

## BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS: CANADIAN PENTECOSTALISM AND MILITARY CONFLICT IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

Geoffrey Butler

Wycliffe College, University of Toronto, Toronto, ON, Canada

One of the age-old debates within the Christian church concerns the believer's role in national conflict. While certain traditions have historically viewed military participation as permissible or even praiseworthy, others have denounced it as antithetical to the teachings of Christ and a capitulation to the kingdoms of this world. With the commencement of World War I, the Pentecostal movement, still in its infancy, was forced to grapple intensely with this issue.<sup>1</sup> Within the North American context, this was especially true in Canada, who entered the conflict three years earlier than its neighbor to the south. Little more than twenty years later, Pentecostals would be required to consider the question again during the Second World War. While not typically a topic of discussion among Canadian Pentecostals today, it bears asking: Where has the tradition historically stood on this issue? How ought a Christian to respond when military service is requested or even required? Perhaps looking into the past may give contemporary Pentecostals a pattern to follow in the present. This paper will explore the pacifist sentiment that permeated early Pentecostalism, with special attention granted to the conversation within Canada concerning the response to the challenges brought on by two world wars in the first half of the twentieth century. It

1. While the focus of this paper will be on the attitude of Canadian Pentecostals toward the first two World Wars, given the deep historical ties that they share with American Pentecostals—as well as the relatively small size of the movement at that time period when compared to the twenty-first century—voices from both sides of the border will be considered as part of this survey, especially in exploring the earliest roots of the movement.

will also highlight the shift that took place during the interwar years and explore the how Pentecostalism, for the most part, came to abandon its pacifist roots by the late 1940s. It will argue that its downfall was largely due to other larger concerns of the movement—namely, evangelism and missions—along with the gradual mainstreaming of Pentecostalism within Christendom. As evidenced by this shift in attitude, it seems clear that through the influence of other Christian traditions, Pentecostalism came to resemble mainstream evangelicalism on this point more closely in the middle of the century than it had in the beginning.

### *The Roots of Nonviolence*

The established presence of Wesleyan, Holiness, Mennonite, and Anabaptist thought in the movement all help explain why pacifist attitudes so strongly permeated Pentecostalism.<sup>2</sup> In a 1994 monograph, Thomas William Miller notes that the first generation of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC) contained many converts from such backgrounds, all of which registered as conscientious objectors during national conflict.<sup>3</sup> Like their predecessors, first-generation Pentecostals viewed allegiance to the state, not as a virtue, but a threat to the believer's commitment to the kingdom of God;<sup>4</sup> viewing their ultimate citizenship as heavenly, some went so far as to label patriotism as a grave sin.<sup>5</sup> Numerous observers have identified the importance of understanding early Pentecostal ecclesiology for comprehending this perspective. John Howard Yoder, for example, points out that, like the nineteenth-century restorationist movements, they were

2. See Dayton, *An Historical Survey*, 6–7. For many Holiness believers, who strongly emphasized entire sanctification and “radical holiness” as adapted from earlier Methodist thought, going to war on behalf of an earthly kingdom appeared inconsistent with the goal of separation from the world.

3. Miller, *Canadian Pentecostals*, 45–46. Numerous early Canadian Pentecostal leaders were formerly affiliated with the Mennonite Brethren Church, a denomination eventually granted conscientious objector status during World War I.

4. Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 242–44.

5. Shuman, “Pentecost and the End,” 74–75.

fiercely opposed to anything that could be perceived as “worldliness” and exhibited what he labels a “literal obedience to Scripture without rationalizing.”<sup>6</sup> To put it another way, they simply took the Bible at face value, committing to practice what they believed it taught regardless of the prevailing culture’s opinion of them. It was a commonly held opinion among the Pentecostals that part of the reason for the church’s moral decline in the fourth and fifth centuries laid in its political involvement with the Roman Empire. By entangling itself with the affairs of the state, including its military, it had unwittingly given rise to a structure of Christendom that betrayed basic principles of the faith. As Joel Shuman has observed:

Pentecostals of the early twentieth century saw themselves as being the contemporary restoration of the New Testament church, a community that had become increasingly unfaithful in the time between the Pentecost of the first century and that of the twentieth. Central to the church’s fall during that interim era was its entry into political establishmentarianism . . . This disestablishment was accentuated by the initial rejection of Pentecostals by the evangelical mainstream. This rejection served to enforce their tendency to see themselves as being citizens not of any earthly nation, but of the kingdom of God.<sup>7</sup>

Their conviction that believers ought to be distinct from society may have stemmed partially from the fact they were outsiders even within Christendom.<sup>8</sup> Of particular interest is Shuman’s comment about evangelicalism’s rejection of the Pentecostal movement.<sup>9</sup> Initially frowned upon by the mainstream, the early Pentecostals felt little discomfort viewing themselves as

6. Yoder, *Christian Attitudes*, 261.

7. Shuman, “Pentecost and the End,” 75–76.

8. Hauerwas, “Foreword,” xiii notes as much by observing that “the early Pentecostal movements represented a restorationist ecclesiology that inclined the church toward a pacifist orientation. The nonviolence of the early Pentecostal movement was first and foremost understood to be an ecclesial commitment.”

