

Institutions and Ideas: The Challenge of the Great War for Canadian Presbyterians

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In the over fifteen years that I have been teaching the history of The Presbyterian Church in Canada at Knox College, there is one quote that I have used which, more than any other, has disturbed students. It doesn't matter whether they are younger or older; it doesn't matter where they would place themselves on the theological spectrum (whether they would consider themselves liberal or evangelical or conservative or mainstream, or have no label); it doesn't matter what their ethnic heritage is—the majority find it disturbing. It comes from a prominent Presbyterian minister, and was part of a sermon preached here in Toronto in 1917 in the midst of the Great War. As part of his sermon on the beatitudes, the preacher proclaimed:

hence we say to those who contend with all the engines of warfare against the most hellish spirit of all time—Blessed are ye armed, booted, equipped for slaughter, we say it because we must, blessed are ye peacemakers.¹

Many of those who have heard this quotation cannot imagine a minister saying these words. It does not fit with our understanding of Christian faith. It would be easy—too easy—to dismiss it as extreme, over the top, or in some other way unrepresentative. It was not. This quote was extremely representative of how the conflict that erupted in Europe in August 1914 came to be understood as a war in which those fighting in the Empire's cause were fighting on the side of God, and the preacher, the Rev. Thomas Eakin, then minister of St. Andrew's, King Street, was reflecting that attitude. Others had expressed similar attitudes from the beginning of the conflict, defining the Great War (what we now commonly refer to as the First World War) as one in which God was actively engaged on the side of Britain and its Empire and her allies, and in which Christians were called to fight. Sometimes the language of "crusade" was invoked, while at other times the justice and righteousness of the Empire's cause were evoked but the idea was clear—God willed Christians to fight in this conflict. To cite one further example, this from Ephraim Scott, the editor of the *Presbyterian Record*, in October 1914:

War is never wrong when it is war against wrong. . . . war in defence of weakness against strength, a war for truth and plighted pledge, for freedom against oppression, is God's war wherever waged, and with whatever weapons, whether tongue or pen or sword.²

But, that is not necessarily our attitude today.

¹ Thomas Eakin sermon, February 1917, Knox College collection, 207/0707, The Presbyterian Church in Canada Archives and Records Office, Toronto (PCCARO).

² *Presbyterian Record*, October 1914, 433.

Attitudes to war, inside the church and in the broader culture, changed over the course of the twentieth century. The place of the church within that society also changed significantly. The church in 1914 had a central role in society that it no longer has. Canada could not have fought the war it did in 1914 without the support of the churches, including The Presbyterian Church in Canada that was one of the three dominant Protestant denominations (the others being the Anglicans and the Methodists) and all of whom were of equivalent size. More recently Canada has gone to war and that war has been opposed by all of the Christian churches in Canada, and most Canadians (including those in churches) did not notice. These two themes, attitudes to Christian faith and warfare, and the realization that the place of Christianity within Canadian society has changed dramatically, have shaped and coloured how we have studied the war. The recent publication of a collection of essays edited by Gordon Heath focusing on Canadian churches and the First World War has provided an opportunity to reconsider these themes.³ In terms of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, the chapter “For Empire and God” attempted to summarize our understanding of the war.⁴ Placed alongside the other essays in that volume, we now have a much clearer picture of how Canadian churches as a whole responded to the war. Support, rather than opposition to the war, is one of the main findings. With the explosion of other writings on the First World War or Great War,⁵ this is a time where new themes are emerging, and a time to consider other aspects of the experience of The Presbyterian Church in Canada in this conflict. This paper will begin by restating a few of the main themes that have clearly emerged before moving on to consider two new subjects: first, the effect of the war on the denominational Colleges, among the most significant institutions within the church at the time; and, second, the ideas about the war that we see in pamphlets published by the denomination. In both institutions and ideas we see continuity with the pre-war church. As much as the Great War affected the church—and profoundly so—it was not a watershed in terms of either attitudes to war or in the overall relationship between church and culture.

The Presbyterian Church offered complete and total support for the Empire and Canada’s participation in the Great War. Canadian Presbyterians were not unique in this; indeed, what the other literature shows was that this was the dominant response in Canada.⁶ The churches supported the war with great vigour. The war was defined as a sacrifice in the service of others and as a new way of achieving God’s purposes on earth. The denomination continued unwavering in that support to the end, even as the casualties mounted. The church showed this in its support for

³ Gordon L. Heath, ed., *Canadian Churches and the First World War* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014).

⁴ Stuart Macdonald, “For Empire and God: Canadian Presbyterians and the Great War,” in *Canadian Churches*, ed. Heath, 133-52.

⁵ With the centenary of the outbreak of the Great War there has been considerable publication in this area, including re-visiting debates on the origins of the war, as well as a number of other fascinating studies. Jay Winter has edited a three-volume academic series, *The Cambridge History of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). Adrian Gregory’s “Beliefs and religion” in volume 3, 418-44, explores this topic but assumes that Europe had already largely secularized by the time of the outbreak of war. A very different assessment is offered in Philip Jenkins’ *The Great and Holy War: How World War I Became a Religious Crusade* (New York: HarperOne, 2014).

