

SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER:  
HOW THE *UNITED CHURCH OBSERVER* AND *THE CANADIAN MENNONITE*  
HELPED THEIR DENOMINATIONS NAVIGATE A NEW CHURCH-STATE  
DYNAMIC DURING THE VIETNAM WAR

by

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A thesis submitted to  
the Faculty of McMaster Divinity College  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts in Christian Studies

McMaster Divinity College  
Hamilton, Ontario  
2010

Master of Arts in Christian Studies  
Hamilton, Ontario

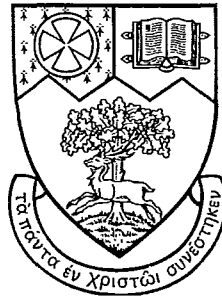
McMASTER DIVINITY COLLEGE

TITLE: Speaking Truth to Power:  
How the *United Church Observer* and *The Canadian Mennonite* Helped Their Denominations Navigate a New Church-State Dynamic during the Vietnam War

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NUMBER OF PAGES: xi + 141



## **McMASTER DIVINITY COLLEGE**

Upon the recommendation of an oral examining committee, this thesis by


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**MASTER OF ARTS IN CHRISTIAN STUDIES**

  
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Date: March 15, 2010

## ABSTRACT

“Speaking Truth to Power: How the *United Church Observer* and *The Canadian Mennonite* Helped Their Denominations Navigate a New Church-State Dynamic during the Vietnam War”

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Beginning in the 1960s, shifts in the Canadian religious climate required the United Church of Canada and Canadian Mennonites to reassess their respective relationships with the state. Meanwhile, the Vietnam War presented practical and urgent challenges to the churches’ political theologies. By examining these denominations through the lens of their periodicals, this thesis demonstrates that each church’s response to the Vietnam War was a function of its ongoing internal negotiations with respect to church-state relations and the engagement of society. When an influential contingent within the United Church recognized that the denomination was no longer viewed as Canada’s vital source of moral legitimacy, they became more willing to voice unpopular opinions. Meanwhile, once-marginalized Mennonites re-evaluated their traditional isolationism when faced with new opportunities to express their pacifist beliefs. Both Canada’s priests and its martyrs began to realize that their role in the national landscape was to be a prophetic one.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis began in a flash of idle curiosity and would never have developed into the *oeuvre* before you without the enduring support and enthusiasm by which I have been surrounded for the last two years. I extend my deepest thanks to my family for tirelessly insisting that this work was important – both for the sake of others and for the purposes of my graduation. My parents and patrons, Luisa and George Apostol, have demonstrated an unfailing trust in my capacity to tell this story well. I hope I have risen to the occasion.

The valuable contribution made by Dr. Gordon L. Heath is evidenced not only by my numerous references to his own scholarship in the history of Canadian Christianity, but also by this paper's fidelity to and dependence on the primary sources. His passion for archival research is contagious, and his kindness, patience, and constant encouragement have been indispensable to me.

I am also profoundly grateful for the generosity shown to me by Nathan Dirks, Jamie Robertson, Michelle Triomphe, Esther Epp-Thiessen (MCCC Peace Section), my fellow delegates at the 2009 MCC Ottawa Student Seminar on "Pursuing Security in an Insecure World," and the staff at the Conrad Grebel Library (University of Waterloo), Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library (University of Toronto), and The United Church Archives (Toronto).

It has been a pleasure and a welcome relief to interact with so many people who believe that history still speaks and that we have a duty to listen... and to change.

## **DEDICATION**

For Gordon Friedrich, whom I will probably never meet.

## FOREWORD

In the weeks before the first draft of this thesis was submitted, a senior Canadian diplomat, formerly assigned to Afghanistan, made some startling allegations. Robert Colvin claimed that in 2006 and 2007 he had tried to inform his government that suspects apprehended by Canadian forces and handed over to Afghani authorities were likely being tortured. These allegations spurred a political circus, a parsing of memos sent by Colvin to his superiors, and denials by high-ranking generals. In the face of their own potential complicity in the torture of Afghani citizens, Canadians responded in a variety of ways. On 30 November 2009, one letter to the editor of the *Globe and Mail* implied that the quotidian lives of Canadians had nothing to do with those of Taliban collaborators. “What a non-issue,” wrote Gordon Friedrich.<sup>1</sup>

Here, forty years later, was a descendant of so many men and women I had encountered in the pages of the *United Church Observer* and *The Canadian Mennonite*. While the academic stakes of this project are described in its formal introduction, the ideology implicit in that *Globe* letter compels me to reflect on the practical impact of my work.

The Vietnam War invited all Canadians to consider the degree to which their seemingly innocuous actions constituted complicity in a devastating conflict that affected millions of vulnerable people. One need not be a Christian to grasp that our common human experience binds us to one another. Even apart from that fundamental spiritual kinship, however, we now have extraordinary grounds for leading lives defined by extraordinary compassion. We live in a complex eco-political network, and our

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon Friedrich, “Torture in-verse,” *The Globe and Mail*, 30 November 2009, A14.

interconnectedness refuses to be dismissed as the figment of a sentimental imagination; it is an undeniable reality, documented by copious paper-trails. As voters, as tax-payers, as inventors and proliferators of goods and ideas, and as consumers, our decisions cause not ripples but tidal waves throughout the world and, for the first time, we can track them. The advent of modern telecommunications has given us access to an unprecedented volume of information about one another at an unprecedented speed. None of us can lay claim to innocence on the grounds that we are ignorant: more than at any other time in the history of our species, we in the developed world are equipped to understand the suffering of others and our complicity therein. As a result, the very definition of “neighbour” has dramatically changed.

By documenting the moral crises Canadians underwent during the Vietnam War, I hope to move the discussion forward, so that as we redefine “neighbour,” we may also redefine our politics.

“Ask not for whom the bell tolls – it tolls for thee.”  
~ John Donne



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## ABBREVIATIONS

1-A <sup>2</sup>	Inducted into the military
1-A-O	Inducted into the military as a noncombatant
1-O/I-W	Conscientious objector offering alternate service in lieu of induction into the military
CCC	Canadian Council of Churches
CO	Conscientious Objector
E&SS	Board of Evangelism and Social Services (United Church)
GC	General Conference (Mennonite)
MB	Mennonite Brethren
<i>MR</i>	<i>Mennonite Reporter</i> , called <i>Canadian Mennonite Reporter</i> in 1971
MCC	Mennonite Central Committee
MCC(C)	Mennonite Central Committee Canada
NCC	National Council of Churches (USA)
NGO	<u>Non-governmental organization</u>
NLF	National Liberation Front (Vietnam)
NISBCO	National Interreligious Service Board for Conscientious Objectors (USA)
NSBRO	National Service Board for Religious Objectors (changed to NISBCO in 1969; USA)
OM	Old Mennonite
SSS	Selective Service System (USA)

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<sup>2</sup> Due to the typeset used by some of the primary sources, these designations sometimes appear as I-A/I-A-O/I-O/I-W in the original texts.

TADP	Toronto Anti-Draft Programme
<i>TCM</i>	<i>The Canadian Mennonite</i>
UCC	United Church of Canada
<i>UCO</i>	<i>United Church Observer</i>
VC	Viet Cong
VCS	Vietnam Christian Service
VS	Voluntary Service
WCC	World Council of Churches

## INTRODUCTION

Years before the United States put boots on the uneven ground of the Vietnamese jungle in the early 1960s, there was a vested American interest in the political turmoil of East Asia. The administrations of John F. Kennedy (1961–1963) and Lyndon B. Johnson (1963–1969) each perceived that the need to intervene was becoming ever more acute: if Communism were permitted to take root in Vietnam, it would only be a matter of time before the dominoes fell and the rest of Asia would be under Soviet or Chinese control.<sup>1</sup> An American military presence in Vietnam was finally established in earnest in 1965, without a formal declaration of war. In order to maintain a mission as complex as Vietnam, over the following ten years the volunteer contingent of the American military would be supplemented by the conscription of as many as two million young men. A million more draftees sought exemptions, went into hiding, or fled the country. In his 1968 campaign for president, Richard Nixon (1969–1974) promised to bring an end to the draft, and then the war, without losing face in Asia. The extraction of American forces began in 1973 and took around two years to complete. The Vietnam War sharply divided Americans, and conscription only exacerbated passionate critiques of the conflict as well as its execution. Indeed, the American involvement in Vietnam continues to be a controversial episode in the nation's history.

Despite Canada's membership in NATO and its traditional support of the United States, a variety of pre-existing commitments and diplomatic relationships dictated against its involvement in the Vietnam War. This did not insulate Canadians from the

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<sup>1</sup> This term was popularized by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1954, with specific reference to the Asian situation. See *President Eisenhower's News Conference, April 7, 1954, 'Public Papers of the Presidents', 1954, p. 382*, No pages, Online: <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/pentagon/ps11.htm>

associated political and social tumult of the period, however. Institutions and individuals had to respond to the increasingly heated – even violent – public debate south of the border, the influx of tens of thousands of draft resisters and military deserters, and news of the humanitarian crisis descending on the Vietnamese people. Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson (1963–1968) publicly criticized Johnson’s policies, Prime Minister Pierre E. Trudeau (1968–1979) allegedly described Canada as a “refuge from militarism,”<sup>2</sup> and thousands of Canadians made financial contributions to relief efforts in Vietnam.

### Canadian Churches, War, and Civil Society

The mechanisms and rhetoric employed in the waging of war are defining elements of the national identity. As a corollary, the behaviour of particular churches in wartime can reveal valuable insights into their role in nation-building.<sup>3</sup> The vast majority of Canadian scholarship on the subject of church and war has focused on the First and Second World Wars; while historians have been most prolific in their assessment of chaplaincy,<sup>4</sup> there has also been attention drawn to the practice of recruiting soldiers from the pulpit, inter-war pacifism,<sup>5</sup> and discord regarding participation in the Second World

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<sup>2</sup> Joseph Jones questions the veracity of this attribution, since the best eyewitness accounts record that the phrase was coined by delegates from the Mennonite Central Committee (Canada). In other words, when asked if he agreed that Canada should continue its proud tradition of serving as a refuge from militarism, the prime minister said he did. See Joseph Jones, “Historical Notes on Vietnam War Resisters,” No pages, Online: <http://www.library.ubc.ca/jones/hstrnt.html>

<sup>3</sup> For more on the role of the Canadian church in nation-building, see Phyllis D. Airhart, “Ordering a New Nation and Reordering Protestantism, 1867–1914,” in *The Canadian Protestant Experience, 1760 to 1990*, edited by G.A. Rawlyk, 98–138 (Burlington, ON: Welch, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> See Jacques Castonguay, *Unsung Mission: History of the Chaplaincy Service (RC) of the RCAF*, translated by Michael Hoare (Montreal: Institut de Pastorale, 1968); Duff Crerar, *Padres in No Man’s Land: Canadian Chaplains and the Great War* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen’s, 1995); Laurence Wilmot, *Through the Hitler Line: Memoirs of an Infantry Chaplain* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Gordon L. Heath, “Flirting with Nirvana: The Canadian Baptist Attitude to Warfare, 1919-1939,” Forthcoming revision of Heath’s masters thesis. See also Thomas P. Socknat, *Witness against War: Pacifism in Canada 1900-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1987).

War.<sup>6</sup> More recently, scholarship on the South African War has elucidated the ways in which the Canadian church historically bolstered imperial ambitions.<sup>7</sup>

With the marked ebb in the influence of Christianity on post-Second World War Canadian society, the time had come to jettison the Christendom project that had been so explicit both before and after Confederation. The 1960s were a watershed in this evolution. Historian Gary Miedema has suggested that Canada's increasingly multicultural and interfaith landscape naturally impinged on the authority and influence of the mainline and Roman Catholic churches.<sup>8</sup> This was exacerbated by the state's intentional movement toward diversity, as displayed in the formal celebrations of Canada's centennial and in Expo 67.

It has been argued by Miedema and others that the established church shifted from a priestly function – lending and withholding legitimacy – to a prophetic one – offering a socio-moral critique and calling for repentance.<sup>9</sup> While the democratization of

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<sup>6</sup> See Robert Edis Fairbairn, *Apostate Christendom* (London: Ken-Pax, 1947); N.K. Clifford, "Charles Clayton Morrison and the United Church of Canada," *Canadian Journal of Theology* 15,2 (1969): 80–92; Gordon L. Heath, "Irreconcilable Differences: Wartime Attitudes of George C. Pidgeon and R. Edis Fairbairn, 1939-1945," *Historical Papers 1999: The Canadian Society of Church History* (1999): 29–50.

<sup>7</sup> Gordon L. Heath, *A War with a Silver Lining: Canadian Protestant Churches and the South African War, 1899-1902* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Gary R. Miedema, *For Canada's Sake: Public Religion, Centennial Celebrations, and the Re-making of Canada in the 1960s* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> This paradigm is briefly described in Miedema, *For Canada's Sake*, 9, citing Hans Mol, *Faith and Fragility: Religion and Identity in Canada*, (Burlington, ON: Trinity, 1985). Mol did not see the two functions – priestly and prophetic – as mutually exclusive. He further contended that "the mainline churches in Canada have never abandoned their priestly concern for the nation.... However secular Canadian culture may be and however much the religious institutions appear to be on the fringes of society, mainline Christianity perseveres in the firm conviction that God is a God of history, and that, therefore, the nation is part of his plan." See Mol, *Faith*, 260. This thesis concurs with the traditional definition of both prophets and priests as powerful intercessors between God and humanity and concedes that the roles may overlap. However, Mol's paradigm does not give due consideration to the archetypal biblical prophet, whose relationship with the establishment was tenuous, and whose critical voice was often unwelcome. The difference between a prophet and a priest has as much to do with hierarchical considerations as it does with function. Indeed, the two are inextricably linked. For the purposes of this thesis, the roles describe two distinct points on the continuum of active engagement. Of course, a church may also decide against formally engaging society or the state, in which case it would be adopting the posture of an isolationist or cloistered community, in keeping with a long tradition of Christian mysticism.

Canadian religion shook mainline denominations, including the United Church, it also lent legitimacy to smaller denominations. This thesis adopts the priest/prophet conceptualization of churches' roles in the national landscape and develops the paradigm by considering the experience of the newly-empowered martyr.<sup>10</sup>

Despite Canada's status as a non-belligerent, the Vietnam War's coincidence with such significant shifts in Canadian religion renders the conflict an appropriate lens through which to examine the church-state dynamic. This project therefore seeks to uncover reactions to the Vietnam War as expressed by elements of the Canadian Protestant churches. While both the United Church of Canada (UCC) and the various Canadian conferences of the Mennonite Church explicitly condemned the Vietnam War, the implications of their opposition were profoundly divisive. Just as rapid shifts in the Canadian religious climate required both denominations to reassess their relationship with the state, the Vietnam War presented practical and urgent challenges to their political theologies. Through its examination of the United Church and Canadian Mennonites through the lens of their church publications, this thesis demonstrates that each denomination's response to the Vietnam War was a function of its ongoing internal negotiations with respect to church-state relations and the engagement of society.

In the case of the United Church, an influential contingent accepted the failure of the Christendom project and recognized that the denomination's role in the national discourse was changing. As the church slowly began to see that its perspective was no longer viewed as Canada's vital source of moral legitimacy, it clung to its respectability but became more willing to voice controversial opinions. By contrast, the once-

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<sup>10</sup> While this term can sometimes connote self-pity, that shade of meaning is not intended here. By and large, Mennonites did not view themselves as victims, but rather as oft-persecuted witnesses.

marginalized Mennonites awoke to a relative parity with other Canadian religious groups. Because this newfound opportunity to speak coincided with a military conflict that struck to the core of its pacifist beliefs, the church was forced to re-evaluate its traditional isolationism. In fact, the Vietnam War itself was an important catalyst for the empowerment and budding integration of Canadian Mennonites. Though their journeys were quite distinct, during the Vietnam War both Canada's priests and its martyrs began to realize that, looking forward, their role in the national landscape was to be a prophetic one.

### Literature Review

In 1968, American church historian James H. Smylie observed the world around him and determined that it would be unconscionable to postpone analysis. While admitting that some might find his efforts "presumptuous," he maintained that contextualizing the events of the Vietnam War and consolidating the voices of American churches were sufficiently crucial tasks as to demand immediate attention.<sup>11</sup> The reactions of various religious communities in the United States also drew the interest of sociologists and historians of Christianity.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, in recent years a host of first-hand accounts by war resisters have been published.<sup>13</sup> Despite the glut of American research,

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<sup>11</sup> James H. Smylie, "American Religious Bodies, Just War, and Vietnam," *Journal of Church and State* 11 (1969): 383.

<sup>12</sup> See Donald Granberg and Keith E. Campbell, "Certain Aspects of Religiosity and Orientations toward the Vietnam War among Missouri Undergraduates," *Sociological Analysis* 34,1 (Spring 1973): 40–49. See also Thomas E. Quigley, *American Catholics and Vietnam* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968); Harry E. Quinley, "The Protestant Clergy and the War in Vietnam," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 34,1 (Spring 1970): 43–52; Peter Steinfels, "Christian Conscience in America and the War in Vietnam," in *Opportunities for Belief and Behavior*, edited by Christian Duquoc, 55–61 (New York: Paulist, 1967); Clarence E. Tygart, "Religiosity and University Student Anti-Vietnam War Attitudes: A Negative or Curvilinear Relationship?" *Sociological Analysis* 32,2 (Summer 1971): 120–29; Clarence E. Tygart, "Social Movement Participation: Clergy and the Anti-Vietnam War Movement," *Sociological Analysis* 34,3 (Autumn 1973): 202–11.

<sup>13</sup> See James Dickerson, *North to Canada: Men and Women Against the Vietnam War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999); Kenneth Fred Emerick, *War Resisters Canada: The World of the American Military-*



there are few parallel works that examine the Canadian story. To date, only a handful of scholars have published works immediately relevant to an investigation of the Canadian church during the Vietnam War.

Gayle I. Thrift conducts research on the Cold War in general, and has written about the impact of the Communist (atheist) threat on Canadian Christianity, with a particular focus on the Protestant denominations. By documenting post-Second World War (1945–1967) developments, Thrift’s work serves to place the events of the Vietnam War along the trajectory of church and state relations during the Cold War.<sup>14</sup>

In his study of the dense religious coverage of the Korean War (1950–1953), Harold H. Osmer seeks to discover the nature of that treatment and whether it changed over time. Osmer also explores the way journalists interpreted “the relation of foreign policy to their expressed religious values.”<sup>15</sup> *U.S. Religious Journalism and the Korean War* describes a post-Second World War shift in the content of American religious publications away from a “general occupation with theology and denominational affairs”<sup>16</sup> and toward more comprehensive coverage. Osmer cites Robert Lekachman’s contention that such changes constituted “attempts to identify the universal relevance of

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*Political Refugees* (Knox, PA: Knox, Pennsylvania Free, 1972); John Hagan, *Northern Passage: American Vietnam War Resisters in Canada* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2001); Mitchell K. Hall, *Because of Their Faith: CALCAV and Religious Opposition to the Vietnam War* (New York: Columbia University, 1990)

<sup>14</sup> Gayle I. Thrift, “Concerning the Evil State of the World Out of Which Strife Comes’: Church-State Relations in Early Cold War Canada, 1945-1955,” Presented at the CHA Conference, 25 May 2001. Thrift contends that the ideological warfare of the Cold War had two conflicting effects on Canadian attitudes toward religion. In the first place, faith was embraced because it was diametrically opposed to atheism, and could potentially function as an antidote. In the second place, organized religion reminded many North Americans of the dogmatic ideology of the Communist bloc. As a result, Canadians were both attracted and repulsed by the established church. Thrift has also addressed the United Church’s political efforts regarding Vietnam directly, however that work has not yet been made accessible in printed form: “Has God a Lobby in Ottawa? The ‘Christian Left’ in the United Church of Canada during the Vietnam War, 1966-68,” Canadian Historical Association, 31 May – 2 June 2005, University of Western Ontario.

<sup>15</sup> Harold H. Osmer, *U.S. Religious Journalism and the Korean War* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1980), vii.

<sup>16</sup> Osmer, *U.S.*, 2.