9. See Althouse, “Canadian Pentecostal Pacifism,” 41. The author goes on to cite the increasing favor Pentecostals enjoyed both with established denominations and the governing authorities as a catalyst for the shift away from a position of nonresistance.

outsiders.<sup>10</sup> It is undeniable that in its infancy the movement contained a strong anti-establishment flavor; in light of Pentecostal positions on tongues, healing, racial unity, and other issues that were quite countercultural for the day; perhaps, the opposition to military participation ought not to be too shocking. They saw themselves returning to the biblical standard that the historic church had, for the most part, ignored or forgotten, along with several other distinctives. The consensus was that Scripture forbade violence against other individuals, and due to a literal hermeneutic that characterized the movement, they took such passages at face value.<sup>11</sup> It may be summarized that most Pentecostals perceived two major barriers to military service. The first was that it required devoting one's allegiance to an earthly kingdom. Viewing themselves as citizens of a heavenly kingdom, they instinctively recoiled at such a notion.<sup>12</sup> Secondly, military service was perceived as incompatible with the call of Christ to a nonviolent way of life. Yet, like other peace movements before them, the Pentecostals would soon be forced to put their theology into practice with the emergence of a conflict the likes of which the world had never seen.

#### *World War I: Response to Conflict*

World War I represented the first major, practical challenge to the young Pentecostal movement's commitment to pacifism. The question of military service was no longer a theoretical matter but an inescapable problem. While a distinct subset of Pentecostalism in its own right, the Canadian branch was heavily influenced by other Canadian denominations as well as by American Pentecostalism. The outbreak illustrated that the influence of the latter extended not only to core distinctives like Spirit baptism and divine healing but also to military involvement. In 1914—the year the war began and the denomination was founded—the Assemblies of God included an unequivocally pacifist resolution

10. Shuman, "Pentecost and the End," 75–76.
11. Shuman, "Pentecost and the End," 73.
12. Shuman, "Pentecost and the End," 75.

in its constitution, stating that believers could not uphold the teaching of Christ to love one's enemy while taking human life.<sup>13</sup> Canadian Pentecostals released no such official statement, as the PAOC did not exist at the time.

Yet, they were strongly impacted by Americans such as Frank Bartleman, who, as he traveled across the nation as an itinerant preacher,<sup>14</sup> denounced the conflict so strongly that he evoked suspicion from some that he was a German sympathizer.<sup>15</sup> There may be several reasons why he in particular expressed such strong opposition. Just prior to the beginning of the conflict in 1914, he had traveled throughout Europe to meet fellow Pentecostals involved in missions work in the UK, Germany, Russia, and other countries.<sup>16</sup> Having seen God move in a nation such as Germany, now an enemy in the eyes of his own government, it is understandable why Bartleman would have viewed the conflict as a hindrance to the mission of the church. Moreover, as for his political convictions, he was convinced that capitalism was in and of itself a corrupt system;<sup>17</sup> therefore, those nations—and churches—that fought to defend it were also corrupt.<sup>18</sup> However, it seems clear that his concerns were first and foremost theological. Not only was his mother a Quaker, but before joining the Pentecostal movement Bartleman frequently ministered among Holiness, Wesleyans, and Anabaptists, all of which would have

13. “Combined Minutes [1914],” 10–11. The subsequent 1916 minutes, however, also condemn animosity toward the federal government and stipulated that those who dishonored the flag would have their credentials revoked (*Combined Minutes [1916]*, 23). Therefore, the unwillingness to take up arms is clearly not intended as an act of disloyalty but rather an exercise of religious liberty.

14. Althouse, “Canadian Pentecostal Pacifism,” 34–35.

15. Beaman, *Pentecostal Pacifism*, 58. The author notes that one of Bartleman’s tracts appeared so pro-German that “the editor of the *Christian Evangel* called upon readers to destroy (it).”

16. Beaman, *Pentecostal Pacifism*, 56.

17. Althouse, “Canadian Pentecostal Pacifism,” 32–33.

18. See Bartleman, “War and the Christian,” 5. In an article published shortly after the outset of the war, he blasts war as a hindrance to foreign missions and flatly declares that “a ‘war church’ is a harlot church.”

contained a strong bent toward nonviolence.<sup>19</sup> Bartleman, perhaps most notable for his bold statements, was in no way unique in his sentiment.<sup>20</sup> Many early Pentecostal leaders were convinced that a rejection of nationalism would be crucial if Pentecostalism was to remain a truly international movement. Crossing borders with the good news, they reasonably deduced, would be much more feasible without the hindrance of armed conflict or even suspicion of foreign nationals.