⁶ This is a major theme throughout Heath’s book and can be seen specifically in these sections: Mark G. McGowan, “‘We are all involved in the same issue’: Canada’s English-Speaking Catholics and the Great War,” 34-74; David B. Marshall, “‘Khaki Has Become a Sacred Colour’: The Methodist Church and the Sanctification of World War One,” 102-32; Macdonald, “For Empire and God,” 133-51; Melissa Davidson, “The Anglican Church and the Great War,” 152-69; and, Michael A. G. Haykin and Ian Hugh Clary, “‘O God of Battles’: The Canadian Baptist Experience of the Great War,” 170-96.

conscription. It showed it in the provision of chaplains. We see it in the service of individual Presbyterians during the war and what they wrote about their experience. We see it in sermons, and in the editorials and other features of the denominational magazines. For example, the *Presbyterian Witness* on August 10, 1918 argued against any thought of negotiation at this stage in the war:

This is why we say there must be no compromise now, in this final stage of the war, when the enemy is drawing near the end of his resources and the prospect of defeat faces him on every side, and when the fruit of our unspeakable sacrifices is coming daily nearer within our reach. This is why we need to stiffen our resolution, to forget our war-weariness and to reinforce our faith and our fortitude to endure unto the end. We have no misgivings as to the justice of our cause.⁷

Victory was required in order to fulfil the justice of the great cause for which so many had sacrificed so much.

It is this unwavering support, and some of the strident language that was used, that has been a challenge for historians. The response in the historiography has been to try to balance this and to try to find other voices or more moderate comments.⁸ This is understandable. But this may also have led us to see more change, and thus the war as a greater watershed, than may actually have been the case. These voices supporting the war as a crusade or arguing against a negotiated end are so foreign to our conceptions today, that one wants to find more moderate voices. One can find those, or, in some cases one can read comments in such a way that makes them more moderate than may actually have been the case; however, the dominant voice was one of unwavering support for the Empire. We see this theme reinforced when we consider how the war affected theological Colleges and how they participated in the war, and the ideas about the war expressed through a variety of pamphlets produced by the denomination near the end of the war.

Theological Colleges and Other Institutions

What was the impact of the Great War on the institutions of The Presbyterian Church in Canada? The most common institution in 1914 would have been the individual congregations. To try to assess that impact across the entire denomination would involve a massive research project. One wonders about the survival of sources as well as the variety of sources that would be available to answer our questions. Would we have enough sermons, worship services, minutes or other kinds of information to give us an accurate picture? Perhaps a more feasible project might be to consider how the war was memorialized through the various plaques, books of remembrance and memorial gifts created during the war or in the years immediately following. These would vary from the standard Rolls of Honour that many congregations have and still display to extremely large gifts such as memorial organs. (I was raised in a congregation with a massive organ that was a memorial to those who had died in the Great War.) As noted, this would be a major project because the war affected so many congregations and villages across Canada. Of particular interest might be the

⁷ Michelle Fowler, "Keeping the Faith: the Presbyterian Press in Peace and War, 1913-1919" (master's thesis, Wilfrid Laurier University, 2005), 84. The original quotation is from the *Presbyterian Witness*, August 10, 1918.

⁸ The historiography of Canadian Presbyterians and the Great War is explored in Stuart Macdonald "Myth Meets Reality: Canadian Presbyterians and the Great War," *Historical Papers: Canadian Society of Church History* (2012): 103-20. <http://pi.library.yorku.ca/ojs/index.php/historicalpapers/article/viewPDFInterstitial/39113/35476>.

kind of inscriptions and the language chosen for these inscriptions in Presbyterian congregations, a subject that has been pioneered by Jonathan Vance.⁹ Other institutions would have been affected as well. Mission Boards would have struggled to serve mission fields, both in Canada and overseas, given the challenges of conflict (this was a world war so that travel was difficult and some regions were involved in fighting), decreased finances, and obtaining adequate personnel. Women's organizations, in particular the Women's Missionary Society, would also have had their activities in this period altered by the conflict.

Theological Colleges were significant institutions in the Presbyterian Church in 1914. These institutions offer us an interesting lens into the impact of the war on the denomination. The Presbyterian Church in Canada had eight theological Colleges in 1914 spread across the nation: Presbyterian College in Halifax; Presbyterian College in Montreal; Queen's in Kingston; Knox College in Toronto; Manitoba College in Winnipeg; Presbyterian Theological College in Saskatoon; Robertson College in Edmonton; and Westminster Hall in Vancouver. They varied considerably in size, in how established they were, in the programs they offered, and their particular challenges. Just prior to the outbreak of war Presbyterian College, Halifax, completed its 94th session, while Manitoba College had completed its 42nd session. In contrast, Westminster Hall presented only its sixth annual report to the General Assembly, while Presbyterian Theological College, Saskatoon, and Robertson College in Edmonton were even newer institutions.¹⁰ For the latter institutions, the challenges they faced in 1914 were to establish faculty, solidify funding, and construct buildings. The established Colleges also faced challenges. Manitoba College joined with Wesley College in the 1913-1914 academic year in anticipation of church union. The following year (1915) saw Manitoba College report that undergraduate education had been largely transferred to the University, as a result of changes in the structure of provincial education.¹¹ Westminster Hall faced the failure of Dominion Trust that affected its finances.¹² Knox College was in the process of building a new building and residence, with those structures not yet completed.¹³ The Colleges were very different from each other on the eve of war. This is reflected not only in the content of their reports, but also the way in which they reported. There was no standard format laid down by the General Assembly, and while there was similar information each College reported there was also information that varied considerably across the Colleges. We have a great deal of information but cross-College comparisons remain challenging. Student enrolment does not always seem to add up even within a College's own report, let alone from one College to another. One thing that is clear is that each College considered their communities to include not only those in the specific theology classes, but also undergraduate students and those at other stages of preparation for ministry. The Great War had a dramatic impact on all of them.