[their] faith;... [and] endeavours to place contemporary political, social, and economic issues within a religious context.”<sup>17</sup> Moreover, Osmer identifies the ideological underpinnings of the Cold War as the impetus for narrowing the gap between horizons of Scripture and culture. He quotes Winthrop S. Hudson:

The uneasy and precarious peace of ‘cold war’... with its recurrent crises and continuing conflicts, heightened the sense of anxiety.... Religious overtones were also present in the confrontation between the Soviet bloc and the Western powers, because of the professed atheism of the Communist regimes. In this situation it was natural that religion should be viewed by many as a weapon to be employed in the struggle.<sup>18</sup>

Osmer’s work ultimately concludes that religious coverage of the Korean War was goal-oriented: columnists and reporters discussed the aims of U.S. containment policy and often considered the degree to which its implementation was consistent with those aims.

Donald W. Maxwell broached the subject of this thesis in a recent *Journal of Church and State* article.<sup>19</sup> Therein, Maxwell argues that insofar as Canadian churches assisted American draft resisters and military deserters, they did so primarily to advance their own agendas: pointedly exercising Canadian independence from the United States, endearing themselves to the federal government and anti-war culture, evangelizing new Christians, and welcoming American believers into their own congregations. Maxwell’s considerable archival and secondary research constitutes an original contribution to the academy. However, his study considers the Canadian Council of Churches and the United Church, to the exclusion of other denominations. This narrow focus not only poses a methodological problem but also has a profound impact on his argument.

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<sup>17</sup> Osmer, *U.S.*, 2. Original parentheses.

<sup>18</sup> Osmer, *U.S.*, 2.

<sup>19</sup> Donald W. Maxwell, “Religion and Politics at the Border: Canadian Church Support for American Vietnam War Resisters,” *A Journal of Church and State* 48,4 (Autumn 2006): 807–29.

Maxwell depicts the Canadian church as both intrinsically political and opportunistic when he contends that “church and government leaders exploited Canadian law to admit” draft resisters, against the objection of a slim majority of their constituents, “motivated by a sense of anti-Americanism.”<sup>20</sup> Not only does a close reading of the *United Church Observer (UCO)* shed doubt on this thesis, but once the testimony of the peace churches is taken into consideration, it becomes clear that there is no ground for extrapolating Maxwell’s findings beyond his immediate focus.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the story of the Mennonites is not only germane but perhaps even vital to a well-rounded understanding of the period in question.

For their part, several scholars of Mennonite history have made promising contributions to the difficult task of graphing the shape of Mennonite peace identity. Ben Redekop’s paper focuses on American Mennonites and spans the First and Second World Wars before addressing the Vietnam conflict. In that latter section, the overarching emphasis is on the establishment of a Washington branch of the MCC – unquestionably a formalization of MCC’s intentions to engage government representatives through lobbying and consultations – and Mennonite relief workers’ struggle to maintain and express independence from the American military. Redekop also suggests that the great strides made during this period failed to trickle down to the Mennonite in the pew.<sup>22</sup>

By contrast, Joe Mihevc’s doctoral dissertation, “The Politicization of the Mennonite Peace Witness in the Twentieth Century,” argues that the Vietnam War was

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<sup>20</sup> Maxwell, “Religion.”

<sup>21</sup> Moreover, there is ongoing debate regarding the degree to which the Canadian government was eager to protect draft evaders and military deserters. See page 2, note 2, for example. See also “Blast Secret Rules,” *UCO*, 15 June 1970, 31, and Patricia Clarke, “Parliament makes the laws,” *UCO*, 15 June 1969, 10.

<sup>22</sup> Ben Redekop, “Mennonite Peace Identity Through Three Wars: 1914-1975,” Senior History Project, Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Spring 1985.

the catalyst for a powerful awakening among Mennonites. What had previously been considered innocuous relief work was finally recognized as not only having political implications, but also political motivations. “The Vietnam War,” Mihevc contends, “is the symbolic turning point for the post-American age and for Mennonites the beginning of a new way of peacemaking.”<sup>23</sup>

The research in hand does more than bring the aforementioned works into dialogue; it broadens Maxwell’s scope by considering the Vietnam War as a whole, and deepens his analysis by immersing itself in the denominational newspapers of the United Church and the Mennonites. It redresses the paucity of Canadian historical works that consult the religious press and fleshes out the experience of the United Church, itself a sizeable gap in the extant scholarship.<sup>24</sup> This thesis also capitalizes on the contributions of Redekop and Mihevc by contrasting the agenda of a mainline denomination, the United Church of Canada, with the unique evolution of the Canadian Mennonite response. These denominations were chosen because, as is explained below, they represent distinct and important voices in the Canadian religious community.

#### Denominational Distinctives

The United Church was born in 1925 through the merging of the Methodist Church, Canada, the Congregational Union of Canada, the General Council of Union Churches, and much of the Presbyterian Church in Canada.<sup>25</sup> In addition to being the

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<sup>23</sup> Joe Mihevc, “The Politicization of the Mennonite Peace Witness in the Twentieth Century,” PhD diss. (Toronto: University of St. Michael’s College, Toronto School of Theology, January 1988): 341.

<sup>24</sup> See page 12, note 36.

<sup>25</sup> Excellent histories of the two largest founding denominations include John S. Moir, *Enduring Witness: A History of Presbyterian Church in Canada*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Toronto: Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1987) and Neil Semple, *The Lord’s Dominion: The History of Canadian Methodism* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen’s, 1996). For shorter treatments, see contributions by Earl B. Eddy, N.G. Smith, Goldwin French, and John Webster Grant in Grant’s *The Churches and the Canadian Experience: A Faith and Order Study*

largest Protestant denomination by membership, the United Church descends from the earliest mainline influence in Canada. In 1906, Andre Siegfried observed that the North American forms of the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Congregationalist churches had established independence from the state by virtue of being inherently voluntary.

However, “[i]t would not be safe to say quite so positively that the state’s independence of the churches, even the Protestant ones, is established to the same degree.”<sup>26</sup> The mainline churches had the opportunity and, they believed, the mandate to set the pulse of the nation.<sup>27</sup> This was not only the legacy the United Church inherited from its predecessors, but also an important aspect of the very act of union: “The United Church of Canada came into being as a self-declared ‘national’ church... [it] was to be a ‘uniting church.’”<sup>28</sup> Prior to union Methodists were instructed to ““use the bond of religious union to promote the national oneness of the Dominion that we may attain to a clarified consciousness and conscience concerning the supreme mission of our country in the life of the world.””<sup>29</sup>

The United Church made every effort to rise to the occasion, and certainly played a crucial role in defining the national ethos. In its first forty years, it both embodied and proliferated Canadianism. Historian Ron Graham has gone so far as to call it “the most

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*of the Christian Tradition* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1966). These chapters give an overview of the histories of the Congregational, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches, and of church union, respectively.

<sup>26</sup> Phyllis D. Airhart, “‘As Canadian as Possible under the Circumstances’: Reflections on the Study of Protestantism in North America,” in *New Directions in American Religious History*, edited by Harry Stout and D.G. Hart (Oxford: Oxford University, 1997): 128. Citing *The Race Question in Canada*.

<sup>27</sup> See Phyllis D. Airhart, “Ordering a New Nation and Reordering Protestantism, 1867–1914,” in *The Canadian Protestant Experience, 1760 to 1990*, edited by G.A. Rawlyk, 98–138 (Burlington, ON: Welch, 1990).

<sup>28</sup> David Lochhead, “The United Church and the Conscience of the Nation,” in *Church and Canadian Culture*, edited by Robert E. VanderVennen (Lanham, ML: University Press of America, 1991) 26.

<sup>29</sup> Airhart, “As Canadian,” 128. Citing General Superintendent S.D. Chown.

Canadian of churches,”<sup>30</sup> and Phyllis D. Airhart adds that its evangelistic activities among immigrants have essentially been forces of so-called Canadianization.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, Airhart has observed, “[f]or a number of years the United Church found that its ranks were filled with many who drew a further conclusion: that to be Canadian was to be United Church.”<sup>32</sup>

The story of this influential denomination is replete with intentional political and social engagement. This was the case during election campaigns, but also during times of war. While generally more liberal than other Protestant groups, the United Church was not fundamentally pacifist. Its predecessors had been supporters of the British Empire in the South African War and almost universally considered patriotism to be central to the Christian faith.<sup>33</sup> In the wake of the First World War, however, the new denomination reconsidered its precursors’ traditional support of the military, which had lately included recruiting soldiers and defending Canadian foreign policy from the pulpit. Indeed, the United Church adopted a sort of reflexive pacifism. Before long, however, the Nazi threat loomed in Europe, and Canada contemplated engaging in another massive military conflict. Faced with the hegemonic and fascist aspirations that threatened European security, the United Church was forced to rethink its outright rejection of warfare.

While that heated and nuanced debate created a lot of friction within the church, it also helped shape a more thoughtful and discerning denomination, one which increasingly eschewed taking extreme positions on complex issues.<sup>34</sup> The devastating

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<sup>30</sup> In Airhart, “As Canadian,” 127. Citing *God’s Dominion: A Skeptic’s Quest*.

<sup>31</sup> Airhart, “As Canadian,” 129.

<sup>32</sup> Airhart, “As Canadian,” 129.

<sup>33</sup> Of course, this was because Canada was a Christian nation. It was not patriotism *qua* patriotism that was valued, but devotion to Christendom in particular.

<sup>34</sup> For a thorough discussion of inter-war United Church pacifism and its relationship to the advent of the Second World War, see the aforementioned article by Gordon L. Heath: “Irreconcilable Differences:

results of the First World War had shamed the church establishment and driven home a renewed appreciation of its responsibility vis-à-vis its parishioners. Following the Second World War, the United Church sought to be a voice of reason as well as the conscience of the nation. Finally, as the Cold War set in, the church's opposition to Communism was evident but not dogmatic. Its most consistent recommendation was that diplomacy be at the centre of foreign policy.

Prior to the Vietnam War, the United Church had exerted influence primarily from the ground up. While its people<sup>35</sup> ran for office and otherwise became involved in politics, the authority of the United Church was most felt on Sunday mornings and in the pages of its newspaper, the *United Church Observer*. By organically shaping the socio-political mores of congregants, the church brought its agenda to bear on society-at-large and, by extension, on the Canadian government. It is well worth noting that, despite the United Church's importance in the development of a distinct Canadian identity, there is a relative dearth of scholarship focused on the denomination.<sup>36</sup>

Harold Jantz notes that, "[a]ccording to the 1971 Census, Mennonites were the most rural of twenty religious groups, though studies showed they were already moving into the cities in large numbers."<sup>37</sup> In 1966, there were about 60,000 adult members of the

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Wartime Attitudes of George C. Pidgeon and R. Edis Fairbairn, 1939-1945," in *Historical Papers 1999: The Canadian Society of Church History* (Canadian Society of Church History, 1999): 29-50.

<sup>35</sup> Because the most common phrase used by the *United Church Observer* to describe adherents and members of the United Church is "United Church people," this is the language that will be used by this paper.

<sup>36</sup> "Judging solely from the historical studies of religion in Canada, one would never guess that the United Church has been since its founding in 1925 the largest Protestant denomination; for scholarly purposes, it has been a virtually invisible religion." See Airhart, "As Canadian," 127. Airhart has also observed that historians of American religion often focus on the Puritans rather than on the influence of Methodist and Presbyterian theology. Her scholarship has gone a long way toward bridging these academic gaps, on both sides of the border.

<sup>37</sup> Harold Jantz. "Canadian Mennonites and Widening World." In *Religion and Public Life in Canada: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, edited by Marguerite Van Die (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2001): 329.

Mennonite Church in Canada.<sup>38</sup> Given that during this period there were around sixty United Church people for every Mennonite,<sup>39</sup> many of them urbanites, a comparison between the two denominations might seem curious. However, these denominations serve as optimal foils because – despite their common opposition to the Vietnam War – their approaches to engaging culture had not only been traditionally opposed to each other, but also independently distinctive within the broader Christian landscape. While the United Church had sought to establish Canada as a Christian nation, the Mennonites had been relatively isolationist. While the United Church had been Canada's priest, Mennonites tended to view themselves as martyrs.

Throughout their history on the American continent, Mennonites had never represented more than a thin sliver of the church, and – in keeping with their Anabaptist roots – a quiet sliver at that. When taken to their logical conclusions, either the Anabaptist innovation of the believers' church or their pacifism could have led to a separation from "the world." Working in tandem under the oppressive and oftentimes violent hand of either Catholic or Protestant authorities of the sixteenth century, these two vital convictions had pulled the faith community away from the surrounding society with exponentially greater force. Early in the movement's history, Anabaptist separation (*Absonderung*) was adopted as a defence-mechanism and then elevated to a central theological principle.<sup>40</sup> As a result, descendants of the Anabaptists tended to keep to

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<sup>38</sup> "Present Brief: MCC (Canada) Delegation Meets With Prime Minister Pearson," *TCM*, 3 May 1966, 11.

<sup>39</sup> W.E. Mann, "The Canadian Church Union, 1925" in *Religion in Canadian Society*, edited by Stewart Crysdale and Les Wheatcroft, 385–97 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1976).

385. The 1971 census recorded that there were nearly 3.8 million United Church people in Canada, comprising 17.7% of the population. It is unclear whether this number included children.

<sup>40</sup> The precise chronology of this development is at the crux of an important on-going discussion in Reformation studies. It is clear that, having been constructed and persistently defined as the Other against whom Catholics and Protestants must unite, Anabaptists embraced the identity thrust upon them. Equally evident is the fact that the Anabaptist emphasis on a pure, voluntary church ruled out both state-sponsored



themselves, pursuing lives of purity and charity, and striving to become *die Stillen im Lande* – the quiet in the land.

Through immigration, Mennonites slowly spread to present-day Canada. In 1793, Upper Canada law recognized the rights of pacifists and formally granted Quakers, Tunkers (Brethren), and Mennonites exemption from military duty.<sup>41</sup> They were later granted the right to make affirmations rather than take oaths, and were included among the churches permitted to own land and appoint trustees to ensure that the property was used for church purposes.<sup>42</sup> Like other immigrant groups, Mennonites tended to keep to themselves, running their own schools, often in German.<sup>43</sup> While this was generally tolerated, it became a sore spot for some Canadians during the First World War. “Both loyalty to the German tongue and nonresistance stood in the way of militant patriotism.”<sup>44</sup> In fact, when Russian Mennonites were seeking refuge from the fallout of the Bolshevik Revolution, they found that their pacifism was no longer so reasonable to

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religion and excessive mingling with those outside the fold. So, which came first: their exclusion or their self-imposed isolation? This complicated chicken-and-egg problem is relevant to the thesis in hand because if Anabaptist separation was a function of a particular political context, rather than a matter of first principles, it would be incumbent on Mennonites to amend their philosophy as their political situation changed. (A good starting point for the reader interested in this area of Anabaptist historiography is John D. Roth’s “Recent Currents in the Historiography of the Radical Reformation,” *Church History* 71,3 (September 2002): 523–535. For more on polygenesis and its implications for the doctrines of the sword and of separation, including valuable works by James M. Stayer, J. Daniel Weaver, and Arnold Snyder, please consult the bibliography.)

<sup>41</sup> According to *The Statutes of the Province of Upper Canada [1792-1831]*, male members of peace churches were exempt from military service provided they paid out twenty shillings every year between their sixteenth and sixtieth birthdays, and a further five pounds if the local militia was ever actually required to mobilize. See John S. Moir, ed., *Church and State in Canada, 1627-1867: Basic Documents* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967) 153. For more on Quaker history in Canada, see Robynne Rogers Healey, *From Quaker to Upper Canadian: Faith and Community Among Yonge Street Friends, 1801 – 1850* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen’s, 2006). For a study of recent developments in the Canadian Brethren peace witness, see Lucille Marr, “Peace Activities of the Canadian Conference of the Brethren in Christ Church: 1945 – 1982,” *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 8,1 (April 1985): 13–36.

<sup>42</sup> Moir, *Church*, 154, 155.

<sup>43</sup> In the 1920s, as a result of the attempted imposition of public, state-run education on all residents of Manitoba and Saskatchewan “about 6,000 of these conservative Mennonites moved to Latin America.” See William Janzen, “Mennonites in Canada: Their Relations with and Effect on the Larger Society,” in *Church and Canadian Culture*, edited by Robert E. VanderVennen (Lanham, ML: University Press of America, 1991) 141.

<sup>44</sup> Mol, *Faith*, 91.

Canadians.<sup>45</sup> On 1 May 1919, Mennonites, Doukhobors, and Hutterites were barred from entering Canada because their pacifist leanings rendered them undesirable citizens.

While this ban was short-lived – it was lifted by Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King in 1922 – it clearly expressed a deep-seated distrust of those who were unwilling to take up arms in defence of their country.<sup>46</sup> In its wake, Mennonite isolationism was reinforced, with the result that church members tended to form clusters of overwhelmingly ethnically homogenous, rural, and politically inert communities.<sup>47</sup> Anticipating that their pacifism would spark distrust and friction again, Mennonites created the alternative national service program during the Second World War.<sup>48</sup> This was not simply an attempt at diverting suspicion: Mennonites were deeply concerned with the plight of the needy and firmly committed to expressing their faith in practical ways. William Janzen posits that the two out-standing themes of the Mennonite relationship to the rest of Canada are ‘separatism’ and ‘service.’<sup>49</sup> Alongside programs that offered assistance to refugees and to reconstruction efforts in Europe, the denomination launched such ventures as the Mennonite Disaster Service, Relief Sales, prison ministries, and work among the First Nations people of Canada. Its activist wing,

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<sup>45</sup> It was not only the increasing militarization of Russia that led Mennonites to flee. Joe Mihevc notes that “the self-governing, relatively successful Mennonite colonies were seen as bourgeois and were persecuted by robber bands. Over 2200 Mennonites were killed.” This experience also laid the groundwork for Mennonite resentment toward Communism. See Mihevc, “The Politicization,” 375.

<sup>46</sup> John H. Redekop posited that Mennonites were also resented for their special privileges. “Our society has great respect for those who champion rights for minorities, but only a strange form of mistrust [sic] for those who take advantage of these.” See John H. Redekop. “Political, Social, and Religious Aspects: Why Are Mennonites Disliked in Canada?” *TCM*, 27 July 1956, 2.

<sup>47</sup> There have rarely been moments in Canadian Mennonite history without notable exceptions to this rule. During the Second World War, for instance, many Mennonites chose to enlist in the Canadian Armed Forces. Over time, some Mennonites became police officers or ran for public office. Each of these examples is notable precisely because it represents an outlier. For a treatment of Mennonite soldiers in the Second World War, see Nathan Dirks, “War Without, Struggle Within: Canadian Mennonite Enlistments During the Second World War,” Master’s thesis, McMaster Divinity College, 2010.

<sup>48</sup> Seventy-five hundred Mennonites and 3000 others participated in various activities that promoted the national welfare and supported the needy. See Janzen, “Mennonites,” 141.

<sup>49</sup> Janzen, “Mennonites,” 139.

the Mennonite Central Committee (Canada), was formed in 1963 to oversee the wide-ranging charitable organizations already extant. MCC(C) joined its American counterpart in providing humanitarian relief, advocating for social justice, and practicing constructive pacifism.<sup>50</sup>

### Research Methodology

The denominational publications of the United and Mennonite Churches provide the core evidence for this thesis. The *United Church Observer* began in 1829 as Egerton Ryerson's Methodist weekly, *The Christian Guardian*. Its current title emerged in 1939 following the 1925 union of Canadian Methodist, Presbyterian, and Congregationalist denominations and publications. From its very inception, the magazine intentionally sought to bring church and culture into dialogue.

The value of *The Observer*<sup>51</sup> lies not only in its successful efforts to provide a locus of self-expression for all points of view, but also in its wide and selective readership. In 1959, the publication was the subject of a Broadman Press reader survey which revealed that "the vast majority of *Observer* subscribers receive no other religious magazine or paper... in about 90% [of homes] *The Observer* is the only one."<sup>52</sup> The editor described this as "a sobering conclusion," apparently cognisant of the responsibility implicit in being the sole source of faith-based interpretation of world events.<sup>53</sup> With a circulation in the area of 330,000 during the Vietnam era, *The Observer* boasted 974,000

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<sup>50</sup> Mennonite Central Committee was itself established in 1920 but greatly accelerated its activity after the Second World War.

<sup>51</sup> Both in its own pages and in this thesis, the *United Church Observer* is commonly referred to as *The Observer* or *UCO*.

<sup>52</sup> Untitled article, *UCO*, 1 January 1960, 5.

<sup>53</sup> Neither *UCO* nor *TCM* provides by-lines for all articles or editorials. Where authorship is not clearly indicated, this thesis assumes that the editor (or acting editor) penned the given piece.

readers from across Canada.<sup>54</sup> In 1969, the average reader had attended high school, and 47% of readers had even graduated – in striking contrast with the 31% of Canadians who had done so. While a 1959 survey determined that “Western Canada... reads *The Observer* with more interest than they do down East,” a similar report in 1969 stated that 47.6% of subscribers lived in Ontario.<sup>55</sup> It is unclear whether the 1960s saw a marked shift in the demographics of the readership, or if Westerners were “more interested” in *The Observer*, but fewer in number.

