

PREACHER, PROFESSOR, PROPHET:
THE LIFE, MINISTRY, AND THOUGHT
OF JAROLD K. ZEMAN

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Introduction

Jarold (Jaroslav) Knox Zeman (1926–2000) was a Czechoslovakian-born evangelical historian who provided visionary leadership to the Canadian Baptists during the second half of the twentieth century.¹ From 1950 to 1968 he served as a pastor and denominational leader within the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec (BCOQ), and from 1968 until his retirement in 1991, he worked as Acadia Divinity College's professor of church history. In his ministry, he prioritized reaching "new Canadians" and working with other churches. In his scholarship, he specialized in the religious history of Czechoslovakia and in the believers'-church movement. His twin passions for academia and the church combined in his quest to locate the Canadian Baptist identity, which he then used as a vehicle for ministry.²

The purpose of this paper is twofold: firstly, it is a biographical study of an important Canadian Baptist leader, and secondly, it is an evaluation of his theology and ministry. Zeman's influence crossed boundaries created by the longstanding Canadian problem of regionalism, and he used this influence to mobilize

1. Presently, only one study of Zeman exists: Wilson, "Christian Historian," 294–314. Wilson's study focuses also on the University of Guelph's longtime church historian W. Stanford Reid. Wilson served as Zeman's successor at Acadia Divinity College. On the term "evangelical," see Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 2–17.

2. Wilson, "Christian Historian," 314.

the local church and bring Canadian Baptists into conversation with other Christians across the country.

Biography

Zeman was born on 27 February 1926 in Semonice, a small village in Bohemia, Czechoslovakia, to pious Christian parents. Although his mother had grown up in a Roman Catholic household, his parents were committed members of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, which was a broadly evangelical national denomination that emerged when the Lutheran and Presbyterian churches united in 1918. Although he was a member of this “united” denomination, during these years he usually identified simply as a Presbyterian. Reflecting on his early spiritual development, Zeman said, “I had to attend the Sunday School, but I often preferred to run away to my Roman Catholic grandmother on the opposite part of the village. She was quite sympathetic with such refugees from the heretical Sunday School.”³ Because his father taught elementary school, his family lived in the Protestant schoolhouse next to the church; as Zeman would later state, “We lived . . . under the shadow of the Protestant church.”⁴ In June 1939, at age thirteen, he was confirmed as a member of the church.

As Zeman was beginning his spiritual pilgrimage, his country was thrust into chaos. In September 1938, the Treaty of Munich granted Germany control of the Sudetenland, the Czech region that bordered Germany, where the majority of the country’s coal, iron, and steel industries were located. In March 1939, Hitler marched his armies into the remaining provinces of Czechoslovakia unopposed. Six months later, after the German invasion of Poland, the Second World War began with Britain and France’s declaration of war on Germany. An article on Zeman published five years after the war claimed that his father “was certainly being watched by the Gestapo” and that “if a car stopped at their door his mother would be sure it had come to take her husband

3. Zeman, “My Conversion,” 4.

4. Zeman, “Open Doors.”

away.”⁵ Over an eight-month period during 1944 and 1945, Zeman’s education was interrupted, as he was put into forced labor by the Germans.⁶ In May 1945, American and Soviet forces liberated Czechoslovakia, and Zeman was able to complete his secondary studies.

Despite the turmoil caused by the war, 1941 to 1945 were years of immense spiritual growth for Zeman. Although he had been confirmed into the church in 1939, he later claimed that this was a conversion of the head, not of the heart: he had memorized Bible passages, but little else had changed. It was not until 1941, nearly two years later, that Zeman had his true conversion experience. That April he received an interdenominational tract that highlighted the difference between nominal Christianity and “real” Christianity. This thought came to occupy the young Zeman’s thoughts and eventually became the focus of his devotionals. He credited his conversion to reading the Bible, an experience that subsequently shaped his theology. The Presbyterian and Lutheran influence of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren engrained in Zeman a high view of Scripture—one that would make his later transition into the Baptist view of “the Bible as the only creed” a very easy one. “I have not moved an inch in my theological development since my conversion,” he would later reflect, “because the Bible was like a bride that I married in my youth.”⁷

In 1945, as a relatively new Christian who was now free to enroll in any academic program he desired, Zeman debated entering the ministry. Originally he was dissuaded by the fact that he grew up in a place where “his people were inclined to be suspicious of [someone training for] the ministry, as sometimes appearing to have no finer motive than to earn an easy living.”⁸ As a result, Zeman spent the first year of his undergraduate studies

5. “A Canadian Czechoslovakian Pastor,” *Link and Visitor*, 163. The article notes that although the authorities questioned the elder Zeman on at least one occasion, they never imprisoned him.

6. Zeman, “Open Doors.” They tasked him with repairing airplanes damaged by the Allies.

7. Zeman, “Open Doors.”

8. “A Canadian Czechoslovakian Pastor,” *Link and Visitor*, 163.

at the University of Prague in the philosophy department before transferring to the theology department.⁹ After several terms of studying the New Testament, Zeman switched his focus to church history.