⁹ Jonathan F. Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning and the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997).

¹⁰ *The Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada*, (the A&P), contain the minutes of the Assembly as well as reports to the Assembly. Most of the information on the Colleges was reported to the Assembly, but without debate. To avoid confusion, the reports section of *The Acts and Proceedings* will be referenced as A&P reports. The College Reports for 1914 are found in the reports, 155-200.

¹¹ A&P reports (1914): 184; A&P reports (1915): 182.

¹² A&P reports (1915): 198.

¹³ A&P reports (1915): 172.

Decline in enrolment was one of the first effects that the outbreak of war had on the Colleges. Not all of the Colleges reported a loss of enrolment in their 1915 reports to the General Assembly (the first reports after the outbreak of war) but reference was made to this by all of the Colleges in subsequent reports. Lower enrolment affected the income and finances of the Colleges, something that was of concern. Presbyterian College in Halifax had reported 45 students in the 1913-14 academic session. In the 1918 report to the General Assembly, only 12 students are noted as being in attendance.¹⁴ That same year (1918), Presbyterian College, Montreal noted 20 students in attendance, a significant decrease from the 80 students reported in 1914. (These numbers included all students, not just in theology, but also in Arts and in the “Matriculation Class.”)¹⁵ A more accurate indicator of enrolment in theology classes themselves might be the 1917 report where the College reported that there were 27 students enrolled: “an exact equivalent of the number that has gone overseas.”¹⁶ Whichever number we choose, one sees a dramatic impact on enrolment at Presbyterian College, Montreal. Similar problems were faced by the other theological Colleges. In 1918 Queen’s reported that its enrolment had decreased throughout the war, with each year being fifty percent of the previous year. Twelve students were present for the 1917-1918 academic session, down from 32 immediately prior to the war.¹⁷ The Knox College Senate chose to focus on the number of graduates to illustrate the same point. The 1918 graduates numbered nine, down from 15 in 1917, and 23 in 1916, and the Senate anticipated five or six graduates in 1919.¹⁸ Manitoba College noted in 1918 “Our theological classes numbered only eleven, of whom not one was liable to be called up—all the men belonging to Class 1 have already gone to the front.”¹⁹ It is more challenging to determine the impact on the younger Colleges. In 1918 Presbyterian Theological College in Saskatoon reported eight Arts and 12 theology students. No classes had been held in 1913-1914 as the College was just being established.²⁰ Robertson College listed 38 students in total (11 in Theology), up from 37 in 1914 (seven of whom were in theology).²¹ That same year Westminster Hall reported seven students registered for the next session, while two more had “signified their intention of attending unless called for Military service.”²²

Each theological College chose different ways to acknowledge or report on the considerable numbers of its students who enlisted. Presbyterian College, Halifax began a roll of honour in its 1915 report noting all who had enlisted, and the military branch or unit in which they served. The 1915 report noted 28 students, which increased to 39 by 1916, and by the end of the war stood at 43 students and two faculty.²³ The yearly reports also noted those who were killed in

¹⁴ A&P reports (1918): 149.

¹⁵ A&P reports (1914): 161; A&P reports (1918): 154.

¹⁶ A&P reports (1917): 138.

¹⁷ A&P reports (1914): 167; A&P reports (1918): 158.

¹⁸ A&P reports (1918): 164.

¹⁹ A&P reports (1918): 173.

²⁰ A&P reports (1914): 188; A&P reports (1918): 178.

²¹ A&P reports (1914): 191; A&P reports (1918): 182.

²² A&P reports (1918): 184-85.

²³ A&P reports (1915): 159; A&P reports (1916): 163; A&P reports (1920): 166. The roll of honour one year after the war (1919), lists 42 students having served (A&P reports (1919): 153). That was an increase of two over the previous year (A&P reports (1918): 150).

the conflict (a subject to which we will turn in a moment). Presbyterian College, Montreal saw 46 students enlist in the course of the war, while Knox College recorded 70 enlisted.²⁴ The reports of Queen's in Kingston throughout the war provide the least information on the war's impact on the College. No total for enlistments was given, but the 1917 report did describe the challenges of enrolment, and the reality that students were leaving to join "the King's Colours," both those in Arts and those entering theological studies, and during theological studies. Queen's also noted that one of its instructors, Professor Dall, had received a commission in the Highland Light Infantry and was serving in Asia.²⁵ The information from Manitoba College in Winnipeg is also fragmentary, but we do know that by 1916 Dr. Macmillan and 15 candidates for ministry had "heeded the Call of the Empire" and joined the military.²⁶ The College encouraged this: "The College has adopted a resolution encouraging the young men under its care to enlist and has promised to treat as special cases those who join the colours during the term." The report continued that all of those who had enlisted during the current academic year had been given credit for completing that year.²⁷ Given this, it is surprising that the College does not update this information in subsequent reports. Recruitment was also active at Presbyterian Theological College, Saskatoon, which saw 14 students and the Principal in service in 1916, with four more students entering service by 1917.²⁸ Robertson College in Edmonton listed 39 students on its honour roll in 1918, while Westminster Hall, Vancouver reported at the conclusion of the war that 60 members of the College community had served.²⁹ It is worth reminding ourselves that in each case Colleges included a variety of individuals in these numbers, not only those actively taking theological classes, but also those preparing for theological classes or recent graduates. Each College saw its students (however defined), and in some cases faculty, actively engaged in the war effort.