In an interview with *The Citizen*, acting *Observer* editor Patricia Clarke admitted that “[p]eople expect things from a religious journal that they don’t in the popular press. For one thing they expect to read things they agree with and they don’t like to see other points of view in their church magazine.”<sup>56</sup> This hope was likely shattered for many of Clarke’s readers on a regular basis. Throughout the 1960s and into the early 1970s, *The Observer* consistently supported both humanitarian aid for draft evaders and UCC lobbying of the Canadian government for action on the Vietnam question. Its position was notably more liberal than that of the vast majority of decision-makers within the United Church of Canada, who were themselves more liberal than many vocal members or adherents of the church. However, the views of both UCC elites and outraged readers were often given expression in the pages of *The Observer* through letters to the editor, précis of various board meetings, and numerous articles. Moreover, *The Observer* clarified its role vis-à-vis the wider United Church community on several occasions, going so far as to state that “[w]e are sometimes called, even in official documents the

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<sup>54</sup> Patricia Clarke, “Will the Average Reader Please Stand Up?” *UCO*, 1 February 1969, 8.

<sup>55</sup> Patricia Clarke, “Will the Average Reader Please Stand Up?” *UCO*, 1 February 1969, 8.

<sup>56</sup> Douglas Fisher, “Who speaks for the United Church? Just about everybody,” *UCO*, 1 June 1969, 37.

‘official church paper’. But it is not an official voice. We try to be loyal to the teachings of the United Church.”<sup>57</sup>

*The Canadian Mennonite (TCM)* was born in 1953 as the first Canadian inter-Mennonite newspaper written in English. The weekly was buried in February 1971 as a result of mounting debt, but in its eighteen years of distribution it served as an important voice and forum for discussion. While Canadians had access to other periodicals, both in English and German, *TCM* was influential in part because it cut across divisions between Mennonite conferences.<sup>58</sup> From its home base in Altona, Manitoba, *TCM* transmitted local, national, and international news, along with devotional material, controversial editorials, and a sense of interconnectedness to Mennonites from coast to coast. Its founding editor, Frank H. Epp, also established *The Mennonite Reporter* (1971) in Waterloo, Ontario, in the hopes that it might fill the void left behind by *TCM*. At its height, *TCM* enjoyed a circulation of 6000, which represented a tenth of Canadian Mennonites.<sup>59</sup>

It is important to note that many of *TCM*’s articles came out of Akron, Pennsylvania and Goshen, Indiana – both strongholds of the American Mennonite community. *TCM*’s close relationship with *The Mennonite* was not only indicative of the ties between Canadian and American Mennonites, but also paralleled the broader bond between the two nations, even as they differed on Vietnam. More generally, while United

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<sup>57</sup>“Unofficial: Who speaks officially for the United Church? The General Council,” *UCO*, 15 September 1968, 11.

<sup>58</sup> Options included *The Mennonite* (General Conference Mennonite Church, 1885–1998), *The Gospel Herald* (Mennonite Church, 1908–1998), *Der Bote* (Mennonite Church Canada, 1924–2008), *The Mennonite Observer* (Mennonite Brethren, 1955–1961), *The Mennonite Brethren Herald* (Mennonite Brethren, 1962 to present), and *The Messenger* (Evangelical Mennonite, 1963 to present).

<sup>59</sup> Larry Kehler, “An end a new beginning,” *Canadian Mennonite*, 6 October 2003, 20. Note that this article was in the new *Canadian Mennonite*, founded in 1998.

Church people were thoroughly Canadian, and overwhelmingly Anglo-Saxon, the Mennonites were emphatically supra-national and nurtured cross-border ties.<sup>60</sup>

Like *The Observer*, *The Canadian Mennonite* tended to express a more liberal position on draft evaders and anti-war protest than did the majority of its constituency. This criticism was expressed in letters to the editor and guest editorials on a fairly consistent basis. It was not uncommon, however, for an article regarding support for draft-age immigrants to inspire both ire and applause from the readership. Many letters of criticism were flanked by expressions of support. In addressing an unrelated matter, the editors revealed that more than 97% of the letters they received were published, and that amendment or exclusion of a letter took place only when it was too emotional, personal, or lengthy, or when its writer submitted letters too frequently.<sup>61</sup> *The Canadian Mennonite* saw itself as an open forum in which “the editors are the moderators... and interfere as little as possible.”<sup>62</sup> Within the context of the newspaper, the letters section had a crucial function. It was, the editors said, “the Mennonite brotherhood in continuous session, a session in which old and young, learned and unlearned, weak and strong, the informed and uninformed, the sinners and the saints, the doubters and the know-it-alls, etc. etc. etc., may be heard.”<sup>63</sup>

When the impact of the newspaper’s financial woes was announced to the readership, there was an outpouring of grief. Alongside those who mourned were some who were determined to pin the death of *TCM* on its liberal bias. One such coroner wrote:

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<sup>60</sup> The advent of a healthy internationalism among Canadian Christians is in a part a credit to the Mennonite Church. See Janzen, “Mennonites,” 143.

<sup>61</sup> “A note about letters,” *TCM*, 18 July 1967, 4.

<sup>62</sup> “A note about letters,” *TCM*, 18 July 1967, 4.

<sup>63</sup> “A note about letters,” *TCM*, 18 July 1967, 4.

Judging from the tone of letters published, the possibility appears to exist that *TCM* editors and contributors have attempted to bring about too much change too rapidly for the Mennonite reader.... When a newspaper advocates too much change too quickly [the average reader] does not buy it. And if he bought it already, he cancels it.<sup>64</sup>

The penultimate issue of *TCM* contained a similar charge from H.R. Baerg, who declared his longstanding disappointment with the broadsheet: "Supposed Anabaptists principles were stretched to such lengths as to allow any radical, reactionary, dissenter, pacifist, and socialist minority to come under its cover that many who were 'genuine' Anabaptists could not identify with them any more."<sup>65</sup> Baerg further admonished *TCM* for ignoring the "sobs and heartthrobs" of disillusioned readers.<sup>66</sup> In his reply, editor Larry Kehler repudiated this diagnosis by emphasizing that *TCM* reached "at least ten percent of the Mennonite households in Canada.... This is a sizeable proportion of the Mennonite constituency, I'm sure you'll agree, and the percentage would become even more impressive" if only the genuine market for English-language Mennonite periodicals were considered.<sup>67</sup> Right until the time of its financial collapse, *TCM* recorded and made a significant contribution to inter-Mennonite discussions on peace, the family, attrition in youth involvement, foreign missions, government, and popular culture.

Determining how these churches responded to the Vietnam War is a complex process because it is not just a matter of tracking their official policies during the period. In order to uncover the pulse of the denomination as a whole, the historian must sort out who speaks for the church. This is by no means straightforward. The divide between the pulpit and the pew is evident in the results of a 1972 survey of United Church members

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<sup>64</sup> R. Epp, Untitled letter to the editor, *TCM*, 29 January 1971, 5.

<sup>65</sup> H.R. Baerg, "Got only milk-sops," *TCM*, 12 February 1971, 4.

<sup>66</sup> H.R. Baerg, "Got only milk-sops," *TCM*, 12 February 1971, 4.

<sup>67</sup> H.R. Baerg, "Got only milk-sops," *UCO*, 12 February 1971, 4.

and adherents, for example: The poll found that the plurality of respondents – 34% – typically voted for Progressive Conservative candidates, and even more intended to do so in the next federal election. Meanwhile, 36% of the ministers surveyed planned to vote for a Liberal.<sup>68</sup> Despite this disparity, *The Observer* article which summarized the findings was titled “United Church Votes Conservative.” Similarly, in response to *The Observer’s* claim that the United Church had been calling for the recognition of Red China since 1952, a reader stated simply: “I don’t recall any plebiscite.”<sup>69</sup>

*The Observer* and *The Canadian Mennonite* struggled with the inevitability of privileging either church elites or members, and any scholar of institutional history is faced with a similar predicament. It is in part because the editors of *UCO* and *TCM* were keenly aware of this problem that their publications are such valuable sources. In both cases, their goal was to express the range of the denomination’s beliefs, while also seeking to shape them. The periodicals brought public decisions into conversation with private convictions by running précis of board meetings alongside letters to the editor. While its coverage cannot be comprehensive, the denominational newspaper is indicative of the pulse of the church it represents.

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<sup>68</sup> “The United Church Votes Conservative,” *UCO*, July 1972, 20. This disparity was also documented in Stewart Crysdale, *The Changing Church in Canada: Beliefs and Social Attitudes of United Church People*, (Toronto: United Church, 1965). In the chapter on “Religion and the Role of the State,” the 1965 survey revealed that while a large number of respondents in all demographics were supportive of social welfare programs, “United Church people were divided over the question of increased public responsibility, first, by their positions in the church. Ministers and national officers had higher expectations of government than laymen had. Ministers in pastoral charges consistently favoured activity by government in social welfare and economic planning to a greater extent than laymen. General Council and field officers were more favourable toward public responsibility than ministers in charge of congregations.” See Crysdale, *The Changing Church*, 53.

<sup>69</sup> J.S. Vanderploeg, “Trudeau interview,” *UCO*, November 1971, 2.



Historiographer John Tosh posits that “the most important published primary source for the historian is the press,”<sup>70</sup> but goes to great lengths to describe the many problems inherent in unearthing historically valid evidence from the raw material of newspapers.<sup>71</sup> As with all genres of primary source, the newspaper can only be helpful to the historian who is well aware of its idiosyncratic limitations and knows what questions it is able to answer. Two important methodological concerns with respect to the use of newspapers are temporal distinctiveness and the bias implicit in editorial machinations.

Tosh’s contention is that newspapers are valuable to the historian because they offer a distillation of the most prevalent opinions in a given culture, as well as chronicling the events contemporary with publication.<sup>72</sup> The press offers a uniquely immediate and communal source of information: without the benefit of any real hindsight, events are represented for public consumption.<sup>73</sup> Newspapers do not address themselves to posterity or to private citizens, but to the society contemporary with their publication. The historian who relies on such works must make herself constantly aware of the inherently occasional nature of her source: it is specific to a particular moment in a particular community.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History*, Rev. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Longman, 2002): 63.

<sup>71</sup> These problems have traditionally led to a suspicion about the use of this source, if not its outright exclusion from the menu, as Jerry W. Knudson discusses in his “Late to the Feast: Newspapers as Historical Sources,” *Perspectives* (October 1993). No pages. Accessed 15 March 2009. Online: <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/1993/9310/9310ARC.cfm>.

<sup>72</sup> Tosh, *The Pursuit*, 63.

<sup>73</sup> Given the strict deadlines involved even in the production of weekly newspapers, however, a certain degree of knee-jerk reporting can be assumed. Moreover, at its most basic level, the absence of profound self-reflection is simply intrinsic to primary documents.

<sup>74</sup> Knudson somewhat oversimplifies when he suggests that, “[u]nder the pressures of time, limited access to information, and available space, a truncated view of society may be presented by the periodical press.” In fact, the press cannot be expected to depict its native culture comprehensively in large part because it has no such aspiration. It assumes that its reader is a citizen of the same civilization, well-versed in its conventions. In order to organically understand a newspaper, one must be immersed in its world. In short,

Moreover, there are at least two levels of editorial control exerted on newspapers: First, as Tosh notes, public information is to be approached with care precisely because it has intentionally been made public. The minutes of a meeting of the United Church Board of Evangelism and Social Service are by no means a comprehensive description of what occurred at that table. Newspapers can only ever give readers access to that which is explicitly “on the record.” Tosh writes that “the very fact of publication sets a limit on the value of [newspapers, parliamentary minutes, and other public sources]. They contain only what was considered to be fit for public consumption... In each case there is a controlling purpose which may limit, distort or falsify what is said.”<sup>75</sup> Secondly, editors must deliberately choose which subjects the newspaper will explore and how much will be invested in the coverage of each event of topic.

Searching back-issues of a newspaper casts light on the intellectual and moral assumptions of the world which birthed it. If historians are seeking raw, undefiled data, they will be disappointed. If they are prepared to engage in some analysis, however, they may stumble across new insights. Bias and even outright agenda are not evils, for – in Tosh’s words – “[o]nce bias has been detected... the offending document need not be consigned to the scrap-heap. The bias itself is likely to be historically significant.”<sup>76</sup> In fact, this study is entirely focused on that bias. It is concerned with the shape and trajectory of that “controlling purpose” and assumes that, beyond recording facts and reflecting a society’s priorities, newspapers can and do shape the surrounding culture. Jerry W. Knudson offers that

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one must be a member of its intended audience. The historian, by contrast, is often trying to reconstruct that audience and that world. See Knudson, “Late,” paragraph 6.

<sup>75</sup> Tosh, *The Pursuit*, 65.

<sup>76</sup> Tosh, *The Pursuit*, 94.

history is concerned – or should be concerned – not only with what actually happened in any given time or place, but also with what people *thought* was happening, as revealed to them through the means of mass communication, which may have conditioned their subsequent actions... it does not matter if the news is false or distorted as long as readers believed it and acted on their belief.<sup>77</sup>

Knudson's own studies led him to assert that newspapers can "play a more direct role by intervening directly in the historical process, whether in broad sweeps or isolated incidents, sometimes leaving historians who neglect them stranded."<sup>78</sup> This thesis approaches *UCO* and *TCM* mindful that the sources were occasional, biased, and influential.

Neither *The Canadian Mennonite* nor *The Observer* was a newspaper in the usual sense. Whether they published weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly, neither periodical could aspire to being a source of timely news for its readers.<sup>79</sup> Their interviews, profiles, and coverage of events appeared in the publication because they were deemed to be relevant to the target community. Often, articles appeared as responses to news that had already received ample coverage in mainstream secular media. For instance, the Tet offensive was never explicitly reported in either publication; however, the impact of the devastating losses in February 1968 is indicated by the treatment the Vietnam War received in the

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<sup>77</sup> Knudson, "Late," paragraph 4. Original emphasis. Knudson also alludes to recent studies that revealed the impotence of editorial content as far as outright persuasion: "they may reinforce existing beliefs but rarely change attitudes." See Knudson, "Late," paragraph 5. By contrast, Knudson's own research into Bolivian media demonstrated that news stories had had a tremendous impact on the public, even fanning the flames of revolution. Contrarily, when Jeffrey J. Mondak studied the impact of the 1992 Pittsburgh press strike on the Presidential, Senate, and House elections of that same year, he found that "[t]he absence of local newspapers had no effect on any objective indicator of political awareness.... The importance of local newspapers is not some mystical capacity to convey a deep understanding of factual information. Instead, the local newspaper is important because it often is the only medium to provide adequate coverage of local politics." See Jeffrey J. Mondak, "Newspapers and Political Awareness," *American Journal of Political Science* 39,2 (May 1995); 525. As has already been mentioned, readers of *UCO* and *TCM* relied heavily on those sources for faith-based interpretations of news.

<sup>78</sup> Knudson, "Late," paragraph 23.

<sup>79</sup> *TCM* was a weekly paper until its demise and *UCO* was typically biweekly, except in the summers, until mid-1970.

March and April issues. These publications did not have the immediacy of a daily broadsheet, but neither did they have the benefit of much hindsight. It is fair to say, however, that a moderate amount of reflection and retrospection are built into their printing schedules.

As a result, the very act of determining that a piece of news had implications for its readership was a reasoned judgement call, although the criteria for the determination were rarely overtly described. In the analysis below, it will be necessary to offer some possible explanations for the inclusion of certain pieces. The underlying assumption here is that both *The Observer* and *The Canadian Mennonite* intentionally sought to draw the attention of their readership to what the editors believed were the critical social, political, and moral issues of their time. The contents of the publications therefore reveal not what was objectively significant news from the Vietnam War era, but what the editorial boards deemed to be worthy of the attention of their constituencies.

The problems ostensibly caused by the intrusion of the editor are in fact the very reasons why this study relies so heavily on denominational periodicals. Newspapers reflect and shape the self-understanding of the readership and this bias is precisely what the research seeks to uncover.<sup>80</sup> The question is not “Is this objective?” but “In what way is this subjective?” Just as importantly, this thesis deals with an *immediate* bias: while probably cognisant of the likelihood that their publications would be collected for posterity, the primary goal of the editors was to effect change in the present.

In theory, the process of uncovering editorial biases is much simplified in the case of *UCO* and *TCM*, since they are explicitly aligned with a denomination or faith group. While “[t]he most obvious reason for having a denominational press [is] religious in

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<sup>80</sup> Tosh, *The Pursuit*, 94.

nature,”<sup>81</sup> this does not cement a particular newspaper’s theological and political views, much less its *raison d’être*, as necessarily intuitive. Self-identification nonetheless serves as a helpful starting point.<sup>82</sup> As was mentioned above, this thesis runs the risk of privileging the elite by reinforcing the disconnect between the paper, the pulpit, and the pew. Such a misstep would seriously undermine the extrapolation of these findings. Fortunately, this concern has traditionally been shared by the editors of denominational publications, as well as their financial backers.

From their earliest days “[d]enominational periodicals, because of their intrinsically restricted market appeal, required high levels of institutional support in order to flourish.”<sup>83</sup> Church publications remain representative of their parent denomination in

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<sup>81</sup> Gordon L. Heath, “‘Forming Sound Public Opinion:’ The Late Victorian Canadian Protestant Press and Nation-Building,” *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society* 48 (2006): 123.

<sup>82</sup> Also useful is an appreciation of the history of denomination publications on this continent. When American religious publications took a sharp sectarian turn, for instance, they did so in parallel with the growth of American denominations and denominationalism. “As denominational identities solidified during the first half of the nineteenth century, the periodical press reflected and promoted this development.” See Candy Gunther Brown, *Word in the World: Evangelical Writing, Publishing, and Reading in America, 1789-1880* (Chapel Hill/London: University of North Carolina, 2004): 144. Once again, the function of the newspaper was two-fold: it described and prescribed. Baptist publications, for instance, were intended to “remind church members of ‘why they are Baptists’ and... to persuade outsiders to join a Baptist church rather than another denomination.” See Brown, *Word*, 145. Referring to pre-Civil War America, Ralph A. Keller contends that “[n]owhere in the church apparatus was there a more obvious place for secular concerns to receive religious scrutiny” than in denominational weeklies. See Ralph A. Keller, “Methodist Newspapers and the Fugitive Slave Law: A New Perspective for Slavery Crisis in the North,” *Church History* 43,4 (September 1974): 319. Gordon L. Heath’s article on the place of religious publications in late-Victorian Canada underscores their early and active roles in shaping the nation. “Many of the denominational publications served as actual newspapers, and sought to provide a thoughtful analysis of national and international events. Unlike most of today’s denominational publications that focus almost exclusively on denominational or ‘religious’ news, these papers had large sections comprised of national and international news.” See Heath, “Forming,” 116–17. Religious newspapers that aimed for the same depth and breadth of coverage as the secular press often succeeded, and the “coverage in many of these publications was so extensive that it would have been possible to have a fairly comprehensive knowledge of world events by simply reading one’s denominational paper.” See Heath, “Forming,” 119. Of course, events were reported on only to the degree that the editors of religious newspapers considered them to be relevant to their readership. This suggests that, at least in the late-Victorian era, some Canadian Protestants interpreted international news as connected to their faith – a perspective reinforced and nurtured by ambitious religious periodicals. Heath is quick to note the diversity of goals expressed by various elements of the Protestant press, however. Not all publications consistently commented on world events, and some did so only with respect to the mission field. See Heath, “Forming,” 119.

<sup>83</sup> Brown, *Word*, 159.

large part because there is little incentive to stray. When denominational newspapers offer reflections and even critiques, they do so as a form of self-expression that works in tandem with other efforts at denomination-building, including sermons.<sup>84</sup> Gordon L. Heath has observed that, in fact, aligned publications seemed more comfortable extracting the log from their own eyes than drawing attention to the specks in the eyes of other denominations.<sup>85</sup>

These facts might suggest that such newspapers sought to please elites while neglecting church members. However, *UCO* and *TCM* both relied on annually-renewed subscriptions – alienating the church faithful would be quite reckless.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, this concern is somewhat tempered by the shared congregational emphasis of the United and Mennonite denominations. Because both churches made deliberate strides toward minimizing the distance between clergy and laity, it can reasonably be expected that denominational publications, while possibly less diverse than the perspectives on the ground, nonetheless accurately represent the views of the denomination.