When I saw how crowded the [biblical studies] field was, and that every verse and every word in the New Testament has been turned over one hundred times by dissertations, I gave up and switched to church history . . . [where] there was a lot of virgin land, unexplored.¹⁰

In particular, he focused on the history of Christianity in Czechoslovakia, specifically on the proto-reformer John Hus (1369–1415) and the radical reformers native to Moravia and Bohemia.

In February 1948, the Soviet-backed Communist party seized control of Czechoslovakia and created a culture that became increasingly inhospitable to Christian ministry. Hoping to find a reason to leave the country legally, Zeman looked across the Atlantic. Fortunately, in spring 1948, as part of the postwar reconstruction effort in Canada, the World Council of Churches offered four scholarships for Czech students interested in entering the ministry to attend Knox College in Toronto.¹¹ Zeman received one of the awards, and in September of that year he relocated to Toronto, where he finished his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1949. Upon completing his degree, Zeman had a choice: should he return to his family in Czechoslovakia, where as a minister he would almost certainly face persecution under the new government, or should he remain in Canada, where he had no ministry contacts and few friends? Ultimately, after acquaintances from home cautioned him about Czechoslovakia's unwelcoming political climate, Zeman made the difficult decision to remain in Canada, eventually becoming a Canadian citizen in

9. Following the Second World War, Allied forces hoped that Czechoslovakia would become a bridge between eastern and western ideals. As a result, Prague became a hub of cultural diversity. During his studies, Zeman soaked in the city's arts and was exposed to the perspectives of intellectuals from around the world. Zeman, "Open Doors."

10. Zeman, "Open Doors."

11. Zeman, "Open Doors."

June 1955. Many years later he returned to visit his father; however, he never saw his mother again.

The postwar religious climate in Canada proved to be a significant departure from his experience in Czechoslovakia. Indeed, as Canadians made efforts to “return to normalcy,” through the 1950s there was a marked increase in church attendance.¹² Religion appeared to be thriving in Canada. In Czechoslovakia there had been a visible distrust between congregants and pastors, which led Zeman to note further that he had observed no difference between those who attended church services and those who did not. From his viewpoint, nominal Christianity had gained a foothold in Czechoslovakia, and the mainline Protestant church had stagnated. Conversely, the perceived religiosity of the Canadian context stimulated his spiritual growth. As a result, he sought a way to distance himself from the nominalism of his home country, and for him, the “practice of baptism was the key to all these problems.”¹³ He surmised that if one elected to receive baptism, his or her faith must be alive. In early 1949, Zeman came under the tutelage of the Rev. Joseph Zajíček, a Baptist pastor in Toronto who was from Czechoslovakia, and joined him as his assistant at the Czech-speaking Beverley Street Baptist Church in Toronto. Shortly thereafter, on 29 May 1949, Zeman received believer’s baptism, notably “having the unusual distinction of preaching his own baptismal sermon.”¹⁴ Following his baptism and for the rest of his life, Zeman pointedly maintained that he was “a Baptist by conviction,” not by tradition.¹⁵ For him, this distinction differentiated between the nominal Christianity he had witnessed in Czechoslovakia and the passion he had personally experienced.

After nearly a year of service in the church, Zeman’s congregation submitted his name for ordination with the Baptist

12. Grant, *The Church in the Canadian Era*, 162–3.

13. Zeman, “My Conversion,” 6.

14. “A Canadian Czechoslovakian Pastor,” *Link and Visitor*, 163.

15. E.g., Zeman, “Greetings,” *The Atlantic Baptist*, 6; *Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec Year Book 1965–66*, 12; Zeman, “Baptist Principles,” lecture notes for a course at Acadia Divinity College, n.d., copy in Zeman Collection, Canadian Baptist Archives.

Convention of Ontario and Quebec (BCOQ). According to the report on ordination, the council “was very favourably impressed with this young man.”¹⁶ Although he did not meet the BCOQ’s prerequisites for ordination because he had not been a member of a Baptist church for over one year, the council agreed to move forward with his ordination.¹⁷ Despite his obvious talent, one Canadian Baptist publication proceeded to introduce Zeman to the larger constituency by noting simply, “His personality is most pleasing and, though but recently come from Europe, his English is good.”¹⁸ What they missed was that, in addition to having a charismatic speaking style and an infectious smile, he also possessed great intellect.

After his acceptance into the Baptist ministry, the early 1950s were years of significant change for Zeman. On 18 June 1951, he married Lillian Koncicky in Esterhazy, Saskatchewan. The two had met several years earlier, when he visited a Czech-Hungarian community in Saskatchewan on his return trip from a ministry conference in Winnipeg. The couple remained in contact for several years, and eventually Lillian relocated to Toronto to begin her schooling. Here the couple continued their courtship and eventually wed. Together, the couple had four children: Miriam, Dagmar, Timothy, and Janice.

The year following his wedding, in spring 1952, Zeman finished the course requirements for a Bachelor of Divinity degree from Knox College. Shortly thereafter, Zajiček moved to Quebec, leaving Zeman as the lead pastor of his growing Czech congregation. During the Cold War period, as many as thirty-six thousand immigrants came to Canada from Czechoslovakia.¹⁹ Zeman saw a ripe mission field. Only a generation earlier, the

16. “Report from the Ordination Council,” June 1950, copy in Zeman Collection, Canadian Baptist Archives.