The question remains of how such attitudes in the broader movement uniquely affected Canadian Pentecostals. As previously noted, they were in the company of other pacifist groups in Canadas such as Quakers, Mennonites, and some Methodists, all proclaiming themselves conscientious objectors. Some, such as the Quakers, went so far as to refuse paying taxes that would fund the war effort.<sup>21</sup> Still in its infancy, Pentecostals were denied conscientious objector status and therefore were not legally exempted from service. George Chambers, the first General Superintendent of the PAOC, notes that numerous young Pentecostal men who declined to serve, and thus were found to violate the 1917 *Military Service Act*,<sup>22</sup> were imprisoned in Kingston, Ontario; a punishment that, due to horrific mistreatment, resulted in the death of at least one man.<sup>23</sup> Murray Dempster, in a 2013 piece on Canadian Pentecostal pacifism in the two World Wars, documents further accounts of persecution and torture of conscientious objectors, including one particularly heinous incident involving a Pentecostal which took place at the Minto Street Barracks in Winnipeg. During this particular incident:

Three conscientious objectors—Charles Matheson, a Pentecostal, and Robert Clegg and Frank Naish, both members of the International Bible Students Association (IBSA)—were sentenced to three days

19. Robeck Jr., “Bartleman, Frank,” 366.

20. See Dempster, “Crossing Borders,” 121–42, cited in Alexander, ed., *Pentecostals and Nonviolence*, 123–25. The author lists no less than five major early leaders in the Pentecostal movement who were absolute pacifists

21. Socknat, “Conscientious Objectors,” 61–63.

22. Canada Department of Justice, “Military Service Act.”

23. Chambers, *50 Years*, 55–56.

confinement for their unwillingness to obey a lawful command . . . All three, in turn, were forcibly stripped naked and held under ice-cold showers until they either surrendered to military authority or collapsed. Pentecostal Matheson was first. After standing firm for hours in refusing to comply, he finally buckled under the unrelenting pressure and agreed to submit to military orders. Clegg and Naish followed. Their severe punishment ended with Naish in a state of nervous collapse and Clegg in an unconscious state, being admitted to the hospital.<sup>24</sup>

Even more severely, David Wells, another young Pentecostal Bible student in Winnipeg during the war, was arrested on account of his refusal to serve and imprisoned at Stony Mountain Penitentiary. Just days after his arrival, he was admitted to the Selkirk Asylum on account of his poor mental condition and died shortly thereafter, with many suspecting that brutal treatment at the prison may well have contributed to his breakdown and eventual death.<sup>25</sup> While some others avoided such a fate by participating in non-combat roles,<sup>26</sup> it seems that Canadian Pentecostals ultimately paid dearly for the fact they had not registered in any official capacity with the Canadian government. Since the American Assemblies of God had done so, they enjoyed, at least in theory, a measure of legal protection not afforded to their Canadian counterparts.

Despite such strong rhetoric denouncing the conflict, it must also be noted that Canadian Pentecostals were not as resolutely pacifist as their American neighbors. As briefly mentioned prior, Canada, in contrast to the US, remained a commonwealth nation with strong ties to the British Crown and, by extension, the Church of England, which strongly supported the war.<sup>27</sup> This was true not only of denominational leaders or clergy; Melissa Davidson, in a 2014 essay, highlights the immense contribution made by its laypersons by noting that:

24. Dempster, “The Canada—Britain—USA,” 7–8.

25. Penton, “Wells, David.”

26. Miller, *Canadian Pentecostals*, 46.

27. See Althouse, “Canadian Pentecostal Pacifism,” 36–37.

In the fall of 1916, when the Canadian government released a report detailing the religious affiliations of recruits in the CEF, Anglicans made up roughly 40 percent of the CEF with 165,145 men in uniform. With a total declared population of just over one million—about 15 percent of the overall Canadian population—Canadian Anglicans were clearly enlisting in numbers disproportionate to their overall population.<sup>28</sup>

Within the official state Church of England, the war effort was perceived as necessary to protect Christian values and defend a truly righteous cause—British imperialism.<sup>29</sup> “Canadian Anglicans,” she notes, “were bound up with other Anglicans in Britain and throughout the Empire.”<sup>30</sup> However, this patriotic fervor was hardly limited to the Anglican fold; in the late nineteenth century, Presbyterian churchman G. M. Grant, a strong proponent of the missionary endeavor and the role of religion in public life, called for a form of Christian unity in Canada that defined the role of the church as inextricably linked to that of the state. As Berger explains:

Imperial unity and church unity were, in Grant’s mind, not merely analogous processes—they were both products of identical causes and directed to the same end. Just as the union of the church was the precondition for the Christianization of the social order, so too the unity of the Empire was necessary to maintain a political power making for righteousness on earth. Both Christianity and imperialism called men to self-sacrifice and service; both required the allegiance to ideals and the denigration of the material and the flesh.<sup>31</sup>

It is on account of this conviction that Grant, as well as many of his contemporaries, supported the British Empire’s Boer War in South Africa less than two decades before the First World War.<sup>32</sup> At the turn of the century, images of the British flag,

28. Davidson, “The Anglican Church,” 153.

29. Davidson, “The Anglican Church,” 155–56.

30. Davidson, “The Anglican Church,” 167.

31. Berger, *Sense of Power*, 34.

32. Although, as Berger (*Sense of Power*, 35) notes, Grant himself was “one of the last Canadian imperialists to support the British government against