This participation came at a cost. At least sixty students (including recent graduates) and one faculty member died in military service. The best statistics indicate the following deaths from the Colleges that provided this information (the number known to be in service is given in brackets): Presbyterian College, Halifax: 7 dead (42 in service); Presbyterian College, Montreal: 10 (46); Knox College, Toronto: 16 (70); Presbyterian Theological College, Saskatoon: 5 (ca. 18); Robertson College, Edmonton: 5 (ca. 39); and, Westminster Hall, Vancouver: 13 (60).³⁰ We have no clear numbers from either Queen's in Kingston or Manitoba College in Winnipeg. In the case of Queens we do know students were killed during the war. In its 1917 report, the College noted that two students, P. C. Caverhill and E. F. Corkill, students "of great promise who, had they been

²⁴ Total enlistment figures are challenging, as not all Colleges gave them for the complete war. The Presbyterian College figure was given in 1919 at the close of the war (A&P reports (1919): 155). Knox College's last report of enlistment was given in its 1918 report, before the end of the war (A&P reports (1918): 165).

²⁵ A&P reports (1917): 143.

²⁶ As with so many of the statements in these reports, it is challenging to arrive at precise numbers. The actual quotation would suggest that it may have been at least fifteen: "In addition to Dr. Macmillan who is now serving with the colours at Halifax, *and in addition to the men who enlisted before the beginning of the session*, 15 of the young men in Manitoba College, who are candidates for ministry, are now on active service" (A&P reports (1916): 188; italics added).

²⁷ A&P reports (1916): 188.

²⁸ A&P reports (1916): 192-93; A&P reports (1917): 165.

²⁹ A&P reports (1919): 188.

³⁰ A&P reports (1919): 151, 153, 155, 178, 188; A&P reports (1918): 183 for Robertson College; A&P reports (1920): 185 for Knox College.

spared would have been graduated this year,” both died in France: “They were beautiful in their lives and in their death they were not divided. We hold them in highest honour and in grateful remembrance for their unselfish devotion to duty and because they fell in defence of the sacred principles of our Christian civilization.”³¹ Two other student deaths were noted in the 1918 report, as was the death in 1918 of Professor Dall in India.³²

Deaths occurred throughout the war. Presbyterian College, Montreal, reported one student dead in its 1916 report, five dead by its 1917 report, eight dead by 1918, and 10 dead by the conclusion of the war.³³ The last year of war was hard on Knox College, as the number of dead increased from the seven noted in the 1918 report, to reach 13 by the end of the war (with 16 names on the memorial plaque).³⁴ As previously mentioned, Presbyterian College, Halifax included in its report each year the honour roll of those serving, and as the war progressed noted those who had been killed (three by 1917; four, and one missing, by 1918; seven in the 1919 report at the conclusion of the war.)³⁵ Some of the tributes to those killed are very moving. In its 1918 report, Presbyterian College, Saskatoon noted they had mentioned the previous year the deaths of three students, then noted the death of another, James Donald Graham: “Donald was a splendid type of man, and one of the cleverest students in our College. He possessed the art of making himself beloved by all.” The report went on to note that Graham, and two other students, had been awarded “the military medal for bravery.”³⁶ The Report of Robertson College that same year named five who had died, one not a candidate for ministry, while noting that the other four had “rendered excellent service on Alberta mission fields and were young men of much promise.”³⁷ Casualties experienced during the war would have extended far beyond those who died, to those who were wounded, prisoners, or otherwise affected. Westminster Hall was the only College to report this kind of information, noting in addition to the 13 dead, two who had been prisoners and serving as chaplains to other prisoners, and two who been permanently disabled.³⁸ Finally, the end of the war saw the flu pandemic reach Canada, with classes postponed, the death of one graduating student at Knox, and two students at Manitoba College.³⁹

In addition to the dramatic impacts of enlisted students and those who did not return, and the financial challenge of lowered enrolment, the Colleges also found themselves dealing with the reality of College buildings being needed, and thus requisitioned by military authorities. Presbyterian College, Halifax, had its residence taken over in 1917 in order for it to serve as a convalescence home. Alternate arrangements had to be made for accommodation of the students

³¹ A&P reports (1917): 143.

³² A&P reports (1918): 158 notes the student deaths. Professor Dall’s death is noted the next year, A&P reports (1919): 159.

³³ A&P reports (1916): 167; A&P reports (1917): 139; A&P reports (1918): 153; A&P reports (1919): 155.