17. “Report from the Ordination Council,” June 1950, copy in Zeman Collection, Canadian Baptist Archives. For the BCOQ ordination procedure and Zeman’s approval to the list of ordinands, see also *Baptist Year Book 1949–50 for the Convention of Ontario and Quebec*, 84–85.

18. From the preamble in “A Canadian Czechoslovakian Pastor,” *Link and Visitor*, 163.

19. Raska, “Freedom’s Voices,” iii.

Canadian Baptist position toward non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants had been one of assimilation at best and outright intolerance at worst.²⁰ It was not until the 1930s, under the influential leadership of Watson Kirkconnell, that Baptists in Canada discarded this imperialistic model of ministry in favor of a more multicultural one.²¹ Zeman had personally benefited from this latter approach and sought to build on Kirkconnell's vision. From his post in Toronto, he led missionary services for Czech people from Hamilton to Oshawa. He identified approximately five hundred Czech homes in the area, where he routinely led outreach programs with the church's young people.²²

Zeman gained visibility throughout the BCOQ for his thoughtful and effective ministry efforts.²³ In February 1955, Zeman became the pastor of Villa Nova Baptist Church, outside of Brantford, Ontario, a predominantly English-speaking congregation. In this role, he continued his ministry among Czech immigrants, largely focusing his efforts in London, Ontario, where there was a large Czech population. His outreach efforts caught the attention of the Rev. Dixon Burns, the superintendent of the BCOQ's Home Mission Board. In 1959, the Board appointed Zeman to the role of field counselor and assistant superintendent. According to the convention report, Zeman's appointment was in an effort to "quicken the pulse of church life" throughout the BCOQ.²⁴ In this capacity, Zeman visited churches, groups, and

20. E.g., see Smale, "Broad is the Road," 103–25.

21. Smale, "For Whose Kingdom?" 225–43.

22. "A Canadian Czechoslovakian Pastor," *Link and Visitor*, 164.

23. See Hall, "Two Visions," *Link and Visitor*, 151. Through the 1960s, Zeman had a number of high-profile speaking opportunities. In 1961, he preached the Canada Day-weekend sermon over national radio. In the days following his sermon, Christian leaders across Canada reached out to Zeman to express their thanks (e.g., F. W. Patterson to Jarold K. Zeman, 3 July 1961, in Zeman, *Open Doors*, 24; J. R. Mutchmor to Jarold K. Zeman, 4 July 1961, in Zeman, *Open Doors*, 24–25). In 1966, the executive of the BCOQ asked Zeman to give the commissioning address at the Convention gathering, and in 1968 he delivered the "State of the Convention" address.

24. *Baptist Year Book 1958–59*, 152. In January 1964, the BCOQ restructured the Home Mission Board as the Department of Canadian Missions, with Zeman serving as assistant secretary under Burns.

individuals, but his primary task was to develop methods of ministering to “new Canadians” in Ontario and Quebec. In August 1966, when Burns retired, the BCOQ executives decided unanimously to appoint Zeman as his successor.²⁵

In order to reach his potential within the church, Zeman determined that he had to pursue additional training. In 1965, he returned to Europe and enrolled at the University of Zurich in the Doctor of Theology program. A decade earlier, during the summer of 1956, Zeman had taken a leave of absence in order to begin doctoral studies, but had ultimately tabled his plans for higher education. While working on his doctorate during these two periods, Zeman studied under several notable scholars, including Karl Barth.²⁶ In 1966, Zeman completed his Doctor of Theology in church history from the University of Zurich, and in 1968, he published his dissertation under the title *The Anabaptists and the Czech Brethren in Moravia, 1526–1628*.²⁷

Now equipped with his doctorate, on 30 June 1968, Zeman resigned his position with the BCOQ in order to become the Thomas J. Armstrong Associate Professor of Church History at Acadia Divinity College (ADC) in Wolfville, Nova Scotia.²⁸ Since its founding in 1838, Acadia University had always served as the training ground for the United Baptist Convention of the Atlantic Provinces.²⁹ Following Acadia University’s devolution from Baptist control in 1966, however, the Faculty of Theology restructured as a Convention-operated seminary and relaunched as a Baptist-controlled, university-affiliated institution in 1968.³⁰ Zeman became the fledgling college’s first professor of church

25. *Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec Year Book 1965–66*, 12–13.

26. Zeman, “Open Doors.”

27. Zeman, *Anabaptists*.

28. *Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec Year Book 1967–68*, 37. See also “New Appointments,” *Acadia Bulletin*, 21.

29. From 1905/1906 to 1963, this body identified as the United Baptist Convention of the Maritime Provinces. Prior to this, Acadia was operated by the Maritime Baptist Convention, an organization of Regular Baptists.