songs about the glories of the Empire, and a sense of identity tied to the imperial project meant that any threat to Britain was a threat to Canada too.<sup>33</sup> Carman Miller notes that, “In the case of the war in South Africa, the churches were firmly convinced of the superiority of the British race, and its institutions,” and goes on to highlight that few Canadian Christians were willing to question the war precisely because of their steadfast loyalty to such ideals. “Since Canadian identity was so closely identified with Britain and the empire,” he explains, “to admit that the war was not just was to raise serious questions about the very essence of Canadian identity.”<sup>34</sup> This illustrates the sense of connection Canadians felt to their mother country as a young nation. Even by 1914, when Britain entered the war, it had been less than 50 years since confederation; should it come as a surprise, then, that neither Canada nor most of its churches would perceive any daylight between its own interests and those of the Crown? Even the Baptists, a free church tradition with a history of stressing the separation between church and state, voiced support for Britain shortly after the outbreak of the war—a stance which grew stronger in the face of reported German atrocities as the conflict carried on.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, a strong sense of loyalty to the Empire was already ubiquitous in Canadian society prior to entering the First World War, an action that only further intensified loyalty. North of the border sat a nation under fifty years old that identified as part of a worldwide commonwealth united under Britain. South of the border was a much more established country that not only rebelled against the British to gain independence well over a century prior but that still largely favored an isolationist foreign policy.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the United States did not even enter the war until 1917—three years after their neighbors had done so, and even then, with divided public opinion. Thus, not only can a stronger

the Boers,” and only changed his position upon determining that “the survival of the Empire was at stake.”

33. Crouse, “Canada’s Salvation Army,” 89–90.

34. Miller, “Writing Religious Minorities,” 27–28.

35. See Haykin and Clary, “O God of Battles,” 173–74.

36. See Heath, “American Churches,” 2.

bent toward pacifism be explained by the lack of any American connection to the Crown, but also by the fact that they were not at war at all until relatively close to its end. Despite their pacifist roots and instincts, the loyalty to the British Empire that most Canadians felt was a significant factor that American Pentecostals would have no reason to consider. The robust imperialist sentiment that permeated more established denominations and, indeed, Canadian society at large was bound to exert significant influence on Canadian Pentecostalism. In the United States, on the other hand, the government had to be wary of religious opposition; not only was there no state church to support its efforts, as with the Church of England, but American authorities had also been subject to criticism from some Christian groups during previous military campaigns that they did not feel were justified.<sup>37</sup> Early twentieth-century America, then, proved a more hospitable environment for Pentecostal pacifism than Canada. It is little wonder that there are no records of Canadian Pentecostals such as R. E. McAlister or George Chambers—despite the Holiness roots of the former and the Quaker background of the latter—openly making statements expressing sympathy with the German cause or painting them as the least culpable in the conflict as in the case of the American Frank Bartleman.<sup>38</sup> Doing so would have invited charges of disloyalty toward the Crown which, despite their unwillingness to take up arms, Canadian Pentecostals wished to avoid. While their American counterparts could make bold statements denouncing military participation for the better part of the conflict, knowing their own countrymen had no part in it, Canadians enjoyed no such luxury.<sup>39</sup> Obviously, making bold statements about the immorality of military involvement is much easier when your nation is not at war. At a time when the

37. Heath, "American Churches," 3.

38. Beaman, *Pentecostal Pacifism*, 58.

39. The Americans did not formally declare war on Germany until 6 April 1917, a mere year and a half before the war ended. Though the British, like other Europeans, "were stunned by the sudden onset of war in the summer of 1914, Americans experienced an altogether different situation," with the nation declaring "neutrality at the outbreak of war." See Heath, "American Churches," 1.

Americans were still neutral in the conflict, Canadian Pentecostals had already been denied conscientious objector status and had been subjected to imprisonment and other forms of persecution. Therefore, while the Assemblies of God eventually did affirm the divine ordination of government and their personal loyalty to the US upon its entry to the war,<sup>40</sup> Canadian Pentecostals experienced a much deeper sense of tension between their faith and their civic obligation—and thus, even had they been as formally organized as their American counterparts, in all likelihood their opposition still would have been rather tepid in comparison.

### *The Interwar Period*

Between the World Wars, pacifist sentiment remained widespread in the Pentecostal movement on both sides of the border. When the PAOC received government charter in May 1919, one of its stated purposes was “To exercise any of the powers usually conferred on duly incorporated benevolent societies by either Dominion or Provincial authority.”<sup>41</sup> Though no explicit reference is made to war, peace, or conscientious objection, given that the letter’s patent was drafted only six months after the war’s end it seems reasonable to deduce the framers of the document viewed legal protection and religious liberty as key benefits of obtaining a charter. In 1920, with the establishment of a denominational publication, *The Pentecostal Testimony*, PAOC adherents had a platform from which to promote their doctrinal distinctives for the first time in their history. The first edition, printed in December of that year, explained that, “The publishing of a Canadian Pentecostal paper has been a keen felt need for a long time, as there is not a Canadian paper in the Dominion.”<sup>42</sup> With the formal establishment of the denomination, Canadian Pentecostals were also enabled to construct doctrinal statements and resolutions like the Americans, which extended to matters of war and peace. At their 1928 General Conference, the fellowship

40. Shuman, “Pentecost and the End,” 76.

41. “Minutes of the Pentecostal Assemblies.”

42. “The Paper,” *Canadian Pentecostal Testimony*, December 1920, 4.

declared itself to be a pacifist organization in their *Statement of Fundamental Truths*, thus marking the first time the PAOC released such a statement. The fellowship declared participation in war to be against “New Testament teaching and principles as prohibiting Christians from shedding blood or taking human life,” and asserted that Pentecostals would not “take up any weapon or destruction to slay another, whether in our own defense, or in defense of others.”<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, the PAOC, at about the halfway point between the two world wars, remained so averse to violence as to even rule out self-defense in its exposition of “fundamental truths.”