³⁴ A&P reports (1918): 165; A&P reports (1920): 185. There are sixteen names listed on the memorial plaque in the Knox College chapel. At the time of writing, the reasons for this discrepancy (sixteen names not thirteen) are unclear.

³⁵ A&P reports (1917): 135-36; A&P reports (1918): 150; A&P reports (1919): 153.

³⁶ A&P reports (1918): 178.

³⁷ A&P reports (1918): 183. One suspects the other student was a resident.

³⁸ A&P reports (1919): 188.

³⁹ A&P reports (1919): 167, 174.

studying for ministry and to provide funding for that accommodation.⁴⁰ Presbyterian College, Montreal, also had its building used as a military hospital, beginning in 1918 and this continued for the next two years. The residence was returned in April of 1919.⁴¹ Knox College retained its new building (the old Knox was used by the military), but found itself sharing the building with St. Andrew's College.⁴² Manitoba College had its building requisitioned at the very end of the war and used as a "vocational school for partially disabled soldiers." The challenge here was not simply finding residence and teaching space, but the fact the College was also unable to use its library.⁴³ In the course of the war, the Assembly was asked to consider how to consolidate the work of the Colleges, given all of the challenges they faced. The 1918 Assembly (which would not have anticipated the war ending later that year) called for a better sharing of resources (in particular faculty) but did not support the closing of any of the Colleges and suggested that each College should continue in its affiliations at the present time.⁴⁴

College reports tended to deal with specifics, not only throughout the war, but in years before and after. One is not surprised to find that the Colleges did not use their reports as opportunities to reflect on the meaning of what they were experiencing during the conflict. We thus need to be cautious in how we read these reports if we wish to use them to conclude how those in the Colleges viewed the war. At the same time, what is clear is that the Colleges supported the war. We see this in terms of their willingness to have their students enlist, the encouragement we sometimes see for these students to join the military, and the pride they expressed in what their students, and in some cases faculty, were doing. The language used was muted. Not surprisingly given the nature of the source, we do not find strong crusading language used. What we do find is a consistent emphasis on service to Empire and King, and that this sacrifice was noble. It was sacrifice in a worthy cause. Occasionally a College went further and tried to give expression to what it felt was involved in the conflict. The Queen's College report in 1917 spoke of the war as one fought for Christian civilization. The next year Queen's noted the death of two students: "By their devotion unto death in the defence of the freedom of the Empire and the sanctities of civilization they have shed a glory on their Alma Mater which will be an inspiration to future generations of students." After expressing their sympathies to the families of these students, the report noted "they laid down their lives for the sacred cause of justice and truth and honour."⁴⁵ A more extensive reflection on the meaning of the war can be found in the report of the Knox College Senate in 1918 as that body considered the world after the war and what would be needed, particularly from those too young to have gone to war:

In these days of appeal to the heroic, the Church must bring home to these boys the unparalleled need there is now and will be after the war for volunteers who will enlist under the banner of King Jesus and give themselves up to His campaign of world redemption with the same abandonment, the same courage, the same readiness, if

⁴⁰ A&P reports (1917): 133-34.

⁴¹ A&P reports (1918): 152; A&P reports (1919): 154.

⁴² A&P reports (1919): 167.

⁴³ A&P reports (1919): 173.

⁴⁴ *The Acts & Proceedings of the Forty-Fourth General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada* (1918): 75-77, 82-83.

⁴⁵ A&P reports (1918): 158.

need be, to suffer and die for a great cause as has characterized their fathers and older brothers in Flanders and in France. Unless the Church can appeal to the spirit of heroism and adventure in our young Christians with something of the same response which has met the call of the nation, the cause for which the Church stands is doomed to failure. This appeal the Church will make and already there are indications that in the years following the war young men will flow to our Church Colleges as never before.⁴⁶

The names of the seven dead from Knox to that point in the conflict follow immediately below this statement. It is worth noting that there is no sense in this comment that those who had died had done so in vain. They were exemplary Christian soldiers. They had fought on a physical battlefield, but the expressed belief was that the fight to redeem the world must continue with the same zeal after the war in other battlefields. The war was not in vain; instead, the war had given a model to follow. We see no break from the past in this quotation, only a call to carry on the mission in new ways.

Did individuals who fought in the Great War have their faith shattered by the experience? Was there a crisis of faith among students for ministry who served, one that led them to leave the church? If so, what was the nature of the crisis? Was it a loss in faith in God, or a loss of faith in the effectiveness of the church or the ethical values the church proclaimed? These are extremely difficult questions to answer. College reports may not be the most useful source to use in determining a definitive answer to this question. At the same time, this has been a major theme in the literature on Canadian churches in World War I, first articulated by David Marshall in his 1985 article "Methodism Embattled: A reconsideration and World War I" and restated (though in a much more cautious form) in his recent chapter on Methodists in World War I.⁴⁷ The argument is that what students (those serving as chaplains or those serving as soldiers) saw in the war challenged their faith: "Belief that the Great War was a noble Christian crusade was quickly shattered in the disillusionment of the battlefield."⁴⁸ Marshall stressed the differences between the experiences and resultant attitudes to war between those who were on the front-lines and those clergy who stayed at home, and suggested that we get a different, and far more realistic, portrait of the war by considering sources created by those who served as soldiers. One poignant example Marshall cites is the complaint of C. T. Watterson, who had been at Wesley College (Winnipeg) prior to the war, that the efforts of the church had completely failed to reach the soldiers and many would now "have done with the Church."⁴⁹ Marshall also provided as evidence for this the loss of, or challenge to, faith that thirty-nine of the ministers and probationers who served overseas resigned, and "113 clergy and theology students were never heard from by the Methodist church

⁴⁶ A&P reports (1918): 165.