30. On the typology of denominational theological colleges, see Brackney, *Congregation and Campus*, 329–31.

history. In his letter of resignation from the BCOQ, he called his decision “perhaps the most difficult one I have had to face in my life.”³¹ Despite his anxiety, Zeman ultimately knew this was where God was calling him. For him, this appointment was simply “a new phase of [his] Christian ministry.”³² This posture reveals Zeman’s approach to teaching. He did not view his position as one to be conducted from an ivory tower, but rather as an extension of his pastoral duties. In this new position, he valued “the opportunity to mold the lives of future Baptist ministers in Canada.”³³ As a professor at a seminary, Zeman saw himself as a pastor to pastors.

As a scholar, Zeman focused much of his attention on Baptist history and identity. In 1979, he organized a national Canadian Baptist conference as part of Acadia’s Hayward Lectures series. The first of its kind, the proceedings were published as *Baptists in Canada: Search for Identity Amidst Diversity*.³⁴ For the next fifteen years, Zeman played a crucial role in organizing Canadian Baptist academic conferences. Likewise, he was influential in pioneering the Baptist Heritage in Atlantic Canada series, which published primary documents and collections of essays. He was a founding member of the editorial committee in 1977 and served as the first chair. Zeman led countless students and scholars to give serious consideration to Baptists in the region, perhaps the most prominent of such scholars being the prolific historian George A. Rawlyk (1934–1995), who claimed Zeman helped him “redefine” his research interests.³⁵ Much like those who inspired him when he was a student, Zeman encouraged other researchers with the observation that “there are no limits to

31. Jarold K. Zeman to D. A. Timpany, 21 February 1968, copy in Zeman Collection, Canadian Baptist Archives.

32. Zeman, “Greetings,” *The Atlantic Baptist*, 6.

33. Jarold K. Zeman to D. A. Timpany, 21 February 1968, copy in Zeman Collection, Canadian Baptist Archives. Citing the ancient philosopher Plutarch, Zeman believed that theological education’s purpose was “to kindle a fire, not to fill a pot.” Zeman, “How to Train Good Leaders,” *The Canadian Baptist*, 7.

34. Zeman, ed., *Baptists in Canada*.

35. Rawlyk, ed., *Sermons of Henry Alline*, 3.

the opportunities for research in this field of studies.”³⁶ By Rawlyk’s assessment, “with tremendous energy and commitment, [Zeman] thrust the Atlantic Baptist experience into the mainstream of Canadian religious history.”³⁷

From 1979 to 1982, Zeman served as the president of the Baptist Federation of Canada.³⁸ The Federation had formed in Saint John, New Brunswick, in 1944 in an effort to overcome the traditional boundaries of regionalism that had historically hampered Baptist efforts in Canada. This kind of national Baptist cooperation had been stoked by the ecumenical impulse among Protestants in the twentieth century. The United Church’s failure to merge with both the Anglican Church and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) during the second half of the twentieth century had suggested that organic union was a relic of the past; however, the rise of national and international ecumenical bodies, such as the Canadian Council of Churches (1944), the World Council of Churches (1948), and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (1964), signaled that interdenominational cooperation was alive and well.³⁹ In this spirit, the Federation’s founders saw it as the nucleus for Baptist ministries and a platform from which to speak with one voice. According to the Federation’s historian, it was only under Zeman’s leadership that the Baptists came close to fulfilling this mandate.⁴⁰ Zeman emphasized awareness of Baptist identity and sought to smooth relations between the conventions and also with other denominations. This had always been part of Zeman’s mission. Indeed,

36. Zeman, “Building a Future,” 16.

37. Rawlyk, “Introduction,” xi.

38. In 1995, the Federation amalgamated with the Canadian Baptist International Mission to create Canadian Baptist Ministries (CBM). Unfortunately, CBM has abandoned much of the Federation’s mandate, which was to overcome regionalism. Today it does little to foster national relationships in Canada between the Baptist conventions. Zeman lamented this union. See Zeman, “Open Doors.”

39. For a good survey, see Stackhouse, “The Protestant Experience,” 198–237. This was common among evangelical groups across the country. See Stackhouse, *Canadian Evangelicalism*, 188–9.

40. Bentall, *From Sea to Sea*, 95–105. See also Wilson, “Christian Historian,” 311.

when Zeman accepted his position at ADC, he wrote, “Since we believe that national cooperation is a must for Canadian Baptists, we felt that our transplanted to another Convention within this Dominion might help cement such relationships and strengthen mutual confidence.”⁴¹ As historian Robert S. Wilson estimates, “it was during [Zeman’s] leadership that the Baptist Federation of Canada reached its high point.”⁴²

Zeman retired from his position at ADC on 1 July 1991. Until 1996, he continued to serve the Baptist community as the director of the Acadia Centre for Baptist and Anabaptist Studies, which he had helped found in April 1991. To this day, the Centre hosts a biennial lecture in his honor, the series being aptly named The Jarold K. Zeman Memorial Lectures. Zeman passed away on 18 September 2000.