The end of the First World War also ushered in a time when opposition to war became widespread among Canadian Christendom at large, undoubtedly due at least in part to dismay over the global catastrophe it had just witnessed.<sup>44</sup> This contributed to clergy outside of peace church movements calling for abstention from armed conflict, contributing to a somewhat more hospitable environment for groups such as the Pentecostals.<sup>45</sup> Within their own circles, the transition into a time of peace did not put an end to the denunciation of military involvement by itinerant preachers. Frank Bartleman published a brief 1922 tract in which he blasted ecclesial bodies which held to just war theory as “apostate”,<sup>46</sup> however, having already, at other points, referred to such churches as “harlots” and associated them with the spirit of the Antichrist,<sup>47</sup> perhaps this charge could be considered rather tame in comparison. Yet, it also shows that the Pentecostal opposition to violence was not just an opportunistic tool used during actual periods of conflict; this was an issue the movement saw as part of their separation from the world. Nor was such interwar sentiment limited to Americans such as Bartleman; Donald Gee, a British conscientious objector during the War who frequently penned articles in North American Pentecostal periodicals, wrote

43. “Statement of Fundamental Truths,” 5.

44. Heath, “Canadian Churches and War,” 80.

45. McCutcheon et al., *The Christian and War*.

46. Bartleman, “Christian Citizenship.”

47. Bartleman, “War and the Christian,” 4.

a 1930 article for *The Pentecostal Evangel* entitled “War, the Bible, and the Christian.” In the aftermath of the First World War, the now-defunct League of Nations had been founded in the hope of securing lasting world peace. While Gee conceded that the support of this endeavor by “the nominal churches of Christendom” was “the only possible attitude consistent with the spirit and teaching of Jesus Christ,” he was also quick to point out the utter failure of such bodies in the previous war and insisted that true faithfulness to Jesus Christ required total obedience to the Scriptures—including those commands not to resist an evildoer in Matt 5.<sup>48</sup> According to Althouse, Gee was “the most influential pacifist in Canada,” as a conscientious objector during the First World War who admonished his fellow Pentecostals to beware of patriotic zeal.<sup>49</sup> In contrast to the overwhelming sentiment within the British Empire during the war that God was indeed on their side and that their efforts were a defense of Christian values, Gee charges that:

However passionately patriotism may overwhelm everything else in time of war, the world certainly expects the Christian church to take a stand against war and it is deeply disappointed at heart when that stand is not taken . . . It would be exceedingly difficult for Britain or Germany, France or the United States, or any other nation to justify any claim to the express command and blessing of God, after such claims are made in time of war by contending armies.<sup>50</sup>

Note here that part of Gee’s argument is rooted in the notion that even “the world,” which Pentecostals often looked upon with disdain, expected the church to retain its pure witness against such atrocities, reinforcing the countercultural mindset that Pentecostalism retained into the 1930s. It is also apparent why early Pentecostals were so keen to keep this international movement from becoming entangled with the kingdoms of the world; in the same 1930 publication in which Gee published this article, another section documents the spread of the gospel across

48. Gee, “War, the Bible, and the Christian,” 6–7.

49. Gee, “Conscientious Objection,” 10.

50. Gee, “War, the Bible, and the Christian,” 6–7.

such diverse lands as Peru, China, Japan, and Syria,<sup>51</sup> an emphasis which was typical of Pentecostal publications during the interwar period.

That the pacifist sentiment remained strong throughout the interwar period is also demonstrated in denominational publications addressing the rise of fascism in Europe. Although Pentecostals were aware of the possibility of another major conflict, far from encouraging their readers to prepare for war as a patriotic duty, they perceived it as a sign of the times that ought to make believers long for the return of Christ. In response to Italian dictator Benito Mussolini's claim that fascism would overtake Europe within the decade, a 1933 edition of *The Pentecostal Evangel* declared that, "The eyes of many may be Romeward for their deliverer and the Antichrist may come from Rome; but the eyes of the saints will be heavenward, for we are looking for our Lord Jesus Christ to descend from heaven."<sup>52</sup> The discussion within the PAOC led George Chambers, the first General Superintendent of the denomination, to publish a series of articles in *The Pentecostal Testimony* beginning in November 1935 arguing vehemently that Christians ought not to participate in war,<sup>53</sup> a stance that should perhaps not be surprising given his Mennonite upbringing.<sup>54</sup> In his view, there was no more appropriate occasion for the disciples of Christ to act in armed defense of another than at Christ's arrest; yet, when Peter does so, the Lord rebukes him. Chambers asserts:

It follows then, that if the disciples of the Lord were not given His permission to use the sword to fight for him, they were not to use it to fight for his interests, nor for the lesser purposes for which nations go to war today. If He did not want His followers to fight for Him when

51. "The Gospel in Foreign," *The Pentecostal Evangel*, 8 November 1930, 10–11. This section on international missions was a regular feature in the Assemblies of God's denominational publication.

52. "Will Anti-Christ," *The Pentecostal Evangel*, 4 February 1933, 5.