⁴⁷ David B. Marshall, "Methodism Embattled: A Reconsideration of the Methodist Church and World War I," *Canadian Historical Review* 66 (1985): 48-64. In his chapter in *Canadian Churches and the First World War*, Marshall stresses that it was a difference on ethics, rather than a loss of faith itself, that distanced the soldiers from the Methodist church in Canada which they left: "The impact of the war on the Methodist Church of Canada was neither revival nor a shattering loss of faith, but a drift away from the church" (Marshall, "Khaki has become a sacred colour": The Methodist Church and the Sanctification of World War One," 104).

⁴⁸ Marshall, "Methodism Embattled," 48.

⁴⁹ Marshall, "Methodism Embattled," 58.

after they returned.”⁵⁰ The conclusion that the war challenged the faith of many who saw combat seems clear; however, there are a few clues we can glean from these reports that would suggest caution in extending this argument to Presbyterian theological students. All of the theological Colleges recovered in the post-War period. Enrolment was not a major concern expressed by any of these Colleges after the war. This stands in sharp contrast to their concerns during the war itself.⁵¹ Indeed the Colleges were generally pleased to have returned to normal and were optimistic about their futures.

Two Colleges did directly address the issue of students returning from the war. Presbyterian College, Halifax, after giving the summary of those who had served, noted in 1920 that “all but seven have returned to resume their studies for ministry.”⁵² It is tempting to imagine that these seven may have left theological studies due to a crisis of faith; however, there is a clue in the Knox College report of the same year which should give us pause before we jump to that conclusion. The Knox report stated that the war had taken its toll with 13 members of the College community dead, then continued: “Some others have been too much broken in health to return to their studies, but of our thirty-five students in Theology this past winter, eighteen are men who have returned from the front; and of the fifty men registered in Arts a good proportion are returned men.”⁵³ Returned soldiers did return to theological studies. Of those who did not, it is unclear how many suffered a crisis of faith and how many failed to continue for other reasons, including as a result of injuries. What is fascinating is how little attention was paid in the College reports to those who were injured. While those who died were honoured in a variety of ways, the wounded were rarely mentioned. Tim Cook has suggested that the dead from the Great War amounted to 9.5 to 10 million soldiers across the world, with another 15 to 20 million wounded. He suggests that it is likely that 60,932 Canadians (as well as 1,305 Newfoundlanders) died as a result of combat, disease or injury. What needs to be added to this are the over 173,000 who were injured.⁵⁴ We have already noted that the wounded were not, with one exception, mentioned in the College reports. Extrapolating from the general number of wounded in the war, we would assume that this would be a considerable number. We should be careful not to move too quickly to assume that those who did not return from combat to theological studies did so as a result of a faith crisis caused by the war. There may be other explanatory factors. And those who did return did not seem to bring altered attitudes with them. After the war, the Colleges seemed more concerned with moving forward than with reflecting upon the issues raised by the conflict.

Impact of the War on Ideas

⁵⁰ Marshall, “Methodism Embattled,” 59. No reference to where these numbers were derived is offered in the article. This makes it challenging to determine if this were a crisis of faith or the result of some other factors. The impression in the article clearly is that these were men who in some sense lost their faith as a result of the conflict—be that faith in God, or, more likely, faith in the church.

⁵¹ Enrolment statistics were down from what they had been previously, but this was not a major concern of the Colleges. The Western Colleges seem to have done better after the war, but it needs to be remembered that these Colleges were just being or had only recently been established. The more established Colleges seem to have seen lower enrolments; to cite Knox as an example: 44 theological students in 1924 as opposed to 55 in 1914, but, as noted in the text this did not seem to raise serious concerns in the College report itself (A&P reports (1925): 161; A&P reports (1914): 155-98). The 1920 Knox College report discusses this (A&P reports (1920): 185).

⁵² A&P reports (1920): 166.

⁵³ A&P reports (1920): 185.

⁵⁴ Tim Cook, *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1917-1918* (Toronto: Penguin, 2008), 611-12. Cook offers a very detailed and careful discussion of Great War casualties.

What was the impact of the war on ideas, on the theological, ethical and other understandings of Canadian Presbyterians? This is a topic that has received some consideration to date, but mostly based upon one pamphlet attributed to T. B. Kilpatrick, *The War and the Christian Church* published by the General Assembly's Commission on War. This pamphlet has been used by John Moir and by Brian Fraser. Each suggests that war raised issues that challenged traditional theological understandings.⁵⁵ Yet, the other pamphlets issued by the Presbyterian Church during the war have received surprisingly little attention. What we see in these pamphlets are not that the war challenged and changed conventional attitudes, but that it merely reinforced what was already accepted. The war did not represent a watershed.

