unable to persuade the atheistic, agnostic, or alternately the scrupulous Christian in the ranks. See Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier; Religion and the British Army in the First and Second World Wars* (London: Routledge, 2005).

been at the front, unless they could overcome the general view of the soldiers that to take communion and kill again was permissible, if the communicant were repentant, were baffled at the tiny proportions of men who came to services who came forward to take the bread and wine. Among those soldiers who became writers, this charge would be made to haunt the chaplains as a whole.

Connecting the war with the mission of the church remained a task which most Presbyterians could achieve, men, officers and padres; too, so long as the consensus persisted that the war was just. Even when utterly appalled at the way the war was conducted, few chaplains and their men disowned the war. Judging by the padres in this instance, most kept their messages to the men (in contrast to some of their Methodist and Anglican colleagues) on that theme low-key. Though most were post-millennial in their eschatology, the Presbyterians at the front focused more on the practical preaching for the task at hand: comradeship, courage, honesty and perseverance. Towards the rear, in camps and some more cloistered hospitals in England, though, most padres preached crusading sermons about the war for the Kingdom of God, and linked it with the upcoming war for the Kingdom of God in Canada when they got back. Their war, to them, was an Armageddon presaging the triumph of the Gospel which by work of the Church would achieve the Kingdom of God on Earth, and in God's Providence, which was always good, must be fitting the soldiers for a front-line role in establishing the Kingdom at home. Like many Christians back home, Canadian padres observed with great interest and excitement the entry of General Allenby's army into Jerusalem in 1917, returning the Holy City to Christian hands. How important it was, to them, to have the men who had overcome the most vicious and demoralizing conditions overseas face down the selfish triviality of the home front, could be seen in the urgency with which they directed their criticisms back to their denomination. How chagrined they could be with other eschatologies found in the ranks, such as the dispensationalist views and timetables cross-referencing the Books of Revelation and Daniel with the news of the war, could be divined from the bemused or chagrined comments of padres, though, as post-war controversies grew, more and more Presbyterians found the proto-fundamentalist theories more appealing than liberal post-millennialism.

Inevitably, the Presbyterian critique led to the quality of the clergy, both in training and spiritual formation. With their emphasis on a highly educated clergy, the padres homed in on seminary training and academics. All the padres except J. A. Petrie raised a chorus of discontent with seminary subjects which were overemphasized at the expense of practical experience. All called for the churches to make provisions for their seminary students in the ranks, who now questioned the point of completing their studies when they came home. F. G. Forster believed that most theological students overseas would not come back to the church, must less the ministry, unless experienced chaplains visited or even became permanent staff in the seminaries, as well as speaking to the returned men to consider the ministry as a post-war vocation. Most demanded that their education include practicums in settlements, urban centres and fewer courses in dead languages and Mesopotamian archaeology and more in sociology and political science. Athletic training had to supplant dogmatics, and preaching over systematic theology. Theological students needed apprenticeships in trade and labour chaplaincies in lumber and mining camps. Wealthy patronage with its strings attached to student ministers had to be eradicated, as well as devoting time to personal holiness instead of honest work.¹⁴ Oliver, while objecting to the demotion of Hebrew and Greek, found the "professional voice" of ministers leading worship repellent, declaring the "manly" tones of the front the new standard for

¹⁴ See responses by Rae, Watts, McColl, McGillivray and Faulds.

preachers. S. J. Compton stated that future ministers had to be “wise in the Book of Human Nature”, and F. G. Forster added that the veterans and home churches needed to know that the ministry was not for the effete, but was indeed “a man’s job.”¹⁵

The ministers turned to the laymen of the kirks at home. J. J. McCaskill used the metaphor of the vine: the churches kept trying to keep the vine in the garden, but it kept growing out of bounds, where the men were, and most needed it to be found.¹⁶ Churches needed to be social as well as worship centres, with elders and managers coming from every class and social station. J. S. Miller, now with the 38th Battalion preparing for the summer offensive, said his men saw the eldership as the preserve of callous bosses and managers chosen primarily because they did not smoke or drink. A. H. Denoon said the church was seen as a club for the rich, while ministers were either owned or silenced on social issues. H. R. Pickup wanted a military-style Parliamentary chaplaincy, with Presbyterian ministers running for public office. Some called for direct links with the Y.M.C.A.¹⁷ One Hospital commander told J. H. White that Paul’s opinions about women in leadership were simply his own, not God’s, and should be thrown out immediately. Oliver wondered how a thousand men had thirty officers while a church of 500 had only one or two ministers. He also proposed a complete reorganization of The Presbyterian Church in Canada along the lines of a Canadian Division, with four branches of staff officers corresponding to church finances, education, missions and administration. Oliver’s vision of the effectiveness of the Corps being transferred to the home Church, however, remained a paper dream resting in the Chaplain Service files of the Canadian Expeditionary Force in Ottawa.¹⁸