53. Chambers, "Should Christians Go," 13–14.

54. Ambrose, "On the Edge," 220–21.

He was about to be killed, by His enemies, does He want you and me  
to fight for the lesser things for which nations go to war?<sup>55</sup>

The implied answer to this rhetorical question is a resounding “no.” He was not alone in addressing this topic; Linda Ambrose notes that articles in the PAOC publication which granted that “war was inevitable” and taking “a decidedly apocalyptic view” were not uncommon in the interwar period. Walter E. McAlister, another influential individual during the interwar years who would later go on to become General Superintendent himself, declared in a 1933 edition of *The Pentecostal Testimony* that the current Russian military buildup would lead the world toward the destruction outlined in Ezek 38, and predicted a worldwide war in the near future triggered by severe famine.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, in the same way that the American *Evangel* encouraged its readers to view conflict and tension as signs of the near return of Christ, such articles in *The Pentecostal Testimony* were quick to assert the same—and encouraged believers to demonstrate their readiness by preaching the gospel. One searches in vain for patriotic sentiment in 1930s Canadian Pentecostal newsletters, despite how often the possibility of conflict is highlighted.

It must also be noted that the sustained opposition to Christian participation in war during these two decades was not rooted in some naïve outlook that believed the First World War was, indeed “a war to end war”—a notion that Gee essentially ridicules in his aforementioned article.<sup>57</sup> On the contrary, particularly in the mid to late thirties, Pentecostal publications increasingly discussed the inevitability of war and the destruction it would again visit upon the world.<sup>58</sup> When Gee penned an article in *The Pentecostal Testimony* following an October 1934 visit to Germany, he applauded the “conscientious objectors among the Lutheran

55. Chambers, “Should Christians Go,” 14.

56. McAlister, “Heralds of the King’s,” 5.

57. Gee, “War, the Bible, and the Christian,” 6.

58. See, for example, Klinck, “War,” 15. This particular publication, was aimed at youth, included a lengthy description of the new weapons that would be available for use in the next war, and declared that such a catastrophe was about to take place in Europe.

pastors” as one of the few obstacles to Adolf Hitler asserting total control over the nation.<sup>59</sup> A 1936 edition of *Christ’s Ambassador’s Herald* contained a brief biography of the *Führer*, decrying his anti-Semitism, his disregard for the Versailles Treaty, and calling on believers to pray for the Jewish people and speak out against their oppression.<sup>60</sup> Yet, there is not a hint of militaristic sentiment; in fact, in the following month’s edition of the same publication, the Roman Catholic Church is blasted on account of its half-hearted calls for peace and accused of actually aiding Benito Mussolini in his invasion of Ethiopia.<sup>61</sup>

Furthermore, while some such as Gee cautioned against hastily identifying Europe’s fascist tyrants with the Antichrist,<sup>62</sup> other contributors to *The Pentecostal Testimony* labeled Mussolini a “modern Caesar” and were convinced that the prophecies recorded in Dan 11 were unfolding before their very eyes.<sup>63</sup> One looks in vain for any reference to Pentecostals preparing for war, even when references to the nations of the world doing so fill their publications. It seems that in the minds of many, the growing tensions in Europe served as a reminder that believers were not of the world—and that their hope of redemption was drawing near. However, as the situation intensified and the Second World War became all but inevitable, some Pentecostals in Canada began to adopt a more nuanced position on the question of military service—marking the start of an identity crisis of sorts for the relatively young movement.

#### *World War II: Pacifism and Conscience*

Twenty-five years after the outbreak of the First World War, the Pentecostal churches in Canada were no longer an informal collection of congregations with no centralized voice. Like their American counterparts, the PAOC reaffirmed its own position on

59. Gee, “The Truth about Hitler,” 1–2.

60. Klinck, “Who is this Hitler,” 4–5.

61. Klinck, “The Vatican,” 16.

62. Gee, “The Truth about Hitler,” 1.

63. Turvey, “Will Egypt Be Next?,” 8–9.

conscientious objection in 1939.<sup>64</sup> Their statement built its argument on the authority of Scripture, which, as Pentecostals understood it, forbade believers from “shedding blood or taking human life.” Once again appealing to New Testament texts that forbid acts of violence and/or murder by followers of Christ, Pentecostal leaders such as Gee argued forcefully that Christians should not be overtaken by patriotism. In his article for *The Pentecostal Testimony* concerning conscientious objection, he outlines five principles that ought to guide those who object to military service. Gee submits that conscientious objectors must refuse service on the basis of moral conviction, not fear of death or injury, nor may believers be involved in arms manufacturing while refusing to serve. He stipulates that the decision must not be based on political concerns and that to protect the witness of the church, conscientious objectors must not appear to be fanatics.<sup>65</sup> In short, his is a challenge against hypocrisy and inconsistency; if one refuses to serve, it must be on moral, not pragmatic, grounds. However, is it noteworthy that Gee’s article, unlike earlier denominational resolutions and even his own writings, appears to present pacifism as a matter of conscience rather than a moral imperative. Like the PAOC’s statement on conscientious objection, Gee does not flatly condemn military service, and the very fact that, in his view, one should object to service only if regulated by certain principles implies the possibility that one may find it consistent with their “principles” to serve in some capacity. While readers may still be tempted to read Gee’s article and the PAOC statement as resolutely pacifist, they are remarkably tame when compared with the Assemblies of God official statement on the war. As Althouse notes, while the Canadian statement only affirms the movement’s opposition to taking life, the American one rules out military service altogether—perhaps not surprisingly given that this precedent had already been established with the reaction to the First World War.<sup>66</sup> While this