We see this strongly in Professor J. W. Falconer's pamphlet *Religion and the War*, which was "Prepared for the General Assembly's Commission on the War and the Spiritual Life of the Church" and issued in 1917.⁵⁶ Falconer was on the faculty at Presbyterian College, Halifax. The pamphlet offers us great insight into his ideas about religion, but the war plays a minor role within the discussion, often serving as a springboard from which the author can re-state his understanding of the Christian message. The war had shown us evil, but the main focus was on traditional sins such as "selfishness" and "worldliness." No examples were given to explain how the current conflict gave particular evidence of these sins.⁵⁷ The war had given clearer evidence of what we should have already known, not only evil, but also "the capacities of endurance and sacrifice that lie dormant in human souls."⁵⁸ The war had shattered the ideas of human progress and made clear "Teutonic apostasy" (never defined or explored), but the response to these new clearer understandings seemed to be more of the same. Christians were to serve and sacrifice, with soldiers giving examples of what this meant.

The Christian disciple is to go out as a member of an army prepared to do battle with all the aggressors of evil. We must not plead the invincibility of sin, or the weakness of our forces. We must pull down the stronghold of vice and cruelty, and realize with clear knowledge that as long as we are in the world and desire to follow Jesus, we are in a state of war. "I came not to bring peace, but a sword."⁵⁹

War offered an example that affirmed traditional Christian ideas. Looking to the future, Falconer suggested that the war called for "a more ardent intellectual struggle" using the best resources available from a variety of disciplines so that the gospel could be presented in a way that made

⁵⁵ John S. Moir, *Enduring Witness: A History of the Presbyterian Church in Canada*, 3rd ed. (Burlington, ON: Eagle Press, 2004), 209-10; Brian J. Fraser, *Church, College and Clergy: A History of Theological Education at Knox College, Toronto, 1844-1994* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 118; Brian J. Fraser, *The Social Uplifters: Presbyterian Progressives and the Social Gospel in Canada, 1875-1915* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1988), 162. Moir and Fraser would not necessarily agree on how the values of Presbyterians were challenged. The discussion on this pamphlet in Macdonald, "For Empire and God," 140-41, challenges this reading of the pamphlet as advocating a change in direction for the Canadian church.

⁵⁶ J. W. Falconer, *Religion and the War* (Toronto: Presbyterian Church in Canada, [1916?]). This pamphlet was difficult to locate. The copy used for this paper was located at the McLennan/Redpath Library, McGill University.

⁵⁷ Falconer, *Religion and the War*, 4.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 5. The "Teutonic apostasy" phrase, 3.

sense to contemporaries.⁶⁰ The war called one “to leave behind . . . old prejudices, selfish denominational and party rivalries” wrote Falconer, using phrases that suggest more about his views on the on-going debate on church union, not what the experiences of the Great War might have suggested to others.⁶¹ In this pamphlet we see the war being used to reaffirm existing values.

Issues raised by the war are addressed far more directly in the pamphlet *War and Divine Providence* authored by Professor J. M. Shaw.⁶² Shaw began by stating the problem. Some, he noted, had argued that the war challenged traditional Christian ideas about God’s sovereignty and providence. The pamphlet was a carefully argued rebuttal to these statements, suggesting ways in which the war actually demonstrated God’s providence.⁶³ One of the ways that God’s sovereignty was being shown, he argued, was in the exposure of the evil in Germany. German evil was clearly stated, and its exposure revealed the true battle taking place.

In thus exposing the essentially barbaric character of Germany’s ideal, and exposing it in such a way as to lead the conscience of the world to condemn it, and to will, at any cost, the defeat and overthrow of it, have we not already the evidence of the working of an overruling Moral Sovereignty?⁶⁴

The answer to this rhetorical question was, of course, “yes.” In an interesting twist, Shaw suggested to those who were arguing the war proved the failure of Christianity that the opposite was true. It was the “failure to apply Christianity and its ideals in national and international life” that was the issue, and this was something that Germany had clearly failed to do. There was also a call for all nations to do this in the future.⁶⁵ The war was a battle between good and evil, the innocent and the barbaric, with Germany clearly (and solely) named as the source of evil. Intriguingly, no reference was made to either the Ottoman or Austro-Hungarian empires.⁶⁶ In fighting against this evil, those involved were following the example of vicarious suffering exemplified by Jesus. Shaw wrote:

And in being called as individuals and as a nation with our Allies through suffering and sacrifice to vindicate the cause of freedom and righteousness, we are called into nothing less than a Divine partnership or fellowship for the redemption of the nations and the bringing in of a new and better era for mankind.⁶⁷

⁶⁰ Ibid., 7.

⁶¹ Ibid., 8.

⁶² J. M. Shaw, *The War and Divine Providence* (Toronto: Presbyterian Church in Canada, [1917]). Call number D 525 .S42 P75 PAM, United Church of Canada Archives.

⁶³ Shaw, *The War and Divine Providence*, 3-4.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 6.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 7. “Through Germany’s wanton crime, Britain, Belgium, France, Serbia, Russia, Canada and the United States, and other countries are deluged with blood and tears.” The omission of Austria-Hungary is telling, given its role in the war in the East, in particular relating to Serbia. The omission of the Ottoman Empire is also noteworthy.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 8.