Beyond denominational self-correction and self-promotion, an important function of religious media has been to interpret current events through the prism of faith. Without forming an absolute monolith, the press had long been a tool of the English Protestant church in the nation-building enterprise. The defining characteristics of the Canada-in-progress were unity, democracy, and Christianity; conversely, a key aspect of English Protestantism was nationalism.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, Heath cites William H. Magney's caution that "historians of national sentiment in Canada who ignore the writings of Church journals,

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<sup>84</sup> Brown, *Word*, 145.

<sup>85</sup> Heath, "Forming," 122.

<sup>86</sup> Careful and well-intentioned alienation of church members did take place on occasion, as numerous letters to the editor will reveal.

<sup>87</sup> Heath, "Forming," 125.

and the declarations of the institutional churches, do so at their own peril, for they overlook one of the most fertile sources of nationalistic writings in existence.”<sup>88</sup>

Despite advances in technology and in church-state relations in the North American context, the two hundred years since religious periodicals began publishing on this continent have done little to alter this reality: denominational newspapers offer insiders a mirror, as well as an open window into the world. In his 1998 American study, Stewart M. Hoover revealed that “[t]hose who consider themselves born again are less likely [than other demographical groups] to read newspapers every day, but they are more likely to regularly read *religious* newspapers (including local, regional, and sectarian papers).”<sup>89</sup> As such, it behoves historians of Christianity to examine denominational and other religious publications as an important source of meaningful insights into the self-invention and worldview of North American Christians. Heath posits that denominational publications endeavoured to cover much more than denominational news, thus offering “a unique window into the lives of Canadians.”<sup>90</sup> Indeed they both expressed and nurtured their respective constituencies’ beliefs on a wide range of issues, not least the role of the church.

### Thesis Outline

The body of this thesis is divided into three chapters, each of which considers a specific crisis that Canadian churches had to address during the Vietnam War. The chapters describe and offer analysis of the evidence gleaned first from the *United Church Observer* and then from *The Canadian Mennonite*, more or less chronologically.

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<sup>88</sup> Heath, “Forming,” 125 n. 51.

<sup>89</sup> Stewart M. Hoover, *Religion in the News: Faith and Journalism in American Public Discourse* (Thousand Oaks/London/New Delhi: Sage, 1998): 115. Original emphasis.

<sup>90</sup> Gordon L. Heath, “Passion for Empire: War Poetry Published in the Canadian English Protestant Press During the South African War, 1988-1902,” *Literature & Theology* 16,2 (June 2002): 130.

The first chapter focuses on how the Vietnam War itself was depicted in *UCO* and *TCM*. It considers the details of the newspapers' opposition to the war: the reasons given, distinctions made between *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*,<sup>91</sup> reader responses to the editorial position, and the central themes of the debate. The chapter further examines how the editorial position seems to have informed coverage of the Vietnam War. Finally, this section describes what each newspaper considered to be appropriate means of expressing dissent. Specifically, it addresses internal disputes surrounding formal lobbying, public protest, and tacit complicity. This first chapter demonstrates that even those who agreed that the Vietnam War was unjust were divided regarding the implications of their opposition, and that differing approaches to church-state relations were an important basis for that demarcation.

The second chapter turns to a matter far more immediate for Canadians: the deluge of incoming American war resisters. Both the editorial position and the wide range of reader reactions to the influx of immigrants are described, and the underlying ideologies are dissected. This issue is germane to the larger discussion precisely because it is both local and concrete. This chapter offers an analysis of the multi-pronged arguments made by those who advocated for providing assistance as well as the motivations such advocates projected onto their opponents. It further examines how war resisters were depicted by each newspaper, and proposes that a consistent agenda was being advanced through the selective coverage. While it is central to the Christian mandate that believers extend compassion to their neighbours, the newspapers'

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<sup>91</sup> Just war theory distinguishes between the criteria necessary for declaring war (*jus ad bellum*) and the standards for a waging a war justly (*jus in bello*). Because a war fought with good reason can nonetheless be prosecuted unjustly, the just war tradition emphasizes that both the ends and the means must be morally sound in order for the entire enterprise to be just.



recommendations were vehemently and persistently rejected by a vocal contingent. The second chapter argues that this failure to thoroughly convince readers is indicative of a more fundamental clash between those who embraced political activism and those who preferred isolationism.

In the final chapter, the relationship between Canadian Christians and the utter devastation of Vietnam is explored. This matter deserves some treatment here because it raises questions about the implications of offering faith-based medical and humanitarian support in times of war. In particular, there was much debate within the denominations about the propriety of appearing to be aligned with either Saigon or Hanoi. Both newspapers demonstrated that editors and readers were acutely aware of the political nature of relief work. This third chapter argues that such considerations confirm that the denominations were grappling with their roles as political actors.

After having provided analysis of the periodicals' treatment of these key issues concurrently with the description of that coverage, this thesis culminates in a synthesis of the themes and trends observed, as well as a distillation of the contrasting concerns of the two publications. The conclusion will reiterate the most salient evidence that the *United Church Observer* and *The Canadian Mennonite*, as representatives of their denominations, interpreted the complex moral quandaries introduced by the Vietnam War through the lens of church-state relations. Finally, the conclusion will restate the stakes – academic and otherwise – of this work.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE VIETNAM WAR

#### “Viet Nam Gone Too Far”: The United Church and the War

The *United Church Observer*'s position on the Vietnam War is best summarized in the title of a 1965 editorial written by E.L. Homewood: “Viet Nam gone too far.”<sup>1</sup> Homewood concluded that American policy in Indochina was flawed because “[e]ven Asian nations who hate one another are becoming united in their hostility to the U.S. over Viet Nam.”<sup>2</sup> When he applauded Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson for recommending a cease-fire, Homewood was echoing statements ratified by the United Church's Board of Evangelism and Social Service and reported in *The Observer* two months previous.<sup>3</sup> The editor revealed his view of Canada's role on the world stage, however, when he explained just why Pearson's suggestion was both essential and courageous: “Viet Nam is getting out of hand,” Homewood warned, “and America's best friends hesitate to say so.”<sup>4</sup> In his concise editorial were contained several significant presuppositions: that Canada was and ought to have been an ally of the United States, that the formation of strong ties with other nations should trump American objectives in Vietnam, and that *The Observer*'s objections to the Vietnam War were based on what that conflict had become. In short, there was at least the theoretical possibility that the war could have been waged to the satisfaction of *The Observer*. Homewood's editorial was essentially a compassionate *realpolitik* critique of American failure to achieve *jus in bello*.

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<sup>1</sup> E.L. Homewood, “Viet Nam gone too far,” *UCO*, 15 May 1965, 10.

<sup>2</sup> E.L. Homewood, “Viet Nam gone too far,” *UCO*, 15 May 1965, 10.

<sup>3</sup> Reported in “Against death penalty,” *UCO*, 15 March 1965, 34.

<sup>4</sup> E.L. Homewood, “Viet Nam gone too far,” *UCO*, 15 May 1965, 10.

### *Two Other Paradigms*

In the 1960s, the editorial position was shared by the authors of dozens of letters and articles, most of whom did not oppose the Vietnam War *qua* war but strongly objected to the means of its execution – not least the looming threat of nuclear warfare. It was not the only perspective given voice in *The Observer*, however: its resident international relations columnist, Willson Woodside, represented the right flank of the United Church. In June 1965, Woodside described the American intervention in Indochina as a form of repentance for its historical isolationism, for “if the U.S. had not gone into South Viet Nam... who is to say that all of South-East Asia, down to Indonesia, would not be under Chinese domination today?”<sup>5</sup>

What separated Woodside from Homewood was that it was not only the incursion itself that the former supported; he also defended the way the war was being waged. When the Americans clarified that nuclear weapons, while out of the question for the moment, were not off the table in the long run, they were “applying what they believe to be the lessons of World War II.”<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, Woodside contended that Prime Minister Pearson had misunderstood the strategic function of the bombing of North Vietnam. The raids were never intended to “bomb the North into submission but merely to create a bargaining position” so that the North had something to gain by negotiating.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, massive losses to the Viet Cong immediately preceded the planned campaign. This sequence of events gave the world the false impression that the bombings

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<sup>5</sup> Willson Woodside, “The United States and Viet Nam: Should the Yanks go home?” *UCO*, 1 June 1965, 22.

<sup>6</sup> Willson Woodside, “The United States and Viet Nam: Should the Yanks go home?” *UCO*, 1 June 1965, 23.

<sup>7</sup> Willson Woodside, “The United States and Viet Nam: Should the Yanks go home?” *UCO*, 1 June 1965, 23.

were retaliatory, and undermined the American intention of creating a bargaining chip. Finally, spurred by his unbridled confidence in Robert McNamara – “probably the finest Secretary of Defence the United States has had”<sup>8</sup> – Woodside contended that the mission had a real hope of succeeding. Indeed, he reiterated, its success was of utmost importance: the alternative to winning the current battle was facing “a much more dangerous enemy, with nuclear delivery capability, later on.”<sup>9</sup> Having twice raised the spectre of a Red China bent on hegemony, Woodside’s summary of the American case for a protracted engagement in Vietnam was complete.

Like many *Observer* pieces, Woodside’s articles straddled the line between reporting and opinion. His language revealed a realist approach to politics; while Woodside often portrayed his analysis as a précis of the American perspective, his willingness to make distinctions between “bombing into submission” and “bombing into a bargaining position,” for example, was telling. It was evident that he was sympathetic to the American agenda, and whenever he expressed doubts about the incursion into Indochina, Woodside framed his objections in terms of that agenda. In the 1 November 1966 issue, for instance, Woodside posited that American interference in North Viet Nam forced the Soviets to dither on nuclear disarmament. Any detente “with the leader of the ‘imperialists’, while the latter is assaulting a fellow-Communist nation”<sup>10</sup> would jeopardize the USSR’s position in the Communist world. The war had also diverted attention from the European theatre.

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<sup>8</sup> Willson Woodside, “The United States and Viet Nam: Should the Yanks go home?” *UCO*, 1 June 1965, 22.

<sup>9</sup> Willson Woodside, “The United States and Viet Nam: Should the Yanks go home?” *UCO*, 1 June 1965, 28.

<sup>10</sup> Willson Woodside. “The hidden burdens of the Viet Nam war.” *UCO* 1 November 1966, 36.

At the same time, Woodside emphasized the warning spoken by Chairman Mao's right-hand man, Lin Biao: "the world is watching the success of the guerrilla effort in Viet Nam" in the hopes that the same tactics might be used elsewhere to combat anti-Communist forces.<sup>11</sup> Such pressures made "the Americans who are conducting the Viet Nam war feel that defeat of the Communist 'trial run' in that country is an extremely important objective."<sup>12</sup> Woodside conceded that the collateral damage involved in such savage warfare was cause for serious concern, but did not question the legitimacy of the objective itself. Shortly after the Tet offensive (February 1968), Woodside remarked that "the hope which arises out of the recent, ferociously intensified fighting in Viet Nam is that both sides will be hurt sufficiently to make them want to negotiate."<sup>13</sup> This was a variation of the mutually-assured destruction theme that defined the Cold War era.

To the left of E.L. Homewood stood the Secretary of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service (E&SS). During the crucial early years of the Vietnam War and until his death on 1 March 1968, Rev. J. Raymond Hord filled this post. Throughout his tenure, he was a passionate advocate for peace and humanitarian work. Ray Hord's steadfastness helped shape the United Church position on lobbying the Canadian government to denounce the war, ensured that the denomination offered some aid to draft evaders, and opened the door for providing relief even to North Vietnam. Although he himself never wrote for *The Observer*, his leadership of E&SS was legendary and formed the basis of many articles. Against the advice of politicians and fellow Christians, Hord spoke at anti-war protests.<sup>14</sup> He called for an end to Canadian defence contracts with the country's

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<sup>11</sup> Willson Woodside. "The hidden burdens of the Viet Nam war," *UCO* 1 November 1966, 37.

<sup>12</sup> Willson Woodside. "The hidden burdens of the Viet Nam war," *UCO* 1 November 1966, 37.

<sup>13</sup> Willson Woodside. "The thin line of hope in Viet Nam," *UCO*, 1 April 1968, 36.

<sup>14</sup> "Protesting a Protester," *UCO*, 1 May 1966, 5.

closest trade partner, arguing that benefitting economically was not only tantamount to complicity and but also undermined Canada's role as a peacemaker on the world stage.<sup>15</sup>

A *UCO* profile of Hord portrayed him as an agitator and an activist who often expressed his views on social issues and foreign policy matters in shocking terms. Perhaps the most famous of Hord's pronouncements was his description of Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson as "a puppy dog on LBJ's leash."<sup>16</sup> This epithet was reported in American periodical *The Christian Century*, which also pointed out that when the United Church asked Hord to apologize for this statement, he clarified that he was referring to Pearson's relationship with Washington only "so far as American policy in Vietnam is concerned."<sup>17</sup> Just as provocative was Hord's repeated characterization of the war as "the American rape of Vietnam."<sup>18</sup> While motivated by the urgency and gravity of the events of the Vietnam War, the scathing tone of Hord's critique was not always welcome within the United Church. One *UCO* editorial on the draft dodger crisis called Hord a prophet and noted that, "[l]ike many prophets, Ray Hord tends to exaggerate, over-simplify, and express opinions which offend the majority. He has a sense of the dramatic... it was rude of a churchman to sound like a politician."<sup>19</sup>

Even as *UCO* began to reconsider its position on Vietnam and describe Hord as a prophet, it was clear that his methods were not palatable to the majority of United Church people. By reinforcing that enduring dichotomy between the churchman and the politician, *UCO* implied that the modern prophet should not be too committed to the

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<sup>15</sup> Douglas Fisher, "Why we won't stop exporting death to Viet Nam," *UCO*, 15 December 1966, 28. See also "Not neutral in Vietnam," *UCO*, 1 April 1967, 34.

<sup>16</sup> Kenneth Bagnell, "The view from the firing line," *UCO*, 1 September 1967, 14.

<sup>17</sup> Maxwell, "Religion." Citing an article in *Christian Century*.

<sup>18</sup> Douglas Fisher, "Why we won't stop exporting death to Viet Nam," *UCO*, 15 December 1966, 28. See also Kenneth Bagnell, "The view from the firing line," *UCO*, 1 September 1967, 14.

<sup>19</sup> "D-Dodgers: If the Church is to have prophets it should be prepared for unpopular prophesying," *UCO*, 1 November 1967, 11.

traditional *modus operandi* of his guild.<sup>20</sup> Hord's so-called rudeness was unpardonable, despite the suffering and injustice he sought to combat. While the United Church had once been divided over whether the ends justified the means in Vietnam, it was largely incapable of embracing Hord's righteous agenda because of his abrasive style.<sup>21</sup>

Following Hord's death, a special Sunday service was held at which "Quakers, hippies, inner-city workers and opponents of the Viet Nam war" came together to honour the activist.<sup>22</sup> As a tribute to him and to his cause, short speeches about peace were made every thirty minutes between 2pm and midnight, and an offering was taken up on behalf of the victims of the Vietnam War.<sup>23</sup>

### *Evolving Positions*

Osmer's aforementioned study found that religious coverage of the Korean War had been goal-oriented: columnists and reporters discussed the aims of U.S. containment policy and often considered the degree to which its implementation was consistent with those aims. At the outset of the Vietnam conflict, *The Observer* fell soundly in step with this pattern. As the war progressed, however, its position was by no means static. Even Willson Woodside came around to opposing the expansion and continuation of American involvement in Vietnam. The plan had failed, and a rabid obsession with Communism threatened to undermine not only American credibility but also American security. By the

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<sup>20</sup> It is arguable that by asking Hord to be more diplomatic *UCO* and other United Church people were in fact asking him to be *less* a churchman and *more* a politician.

<sup>21</sup> It is important to realize that while Hord's brashness and vehemence were unique, he was not the only Secretary of E&SS to take on the role of an advocate and protestor. When Clarke MacDonald was appointed to that position in 1971, Patricia Clarke observed that he had "some big shoes to fill in this job. The Very Rev. Jim Mutchmor made so many headlines in his 25 years that former Ontario Premier Leslie Frost, meeting him once at an airport, asked, 'Where are you going to raise hell this time?' After Mutchmor came the late Ray Hord, whose statements, including calling then Prime Minister Pearson a 'puppy dog,' had church finance officials choking on their breakfast when they opened the morning paper." See Patricia Clarke, "Clarke MacDonald – an ear for evangelism at the top," *UCO*, February 1971, 14.

<sup>22</sup> "Honor Hord," *UCO*, 1 April 1968, 33.

<sup>23</sup> "Honor Hord," *UCO*, 1 April 1968, 34.

same token, many centrist United Church people came to deeply regret their tacit approbation of the war. Indeed, the memory of Hord's advocacy would come to haunt certain corners of the United Church. This is perhaps best exemplified in A.C. Forrest's editorial of June 1971.

Forrest cited "Call to Penitence and Action," a jointly-written editorial published over Easter in *The Christian Century*, *Christianity and Crisis*, *Commonweal*, and *National Catholic Reporter*.<sup>24</sup> That piece had accused American leaders of "a total lack of proportion between ends sought and means used in Viet Nam, and of deliberately closing their eyes to the most incalculable human suffering which has resulted."<sup>25</sup> It further warned that the "real isolation we must fear is America's throwing its weight around the world, seeking to shape the world's destiny without its invitation or consent."<sup>26</sup> The editors' concerns about American foreign policy were not limited to its effects on the Vietnamese people or on the national reputation on the world stage. They charged that their government was also systematically undermining the American poor and working classes in order to wage their war. In fact, this zealous critique went so far as to call it outright theft.

Portions of this damning proclamation were reprinted in *The Observer* following a *mea culpa* from Forrest. He reminded readers that when Ray Hord had made his protests against the Vietnam War, the latter had been "bitterly attacked within and without the United Church, and some of us may now regret – at least the editor of *The Observer* regrets – that we did not give more support to Ray Hord. Much of what he said

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<sup>24</sup> "American church editors summon Christians to penitence and action," *UCO*, June 1971, 12.

<sup>25</sup> "American church editors summon Christians to penitence and action," *UCO*, June 1971, 13.

<sup>26</sup> "American church editors summon Christians to penitence and action," *UCO*, June 1971, 13.



then, we now know, was prophetic.”<sup>27</sup> Of course, that was not the first time *UCO* had bestowed that epithet on Hord. While sympathetic, the article about his politicization of the E&SS budget used the term ‘prophet’ almost as a catchall for Hord’s forceful and sometimes offensive methods. Four years later, *UCO* employed the term in order to emphasize his foresight, his compassion, and the righteousness of his cause. Not only had the focus shifted from the medium to the message, but there was a budding realization that, by virtue of the content of that message and the church’s diminishing capacity to shape the national discourse, it was time to seriously consider political postures that would have seemed outrageous ten years before. By thus reframing prophecy, *UCO* paved the way for the United Church to embrace its role as a prophetic voice within Canadian society.

### *Inbox*

Throughout the Vietnam War, *The Observer* kept its readers abreast of the positions taken by other denominations, whether in Canada, the United States, or elsewhere. In return, the readership felt free to express itself. Letters to the editor between 1965 and 1975 reveal that each of the paradigms described above had its critics. Some felt that Hord went too far in demanding that all Christians enter the political arena. In fact, after the E&SS set up its fund “to initiate welfare work among” draft evaders, there was an “outcry; some United Church people immediately announced they would no longer contribute to the Missionary and Maintenance Fund.”<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, others diagnosed Woodside as being too much influenced by American arrogance. They

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<sup>27</sup> “American church editors summon Christians to penitence and action,” *UCO*, June 1971, 12.