If there were one general topic of debate among Presbyterians before, during and after the war, it was Church Union. What began earlier in the century as a general theory thrown out by Principal William Patrick (Manitoba College) had grown to be the most divisive (or progressive) movement in Canadian Protestant church history. Though Methodist and Congregational leaders had achieved consensus on Union before the war, Presbyterians remained divided, often between senior leadership and the elders and ministers in the local Presbyteries, who were unwilling to give up their constitution, Confession, culture and identity without a fight.¹⁹ The divisions were not merely between those for or against, but also between those who wanted a federative union, with each denomination keeping its separate identity, more or less like confederation, while others insisted on the complete fusion of all into one organic union, with a common theology, polity, missions and property. When advocates on all sides claimed the war supported their agenda, the debate was so bitter at home that the Church declared a moratorium on discussing Union until after the war. Most chaplains reported that the men did not care much about denominationalism, and cheerfully endorsed Union.

Underneath this apparent consensus, however, was a deep skepticism about the ways and means to achieve the goal. Famous wartime chaplains such as C. W. Gordon, John Pringle, George Kilpatrick, E. H. Oliver, William Beattie, and a handful of others represented in the

¹⁵ Responses by Forster, Compton and George Pringle.

¹⁶ McCaskill’s response.

¹⁷ Faulds’ response; see also E. H. Burgess.

¹⁸ Oliver’s response. His detailed recommendations would have resembled the staff model of a Canadian Division overseas, right down to military job titles for the new denomination. For similar sentiments see J. A. Beattie, H. R. Pickup, W. F. McConnell, R. Howie, J. M. McElhiney and A. H. Denoon.

¹⁹ Barry Cahill, Laurence DeWolfe, Elizabeth Chard, Lois Yorke, *The Blue Banner* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2008) 25, 29-31, 43.

survey were already known as outspoken organic Unionists.²⁰ They grew increasingly impatient, even dismissive of those who had reservations. Some respondents wanted a post-war Presbyterian chaplain fellowship to maintain the focus and unity of the padres.²¹ Others called for the new church to create bureaus of veterans' resettlement, social research, and political policy and strategy. Most chaplains were less sanguine: some preferred federative over organic union, a view not well-represented by those speaking for the chaplains back home. J. A. Beattie, brother of William Beattie and equally committed to union, wondered if a church forced into union might be as flawed as a new garment with an old patch until the anti-unionists had been persuaded. But others, such as Oliver, would press hard for a quick and organic union as impatiently after the war as they had in the surveys.²² The cautious federationists, half of those who returned the survey, including A. M. Gordon, H. R. Pickup, J. J. McCaskill, S. J. M. Compton, James Faulds and especially W. F. McConnell, alarmed that their old church would cease to exist one day, became convinced that a rushed Union would only lead to disaster. In 1925, it led to schism.

When the 1917 ban on discussion was lifted in the 1920s, the Presbyterian padres found their apparent consensus had evaporated.²³ Though Thurlow Fraser, a returned padre who had brokered the 1917 truce called for moderation, of the twenty-seven ministers, seven with service at the front joined the United Church of Canada, along with John and George Pringle, and William Beattie. Two others remained continuing Presbyterians, joined by A. M. Gordon, and, surprisingly to those who assumed he was an ally, E. D. MacLaren, now disillusioned and alienated from contentious unionists. McConnell founded the Presbyterian Church Association, the bastion of anti-Unionism across Canada, while Compton, J. M. McGillivray, Pickup and McCaskill turned their back on Union. When the year 1925 had ended, 93 Presbyterian chaplains had gone into Union. Thirty-six refused to let their old kirk die. Many were embittered when the United Church went to Parliament to ban the use of the old name, and claim both property and records. The unity of the chaplains in war was illusory: those radicalized and rendered impatient had tried to run roughshod over the moderates, and the result had been internecine war. G. A. Little, who had feared that the unity of the chaplains was based more on the wartime cause and proximity of death than any new consensus, turned out to be more prophetically astute than the Unionists.²⁴

The unionist fracture was another symptom of the growing doubt in the 1920s about the wartime experiences of the chaplains and their lessons for the home church. Even as the war's last battles of 1918 took place overseas, a struggle over "The Chaplains' Message" was being waged at home. The Anglican Church simply suppressed the "Message", and forbade its distribution, while commentators who once had eagerly anticipated padre recommendations hinted that they settle down and get back to the regular work of the church. Methodists enthusiastically endorsed the message, even as church bureaucrats denounced radicalism in

²⁰ See Pringle in *The Presbyterian*, 28 October 1915, also 1 June 1916.

²¹ See also "A Chaplain," *Presbyterian and Westminster*, 5 September 1918.

²² Responses by J. A. Beattie; also A. J. MacDonald, A. M. McColl, George Little, A. D. Cornett, R. M. Campbell, and A. H. Denoon.

²³ N. Keith Clifford, *The Resistance to Church Union in Canada, 1904-1939* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press), 131-54, 170-73.