Ministry

Lay and Professional Ministry

For Zeman, ministry was a “partnership” between the entire church and the ordained pastor wherein each augmented the other where they lacked. In 1987, he outlined his theology of ministry in an article entitled “Partnership in Ministries,” in which he raised various concerns regarding the role of the “contemporary pastor” in the twentieth-century church. As he saw it, increasingly since the Second World War, pastors were becoming saddled with responsibilities they were ill equipped to handle, such as those of a media personality, counselor, and community leader. The result was “fatigue and frustration, loneliness and marital tensions.”⁴³ Instead, Zeman sought to restore what he considered the New Testament ideals of ministry.

Like many evangelicals, Zeman believed that ministry was not a task reserved strictly for a class of ordained ministers, but was rather the responsibility of each believer. “Conversion

41. Jarold K. Zeman to D. A. Timpany, 21 February 1968, copy in Zeman Collection, Canadian Baptist Archives.

42. Wilson, “Christian Historian,” 312.

43. Zeman, “Partnership in Ministries,” *The Canadian Baptist*, 4–5.

automatically leads to ministry,” reflected Zeman. “As long as you become a follower of Christ and the Holy Spirit fills you, you [will] begin to witness.”⁴⁴ Yet as he lamented, “The giant of the church is *laity, the whole people of God*. And this giant is asleep.”⁴⁵ Nevertheless, Zeman used passages in the New Testament to show that leadership within the church was not singular (e.g., Eph 4:11–13) and that God gave *every* believer spiritual gifts for ministry (e.g., Rom 12:4–8; 1 Cor 12:1–11). Put in a way that would have resonated with Zeman, nominal Christianity was not an option. In light of this biblical foundation, Zeman maintained, “the old image of the Protestant minister [who does everything] must be discarded and replaced by the New Testament concept of multiple ministries which are carried out by all members of the congregation.”⁴⁶

While his vision for the laity was broad, he had a specific view of the professional minister. Zeman noted that the New Testament identifies three titles for professional ministers: “bishop,” “elder,” and “deacon” (e.g., 1 Tim 3:1–13).⁴⁷ He observed that these three titles were not featured in the lists of spiritual gifts, which suggested that they referred to professional ministry roles.⁴⁸ Central to Zeman’s view of professional Christian ministry was his rejection of the notion that a pastor could function as a “jack-of-all-trades”:

The unique expertise of a Christian minister surely lies elsewhere. He/she is usually the only person in the community who is trained in competent exposition of the Scriptures, with the knowledge of the original languages; a person with theological discernment in the field of religious experience; and, above all, a person who is in touch with

44. Zeman, “Open Doors.”

45. Zeman, “Sleeping Giant,” *The Atlantic Baptist*, 2 (emphasis in original).

46. Zeman, “Partnership in Ministries,” *The Canadian Baptist*, 5.

47. Zeman, “Partnership in Ministries,” *The Canadian Baptist*, 5. As a Baptist, Zeman argued that the former two terms were synonymous and reflected that of “pastor.”

48. Zeman, “Partnership in Ministries,” *The Canadian Baptist*, 5.

God through a life of prayer, and empowered by him to serve as His messenger and ambassador.⁴⁹

For Zeman, the minister was to be a specialized leader in society, and the mobilization of the laity should augment the areas in which the minister lacked. The role of the ordained pastor was “the co-ordinator, enabler, [and] ‘coach of the team,’ a true servant leader.”⁵⁰ The professional minister’s role was to partner with the church members, utilize their talents, supervise ministries to ensure their success, and help each member refine his or her gifts. In other words, the minister must wake the sleeping giant.

With this as his framework, Zeman viewed the ideal ministry as a balance between preaching (*kerygma*) and service (*diakonia*).⁵¹ The “Central task of the church,” wrote Zeman, “is *witness and service to Jesus Christ*.”⁵² He believed that churches in the twentieth century focused too much on “inner-directed” ministries and not enough on “outer-directed” ministries. Again, looking to the New Testament, Zeman noted that Jesus “dispatched [the disciples] on a mission in society, as messengers with the Good News, and as helpers with divine empowerment to heal both souls and bodies.”⁵³ When the church fixates on the “inner” needs, it becomes irrelevant to society, whereas when the church focuses on “outer” needs, it “degenerates into mere social work.”⁵⁴

Zeman’s position on this was perhaps most clearly visible in his work on the domestic mission field, where he sought to minister to the vulnerable—particularly the “new Canadians.” His background gave him a unique insight into reaching immigrants to Canada. His faith had been tested by the dual threats of

49. Zeman, “A Plea for Wholeness,” 174. The phrase “jack-of-all-trades” was one that Zeman used himself to decry the modern trend. See Zeman, “Partnership in Ministries,” *The Canadian Baptist*, 5.