<sup>28</sup> “American church editors summon Christians to penitence and action,” *UCO*, June 1971, 12.

demurred at his “whitewashing” of the foreign policy at work in Vietnam.<sup>29</sup> Even Homewood’s relative neutrality came under fire. In the 15 December 1965 issue, an editorial was published defending the right of the uninformed to stay silent. Readers did not all agree. Objecting that Vietnam was “a pressing moral issue of our time,”<sup>30</sup> one reader called for ministers to speak out on matters more complex than “motherhood and the ‘simple truth’ of the gospel.”<sup>31</sup> Another reader opined that it was not merely the case that the church should take a position on controversial matters; just as importantly, whatever its positions were, they should be consistent with one another. Two readers called attention to the apparently disproportionate attention *The Observer* gave to the abolition of capital punishment. One of them expressed disappointment with the fact that “[o]pposition to capital punishment seems to have become an official policy of the United Church, but opposition to genocide is still left to the conscience of individuals.”<sup>32</sup>

Readers demanded not only parity between domestic and foreign policy, but also a consistent approach within each domain. It was troubling, for instance, that the United Church opposed American involvement in Vietnam while “advocating that England use force in Rhodesia.”<sup>33</sup> This illuminated a real problem at *The Observer*, if not within the United Church of Canada more generally: there was no clear philosophical and moral basis on which to build political and social policy. The UCC acknowledged that biblical principles should be brought to bear on real-world dilemmas, yet it ran the risk of appearing capricious. In the case of the Vietnam War, its position was all too easily dismissed as pure anti-Americanism or outright Communism, as one reader suggested in

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<sup>29</sup> Rev. Charles Catto, “Kiss goodbye to hope,” *UCO*, August 1965, 2.

<sup>30</sup> Karl D. Jaffary, “Not neutral,” *UCO*, 15 January 1966, 6.

<sup>31</sup> Karl D. Jaffary, “Not neutral,” *UCO*, 15 January 1966, 3.

<sup>32</sup> Freda Bunner, “View on capital punishment,” *UCO*, 1 October 1967, 8.

<sup>33</sup> G. Perley Stewart, “Inconsistent?” *UCO*, 1 November 1966, 4.

his September 1969 letter. Despite its condemnation of the Vietnam War, *The Observer* “urges the Canadian government and people to send troops, aid and food into Biafra to end the civil war in that country. But this is lauded as ‘an act of mercy’ and not ‘interference’.”<sup>34</sup> That inconsistency led this reader to demand that *The Observer* cease its dissemination of “pinko-politics” and “anti-Americanism.”<sup>35</sup>

Of course, there were also readers who simply disagreed with the stance of *UCO*, irrespective of other positions the latter had taken on foreign or domestic affairs. Most of these letter-writers simply supported the Vietnam War because they were on board with the American anti-Communist agenda. One letter in particular stands out not because it is a cogent distillation of the position mentioned above, but because its writer acted as the polar opposite to the Ray Hords of the United Church. As late as August 1972, a United Church minister publicly lodged his complaint against Rev. A.B.B. Moore and Archbishop E.W. Scott, who had put out a statement on Vietnam. What made Rev. Ross such an anomaly within the United Church was this: he objected to the fact that the statement took nuclear engagement completely off the table.<sup>36</sup> Few United Church people would have stood in solidarity with Ross, but there were also few who fully embraced Hord’s agenda and methods. *The Observer* not only brought these two extremes into dialogue, but also allowed the multitude of voices in-between to be heard.

### *The Survey*

In *The Observer* of 1 February 1968, there appeared an eleven-question survey titled “The Christian and Viet Nam: a reader-opinion poll.”<sup>37</sup> Identical questions were

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<sup>34</sup> W. Desmond Feres, “Trite, Boring... And Left Wing,” *UCO*, 1 September 1969, 2.

<sup>35</sup> W. Desmond Feres, “Trite, Boring... And Left Wing,” *UCO*, 1 September 1969, 2.

<sup>36</sup> Gordon Ross, “Statement on Viet Nam deficient,” *UCO*, August 1972, 2.

<sup>37</sup> “The Christian and Viet Nam: a reader-opinion poll,” *UCO*, 1 February 1968, 4.

published in eight American church magazines, and *UCO* was the only Canadian participant. Readers were invited to identify themselves as either laity or clergy and to indicate whether they were younger or older than thirty-five years of age. After answering any or all of the eleven questions, readers could add any comments they might have and mail in their response sheets. The subjects of the survey included President Johnson's job performance, the likelihood of nuclear war, the importance of an American victory in Vietnam, and the plight of conscientious objectors.<sup>38</sup>

Early reactions to the questionnaire itself were telling. Patricia Clarke reported that some respondents were "awfully belligerent" and seemed "suspicious of the motives for the poll. You thought 'Communists' made up the questions. You were afraid 'peaceniks' would stuff the ballot box. You were sure the 'left-wing editor' wouldn't count the ballots fairly."<sup>39</sup> By contrast, after the results were published, two letters to the editor expressed thanks to *The Observer* for helping them to better understand the landscape within the United Church.<sup>40</sup>

That landscape was varied. The sample – 2440 people – represented less than one percent of *UCO* subscribers. While this "does not necessarily indicate the opinions of the entire church membership," *The Observer* admitted, "[i]t probably does indicate how many people feel strongly on each side."<sup>41</sup> Support for the war fell into three broad categories: some felt that it was important for the United States to combat Communism, which was itself opposed to the spread of gospel, while others held that America's foreign policy was "nobody's business but her own" and questioned the right of the

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<sup>38</sup> The four questions related to alternate service and military resistance will be dealt with in the next chapter.

<sup>39</sup> Patricia Clarke, "What We Found Out About You," *UCO*, 1 March 1968, 8.

<sup>40</sup> "The Viet Nam poll," *UCO*, 15 April 1968, 6.

<sup>41</sup> "How You Vote On Vietnam," *UCO*, 15 March 1968, 16.

United Church to “sit in judgment on our neighbors.”<sup>42</sup> Finally, in keeping with Willson Woodside’s analysis, some respondents expressed the conviction that “aggressors” must be faced eventually, “and Hitler taught us it’s better to fight sooner.”<sup>43</sup> Meanwhile, those who opposed the war effort often appealed to Christian charity and contended that “the Vietnamese don’t want to be ‘saved’,” and that even if they did, guns could not effectively combat ideas.<sup>44</sup> Clarke herself was concerned about the fear that appeared to have taken hold of so many United Church people. She concluded that the church had been remiss in its presentation of the gospel, having apparently neglected to emphasize “the perfect love that casts our fear.”<sup>45</sup>

Overall, respondents disapproved of President Johnson’s handling of the war,<sup>46</sup> and felt that it was more likely to cause a third world war than to prevent it.<sup>47</sup> There was also support for allowing the Saigon government to “take on more responsibility for the fighting of the war”<sup>48</sup> and the immediate and unconditional cessation of the American bombing of North Vietnam.<sup>49</sup> Were history to repeat itself, and the world see a situation similar to Vietnam’s develop elsewhere, most respondents would not want to see the United States intervene.<sup>50</sup>

Given this apparent opposition to U.S. involvement in the region, it is hard to understand how respondents could be so divided as to whether “[t]he United States

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<sup>42</sup> “How You Vote On Vietnam,” *UCO*, 15 March 1968, 16.

<sup>43</sup> “How You Vote On Vietnam,” *UCO*, 15 March 1968, 16.

<sup>44</sup> “How You Vote On Vietnam,” *UCO*, 15 March 1968, 16.

<sup>45</sup> Patricia Clarke, “What We Found Out About You,” *UCO*, 1 March 1968, 8.

<sup>46</sup> “How You Vote On Vietnam,” *UCO*, 15 March 1968, 17. 57% of all respondents, with at least 54% of the vote in each group (laity under 35 years of age, laity over 35, clergy.) Unless otherwise indicated, these figures only consider those who expressed a clear preference, rather than leaving the question blank or choosing “No opinion.”

<sup>47</sup> “How You Vote On Vietnam,” *UCO*, 15 March 1968, 17. 55%; at least 53% in each group.

<sup>48</sup> “How You Vote On Vietnam,” *UCO*, 15 March 1968, 17. 77%; at least 72% in each group.

<sup>49</sup> “How You Vote On Vietnam,” *UCO*, 15 March 1968, 17. 61%; at least 59% in each group.

<sup>50</sup> “How You Vote On Vietnam,” *UCO*, 15 March 1968, 17. 63%; at least 59% in each group.

should use all military strength necessary (short of nuclear weapons) to achieve victory in the war.”<sup>51</sup> By a margin of only 94 votes, readers agreed with the statement.<sup>52</sup> Most startling of all, among the clergy – the group in this survey that had been most firmly opposed to the war – 71% were willing to hold out for an American victory. It is possible they interpreted the question through the lens of wanting the war to end as soon as possible, and were therefore hoping that the United States would pull out the stops sooner rather than later. Even so, the sudden shift of votes is striking.<sup>53</sup> A few weeks later, *The Observer* released the combined results of the poll, including the responses of the other eight church magazines. The discrepancy seems to have held for the entire sample of 33,934 respondents. While 63% of respondents “expressed disapproval of the way President Lyndon Johnson is handling the war in Vietnam... 56% of [them] said they felt the U.S. should use any force, short of nuclear weapons, to obtain a military victory.”<sup>54</sup> As a spokesman for the poll noted, the timing of the questionnaire was significant. By the time news of the Tet offensive had reached the respondents, they had already submitted their forms. On the one hand, this meant that the data was already markedly outdated. On the other, it revealed the pulse of North American churches just moments before a watershed. It is a small tragedy that the poll was not repeated in the summer of 1968 – a comparison of the results would have certainly yielded valuable insights.

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<sup>51</sup> “How You Vote On Vietnam,” *UCO*, 15 March 1968, 18.

<sup>52</sup> “How You Vote On Vietnam,” *UCO*, 15 March 1968, 18. 52%; at least 50% in each group.

<sup>53</sup> Also unexpected is the fact that respondents seemed to be most confident when asked to predict whether China or Russia would become belligerent. Nearly 54% thought it unlikely that the Western world would be facing outright hostilities with either of those Communist giants. While the vote itself was by no means decisive, this question returned the fewest “no opinion” and blank answers. See “How You Vote On Vietnam,” *UCO*, 15 March 1968, 17. At least 53% in each group. How strange it seems that respondents would feel more comfortable with outright prognostication than with commenting on policy. This question returned meaningful answers on over 95% of response forms, while the average response rate on the survey as a whole was 91.4%, and the inquiry about the American bombing campaign against North Vietnam hovered ten points below that.

<sup>54</sup> “Poll on Viet Nam,” *UCO*, 15 April 1968, 33.

*Taking to the Streets: Protest Marches*

In addition to lobbying the federal government directly by sending delegations to Parliament or becoming involved in letter-writing campaigns, many Canadians who opposed American involvement in Vietnam took to the streets in protest. While *The Observer* gave tacit approval to the practice, the United Church was somewhat divided over the propriety of public demonstrations. The debate was not terribly heated, however.

In 1965, Rev. Charles Catto contended that Christian support for what the United States was doing to “some of the planet’s least privileged human beings, namely, burning them alive with jellied gasoline bombs”<sup>55</sup> was utterly incompatible with effective evangelistic missions. He called for widespread vocal opposition, arguing that “every Christian congregation in North America should be in the streets protesting the nuclear collision course of U.S. foreign policy, and declaring for the right of any country to its own destiny and the appropriate recognition thereof.”<sup>56</sup> This passion was not shared by all of his fellow readers, let alone all United Church people. In fact, the 1 May 1966 issue reported that despite the widespread condemnation of the Vietnam War by Christian institutions – including the World Council of Churches, the Vatican, the Canadian Council of Churches, and the United Church of Canada – Ray Hord’s presence at two Saskatchewan rallies was strongly objected to by members of the church, as well as the Saskatchewan government.<sup>57</sup> Those opposed to Hord’s participation alluded to the expectation that Communist sympathizers would also be in attendance, but Hord was

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<sup>55</sup> Rev. Charles Catto, “Kiss goodbye to hope,” *UCO*, August 1965, 2.

<sup>56</sup> Rev. Charles Catto, “Kiss goodbye to hope,” *UCO*, August 1965, 2.

<sup>57</sup> “Protesting a Protester,” *UCO*, 1 May 1966, 5.

undeterred. On both occasions, he advocated for a “clear-cut, independent position”<sup>58</sup> on Vietnam.

Possibly aware of the image many Canadians had of the protest march – rife with Communists, prone to violence, and so on – *The Observer* offered a brief counter-example in 1967 when it drew attention to a vigil organized by the Committee on Canadian Responsibility in Viet Nam. For one hour each Saturday, those who longed for peace came together in downtown Victoria, B.C. to express opposition to the Vietnam War and Canada’s complicity therein through a silent vigil.<sup>59</sup> In 1971, two readers also repudiated the common caricature of the protest march. A peaceful expression of dissent should not be confused with a harbinger of violent revolution, they argued.<sup>60</sup>

Gordon K. Stewart’s manifesto of 1 March 1970 was boldly titled, “Why I Shall Join the Next Peace March.” Therein, he stated that it was impossible to remain silent in the face of the escalation of hostilities, the brutality of the Saigon and American forces as evidenced in the Mylai massacre, and the manifest damage the war was inflicting on the land and the people. American soldiers “must leave for Viet Nam’s sake.... Even more the troops must leave for the sake of the soul of the west.”<sup>61</sup> Thus far, Stewart was falling in line with countless other opponents of the war. What was significant was that he described a growing conviction that “the role of the United States has become allied to and symbolic of so much that is evil, that the necessity of ending that role outweighs all other considerations.”<sup>62</sup> This article was not titled “Why I Oppose the Vietnam War.” It was intended as an explicit apology for a form of political involvement that went beyond

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<sup>58</sup> “Protesting a Protester,” *UCO*, 1 May 1966, 5.

<sup>59</sup> “Vigil for peace,” *UCO*, 1 March 1967, 32.

<sup>60</sup> “Protest Marches,” *UCO*, March 1971, 5.

<sup>61</sup> Gordon K. Stewart, “Why I Shall Join the Next Peace March,” *UCO*, 1 March 1970, 36.

<sup>62</sup> Gordon K. Stewart, “Why I Shall Join the Next Peace March,” *UCO*, 1 March 1970, 36.



the quotidian. After all, it was not mere opposition to the Vietnam War that motivated Stewart to protest; his use of the word “evil” almost implied that the time for politely negotiating with the American government had passed. Although he did not describe the source of his reticence, it was evident that Stewart considered participation in a peace march to be a serious action indeed, and one which he would not have undertaken were it not for his firm belief that the circumstances demanded it.

A joint-editorial by four influential Christian magazines was described above.<sup>63</sup> The issue of *The Observer* that reprinted that text also reported that the editors of *Christianity and Crisis*, *Commonweal*, and the *National Catholic Reporter* were arrested at an anti-war protest near the White House.<sup>64</sup> In their article, they had encouraged fellow Christians to communicate their views to elected representatives, support organizations that were working to bring an end to the war, and participate in peaceful protests “so that they may be neither wrecked by the violent nor muted by the complacent.”<sup>65</sup> The brief mention of their arrest did not elaborate on the circumstances; however, it is conceivable that *The Observer* chose to run their editorial in parallel with the report of their arrest so as to provide context for the alarming news.

*UCO* depicted participation in protest marches, whether at home or in Washington D.C., as a legitimate response to the savage military campaign being inflicted upon the Vietnamese. However, the subtext of *The Observer*’s coverage was that such efforts were almost radical, and only justified by the urgency and severity of the injustice being perpetrated. Protesting was a drastic action, demanded by dire circumstances.

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<sup>63</sup> See page 38.

<sup>64</sup> “Anti-war editors arrested,” *UCO*, June 1971, 47. The article did not mention whether the editor of *The Christian Century* was present.

<sup>65</sup> “American church editors summon Christians to penitence and action,” *UCO*, June 1971, 13.

*Economic Complicity*

As events progressed, there was a growing awareness, particularly on the left, that Canada was complicit in the Vietnam War by virtue of its defence-sharing arrangement with the United States.<sup>66</sup> In December 1966, Douglas Fisher discussed this relationship in an article provocatively titled “Why we won’t stop exporting death to Vietnam.”<sup>67</sup> Given Fisher’s obvious disappointment with Canada’s silent enabling of this devastating war, his inclusion of Ray Hord’s incendiary language was apt:

We Canadians should be strongly opposed to the American rape of Viet Nam. Our government should express the moral revulsion of our people by refusing to sell explosives, weapons, or military equipment which is being used to maim, burn and kill the Vietnamese people.<sup>68</sup>

Fisher also reproduced a copy of “Lest we forget,” a poem by F.R. Scott. Reflecting on the First World War, Scott had explored the irony of a global arms trade that allowed “a brave Canadian youth” to “shed his blood on foreign shores/And die for Democracy, Freedom, Truth/With his body full of Canadian ores.”<sup>69</sup>

Fisher argued that the time had come for public debate on defence-sharing. Canada’s “near total acceptance of the interlocking of our military manufacture with the U.S. can be seen in the fact that since 1958 we have not had a serious critical debate in the House of Commons on the sharing agreement.”<sup>70</sup> Not even the CCF or the NDP, both

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<sup>66</sup> When some opponents of the Vietnam War realized that their investments in Honeywell and Dow Chemical were means of sponsoring the war, they opted to use their voices as shareholders, rather than simply sell off their stock. “These churches calculated that the selling of their shares would result in a one-time-only public event. Keeping the issue on the public agenda of companies, by contrast, might in time win the support of other shareholders and thereby give a continuing and expanding to the strength of anti-Vietnam sentiments.” See Renate Pratt, “From the Gold Mines to Bay Street: In Search of Corporate Social Responsibility,” in *Canadian Churches and Foreign Policy*, edited by Bonnie Greene (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1990), 105. For more on this ethical dilemma, see Pratt’s chapter.

<sup>67</sup> Douglas Fisher, “Why we won’t stop exporting death to Viet Nam,” *UCO*, 15 December 1966, 28.

<sup>68</sup> Douglas Fisher, “Why we won’t stop exporting death to Viet Nam,” *UCO*, 15 December 1966, 28.

<sup>69</sup> Douglas Fisher, “Why we won’t stop exporting death to Viet Nam,” *UCO*, 15 December 1966, 28.

<sup>70</sup> Douglas Fisher, “Why we won’t stop exporting death to Viet Nam,” *UCO*, 15 December 1966, 29.

of which were traditionally opposed to armament and wary of being too closely tied to the United States, had raised the issue in Parliament.

The reason for this silence was transparent to Fisher: Canada was benefitting enormously from the American war effort. Since its inception in 1959, sharing procurement had brought nearly \$1.2 billion to Canadian contractors. In 1965, a new annual high was achieved as \$295.5 million flooded into Canada.<sup>71</sup> These figures only accounted for actual defence contracts, and did not include the sale of nickel, lead, zinc, iron, cellulose, and textiles, all of which were put to use in the American campaign in Vietnam. Fisher posited that Canadians were simply unwilling to relinquish the financial benefits of the defence trade, to say nothing of their aversion to jeopardizing the mutual-defence pact between the two nations.

Fisher further claimed that the hypocrisy of Canada's stance was evident to some American critics who noted that "we stand under their umbrella, we deal with them to our tremendous advantage in terms of standard of living, yet we try to behave, especially in the Viet Nam conflict, as if we were really neutral and unattached."<sup>72</sup> The Canadian Labour Congress had likewise emphasized its opposition to American policy in Vietnam, but taken no steps to amend the defence-sharing agreement. Fisher wondered whether this was because the subject had not occurred to the CLC or whether they were all too aware that any change in the arrangement would translate into a loss of jobs.

In April 1967, Ray Hord accused Paul Martin, Canada's External Affairs Minister, of "misleading the public when he says Canada can play a significant role in

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<sup>71</sup> Douglas Fisher, "Why we won't stop exporting death to Viet Nam," *UCO*, 15 December 1966, 29. Citing a 1965 report from the Department of Defence Production.

<sup>72</sup> Douglas Fisher, "Why we won't stop exporting death to Viet Nam," *UCO*, 15 December 1966, 29.

peace efforts while Canada supplies arms for the U.S. to use in Vietnam.”<sup>73</sup> That September, *The Observer* broached the issue with Martin and he replied that “Canada must live with the fact that its products may be used in wars such as Viet Nam, at least for the present.”<sup>74</sup> In the summer of 1968, *The Observer* mentioned that the Oshawa chapter of the Committee to End the War in Viet Nam was on the verge of issuing an ultimatum to Canadian suppliers of weapons and chemicals: if they did not terminate their defence contract “in a reasonable period,” the Committee would advocate for an outright boycott.<sup>75</sup> It was not clear whether *The Observer* endorsed the campaign, though its mention of the Committee’s intentions was probably meant to stimulate discussion on the issue. By and large, it failed to do so, though Charles H. Forsyth did revisit the subject in early 1969. The newly installed Secretary of the Board of E&SS followed in Ray Hord’s footsteps when he declared that the church had a responsibility to express its dissent on crucial matters. “In today’s world,” he wrote, “‘collective security’ must be grounded – not on overkill capacity – but on economic and social mutuality.”<sup>76</sup> To that end, the church was called to “remind Canadians of the degree to which military-defence procurement distorts our economy.... We live off our capacity to destroy.”<sup>77</sup>

For several years, *The Observer* left the matter alone. In fact, when it was finally discussed again in August 1972, it was in the context of a plea expressed by the Quakers. It was this small denomination, and not the sizeable United Church that wrote to Prime Minister Trudeau and noted “with shame... that Canadian industry, with the concerted

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<sup>73</sup> “Not neutral on Viet Nam,” *UCO*, 1 April 1967, 34.