64. Shuman, “Pentecost and the End,” 75.

65. Gee, “Conscientious Objection,” 10.

66. Althouse, “Canadian Pentecostal Pacifism,” 33–34. The author does note that despite subtle differences, neither statement is “anti-state” and both, at

could reflect an adjustment due to context—readers of the Canadian publication, after all, would likely have not been as staunchly pacifist as those of the American *Evangel*—Gee's apparent subtle shift away from strict pacifism in such a short time may well serve as a microcosm of the movement at large.

Despite the widespread attitude of conscientious objection that still typified Canadian Pentecostalism at the commencement of the war, it is also crucial to note that it was over the course of this conflict that the attitude of many adherents of the movement began to shift from this position and toward a more neutral—or just war—posture. One of the clearest indicators of change within the denomination may be viewed in *The Pentecostal Testimony*, the same publication which printed Gee's letter outlining principles for conscientious objection, which began to publish letters from Pentecostals in the military. Not only did the testimonies about evangelistic opportunities from these service members add a spiritual element to the conflict, but they eventually helped spread knowledge of the horrific actions of the Axis powers.<sup>67</sup> In an even more blatant turn away from the movement's early pacifism, *The Pentecostal Testimony* published the sermon of a British preacher in its January 1941 edition replete with nationalistic sentiment, declaring that the English speaking peoples of the world, "are destined to be His witnesses to the ungodly nations" and that they were "custodians of God's eternal truth."<sup>68</sup> Not only does the appearance of such statements in a Canadian publication prove that British imperialism remained alive and well in the dominion at this time, but also that its influence was beginning to outweigh that of the movement's earlier conviction concerning war. The editor of the paper, D. N. Buntain, concluded concerning military service in one 1939 edition that:

It is not for any church or individual to dictate at this time, but to leave every individual to be guided by the Word of God and his own conscience. Let every man go to his knees and his Bible and be

least in theory, do leave open the possibility of non-combat roles in the military.

67. Althouse, "Canadian Pentecostal Pacifism," 38–39.

68. Morgan, "What is Britain's Destiny?," 12.

honest and true . . . If the call of the Empire becomes so insistent that he must decide, there are non-combatant units as the production units, the transport units, the hospital units, etc., where he can offer himself. On the other hand, if the believer feels that he should enlist in the standing army in any capacity, let the church keep silent. Let each person be guided in their own soul.<sup>69</sup>

Thus, if the witness of the denominational publication indicates anything, the war clearly marked a move from straightforward objection to a place of neutrality whereby military service was viewed as a matter of conscience. It also highlights a degree of tension within the movement's leadership. How could the editor of such a publication make this statement in the same general time frame that his denomination released a statement declaring themselves to be objectors? Newsletters such as *The Pentecostal Testimony* are particularly noteworthy in that they not only seem to push back against the established consensus early on in the war but also printed testimonies and columns during the war that implicitly highlighted some of the potential benefits of its adherents serving in the military. Celebrating the opportunities for evangelism that were presented in the armed forces, their newsletters highlight yet another possible catalyst for the decline in pacifism among Canadian Pentecostals: the primacy of missions. Pentecostalism has, from its infancy, emphasized evangelism more so than pacifism. Therefore, it appears that when military service came to be viewed as an evangelistic opportunity, reaching the lost took primacy over the commitment to nonviolence. As Althouse notes, many came to see the conflict as a means by which God could use his people to reach the world, further explaining that:

Pentecostal pacifism declined for theological and sociological reasons. Pentecostals have always had a strong emphasis on missions. Moreover, pacifism was always second to missions and charismata . . . with a military mission endeavor involving Pentecostals in the

69. Buntain, "The Pentecostal Movement," 3, cited in Dempster, "The Canada—Britain—USA," 14.

armed forces, the army became a mission field. Since then, more Pentecostals have entered the military with the intent to proselytize.<sup>70</sup>

What might be summarized, then, is that Pentecostals shifted away from their pacifist roots in no small part due to the logical implication, as they saw it, of even deeper concerns within their movement. Though pacifism may have been integral enough for the 1928 General Conference to include it in their *Statement of Fundamental and Essential Truths*, it simply was not the movement's *raison d'être* in the way that missions clearly was.