In case anyone had missed his point, he concluded the paragraph with the simple sentence: “God is with us in the conflict.”⁶⁸ There was self-reflection and criticism in the pamphlet. Shaw wondered if the nation (one assumes he meant Canada but he might have meant the entire British Empire) was worthy of this high calling. He pointed to failings in the nation, the “war spirit in its own internal life,” as well as the “drink curse” that he described “as a root-source of military inefficiency and economic waste” both during the war and at other times.⁶⁹ Changes needed to be made, but they were not changes in what the church believed. Rather, they were society and those in the church applying the vision of Christianity proposed prior to the conflict. The conflict had not altered these values, only demonstrated clearly how important they were. God’s sovereignty had not been challenged by the war; rather God had used the war to warn of evil possibilities in modern society, and lead those who were willing to follow onto the correct paths.

One final pamphlet, *The Presbyterian Church in Canada and the War: Prayer, A Call from God for this Hour*, deserves consideration.⁷⁰ Unlike the others discussed, it was not produced by the Commission on the War, but was the product of the National Service Commission. This pamphlet called the church to intercessory prayer and gave examples of prayers which could be used. After a prayer written by a deceased British officer, the pamphlet noted that the country was now entering the fifth year of this “great and just war.”⁷¹ Prayer, it was stressed, was key to victory, and while the Commission did not want to interfere with the forms of free prayer, it offered a set of themes for prayers each day of the week. It offered these themes, a model prayer at the end, and encouraged people to register with the “League of Intercession” in this important ministry. As well as these prayers and suggestions for prayers, the pamphlet included numerous quotations on the importance and value of prayer, including a comment attributed to the Commander of the Grand Fleet, Admiral Beatty: “Until a religious revival takes place at home, so long will the war continue.” This would indeed suggest to the reader that by doing her or his part in praying, they would be helping to win a victory and end the suffering. The themes for prayer focused directly on the war and those involved. The reader was encouraged several times to pray for those in military service, for prisoners of war, for the King and those involved in government, and for those who mourned those who had died. The reader was also encouraged at various points to pray for victory that would end the conflict, “that a speedy and conclusive victory may come, and that our brave lads may soon come home, and that we may be delivered from the spirit of hate towards our enemies.” This was the only reference to “the enemy” in the pamphlet. One was praying for an end to war, but thought for the enemy was limited. Those on active military service were prayed for in a variety of ways, but on Thursday and in the sample prayer offered at the end, the prayer took on a more moral tone: “That our soldiers and sailors and airmen be preserved chivalrous and pure, and saved from everything that would stain their honor [sic] or debase their souls.” In the model prayer, the phrase is actually “the honor [sic] of their country or debase their souls.” Prayers were also offered for a better world at the end of the conflict, perhaps the most poignant being the concluding suggestion on Saturday, the final day of the cycle: “That out of so much death a new life may be born in the world.”⁷²

⁶⁸ Ibid., 8.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 8-9.

⁷⁰ *Prayer: A Call from God for this Hour*, National Service Commission fonds, 1994-1022, PCCARO.

⁷¹ *Prayer*. There is no pagination in this pamphlet. The reference to this being written in the fifth year of war would suggest it was written sometime around August 1918 or thereafter.

⁷² Ibid.

We see in all of these pamphlets a commitment to the cause of victory and a similar understanding of the war as a fight against evil, personified by Germany, and a sense that in being involved in this conflict that one was being a faithful Christian. We see the war defined as sacrifice (however costly) in the interest of bringing God's kingdom into this world. This was defined in very practical ways, and included labour relations, the fight against alcohol, as well as international relations. While there were moments when self-criticism was offered, the main exemplar of evil was Germany and elements within German society. What we do not see in these pamphlets is a real questioning of the war nor do we see new ideas. What the church needed after the war was what it needed before the war, only this time purer and better. These pamphlets, including the Kilpatrick pamphlet on *The War and the Christian Church*, do not call for a change of direction but rather for greater devotion in the same primary cause the church had articulated before the war.

Conclusion

When the Empire went to war, Canadian Presbyterians went willingly. This was made easier in 1914, because of the violation of Belgian neutrality and because of the atrocities committed by the German army in the course of that invasion. They continued that support, unwavering to the end. The sources we have examined provide no evidence to suggest that the experience of the Great War created a crisis of faith among Canadian Presbyterians or changed their attitudes to war. Those who died in the war were seen as heroic individuals who had offered their lives as a sacrifice. Through that sacrifice, a better world would (it was hoped and believed and proclaimed) come into being. Their deaths were, to borrow David Reynolds' important distinction, a sacrifice not a slaughter.⁷³ We see this in the College reports and in the pamphlets, and in the other sources such as periodicals and Assembly reports. If attitudes didn't change at the end or shortly after the end of the Great War, the question then becomes, what was the turning point? And, even more appropriately, when did attitudes change to the point that theological students today have a very different attitude to war, and think Eakin's comments and those like them are completely unchristian. When did that change? This is a question that needs to be considered carefully. At the same time, we need to use caution in assuming that the churches' support for this war led individuals to leave the Christian faith. In what way was the Great War a turning point in Christendom? This is another question that deserves careful consideration. At the moment, the evidence would stress more of a continuity with the pre-War world than we have sometimes imagined.

⁷³ David Reynolds, *The Long Shadow: The Legacies of the Great War in the Twentieth Century* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014), 401.