<sup>74</sup> “Mr. Martin comments,” *UCO*, 1 September 1967, 7.

<sup>75</sup> “Boycott War Goods,” *UCO*, 15 June 1968, 21.

<sup>76</sup> Charles H. Forsyth, “Dissent: Here’s where the church should speak out – and why.” *UCO*, 15 March 1969, 11.

<sup>77</sup> Charles H. Forsyth, “Dissent: Here’s where the church should speak out – and why.” *UCO*, 15 March 1969, 11.

help of the Canadian government, has supplied weapons, instruments and raw materials” for the destruction that had by then engulfed Laos and Cambodia.<sup>78</sup> Among other emphases, this letter called for an end to defence procurement contracts and defence production sharing. *The Observer* expressed gratitude for the Quakers’ leadership and hope “that the General Council of the United Church and other churches may join the Quakers and say, ‘For God’s sake, Mr. Trudeau, do what you can to stop it.’”<sup>79</sup> Even as it acknowledged the contribution of peripheral denomination, the United Church implicitly agreed with the Quaker’s assumption that the prime minister’s own Roman Catholic faith would serve as a powerful motivator for amending Canada’s foreign policy. The language *UCO* borrowed testified to the democratization of Canadian religion. The fact that it spoke on this issue at all underscored *UCO*’s strongly-held belief that its denomination still had an important role to play in determining Canada’s place in the world.

### Mennonites and “The Lost War”

In the spring of 1965, *The Canadian Mennonite* editor Frank H. Epp referred to American policy in Asia as both “uncreative and unchristian,”<sup>80</sup> and called the incursion into Vietnam “the lost war.”<sup>81</sup> Failure was inevitable, he wrote, because “the big defending nation is in that war losing her soul, and the little defending nation is in that war losing her body. We say lost because the defenders of freedom have in that defence sacrificed all the principles they were defending.”<sup>82</sup> Epp traced American defeat back to

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<sup>78</sup> “‘For God’s sake, Mr. Trudeau, help stop this horror,’” *UCO*, August 1972, 10. Citing Quaker letter to Prime Minister Trudeau.

<sup>79</sup> “‘For God’s sake, Mr. Trudeau, help stop this horror,’” *UCO*, August 1972, 10.

<sup>80</sup> “Two Days of Talks On Southeast Asia And China: American Policy In Far East Is Both Uncreative and Unchristian,” *TCM*, 23 February 1965, 6.

<sup>81</sup> Frank H. Epp, “The lost war,” *TCM*, 30 March 1965, 1.

<sup>82</sup> Frank H. Epp, “The lost war,” *TCM*, 30 March 1965, 1.

its initial interference in the democratic process in Vietnam. Having sabotaged self-determination in that country, American policy sealed its fate when it “assumed that a strong military position could be substituted for a weak moral position.”<sup>83</sup>

While clinging to Anabaptist pacifism, Mennonite opposition to the Vietnam War expressed in the pages of *The Canadian Mennonite* was not simply a matter of opposing war in the abstract. The editor and his contributors routinely highlighted particular instances of injustice and discussed specific decisions that they deemed to be unwise. In 1965, for example, *TCM* questioned both the sincerity and the plausibility of Lyndon B. Johnson’s efforts at negotiation and decried the president’s “declared unwillingness to talk to the Viet Cong” as an insurmountable obstacle on the road to peace.<sup>84</sup> “People who are not bypassed in the shooting,” argued the same editorial, “should not be bypassed in the talking.”<sup>85</sup> *TCM*’s objection, then, was that American policy was both morally and strategically reckless. The threat of escalation was especially troubling to the editors, even if it did not necessarily imply the use of nuclear weapons.

In early June 1965, *TCM* reported that MCC had sent a letter to President Johnson, informing him that a Mennonite relief worker had been in captivity under the Viet Cong for three years. The letter promised that the Mennonite community would pray for the president, and asked him to act on his own admission that violence is inherently ineffective. A wide range of Mennonite co-signers echoed that the war could only be “won” through the wholesale conquest of the entire continent: in order to silence the

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<sup>83</sup> Frank H. Epp, “The lost war,” *TCM*, 30 March 1965, 1.

<sup>84</sup> “Talk To The Viet Cong,” *TCM*, 13 April 1965, 5.

<sup>85</sup> “Talk To The Viet Cong,” *TCM*, 13 April 1965, 5.

supporters of Communism, Asia itself would have to be destroyed.<sup>86</sup> That fall, Vincent Harding considered the role of Mennonites in the Vietnam War in a two-part series. “What Shall We Do About Vietnam?” emphasized that the National Liberation Front had a real political agenda that had to be addressed if there was any hope of preventing the “wanton destruction” of the entire nation.<sup>87</sup> The follow-up article offered a range of options for expressing opposition to the Vietnam War in meaningful ways: prayer, fundraising for relief work, seeking an audience with President Johnson, vigils at military installations and in front of munitions factories, and withholding a portion of one’s taxes. Moreover, Harding suggested that it might be appropriate for Americans who opposed the slaughter of the Vietnamese to do more than voice their opinions at home. They ought to “go to Vietnam and stand in front of the flame-throwers of our own soldiers and say: ‘If blood must be spilled, let it be mine and stop killing Vietnamese children.’”<sup>88</sup>

The horrors of war were often described in the pages of *The Canadian Mennonite*. In the 5 October 1965 issue, an MCC doctor working in Vietnam depicted the scene of an accidental bomber crash in a residential and business neighbourhood in Nhatrang. By describing one hospital’s experience on that tragic day, Dr. Linford Gehman drew attention to some of the unintended consequences of war.<sup>89</sup> In the same issue, Gehman offered several good reasons to oppose the advent of Communism in Vietnam, not least increasing barriers to relief work, but maintained that “our primary concern... is not the

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<sup>86</sup> See also Peter Fast’s critique of cultural imperialism in “Christian Church Is Growing: ‘Socialism In Southeast Asia Is Traditional And Practical Way,’” *TCM*, 21 September 1965, 6.

<sup>87</sup> Vincent Harding, “What Shall We Do About Vietnam?” *TCM*, 14 September 1965, 6.

<sup>88</sup> Vincent Harding, “Speaking On International Issues: What Shall We Do About Vietnam?” *TCM*, 21 September 1965, 6.

<sup>89</sup> Linford Gehman, “Is War Only An Accident?: Hospital Activity On The Day A Bomber Crashed In Nhatrang,” *TCM*, 5 October 1965, 3.

sins of other nations.”<sup>90</sup> Gehman refuted the notion that the withdrawal of American troops would lead to catastrophe by suggesting that international cooperation could bring about stability in Vietnam without further military involvement.<sup>91</sup> He also underscored the fact that, however vehement, Mennonite criticisms of American policy in Vietnam were inspired “not by disloyalty but by love of our nation.”<sup>92</sup>

This expression of patriotism was decidedly out of step with traditional Anabaptism, as well as many of Gehman’s Mennonite contemporaries. Such an emphasis on national devotion would certainly have been appreciated by those outside of the Mennonite community; after all, Mennonites had long suffered persecution and marginalization precisely because their isolationism seemed to imply a lack of allegiance to the state, as well as half-hearted interest in the national welfare. Yet it was not to those outside of the fold that Gehman wrote. Buried within that clarification of motives, written explicitly for the benefit of Mennonite congregants and published in a Mennonite newspaper, there was an indication that the relationship between their church and the state was changing. The two were no longer polar opposites. Indeed, Gehman assumed that it was for the sake of their nation that Mennonites ought to speak out against the Vietnam War. Such dissent, Gehman argued, would further the long-term interests and aspirations of the state.

Just as there were *Observer* readers who took exception to E.L. Homewood’s suggestion that there was room for neutrality on the Vietnam question, *TCM* expressed an

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<sup>90</sup> Linford Gehman, “A Message From Mennonite General Conference To The Congregations Concerning The War In Vietnam,” *TCM*, 5 October 1965, 6.

<sup>91</sup> Linford Gehman, “A Message From Mennonite General Conference To The Congregations Concerning The War In Vietnam,” *TCM*, 5 October 1965, 6.

<sup>92</sup> Linford Gehman, “A Message From Mennonite General Conference To The Congregations Concerning The War In Vietnam,” *TCM*, 5 October 1965, 6.



impatience with inaction. Having spoken with Viet Cong representatives, Hans A. DeBoer intimated that it was time to jettison all hope of defeating Communism by military means. "If we say that we fight against the Viet Cong," he contended, "we must realize that we fight against 85 percent of the Vietnam people."<sup>93</sup> This analysis was very much in keeping with the original application of Anabaptist pacifism: it was a condemnation of ideological battles fought with swords. "It is instructive," Walter Klaassen has written, "that the setting [of that denunciation of violence]... is not the secular war of the twentieth century, but rather the holy war, the war for the defence of Christian faith."<sup>94</sup> Given the religious motifs woven into the fabric of the Cold War, Christians who were supportive of American policy in Vietnam often cited the necessity of defeating the atheist empire.<sup>95</sup> A return to Anabaptist roots was necessary if Mennonites were to surface from that holy war mindset.

This is likely one of the reasons that *TCM* drew its readers' attention to expressions of dissent coming from without the Mennonite community. Whether in the form of the Russian Orthodox Church, one hundred Washington-area clergy, or a small group of Japanese Christians, *TCM* described a nascent opposition campaign.<sup>96</sup> The 1 June 1965 issue reprinted a letter signed by around 1000 college and university faculty

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<sup>93</sup> Hans A. DeBoer, "A Man Who Talked To The Viet Cong Suggest 15 Responses To Asian War," *TCM*, 5 October 1965, 6. It is by no means certain that DeBoer's statistic had any basis in reality. Other sources suggest that the vast majority of Vietnamese had no particular political attachments, and had been drafted into one army or the other on the basis of geography or sheer chance. Such recruits were likely to change allegiances if they believed that it would improve their likelihood of surviving the war and providing for their families. Among those Vietnamese who were strongly motivated by ideology, their aspirations were more likely to be nationalistic than explicitly Marxist.

<sup>94</sup> Walter Klaassen, ed., *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources* (Kitchener, ON: Herald, 1981), 265.

<sup>95</sup> See, for example, Gayle I. Thrift, "'Concerning the Evil State of the World Out of Which Strife Comes': Church-State Relations in Early Cold War Canada, 1945-1955," Presented at the CHA Conference, 25 May 2001.

<sup>96</sup> "Russian Churchman Speaks On Vietnam," *TCM*, 9 March 1965, 2; "Ministers Ask Cease-Fire In Vietnam," *TCM*, 12 January 1965, 2; "Speaking On International Issues: A Letter From Japanese Christians Concerning Vietnam," *TCM*, 14 September 1965, 6.

and originally published in the *New York Times*. In their united protest against the substitution of military tactics for political and diplomatic efforts, each expression of concern addressed a few core themes: the war was an outrage to the principles of both democracy and human rights and it dramatically increased the possibility of escalation to nuclear engagement. While this coverage was certainly justifiable on the grounds that other denominations' views were relevant to Mennonites, it also had a rhetorical effect.

In the years following the Reformation, Anabaptists became convinced that theirs was the purest interpretation of the Christian faith. Their theology and praxis developed, was codified in the Schleithem Confession (1527), and was then gradually ratified by various off-shoots of the movement. Schleithem was by no means comprehensive – it was primarily concerned with Anabaptist distinctives such as believer's baptism, separation, and pacifism. Over the years, Anabaptism nurtured a healthy martyrology, and twentieth century Mennonites were well aware that, in defence of those core principles, many of their predecessors had lost limbs, livelihoods, and even their lives. For them to read in their denominational newspaper that other churches, to say nothing of non-Christians, were now at the forefront of promoting global peace was tantamount to being stripped of one of their most cherished distinctives. By alerting *TCM* readers to the efforts made by other groups, the editors and contributors were appealing to a sort of holy pride and calling Mennonites to repentance.

While the general Mennonite consensus was that the Vietnam War was wrong, *TCM* suggested that there were two main types of outliers: one group was unwilling to object to any war that might rid the world of Communism, while the other simply felt that

neither individual Mennonites nor their formal leaders ought to express political views in public forums.

*Mennonite Anti-Communism*

The second of Vincent Harding's aforementioned articles began by citing an eloquent and rousing speech given in opposition of Communism, complete with familiar invocations of the importance of peace and freedom. Harding revealed that the speech had been given by none other than Adolf Hitler, a year before the Second World War began. Not only was anti-Communism not inherently virtuous, Harding argued, but the rhetoric of anti-Communism was too often permitted to cover a multitude of sins. This caution against blindly embracing anti-Communism spoke directly to the heart of Mennonite history.

Some mention has already been made of the plight of Mennonite Germans in Russia following the Bolshevik Revolution. Mihevc has identified this history as a "main factor for Mennonite hesitation in developing a progressive agenda for the Vietnam War."<sup>97</sup> In the mid-1960s, when the Vietnam War was just beginning to lay claim to the front page of every newspaper, Rodney J. Sawatsky conducted a study of Mennonite weekly periodicals. He examined several years' worth of issues of *Der Bote*, *TCM*, *The EMC Messenger*, and *The MB Herald* for indications as to Mennonite attitudes toward Communism. While Sawatsky's work could stand some semantic clarification, his research demonstrated that "there is a strong militant anti-Communist force within the Canadian Mennonite church which is being battled by an anti-Communist force."<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Mihevc, "The Politicization," 376.

<sup>98</sup> Rodney J. Sawatsky, "The Attitudes of the Canadian Mennonites Towards Communism as Seen in Mennonite Weekly Periodicals," Research Paper, Bethel College, 1965, 33. The trouble is that Sawatsky defined "anti-Communism" as a political position that "does not accept the Communist creed." See

Sawatsky himself believed that the former attitude was “diabolically opposed to Christian pacifism,”<sup>99</sup> but he suspected that the attitude had lain dormant within the Mennonite readership for some time before their press began publishing pieces that appeared to be sympathetic to Communism. In light of such “provocations,” there came “a storm of replies.”<sup>100</sup> The paper concludes with a warning that if something was not done “to rout militant anti-Communism from the Canadian Mennonite bloodstream now... it never will be.”<sup>101</sup>

It should be noted that, long before the Vietnam conflict brought this issue to the fore, *The Canadian Mennonite* had made it a priority to inject nuance into Mennonite perceptions of the Cold War.<sup>102</sup> Despite those efforts, letters to the editor received by

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Sawatsky, “The Attitudes,” 7. In this group he included a letter to the editor which claimed that “neither Communism nor Capitalism can be equated with Christianity,” letters which counselled an attitude of love toward Communists, and other examples of fundamentally neutral political sentiment. See Sawatsky, “The Attitudes,” 22. Given that Communism was (at least perceived to be) essentially atheistic, it is meaningless to conduct research into whether Christians disapproved of the Communist creed. In short, Sawatsky did not draw a strong enough distinction between un-Communist and anti-Communist positions. The latter should include only actively antagonistic (though not necessarily “militant”) opposition. It is possible that Sawatsky used these categories because he wanted to leave no room for the accusation that those who objected to *militant* anti-Communism were simply sympathetic to Communism themselves.

<sup>99</sup> Sawatsky, “The Attitudes,” i.

<sup>100</sup> Sawatsky, “The Attitudes,” 33.

<sup>101</sup> Sawatsky, “The Attitudes,” 34.

<sup>102</sup> In the fall of 1961, for instance, *TCM* published a series on “The Christian Response To The Communist Advance.” One editorial rejected Communism – a “materialistic philosophy and interpretation of life which is not of God” – but also acknowledged that the church was partly to blame: it had created the necessary preconditions for the rise of Communism by failing to address global poverty and oppression. The editor contended that it was now imperative that Christians “recognize Communism as a form of judgment on the sins of the church.” See “The Hammer And The Sickle,” *TCM*, 15 September 1961, 6. The next editorial rejected the pervasive and false dichotomy proliferated during the Cold War. After contextualizing the current animosity between East and West, the piece emphasized that latter was by no means innocent. In a clear appeal to traditional Anabaptist otherworldliness, *TCM* amended the common sensibility: “We like to say that the struggle between East and West is a struggle between Satan and God. It is more correct to say, that both East and West are against each other and both are against God.” See “The East And The West,” *TCM*, 22 September 1961, 6. The third editorial rebuked Mennonites for applying their belief in the separation of church and state unevenly. While churches in the East were vilified as “simple tools of their governments,” North American Christians rarely considered the possibility that they, too, were “instruments and tools of national policy. Our churches denounce the political and economic sins of Communism, and there are many, but when it comes to speaking judgment on the political and economic sins of our own countries, we are silent, on the pretext, that we believe in the separation of church and state, religion and politics.” See “The Conflict And The Church,” *TCM*, 29 September 1961, 6. The final editorial in the series decried the church’s sanction, whether explicit or not, of the military complex. See “The Cross

*TCM* throughout the 1960s and 1970s are ample evidence that this anti-Communist sentiment was ubiquitous. In early 1966, reader Henry Becker defended American intervention in Vietnam by declaring his certainty that every Mennonite suffering under Communist rule in Russia would have “welcomed an armed intervention.”<sup>103</sup> He also warned *TCM* not to “try to identify your point of view with those of the majority of the Mennonite people!”<sup>104</sup> In response to the allegations that *TCM* was a Communist newspaper, Epp enumerated the ways in which that label had lately been used. Too often, he noted, it was a term used to deride anyone who criticized any aspect of Western society, especially the prosecution of the Vietnam War. Epp reiterated that *TCM* was “after the truth, after the Christian truth,” irrespective of whose ideology it might resemble in places.<sup>105</sup>

### *Political Activism*

In the spring of 1966, two Ontario-based readers of *TCM* debated the merits of the newspaper’s political focus. One reader complained that *TCM* spent too much time “soft-pedaling” Communism; he requested that less attention be paid to international affairs and that *TCM* focus instead on offering its readers “spiritual guidance and Christian knowledge.”<sup>106</sup> The other countered that, in lieu of “the worn-out clichés of McCarthyism and the bogeyman image” of Communism so often propagated by the press, *TCM*

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And The Crown,” *TCM*, 6 October 1961. The paper’s critique was not always abstract: following the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, *TCM* reported that Mennonite leaders had choice words for American foreign policy: they condemned the rampant hypocrisy, increased militarization, and flagrant exploitation practiced by the so-called bastion of justice liberty. See “How Some US Mennonite Leaders Reacted To The East-West Crisis Over Cuba,” *TCM*, 2 November 1962, 1,3,10. Contributors included Edgar Metzler, Executive Secretary of MCC Peace Section, and a group of Mennonite pastors in Chicago.

<sup>103</sup> Henry Becker, “Don’t Take Nonresistance Too Far!” *TCM*, 4 January 1966, 15.

<sup>104</sup> Henry Becker, “Don’t Take Nonresistance Too Far!” *TCM*, 4 January 1966, 15.

<sup>105</sup> Frank H. Epp, “Letter From The Editor: ‘It Must Be A Communist Paper,’” *TCM*, 11 January 1966, 5. It took Epp four editorials to deal with all of the allegations made in Becker’s letter.

<sup>106</sup> Cornelius Kaethler, “Unwise and Unfair Decision,” *TCM*, 15 March 1966, 5.

provided sound Christian teaching on important matters. “Mennonites are developing a political awareness which can and should be guided in light of a Christian commitment instead of selfish nationalism.”<sup>107</sup>

Henry Becker, who had claimed that Mennonites would have welcomed a Vietnam-style intervention on their own behalf, made another noteworthy assertion in his forceful letter. “In a democracy,” he explained, “we elect our government, but after their election, we should not continuously bombard our government officials with half-baked advice regarding situations about which we know little or nothing.”<sup>108</sup> In the first place, this was a foreshadowing of the findings of the *Observer* reader survey: many Canadians trusted that “President Johnson has the facts; he must know what he’s doing.”<sup>109</sup> It was also indicative of the inaccessibility of “unbiased” information about the situation in Vietnam. More significantly, however, it reduced democratic participation to voting. While other readers expressed similar ideas over the years, the reality was that this depiction corresponded neither with the opinion of many Mennonites nor with the historical relationship between the Mennonite Church and the Canadian government.