50. Zeman, “Partnership in Ministries,” *The Canadian Baptist*, 5.

51. Zeman, “Pathways to Better Evangelism,” 6.

52. Zeman, “Partnership in Ministries,” *The Canadian Baptist*, 5 (emphasis in original).

53. Zeman, “A Plea for Wholeness,” 173.

54. Zeman, “Pathways to Better Evangelism,” 6.

Nazi occupation and communist suppression, and he therefore knew a kind of vulnerability unfamiliar to many of his contemporaries in Canada. This experience helped him reach others who had gone through similar trials. With this in view, Zeman identified four important evangelistic steps for reaching immigrants in Canada: (1) help them feel welcome when they arrive; (2) help them find lodging and employment; (3) host children's programs, such as Sunday Schools and summer camps, for them; and (4) have "preaching, visitation, and personal evangelism" ministries, which, Zeman maintained, should always remain at the heart of Baptist outreach to immigrants.⁵⁵

History, Identity, and Ministry

In addition to his work as a professional minister, he saw his role as a historian as a ministry. "Historians who are committed Christians," wrote Zeman, "are among the church leaders who must assume a major responsibility during any time of reorientation to a different future."⁵⁶ Zeman saw the second half of the twentieth century as one such era of reorientation for Canadian Baptists.⁵⁷ It was this drive that led Zeman to dedicate much of his scholarly career to looking at the Canadian Baptist identity. Zeman's research question, "Who are the Canadian Baptists?" might be equated with "Where are Canadian Baptists going?" While he was a consummate scholar, he understood that his focus must be larger than the academic community; therefore, he maintained a publishing profile that appealed to popular audiences. In these contexts, he used his expertise to raise questions related to Baptist identity in the denominational press and

55. Zeman, *Baptist Missions*, 17–18. On Zeman's emphasis on reaching immigrants, see also Zeman, *New Approach*, 34–38. Cf. Zeman's plan for the BCOQ in *Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec Year Book 1965–66*, 22.

56. Zeman, "Building a Future," 16. Cf. Zeman, "Open Doors." "The motivation for my scholarly pursuits . . . [came from] a sense of accountability to God. When God endows anybody with certain gifts we must give an account of what we are doing with [them]."

57. Cf. Zeman, "The Changing Baptist Identity," 1–26. Cf. Zeman, "Partnership in Ministries," *The Canadian Baptist*, 4–6.

challenged Canadian Baptists to reflect on their heritage.⁵⁸ Similarly, he took every opportunity to speak at events with broader appeal. It is clear that he did not conduct his research from some isolated corner of his discipline, but rather sought to use it in order to reach future Baptist generations and provide a path forward. He believed that the Christian historian has a responsibility not just to academe, but also to the churches, conventions, and schools, as well as to the public.⁵⁹

From this position, Zeman used Baptist identity to challenge and inform. As Wilson has suggested, Zeman “almost single-handedly forged a Canadian Baptist historical identity that he then used as a challenge for ministry.”⁶⁰ Worth noting, of course, is that because Zeman had not been raised as a Baptist and was not originally from Canada, he had a unique insight into the Canadian Baptist situation.⁶¹ Additionally, he had few reservations about criticizing positions with which he disagreed or that departed from historic Baptist faith.⁶² As he succinctly stated, “A better understanding of their history will help Baptists overcome the ever-present temptation of an uncritical acceptance of many traditional teachings and customs among them for which there is no basis in the Scriptures.”⁶³

58. E.g., how have Baptists in the past balanced the ideas of biblical authority and freedom of interpretation? See Zeman, “Authority and Freedom,” *The Atlantic Baptist*, 13. He maintained that they were bound in tension in the principle of the lordship of Christ, noting further that “it is not unlimited freedom to believe anything” but is rather “freedom circumscribed by the authority of the Scriptures.”

59. Zeman, “Building a Future,” 18.

60. Wilson, “Christian Historian,” 314.

61. Wilson, “Christian Historian,” 313.

62. E.g., overemphasizing the autonomy of the local church had the potential to fall into what he identified as a kind of spiritual narcissism, a Baptist “self-centredness.” See Zeman, “Beyond Ourselves,” *The Atlantic Baptist*, 3.

63. Zeman, “Building a Future,” 19.

*Baptist Identity and Ecumenism*⁶⁴

Perhaps most prominently in his ministry, Zeman used Baptist history and identity to encourage Canadian Baptist participation in the larger Christian community. According to him, Baptists had their twin origins in the Puritan Separatists and the seventeenth-century Anabaptists,⁶⁵ and throughout their history they had straddled these two identities. In the twentieth century, this placed Baptists in a unique position “in the middle of the Canadian denominational spectrum.”⁶⁶ Because of this unique history and how it translated into modern society, Zeman believed that Baptists had a central role to play in the ecumenical movement.

As Zeman reasoned, if Baptists were to identify with their origins in these two distinct movements, they might serve as a bridge in the larger ecumenical conversation. He entreated his Canadian Baptist contemporaries, “Enlarge your ecumenical vision! Ecumenicity involves the whole body of Christ, or it is not ecumenicity at all.”⁶⁷ In order to achieve this, he appealed to history. As noted, he believed that Canadian Baptists existed in tension somewhere between “church” (represented by the mainline Protestant denominations, such as the Anglican Church and the United Church) and “sect” (represented by the Anabaptists, such as Mennonites and Disciples).⁶⁸ Put alternatively, Zeman differentiated between “social ecumenism” and “theological ecumenism.” Canadian Baptists had strong *social* connections to the mainline Protestants in Canada insofar as they shared “a similar

64. Interestingly, Wilson’s study on Zeman does not mention his emphasis on ecumenism. This is likely owing to the fact that Wilson focused largely on Zeman’s denominational contributions; however, as shown here, it was *because* of Zeman’s focus on denominational identity that he entered ecumenical discussion.