A case in point on this topic can be observed in the case of bible college students. Unsurprisingly, military service proved to be a vital topic of conversation among college students at the time,<sup>71</sup> with Western Bible College in Winnipeg as a flashpoint for controversy. Along with the war came the conscription of young men, including students of the College; Reverend J. E. Purdie, then the college's principal, lobbied his PAOC colleagues to join him in fighting for his students to be allowed to remain in school after one had been drafted.<sup>72</sup> Neither he nor the student in question was a pacifist;<sup>73</sup> quite the contrary, he expressed full support for the allied powers, and referred to Hitler's ideology as demonic.<sup>74</sup> Rather, Purdie was concerned that his conscription would mean the loss of a promising minister to proclaim the soon return of Christ, which Purdie viewed as a higher obligation; his focus was on an eschatological vision, not cultural engagement. Hoping that Pentecostalism would no longer be seen as a fringe movement, but rather in the same category as the Catholics or other Protestants, when Purdie made the case to Canadian authorities that his students ought to be given exemption from service<sup>75</sup> he argued that doing so would allow them to train chaplains for the military. Yet, Pentecostals' ability to provide chaplaincy services was deemed negligible; even with the

70. Althouse, "Canadian Pentecostal Pacifism," 38–39.

71. Ambrose, "On the Edge," 215.

72. Ambrose, "On the Edge," 218.

73. See Ambrose, "On the Edge," 218.

74. Ambrose, "On the Edge," 222.

75. Ambrose, "On the Edge," 226.

changes that began to take place very few adherents served. Thus, it should not be shocking that Purdie found little favor with the authorities of the time. What is surprising, however, is Purdie also did not find strong support in the denomination as he almost certainly would have had in the First World War had he tried to find a means by which his students might avoid armed combat.

The 1941 General Superintendent D. N. Buntain—formerly the editor of *The Pentecostal Testimony*—took a more nuanced approach to the issue than his predecessor, George Chambers, who was a former Mennonite and staunch pacifist.<sup>76</sup> Assuming a posture that would likely have been anathema to Chambers, Buntain contended that young Pentecostals conscripts could use the occasion to spread the gospel. While not condemning conscientious objection, his stance is a marked change from that of Chambers. Moreover, in a 1945 correspondence between then General Superintendent, C. M. Wortman, and Reverend W. J. Taylor concerning the ordination of military-aged men, Wortman notably does not make any statement indicating Pentecostal men should not serve—implicitly treating it as a matter of conscience, not a matter on which to impose a blanket standard.<sup>77</sup> On the contrary, he states that he would not want to appeal for a military exemption for Pentecostal students training for ministry. It appears that, in a sense, the very thing that had prompted many first-generation Pentecostals to refuse military service ended up being the thing that pushed some in the next generation to allow it: a belief in the imminent return of Christ, and the consequential need for spreading the gospel. Though ironic, this view gained considerable traction over the course of the war.

#### *The End of The War, The End of a Distinctive?*

Just as the movement in Canada was more tempered in its pacifism early on than in the United States, so too the Canadian shift away from this position was quite subtle and gradual. That said,

76. Ambrose, “On the Edge,” 221.

77. Wortman, “Christian Greetings.”

it would be difficult to argue against the position that the Second World War proved to be a notable turning point based on PAOC literature. Perhaps the shift was inevitable; as the denomination grew and attracted converts from various Christian backgrounds, such individuals were bound to bring with them their own assumptions regarding war.<sup>78</sup> By the 1940s, when the denomination's attitude toward the subject began to shift, adherents included former Presbyterians, Anglicans, and others who were drawn to the more central doctrines of Pentecostalism, such as Spirit baptism, than to the finer distinctives of the movement like nonviolence.<sup>79</sup> It is not too surprising, then, that the relatively more peripheral teaching of pacifism faded into the background—especially when the influx of such converts from denominations with non-pacifist positions on war coincided with a major global crisis.

However, there could be an even deeper reason. While some Pentecostal scholars like Shuman see nonviolence as the proper scriptural response to war and advocate a return to it, Canadian scholar Peter Althouse argues that part of the reason that Pentecostals in his country moved away from pacifism is that the New Testament nowhere explicitly prohibits military participation.<sup>80</sup> While first-generation Pentecostals by and large took the New Testament's prohibition of killing as a prohibition of armed combat, the Bible also calls on believers to obey the governing authorities. Althouse, then, labels "inevitable" the emergence of a Pentecostal debate concerning whether war and killing were in fact the same thing—with many answering in the negative, thereby justifying military service.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, while early

78. Ambrose, "On the Edge," 219.

79. See Ambrose, "On the Edge," 219–20. The author notes "Diversity continued to be a defining feature of the movement and in 1943 Principal Purdie pointed out that the students who had studied at Western Bible College came from over 25 different countries and at least 23 different church backgrounds including Mennonite, Catholic, Baptist, Holiness Movement, and many more."

80. Althouse, "Canadian Pentecostal Pacifism," 40–41.

81. Allin, "Christianity and War," 4, cited in Althouse, "Canadian Pentecostal Pacifism," 40.

Pentecostals wished to avoid entanglement in the affairs of the world and thereby adopted a position of conscientious objection, during the Second World War it became clear that to object to military service was actually a far more politically charged stance than simply remaining neutral.<sup>82</sup> To openly criticize military involvement in the war was to “jeopardize the universal, Pentecostal message” by making it appear politically charged, whether this was the intent or not. In short, while the reasons for this shift in stance are multiple, and indeed quite complex, what seems clear is the movement’s initial pacifist conviction proved no match when in conflict with the Pentecostal zeal for evangelism. Ultimately, this zeal helped bring members from virtually every Christian tradition into the Pentecostal fold including individuals who did not share their position on conscientious objection and thus, contributed to this notable change in the movement’s outlook.

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82. Althouse, “Canadian Pentecostal Pacifism,” 41.

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