Even after they had established themselves in Canada, Mennonites interacted with their government as little as possible. In fact, they sought exemptions from public education, conscription, and government pension plans. During the Vietnam War, motivated in part by the arguments put forth by Epp, Walter Klaassen, and others, the Mennonite Church began to reverse a history of approaching the state only to request permission to abstain from government programs. At the same time, influential Mennonites were also realizing that their denomination’s traditional approach to church-

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<sup>107</sup> Edgar Rogalski, “Our Nationalistic Prejudice,” *TCM*, 26 April 1966, 3.

<sup>108</sup> Henry Becker, “Don’t Take Nonresistance Too Far!” *TCM*, 4 January 1966, 15.

<sup>109</sup> “How You Vote On Vietnam,” *UCO*, 15 March 1968, 16.

state relations was antiquated precisely because it had developed in a totalitarian context.<sup>110</sup> *The Canadian Mennonite* reported on every inch of this evolution with an enthusiasm that was none-too-subtle.

In 1958, a Mennonite pastor named Peter Kehler had written a three-part series on the responsibility of the church vis-à-vis the state. None of the pieces offered concrete recommendations, but his analysis in the second article underscored the distinction between the political context of the early church and that of his contemporary Mennonites: neither the composers of the New Testament nor their immediate audience had access to representative democracy. Kehler urged his readers to allow that essential difference to inform the political theology of their own church.<sup>111</sup>

That same year, David Janzen offered the readers of *TCM* a book review of *The State in the New Testament*, by Oscar Cullman. Janzen explained that, according to Cullman, the tension between the church and the state was not a function of particular crises but rather “one which arises because of the very essence and presuppositions of the Christian faith.”<sup>112</sup> There was further discussion of the fact that Mennonites were “coming to realize that our peace witness must be more sustained than it has been in the past,”<sup>113</sup> and that, like Kehler, Cullman left the particulars of that sustained peace witness open to interpretation. In the 2 November 1962 issue of *TCM*, Leo Driedger echoed Kehler’s distinction between contemporary Mennonites and their predecessors, but took the implications beyond simple political engagement: “It would have been impossible during New Testament times for a Jew to run for a government office. The Anabaptists of

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<sup>110</sup> See page 13, note 40.

<sup>111</sup> Peter Kehler, “The Church in Peace and War: Responsibility to the State,” *TCM*, 31 January 1958, 2.

<sup>112</sup> David Janzen, “Book Review,” *TCM*, 22 August 1958, 5.

<sup>113</sup> David Janzen, “Book Review,” *TCM*, 22 August 1958, 5.

the 16<sup>th</sup> century did not have that choice in most places either. We in Canada do have that opportunity and I can see that God calls Mennonites to such positions.”<sup>114</sup>

One tangible outcome of the philosophical developments in this vein was that in 1963 Altona Mennonite Church hosted a public meeting with three candidates for Member of Parliament in its Manitoba riding. Motivated by the fact that “Mennonites across the country are extensively involved (albeit to varying degrees) in political discussion and action,”<sup>115</sup> though too rarely in public forums, the church invited the candidates to outline their platforms and engage in dialogue with one another as well as with the audience. Alongside the hope of fostering discussion between church and state, the event was intended to refute the community’s assumptions about Mennonite separation. The church sought to “give evidence of [its] relevance to, and concern for, justice and righteousness in the affairs of the state. Whatever the separation church and state meant originally and whatever it means now, it is not that the church is indifferent, apathetic, or ignorant about what goes on.”<sup>116</sup> In the wake of this well-attended service,<sup>117</sup> the editor of *TCM* noted that the Mennonite community was unclear about what the principle of separation of church and state really meant, and that the prevailing understanding “cannot be reconciled with the Christian gospel.” Indeed, Epp was worried that the prophetic role of the church was “quite foreign to many Mennonite people.”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Leo Driedger, “Some Guides To Consider In Political Involvement: There Are Risks And There Are Rewards,” *TCM*, 2 November 1962, 5,7.

<sup>115</sup> “The Day Church And State Talked Together: Three Candidates For Federal Office Appeared In Mennonite Church Service,” *TCM*, 3 May 1963, 5.

<sup>116</sup> “The Day Church And State Talked Together: Three Candidates For Federal Office Appeared In Mennonite Church Service,” *TCM*, 3 May 1963, 5.

<sup>117</sup> There were over three hundred attendees and a larger auditorium had to be rented.

<sup>118</sup> “The Day Church And State Talked Together: Three Candidates For Federal Office Appeared In Mennonite Church Service,” *TCM*, 3 May 1963, 5.



Despite the efforts of *TCM*, the Vietnam War was the context for persistent Mennonite refusals to embrace that prophetic role. It continued to be the conviction of some Mennonites that neither private citizens nor churches had any business lobbying elected officials. It was *TCM*'s oft-articulated position that those Mennonites were choosing to ignore their church's longstanding practice of seeking the exemptions and privileges described above. Additionally, the Mennonite Church lobbied the Canadian government on social issues: In 1961, it resolved to petition for stricter liquor laws.<sup>119</sup> In 1966, MCC(C) urged Prime Minister Pearson to broaden immigration policies in the interest of humanitarian concerns.<sup>120</sup> In 1968, Mennonites contributed to an inter-church brief which then-Justice Minister Trudeau cited during parliament debate regarding new divorce legislation.<sup>121</sup>

Moreover, this engagement with elected officials did not only take place on an *ad hoc* basis. Following the election of each new prime minister, Mennonite leaders were in the habit of seeking an audience with the new leader of Canada. At this meeting, the history of Canadian Mennonites would be described, and MCC(C) representatives would humbly request that the prime minister commit himself to continuing the tradition of granting Mennonites such privileges as exemption from conscription.<sup>122</sup> On the heels of one such meeting between the Historic Peace Church Council of Canada and Prime Minister Diefenbaker on 14 February 1959, Mennonite pastor Edgar Metzler wrote an article in *TCM* expressing his concern about the agenda. As before, the delegation had presented the prime minister with a précis of the pacifist position and expressed

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<sup>119</sup> Maynard Shelly, "The Church Witness in Society," *TCM*, 24 November 1961, 34.

<sup>120</sup> "Present Brief: MCC (Canada) Delegation Meets With Prime Minister Pearson," *TCM*, 3 May 1966, 11.

<sup>121</sup> "Concerns incorporated: Legislators heed churches' brief," *TCM*, 9 January 1968, 1,7.

<sup>122</sup> See, for example, "Present Brief: MCC(Canada) Delegation Meets With Prime Minister Pearson," *TCM*, 3 May 1966, 1,11.

“gratitude for the privileges of religious liberty which have been granted to us.”<sup>123</sup> The object of Metzler’s frustration was the sole request made by the Mennonite representatives at this meeting, which he cited for his readers’ benefit:

We come to you with but one request. In the unfortunate event of a national emergency which, in the view of the Canadian government demands taking inventory of manpower, that our leaders be given the privilege for consultation with proper government officials as to ways in which we might utilize our contributions in manpower and resources to their greatest potential value to our country within the framework of law and with our peace testimony. We are not seeking safety that avoids danger and sacrifice, but we cannot have part in the taking of human life. We trust our religious conviction will continue to be understood in the future as it has been in the past. We hope our government will always respect the conscience of minority groups and individuals.<sup>124</sup>

Metzler was disappointed that Mennonite leadership was once again bringing forth old information and making old arguments in order to seek protection for its own people, rather than taking the opportunity to advocate for others. Metzler’s provocative conclusion was that

[a]pparently there is nothing in our theology of church-state relationships which prevents us from making representation to the government. We have done so repeatedly in the past whenever our young men were involved in compulsory military conscription. But is there any justification whatsoever for making representation to the government when our right and privileges are endangered *but not doing so for the benefit of others?*<sup>125</sup>

In other words, as an expression of both their separatism and their pacifism, Mennonites engaged in lobbying. By what criteria was it rendered conscionable to limit their agenda to matters of personal piety and ignore the wider implications of their peace witness?<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Edgar Metzler, “This Is My Concern: Mennonite Witness to Government,” *TCM*, 12 June 1959, 2.

<sup>124</sup> Edgar Metzler, “This Is My Concern: Mennonite Witness to Government,” *TCM*, 12 June 1959, 2.

<sup>125</sup> Edgar Metzler, “This Is My Concern: Mennonite Witness to Government,” *TCM*, 12 June 1959, 2. Emphasis added.

<sup>126</sup> In 1961, the General Conference Mennonite Church sent eighty delegates to Chicago to discuss the church’s responsibilities toward a suffering world. In Maynard Shelly’s abstract of the four-day conference, he provided a partial answer to Metzler’s question. “Historically Mennonites have been pessimistic about the possibility of transforming society... They expected to snatch some individuals from the polluted

A decade later, MCC(C) began 1969 hopeful that they would soon meet with Prime Minister Trudeau to introduce him to the philosophy and work of their denomination. In December 1969, *TCM* reported that Trudeau had become the first Canadian prime minister since the 1920s to fail to respond to MCC(C)'s request for such a meeting. "After nearly a year of trying," MCC leaders had resigned themselves to the fact that it would never take place.<sup>127</sup> In the following issue, Epp penned an editorial entitled "Touché, Mr. Trudeau." The prime minister had apparently met with John Lennon and Yoko Ono just days after turning down MCC(C). Unsurprisingly, this juxtaposition sparked outrage, both within the Mennonite community and the Liberal party.<sup>128</sup> While there was no real indication of what Trudeau's motives may have been, Epp interpreted it as an indictment of Mennonite isolationism. He wondered whether the Prime Minister had made time for the peace activist/musician couple while snubbing the Mennonite delegation because the agenda of the latter had traditionally been self-serving.

Did he have any reason to suspect that this time the Mennonite would not be coming to the prime minister's office with mainly a series of requests for special privileges? How could he have guessed that this time they wanted to talk to him about China, Taiwan, NATO, the US draft resisters, and other vexing problems of today?<sup>129</sup>

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stream, of the human tide, but they never attempted to purify the waters of society." Shelly's analysis did not absolve the church of its silence on the issues Metzler mentioned, however, given that Mennonites had established social welfare initiatives, against all hope. Shelly's explanation for these presumably futile efforts was straightforward: "The word is obedience." See Maynard Shelly, "The Church And Her Witness In Society: An Intensive Four Day Study Held on Biblical And Practical Aspects," *TCM*, 17 November 1961, 5.

<sup>127</sup> "First PM since '20s: MCC (Canada) fails in efforts for audience," *TCM*, 19 December 1969, 1.

<sup>128</sup> See Dave Boldt, "Disappointed in Prime Minister," *TCM*, 9 January 1970, 5. (A letter from Saskatchewan's Minister of Highways and Transportation.) See also "'Somebody goofed': PM's snub irks politicians, paper," *TCM*, 16 January 1970, 1,2.

<sup>129</sup> "Touché, Mr. Trudeau," *TCM*, 31 December 1969, 4. The situation was eventually resolved and Mennonite representatives were able to meet with Trudeau in March 1970. See "Trudeau will meet MCC officials after all: No disregard for Mennonites," *TCM*, 13 March 1970, 1.

As Canadian Mennonites shifted toward a more progressive agenda, Epp did not miss this opportunity to remind them that their past isolationism had far-reaching consequences.<sup>130</sup>

In March 1970, during the long-awaited meeting, five Mennonite leaders, the Prime Minister, and three cabinet ministers discussed pacifism and “[k]eeping Canada’s doors open to émigrés who have been made homeless by war and persecution, including US draft-age immigrants.”<sup>131</sup> Prime Minister Trudeau expressed admiration for the conscientious objectors who stood by their convictions during the Second World War, going so far as to say that it was beneficial for Canada to have such citizens in its midst. He added that he appreciated how Mennonites had not “copped out of the whole thing, but helped alleviate miseries which arise from wars by serving in peaceful capacities.”<sup>132</sup> Finally, the Prime Minister clarified that he was very much interested in speaking with representatives of the Mennonite community because he valued “the spiritual input that you are bringing into this society, as a group of people who have a certain faith and who are a leaven in the dough, as it were.”<sup>133</sup> This metaphor, however biblical, could not be more at odds with the tradition Mennonite aspiration of being *die Stillen im Lande*.

Throughout the war, *TCM* was peppered with articles and letters explicitly repudiating the *Stillen* myth. For instance, John H. Redekop urged readers to jettison false dichotomies of engagement and seek a position that was more progressive than *die Stillen im Lande*.<sup>134</sup> Reader D.D. Klassen pointed out that the role evolved while Anabaptists were under persecution and was not in keeping with the responsibilities of “true disciples

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<sup>130</sup> There were, of course, objections to engaging in political activism in order to intercede on behalf of war resisters in particular. These concerns, as well as their rebuttals, are the subject of the next chapter.

<sup>131</sup> “Five will meet Prime Minister,” *TCM*, 20 March 1970, 1.

<sup>132</sup> “A ‘most beautiful brief’: Prime Minister impressed with ‘spiritual input’ of Mennonites,” *TCM*, 27 March 1970, 2.

<sup>133</sup> “A ‘most beautiful brief’: Prime Minister impressed with ‘spiritual input’ of Mennonites,” *TCM*, 27 March 1970, 2.

<sup>134</sup> John H. Redekop, “A Study Report: Church And State: A Fresh Look,” *TCM*, 18 January 1966, 6.

of the Lord Jesus [who] claim to live in the tradition of our Anabaptist forefathers.”<sup>135</sup>

Writing from Zambia, another Mennonite commented that “[i]t is only too easy to be the ‘*Stillen im Lande*’ during a period when our young men (in Canada) are not being conscripted, or to be ‘still’ when secretly you condone the massacre that is carried on in the name of anti-communism (equated with Christianity).”<sup>136</sup> Underlying these critiques was the argument that a Mennonite’s refusal to intervene in political matters was a function of either a tragic misinterpretation of Anabaptist theology and history, or outright hypocrisy. In either case, it had to be remedied.

### *Protest Marches*

If some Mennonites had trouble with the fact that MCC(C) delegates were sitting down with political leaders, they were livid when they heard about peace church participation in public demonstrations. Those who spoke out against participating in protest marches referenced some of the arguments that had already been employed in the course of opposing lobbying efforts, but also invoked the danger implicit in collaborating with misfits and the threat of escalation. “[W]ho is usually represented in peace marches or any other protest demonstration?” asked one reader.<sup>137</sup> Alongside the few sincere people, “[a]ren’t there a lot of beatniks and other depraved persons known as professional agitators?... Are you doing your Christian duty by condoning the burning of draft cards and rejection of your country’s laws by taking part in marches started by people of this ilk?”<sup>138</sup> In an editorial reprinted from *Der Bote*, P.B. Wiens argued that peaceful marches always escalated into violence over time and wondered why Mennonites were willing to

<sup>135</sup> D.D. Klassen, “‘Feet on the ground,’” *TCM*, 28 February 1967, 4.

<sup>136</sup> David Winter, “The Nerve Of The Peace Witness,” *TCM*, 16 August 1966, 5.

<sup>137</sup> Robert A. Schultz, “Peace Marches,” *TCM*, 12 April 1966, 5.

<sup>138</sup> Robert A. Schultz, “Peace Marches,” *TCM*, 12 April 1966, 5.

protest against American policy, but not against the Soviet Union. Finally, Wiens expressed the hope “that the demonstration-consciousness in our people will soon fade into oblivion.”<sup>139</sup>

The *TCM* certainly made strides to ensure this would not be the case. In the spring of 1965, *TCM* began reporting on grassroots expressions of dissent regarding American policy in Vietnam. In its coverage of the work of Dr. Mulford Q. Sibley, a pacifist activist from the United States, *TCM* described a peaceful demonstration planned for Holy Week: “approximately 5,000 students in the US, in remembrance of the Crucifixion of Christ will silently march towards Washington in a non-violent protest against the Crucifixion of Christ in Vietnam.”<sup>140</sup> After evangelist Billy Graham invited participants to pray for American soldiers in Vietnam during a Houston crusade in 1966, *TCM* helped clarify the details of this event, which had received much coverage in various Christian publications, not all of it accurate.<sup>141</sup> Walter Klaassen contended that

Graham’s uncritical denunciation of peace demonstrations is irresponsible because in these demonstrations we have evidence of deep concern for a specific evil, not moral evil in abstraction. To say that protest against ‘sin and moral evil’ is opposed to protest against war is evidence of either of careless rhetoric or moral confusion.<sup>142</sup>

Klaassen also took pains to emphasize that the evangelist’s penchant for conflating Christian devotion and nationalism was deeply troubling.

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<sup>139</sup> P.B. Wiens, “What Other Editors Say: Protest Marches Are Not Good,” *TCM*, 17 May 1966, 7.

<sup>140</sup> Hans A. DeBoer, “As A Quaker and a Christian: ‘I Must Disobey Laws Against Democracy And God’ – Sibley,” *TCM*, 13 April 1965, 11.

<sup>141</sup> There was initially a sense that Graham had expressed support for America’s incursion into Vietnam. During this period both *TCM* and *UCO*, especially the latter, bore witness to the fact that their respective denominations were trying to decide where to stand on Graham and his ministry, particularly in light of his explicitly nationalistic approach to the Christian faith.

<sup>142</sup> Walter Klaassen, “Comments At Houston Crusade: Setting The Record Straight On Billy Graham’s War Stand,” *TCM*, 7 June 1966, 2.

The debate came to a head in North Newton, Kansas – and on the front page of *The Canadian Mennonite* – in the fall of that year. The student-led Peace Club at Bethel College had planned a Repentance Walk for 11 November 1966, Veterans Day. The intention was to quietly march from campus to a post office across town, where they would mail letters of concern to national leaders. Not long after this event was announced, *TCM* reported, numerous complaints were lodged by community members and supporters of veterans groups. It was, they suggested, an outrage that “pacifists would dare to venture forth on a supposedly militaristic and patriotic day.” Although he was likely unrepresentative of the tone of the other detractors, one young man warned “I’ll shoot the first pacifist that walks under an American flag.”<sup>143</sup>

At first by hinting and then through an explicit letter, the college president pressured the Peace Club to cancel the march, which they did. However, the group decided to go ahead with the peace rally on campus. Maynard Shelly, the editor of *The Mennonite* and writer of this story, was highly critical of the comportment of the administration. Indeed, the lead was “Concerns for the welfare of a Mennonite institution got in the way of a demonstration of concern for righteousness.”<sup>144</sup> Shelly’s follow-up described the speeches that had been given at the rally, as well as noting that the event culminated in a walk to the on-campus post office. Additionally, a hastily-planned veterans’ parade took place three hours after the peace walk: it featured American flags and included the firing of blanks by a National Guard gunnery crew.<sup>145</sup>

Sometime contributor Leo Driedger wrote in to *TCM* to decry the decision to cancel the larger march, and Shelly revisited the details of the controversy at length again

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<sup>143</sup> Maynard Shelly, “Newton Repentance Walk Called Off,” *TCM*, 8 November 1966, 1.

<sup>144</sup> Maynard Shelly, “Newton Repentance Walk Called Off,” *TCM*, 8 November 1966, 1.

<sup>145</sup> Maynard Shelly, “Newton: sounds in conflict,” *TCM*, 22 November 1966, 5.

in December.<sup>146</sup> By contrast, Dr. Walter Quiring, former editor of *Der Bote*, complained about the volume of coverage this event had received, implying that it was propaganda. He argued that interest in protest marches was concentrated in a small fraction of Mennonites, and that those few should not be permitted to “force their will” on the vast majority.<sup>147</sup> Moreover, he contended, “[t]hose ‘peace marches’ are totally worthless. The effect on our own society is without a doubt a negative one: bringing confusion, anger, and reaction.”<sup>148</sup> Quiring’s call for a return to the traditional Anabaptist formulation of separation of church and state included a reminder that the readers’ forefathers had said to their governments, “We Mennonites do not mix ourselves into your worldly affairs, and you should not mix in our religious affairs.”<sup>149</sup> Finally, the letter revealed Quiring’s own support of the Vietnam War, the discontinuation of which would only increase the chance that “the Communists may take over the land.”<sup>150</sup> Quiring posited that his view, rather than that of *TCM*, represented the Mennonite consensus, and that funding for the newspaper should be contingent on its willingness to cease stirring up trouble.

*TCM* headquarters was flooded with responses. Readers pointed out that Quiring assumed that the government had no interest in receiving input from citizens, that his position was declining in popularity, and that it was folly to suppose that the average Mennonite supported the war as a means of keeping Communism at bay.<sup>151</sup> One reader suggested that it was Mennonite silence, rather than participation, which was confusing:

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<sup>146</sup> Leo Driedger, “Unbelievable,” *TCM*, 22 November 1966, 5; Maynard Shelly, “Peace church baffled by peace walk,” *TCM*, 13 December 1966, 1, 11–18.