65. Zeman, *Baptist Roots and Identity*. See also Zeman, “Reformation,” *The Atlantic Baptist*, 10.

66. Zeman, “Interfaith Interface,” *The Canadian Baptist*, 14–15.

67. Zeman, “Growing Together,” *The Canadian Baptist*, 5–6.

68. Zeman, “Baptists in Canada and Cooperative Christianity,” 219. In this way, Zeman follows Troeltsch’s church/sect typology. For a critical assessment of Zeman’s use of this typology, see Rudy, “Ecumenical Movement,” 18–20.

middle class outlook and identical educational standards for the ministry.”⁶⁹ By associating solely with the mainline churches, however, Canadian Baptists had watered down their identity, limited their evangelistic reach, and ignored their most natural partner: the believers’ church. Indeed, Canadian Baptists had strong *theological* connections to the believers’-church tradition, for they shared numerous similarities in polity, such as believers’ baptism and regenerate church membership.⁷⁰ He concluded that if Baptists would retain their strong relationships with mainline denominations while also emphasizing their own denominational identity, they could serve as a bridge between mainline Protestants and the believers’ church.

In addition to the shared origins and theological similarities, Zeman also appealed to the distinctives in Baptist polity to encourage ecumenism. For him, emphasizing the Baptist view of freedom of interpretation served as a healthy means by which to communicate with other Christians without feeling threatened.⁷¹ Moreover, he stressed the Baptist view of the sole authority of the Bible in order to encourage further dialogue. As he wrote,

One might even suggest that in view of their affirmation of the all-sufficiency of the Bible Baptists have been, from the beginning of their movement, the truly “ecumenical” Christians. They added no other authority to the one foundation common to all Christians. The Bible unites, creeds and confessions divide.⁷²

With their history and identity combined, it was clear to Zeman that Baptists had not only a theological basis for ecumenical discussions, but also an ecclesiastical responsibility to the larger Christian community. To this end, on a popular level, he wrote columns in Christian newspapers identifying Baptists within the believers’-church movement,⁷³ and on a scholarly

69. Zeman, “Pathways to Better Evangelism,” 2.

70. Zeman, “Pathways to Better Evangelism,” 2–3.

71. Zeman, “Authority and Freedom,” *The Atlantic Baptist*, 1, 13.

72. Zeman, “Authority and Freedom,” *The Atlantic Baptist*, 13.

73. Zeman, “Canadian Baptists and the Believers’ Church Movement,” *The Atlantic Baptist*, 5; Zeman, “Baptists and Mennonites,” *The Mennonite Reporter*, 5.

level, he emphasized the theological similarities and historical relationships between Baptists and the Anabaptist tradition.⁷⁴ In May 1978, along with historian Walter Klaassen of Conrad Grebel College at the University of Waterloo, Zeman organized the Believers' Church in Canada Conference, under the auspices of the Baptist Federation of Canada and Mennonite Central Committee, held at the Mennonite Bible College in Winnipeg. With Zeman at the helm, the conference had a strong showing of Canadian Baptist leaders who were eager to engage with their believers'-church counterparts.⁷⁵

Weaknesses

The nature of Zeman's ministry sparks two minor criticisms. Firstly, Zeman's emphasis on the pastor as the "coach of the team" works well in larger churches, but may not translate to rural or smaller community churches. Indeed, while the mega-church may have specialists who are able to offer their services or talents in a variety of professional ways, churches with smaller congregations may not have this option. In this instance, the pastor may be required to serve in areas outside of his or her comfort zone. While one may not disagree with the reasoning behind Zeman's argument for this kind of ministerial structure, from a purely practical standpoint, this kind of blanket model needs to be qualified.

Secondly, despite Zeman's ecumenical perspective, his focus on Baptist identity, paired with his high view of the Bible, led him to dismiss various aspects of non-Baptist faith. Occasionally, he lamented that Baptists in Canada had adopted practices not indigenous to the historical Baptist church.⁷⁶ He was especially critical of practices that he viewed as too reminiscent of Roman

74. Zeman, *Baptist Roots and Identity*.

75. The conference proceedings were published as Zeman and Klaassen, eds., *The Believers' Church in Canada*. Among those who presented papers or responses was a veritable who's who of Canadian Baptists in the 1970s, including Clark Pinnock, Harold Mitton, Fred Bullen, Harry Renfree, Maurice Boillat, Stuart Murray, Ken Davis, Robert Wilson, Paul Dekar, Samuel Mikolaski, and, of course, Jarold Zeman.

76. E.g., Zeman, "Building a Future," 19.

Catholicism.⁷⁷ Likewise, he was dismissive of modern movements, especially particular strands of Pentecostalism, for their “heightened emotionalism” and “experience-oriented existentialism.”⁷⁸ Throughout Christian history, tradition and experience have served to supplement one’s reading of the Scripture, and unfortunately, Zeman’s criticism of both may have limited his theological reflection.