²⁴ George A. Little's response.

labour relations and thundered against what they saw as the rising tide of Bolshevism in the country, especially fearful, it seemed, of the veteran. Baptists were divided, though Congregationalists were receptive. Presbyterians were ambivalent, and their leadership seemed confused over how to respond. While chaplains spoke to rapt audiences of their experiences overseas at General Assembly, and the Presbyterian press loyally supported their statements, the radical calls for reform seem to have been quietly shelved or put aside until the greater battle over Union was resolved.

Canadians were distracted, and frightened, by the reaction of the government to the Winnipeg strike and other manifestations of discontent, where veterans were portrayed as dangerous elements influenced by Bolsheviks and revolutionaries. Most chaplains voluntarily enlisted as agents speaking against radicalism, shunned the more populist Great War Veterans Association, and became founding members and local leaders of the moderate, sometimes reactionary, Canadian Legion. By the earliest days of 1921, as the Government reorganized the militia and regular forces (and returned the Chaplain Service to the non-Permanent Militia), most church organizations and leaders had left the chaplains' cause and its reforms far behind. The clarion call for reform was drowned out by the rush to normal, the arduous post-war economic situation, and its most idealistic proponents forced with re-establishing themselves in isolated parishes or generally ignored. As for the veterans, many were able to reconcile to some form of family and church life, though many more remained skeptical and distant from pew and pulpit. While many had affection and respect for their own padre overseas, and many more over the next two decades would meet them again in militia units and in times of crisis, the public discourse was soon dominated by disillusioned soldier writers, who portrayed most chaplains as hyper-patriotic buffoons or cowards. Padres were preachers, and talk counted for little to the men who picked up the pen and wrote about their experiences. Their dismissals and accusations would poison Canadian readers against the padres for three generations.

Looking back, the call of the Presbyterian chaplains for a new church seems remarkably prescient. On the other hand, many of the reforms in church life and education were realized only in the two decades after the Second World War. One of the great ironies of Canadian religious life in that later era was that while many veterans of the Second War flocked to churches during the Cold War, other veterans joined Pierre Berton in belaboring churches for their irrelevance, sometimes in the same terms that the Great War padres had prophesied against their churches. In our own time, the calls for reform of the Great War padres have been forgotten, while the calls for reform of the Cold War era have, almost, become the stuff of church history. Nevertheless, new generations of critics, drawn mostly from those which have known little of war, continue to call for relevance in terms strangely reminiscent, though specific remedies are often different. With each iteration of critique and remedy, the institutional church continues to decline in membership and establishment. Looking back, it is hard not to wonder how this pattern might have been different if the Great War padres had postponed the Union controversy until the rest of their agenda had been realized. Yet, ultimately, the war, with its bereavement, suffering and danger, was over. The unity of The Cause was far more fragile than many commentators, including the pastors and padres, could see. Though the padres had earned an audience, they could not keep its attention as the war faded into the recent past. At home, they were judged a risk to the peace of the church, and perhaps to Canadian society. Most Canadians would forget their dedication, sacrifices, wounds and demands for reforms, their message, like their careers, ignored and unvalued, in what may one day be seen as one of the greatest lost opportunities of modern Canadian church history.

Appendix: Chaplain Service Questionnaire²⁵

1. Does our church appear to you in a measure to have failed to win and hold men? If so:
 - a) In what particular?
 - b) To what extent?
 - c) For what reason?
2. Have you found in your personal dealings with men that there has been a neglect of definite Christian instruction in the fundamentals of religion? If so, specify.
3. Do our men seem to believe that our Church has not dealt effectively and sympathetically with the problems of practical life?
4. To what extent have you found Denominational differences a hindrance in your work among men?
5. What are considered in the Army to be the chief sources of ineffectiveness:
 - a) In the Church?
 - b) In the Ministry?
6. In what way can our Churches develop a Christian Fellowship as vital and intimate as the present comradeship in arms?
7. Does your experience show that the Communion in our Church should receive greater emphasis than is the case at present?
8. Has your experience with the Church Parades and Sunday Services convinced you that our Church Service would be improved by giving the Congregation an opportunity more largely to participate in the public worship?
9. Has your experience as a Chaplain revealed any way in which the training of our Ministry can be improved? If so, particularize.
10. The energy, devotion and sacrifice which have been put into the War should be conserved and dedicated more definitely to the work of the Kingdom of God.
 - a) How can this best be brought home to the individual?
 - b) How can the church best magnify the calling of the Ministry and make the most effective appeal to suitable young men?
11. The war has revealed the necessity of large vision and wise direction for the attainment of great directives.
 - a) Has the Church caught a similar vision?

²⁵ Chaplain Service Records, RG9IIIc15, Volume 4663, Questionnaire file, Library and Archives Canada. See also Crerar, *Padres in No Man's Land*, 248-50.

12. What suggestions in the way of constructive statesmanship have you to offer from your observations and experience which are not covered by the above questions?