Lessons for Today

The emphases in Zeman’s nearly fifty-year ministry remain strangely relevant today. In 1992, upon the publication of a collection of Zeman’s popular writings, George Rawlyk remarked that Zeman was “an unusually gifted ‘practitioner of religion and theology,’” adding that Zeman’s writings had “both prophetic insight and prophetic power.”⁷⁹ Indeed, Zeman’s words resonate in the twenty-first century church in several significant arenas.

For Evangelicals

Zeman’s ministry provides lessons for a church in, to use today’s nomenclature, a post-Christendom society. In 1978, he wrote that Canadian society “has passed, or is passing, from the final phase of the Constantinian era to a post-Constantinian age.”⁸⁰ Instead of becoming discouraged, he saw the challenges of post-Christendom society as an opportunity for spiritual growth. As far as he could tell, the end of Christendom had effectively turned Canada into “a frontier society which calls for basic evangelization comparable to mission fields abroad.”⁸¹ By focusing on interdenominational work and maintaining a strong witness through a balance of evangelism and service, the church in Canada could retain a strong testimony and thereby remain an

77. Zeman, “Open Doors.”

78. Zeman, “Potential for Renewal,” 100.

79. Rawlyk, “Introduction,” xi–xii.

80. Zeman, “Believers’ Church,” 23.

81. Zeman, “Believers’ Church,” 23.

important part of Canadian society—a challenge that rings true today. Faced with shifting demographics and declining denominational adherence, Zeman issued a challenge to Canadian Baptists that equally applies to the larger evangelical church in post-Christendom: “*Do we have the courage to be a minority?*”⁸² In order to focus on spiritual vitality, he was willing to sacrifice statistics.

Similarly, Zeman’s focus on ministry to immigrants finds new relevance today. Amid the recent Syrian refugee crisis, Zeman reminds his readers that ministry among “new Canadians” is an ongoing need. In particular, he observed that churches should be on the frontline, offering both social and spiritual guidance: all laypersons should seek to reach immigrants in their neighborhoods; they should provide classes (secular and religious) at the church level; and they should be prepared to share their faith. As Robert Smale suggests, in Canada’s current multicultural context, these kinds of emphases may be crucial to denominational visibility and viability: “In order to be relevant in today’s Canada Baptist Churches are in need of a radical reorientation in vision and strategy, especially in the area of ethnic ministry.”⁸³ Zeman offers important insight into how evangelicals can approach these issues in the twenty-first century.

For Baptists

Zeman’s ministry provides an important challenge for Baptists in Canada. His commitment to the Baptist faith was not a dormant one, and indeed, his Baptist convictions appear as a thread throughout his entire ministry. His work very clearly reflects his theological emphasis, emanating from his conviction of the lordship of Christ, on the Baptist distinctives, especially believers’ baptism, regenerate church membership, the authority of the Bible, freedom of interpretation, and the role of the local church. Far from impeding Zeman’s effectiveness in ministry, this emphasis enhanced his ministry potential. Always critical of

82. Zeman, “Courage to Be a Minority,” *The Canadian Baptist*, 15 (emphasis in original).

83. Smale, “For Whose Kingdom?” 252.

isolationist Christians, Zeman believed that Baptists had a responsibility to work with other denominations for God's kingdom. By emphasizing the various Baptist distinctives, he brought them into conversation with the larger believers'-church movement, which subsequently allowed them to function as a bridge between mainline Protestants and Anabaptists. Zeman's example adds a profoundly practical level to the study of Baptist identity.

For Historians of Christianity

For Christian historians, Zeman's career exemplifies how a skillful researcher can and should influence other believers. As historian Rowan Williams observes, "good theology does not come from bad history."⁸⁴ The Christian historian therefore has a responsibility to his or her church and denomination. Zeman modeled this reality and was able to shape the Canadian Baptist movement in significant ways. By drawing on the past, and Baptist origins in particular, he sought to clarify a path forward. In this way, Zeman managed to integrate fully his scholarship and his denominational contributions. At no point in his scholarly career did he resemble the stereotype of the detached, ivory-tower academic.

Conclusion

For his rich ministry and scholarly contributions, Zeman received Doctor of Divinity degrees (*honoris causa*) from McMaster University (1985) and Acadia University (1994), and for his research into the religious history of Czechoslovakia, he received the Comenius Medal from the University of Prague (1994). Although he was "Jerry" to his friends, the University of Chicago's longtime Christian historian Martin Marty (often identified as the "dean of American church historians") once referred to Zeman as the "best church historian in North America."⁸⁵ Perhaps what made Zeman such a successful church historian was the fact that he was not only able perceptively to draw out details

84. Williams, *Why Study the Past?* 2.

85. As quoted in Wilson, "Christian Historian," 307.

from the Baptist narrative, but he was able also to use those details to inspire other historians and church leaders.

Historians have identified several important individuals from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the “patriarchs” of Baptists in Canada.⁸⁶ In light of this designation, when looking at the history of the history of Baptists in Canada, Zeman stands as one who might best be called the patriarch of Canadian Baptist history.

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86. E.g., Goodwin, *Into Deep Waters*.

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