<sup>147</sup> Walter Quiring, “Peace church baffled...” *TCM*, 3 January 1967, 4.

<sup>148</sup> Walter Quiring, “Peace church baffled...” *TCM*, 3 January 1967, 4.

<sup>149</sup> Walter Quiring, “Peace church baffled...” *TCM*, 3 January 1967, 4.

<sup>150</sup> Walter Quiring, “Peace church baffled...” *TCM*, 3 January 1967, 4.

<sup>151</sup> See Aaron Klassen, “On getting even,” *TCM*, 17 January 1967, 5. See also Leo Driedger, “Clarification Requested,” *TCM*, 17 January 1967, 6; Helen Rempel, “The alert ones in the land,” *TCM*, 17 January 1967, 5, 6.



those aware of the church's pacifism would surely be puzzled by the absence of a clear Mennonite voice on the issue. "Or," the reader observed, "they might become confused when we seemingly support the war by our silence."<sup>152</sup> Another letter highlighted the hypocrisy of Quiring's position: having sought recourse when their own safety and conscience were threatened, Mennonites were now being encouraged to stay silent while others suffered. Under the tutelage of men like Quiring, the reader argued, "we've raised a battalion of Mennonite religionists who look with inner pleasure over spilled guts because by virtue of such butchery their's [sic] are warm and full."<sup>153</sup> All of the reader responses printed by *TCM* suggested that Quiring's objection was not so much to protest marches themselves, but to their content.

While the concerns expressed by Quiring and others did not dictate policy, Mennonite decision-making bodies carefully considered the pitfalls of public protest and adopted a nuanced approach to the issue. At the 1969 convention of Mennonite Brethren, delegates drafted a provisional statement which discouraged "participation in violent protest marches or demonstrations" but acknowledged the need "to be tolerant to those who arrive at the personal conviction that they should participate in peaceful demonstrations as a means of witness and concern."<sup>154</sup> In advance of a three-day peace march planned in Washington around Veterans Day 1969, MCC Peace Section anticipated Quiring's concerns and urged Mennonite protestors to be a "mediating presence." Delton Franz, Director of the Washington office, acknowledged that "[t]hough the clearly-stated goals of the [activities] call for legal expressions for peace, the concern

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<sup>152</sup> Helen Rempel, "The alert ones in the land," *TCM*, 17 January 1967, 6.

<sup>153</sup> Jack Dueck, "More agony and less hope," *TCM*, 24 January 1967, 5.

<sup>154</sup> Dave Kroecker, "At 59<sup>th</sup> MB Convention: Delegates vote for college expansion; adopt peace witness policy statement," *TCM*, 11 July 1969.

that conflict and violence could occur troubles many citizens.”<sup>155</sup> Two weeks later, a photo from the event graced the front page of *TCM*, and one of the hundreds of thousands of participants described his experience at the peace march. John Bender shared the details of the Mennonite breakfast meeting that preceded the protest, and noted that there was a common concern that their church was “abiding by a definition of peace which implies only passiveness.”<sup>156</sup> While he conceded that militant groups had incited violence toward the end of the event, Bender echoed the sentiments of another Mennonite participant: “If we as Christians are concerned about people we have to be concerned about politics.”<sup>157</sup>

One American reader suggested that the debate about public protest might simply boil down to two fundamental schisms: the generation gap – which, for Mennonites, divided those haunted by memories of violent protest and revolution in Russia from those whose North American experiences of demonstrations were limited to peaceful suffrage and civil right campaigns – and the urban-rural rift.<sup>158</sup> Implicit in his analysis is an understanding that as the attitude of the state to the church had shifted, Mennonites must reconsider their own approach to political matters.

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<sup>155</sup> Delton Franz, “Washington office encourages Mennonite protestors to be mediating presence,” *TCM*, 14 November 1969, 1.

<sup>156</sup> John Bender, “Washington: a feeling of community,” *TCM*, 28 November 1969, 3.

<sup>157</sup> John Bender, “Washington: a feeling of community,” *TCM*, 28 November 1969, 3.

<sup>158</sup> V.A. Dirks, “No Time For Legalism On Issue Of Demonstrations,” *TCM*, 28 June 1966, 5.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CANADA: A “REFUGE FROM MILITARISM?”

While conscription had been in place in the United States since 1948, its scope broadened as with the increase in American involvement in Vietnam. For the young man reluctant to enter military service, two broad options were available: he could refuse to comply with the Selective Service System’s induction process, either attempting to fail his physical exam, fleeing the country, or going underground; or he could avail himself of legitimate avenues of appealing his induction. The most controversial deferments were those granted to college students, since they clearly privileged the wealthiest American families. One could also avoid service by joining the clergy or on the grounds of the hardship it would cause the draftee’s family. Finally, one could claim Conscientious Objector (CO) status, either opting for a non-combatant military role (designated 1-A-O) or choosing some form of alternative service (1-O).

The United States Supreme Court had made it clear that conscientious objectors did not have to subscribe to any faith, so long as their aversion to war was derived from a belief “that is sincere and meaningful [and] occupies a place in the life of its possessor parallel to that filled by the orthodox belief in God of one who clearly qualifies for the exemption.”<sup>1</sup> In his guide to draft board appearances, Allan Blackman emphasized that it

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<sup>1</sup> Colin McLeod, of American Friends Service Committee. Letter to William D. Hooley, Dean of Men, Goshen College. January 24, 1967. Hist.Mss. 1.138.1 Samuel Jay Steiner Collection, folder 7. The Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Conrad Grebel. No pages. The wording of the *Seeger* decision (1965), as cited by Allan Blackman, is actually slightly different. It stated: “A sincere and meaningful belief which occupies in the life of its possessor a place parallel to that filled by the God of those admittedly qualifying for the exemption comes within the statutory definition” of religion. See Allan Blackman, *Face to Face with your Draft Board: A Guide to Personal Appearances* (Berkeley, CA: World Without War Council, 1972), 43. Five years later, the *Welsh* decision clarified that such beliefs “need not be confined in either source or content to traditional or parochial concepts of religion.... What is necessary under *Seeger*... is that

was not the draftee's responsibility to persuade the board to change its mind about war, or to demonstrate the strategic feasibility of pacifism. Rather, he had to convince the interviewers that he had a "sincere and meaningful" objection to serving in the military. "The draft board is supposed to determine what a man believes," Blackman stressed, "not whether that belief is practical."<sup>2</sup>

On paper, then, the basis for CO status was a demonstrable, long-held philosophical or religious aversion to war in general; in reality, however, local draft boards were reluctant to grant 1-O classifications to those outside of the traditional peace churches – Mennonite, Quaker, or Brethren. J. Harold Sherk, Executive Secretary of the National Service Board for Religious Objectors (NSBRO), even explicitly discouraged at least one applicant from disclosing his atheism and hinted that, given his age, it was likely that his religious beliefs had not been fully formed and that "agnosticism" might be a fairer, and more helpful, representation of his views.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, there was no provision whatsoever for those potential inductees who stood in opposition to the specific conflict into which they would be drafted. It was no stretch to imagine that the Vietnam War, which drew controversy for both its aims and its execution, found many opponents among those who were not strict pacifists. Yet occasional pacifism was not grounds for CO status.<sup>4</sup>

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the opposition to war stem from the registrant's moral, ethical, or religious beliefs about what is right and wrong and that these beliefs be held with the strength of traditional convictions.... If an individual deeply and sincerely holds beliefs which are purely ethical or moral in source and content but which nevertheless impose upon him a duty of conscience to refrain from participating in *any* war at *any* time, those beliefs certainly" qualify. See Allan Blackman, *Face to Face with your Draft Board: A Guide to Personal Appearances* (Berkley, CA: World Without War Council, 1972), 43. Emphasis added.

<sup>2</sup> Blackman, *Face to Face*, 35. Original emphasis.

<sup>3</sup> J. Harold Sherk, Executive Secretary, National Service Board for Religious Objectors. Letter to Dr. Russel A. Liechty, Dean of Students, Goshen College. March 22, 1966. Hist.Mss. 1.138.1 Samuel Jay Steiner Collection, folder 7. The Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Conrad Grebel

<sup>4</sup> Note the repetition of "all" in *Welsh*.

*Exodus: Out of Options*

Unsurprisingly, many draft-aged men did not reasonably expect to find a legitimate and effective means of avoiding service. They were left, then, to choose roughly between jail and emigration.<sup>5</sup> Whether supported by friends and family or virtually disowned, those seeking to leave America were assisted by countless draft counselling services both in the United States and in Canada. Compiled by Mark Satin of the Toronto Anti-Draft Programme, the *Manual for Draft-Age Immigrants to Canada* was an invaluable guide, offering the expertise of lawyers and social workers, along with pertinent information about Canadian weather, politics, and culture. The impressive number of copies sold in the United States – 65,000 – is likely the tip of the iceberg, as it is impossible to estimate how many more were copied and distributed underground.<sup>6</sup>

Because Canadian officials did not request or record whether the draft was a motive for immigration, and because there were surely countless resisters who arrived on a tourist visa and stayed, calculating the number of immigrants is all but impossible. James Dickerson notes that United States Attorneys were referred more than 200,000 cases of draft evasion, and that at least another 500,000 inducted soldiers deserted.<sup>7</sup> Somewhere around 200,000 American men and women emigrated to Canada between 1965 and 1973. However, this number only accounts for those who sought landed immigrant status; some draft evaders entered the country on a tourist visa and simply

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<sup>5</sup> Although the focus of this paper is on Canadian immigrants, a number of military deserters who were already stationed abroad fled to Sweden, while some draft resisters chose Mexico and still others hid within the United States.

<sup>6</sup> Linda Hurst, "A picture and a thousand words," *The Toronto Star*, 24 August 2008, paragraph 13. While it was by no means illegal to distribute materials like Satin's manual, even considering resisting the draft could carry hefty and devastating social consequences for the draftee and his family. By making draft counselling resources informally, anti-draft activists made it easier for young men to access information without the fear of being publicly ostracized.

<sup>7</sup> Dickerson, *North*, xii.

remained abroad without filing the appropriate paperwork.<sup>8</sup> Maxwell cites the estimates of other scholars and arrives at a broad range of 15,000 to 100,000 men.<sup>9</sup> Although the precise number of immigrants remains a mystery, the impact on both sides of the border is well-documented.

*Eisodus: Into Muddied Waters*

Major cities throughout Canada gave way to resister ghettos. The Toronto Anti-Draft Program, Regina Committee to Aid Immigrants, Calgary Committee on War Immigrants, Nova Scotia, Vancouver and Winnipeg Committees to Aid American War Objectors, Montreal Council to Aid War Resisters, a total of 26 specific aid centres, and countless volunteers all sprang up in response to the need for immigration counselling, employment services, and basic support for survival. Hostels and billets offered objectors community as well as housing. Operating on a shoe-string budget, the aid centres and their governing bodies sought practical help from the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC), as well as local parishes. It is important to note that, while the help came, Canadian Christians did not constitute a united front.

While Maxwell follows John Hagan in claiming that the welcoming of military resisters was indicative of Canadian autonomy, it is noteworthy that, as of April 1970, of all the funds forwarded to the CCC for the purpose of supporting war resisters, only 15%

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<sup>8</sup> Dickerson, *North*, xiii.

<sup>9</sup> Maxwell, "Religion," 810. One way these numbers were derived was by subtracting the annual influx of draft-age American men from the average immigration rates before and after the war and then estimating how many war resisters entered the country without formally immigrating. Dickerson hyperbolically claims that "[v]ery few male draft resisters went to Canada without a woman at their side;" while it is known that many women left the United States either in support of their resisting or deserting family members or as an expression of their own opposition to the war, Dickerson provides no hard data to support his estimate. See Dickerson, *North*, xv.

had been donated by Canadians.<sup>10</sup> Of course, it is impossible to gauge how many Canadians sacrificed time, energy, money, and goods to assist war immigrants outside the auspices of any formal institution. In the same year, the World Council of Churches “authorized a special appeal to member churches and related agencies for funds to help the Canadian Council of Churches with its pastoral work among draft-age immigrants to Canada,”<sup>11</sup> inspired in part by information that many resisters and deserters had “emotional problems that prevent them from becoming ‘landed immigrants’ and thus able to work.”<sup>12</sup> It is first of all unclear whether the CCC directly engaged in any ministry with objectors; it appears that its emphasis was on funnelling collected donations into aid centres. Secondly, while dividing themselves from their communities and families – to say nothing of fearing criminal charges – certainly had a profound psychological effect on the immigrants, there is little evidence to support the claim that few found gainful employment. These examples demonstrate that there was by no means clarity about what the problem was, nor about what the appropriate solution might be. While some congregants and contributors had argued that it was inappropriate for Canadians to insinuate themselves in the foreign policy of another country, it was impossible to ignore the ethical, humanitarian, and political ramifications of this mass migration. Because their churches had established themselves as resources for the financially and emotionally needy, Canadian Christians, in particular, did not have the luxury of retreating into neutrality. The question of whether to offer practical support was essentially a binary one.

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<sup>10</sup> Canadian Council of Churches. 1969. “Emergency Ministry to U.S. Draft-Age Immigrants in Canada.” Pamphlet. XIV - 3.1.3.8 MCC (Ont.), folder 11. The Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Conrad Grebel.

<sup>11</sup> “WCC will assist draft refugees in Canada,” *TCM*, 3 July 1970, 3.

<sup>12</sup> “WCC will assist draft refugees in Canada,” *TCM*, 3 July 1970, 3.

Confusion abounded, even in the midst of goodwill. This pattern held true for both the United Church and the Mennonites.

#### Divided: The United Church and Military Resisters

Between 1965 and 1975, over 200 issues of *The Observer* were published. Within their pages were around forty pieces which dealt specifically with the plight of military resisters, about evenly split between articles and editorials, on the one hand, and letters to the editor, on the other. With respect to aid for draft evaders, the editorial position was identical to Hord's. Neither *The Observer* nor the General Council always appreciated his aggressive approach, however. As "D-Dodgers," a full-page editorial from November 1967, described, Hord's approach and his position were closely connected. One important bone of contention was whether the United Church should intentionally eschew the appearance that it was encouraging either resisting the draft or deserting the military.

On the basis of the Christian principle of conscientious objection and a longstanding Canadian openness to offering political asylum, the E&SS, under Hord's leadership, publicly "urged [all] Canadians to welcome Americans who for reasons of conscience refuse to do military service in the war in Vietnam and... to welcome them by offering temporary residence in their homes, practical and financial support and employment."<sup>13</sup> E&SS also committed to supporting aid groups.<sup>14</sup> *The Observer* cut to the heart of the symbolism of this allocation of funds when it noted that "[f]or \$1000, E

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<sup>13</sup> "D-Dodgers: If the Church is to have prophets it should be prepared for unpopular prophesying," *UCO*, 1 November 1967, 11.

<sup>14</sup> In the 30 April 1968 issue of *The Canadian Mennonite*, Frank H. Epp claims that Hord "experienced considerable opposition in his own church to this help and succeeded in implementing it only after it was designated not for draft-dodgers but for refugees." See Frank H. Epp, "American draft-resisters and Canadian Mennonites," *TCM*, 30 April 1968, 2.



and SS had a million dollar protest of American actions in Viet Nam.”<sup>15</sup> It appeared that the United Church was prepared to respond to the thousands of young men who were crossing the border in search of refuge, thanks in no small part to Ray Hord. While he was certainly not alone in his passionate advocacy, Hord quickly became the public face of this movement within the United Church, and his position drew both harsh criticism and enthusiastic support.

The General Council Executive stepped in to clarify and correct what E&SS had said. The Executive reiterated its firm opposition to the war, agreed that the right of the conscientious objector must be safeguarded, and emphasized that it was always concerned for the material and spiritual needs of others. However, it argued that “in such a democracy as the United States, the genuine conscientious objector can best make his witness in his own land.”<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the Executive trusted that the process of obtaining CO status was sound and protected any draftee who had sincere qualms about military service. It was therefore not “the province of Canadian citizens to proffer incitement or encouragement for young Americans to break the laws of their own country.”<sup>17</sup> They further objected that E&SS had no license to use funds in such a way as to effectively create new policy. E.L. Homewood concluded his editorial by bringing the problem of tactics to the fore:

One of the great moral issues of 1967 is American prosecution of the war in Viet Nam, and the drafting of young men into military training, and then sending them to fight an undeclared war. Dr. Hord has been screaming as loudly and effectively as he can that this is an evil war. The

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<sup>15</sup> “D-Dodgers: If the Church is to have prophets it should be prepared for unpopular prophesying,” *UCO*, 1 November 1967, 11.

<sup>16</sup> “D-Dodgers: If the Church is to have prophets it should be prepared for unpopular prophesying,” *UCO*, 1 November 1967, 11.

<sup>17</sup> “D-Dodgers: If the Church is to have prophets it should be prepared for unpopular prophesying,” *UCO*, 1 November 1967, 11.

executive voted as carefully as it could to say, 'we agree but that's not the way to say it.'<sup>18</sup>

Hord's uncompromising rhetoric was a function of his sense of urgency. Perhaps more than anyone else at the helm of the United Church, Hord felt that the war had settled an enormous responsibility on his shoulders, both as a Christian and as a Canadian. The 1967 profile in which Hord referred to Pearson as Johnson's puppy dog also contained inflammatory statements about Canadian hypocrisy with regard to draft evaders. Hord had by now developed a habit of rhetorically asking how Canadians could ignore the emotional turmoil and logistical struggles of these immigrants while cherishing the heritage of those who had fled to Canada from the colonies rather than participate in the American Revolution. One of these speeches caught the ear of The United Empire Loyalists Association of Canada, and a representative lodged a strongly-worded complaint in the 1 October 1967 issue of *The Observer*. Kenneth A. Benson accused Hord of "shocking misconduct and stupidity" for stating at "a beatnik love-in" that military resisters based their decisions on "far loftier" ideals than did the Loyalists.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, the aptness of the parallel Hord had drawn was not lost on all of his audience; indeed, several *Observer* readers described assistance to draft resisters as a matter of fidelity to their Loyalist heritage.<sup>20</sup>

A year after the "D-Dodgers" editorial, in the fall of 1968, *The Observer's* cover story was a multi-page investigation of the life of a military resister. While much of

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<sup>18</sup> "D-Dodgers: If the Church is to have prophets it should be prepared for unpopular prophesying," *UCO*, 1 November 1967, 40.

<sup>19</sup> Kenneth A. Benson, "Ray Hord and the church," *UCO*, 1 October 1967, 2.

<sup>20</sup> Phyllis Airhart has questioned the historicity of the Loyalist myth. Even here it has three distinct hypostases: were the Loyalists fleeing military service, seeking peace, or expressing devotion to the Crown? See Phyllis D. Airhart, "'As Canadian as Possible under the Circumstances': Reflections on the Study of Protestantism in North America" in Harry Stout and D.G. Hart, eds., *New Directions in American Religious History* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1997): 116-37.

“Draft Dodgers: What Makes Them Run?” is expository, both its focus and its inclusion in *The Observer* – to say nothing of its prominent placing – reveal a clear agenda. Robert Marjoribanks began by crystallizing the moral quandary in which draft-age Americans found themselves. Their menu of options was a short one: “They had a choice of going to Viet Nam, to jail, or to Canada.”<sup>21</sup> As far as Lieutenant General Lewis Blain Hershey, head of the U.S. Selective Service System, was concerned, those who chose the latter option were “offal.”<sup>22</sup> It is hard to imagine a more inflammatory characterization, and Marjoribanks’ inclusion of the phrase effectively inspires sympathy for the objects of Hershey’s revulsion. Marjoribanks then described the wide range of personal experiences represented by draft evaders, including their motivations for refusing to serve. While it is unclear how representative Marjoribanks’ sample was, he emphasized that few of the men he interviewed were outright pacifists. The overwhelming majority was simply opposed to American participation in the Vietnam War, and wanted no part of it. One young man cited the Nuremberg Trials as a prime example of the limits of national loyalty, while another argued that by avoiding jail he had retained his ability to be politically effective as part of the anti-war campaign.

Marjoribanks then narrated the typical path from one’s eighteenth birthday to settling down in Canada. Support for draft resisters began on American university campuses, which were the bastions of anti-draft – and, indeed, anti-war – protest. Unfortunately, Marjoribanks noted, as a result draft counselling was virtually limited to students. Once a young man decided to flee, he benefited from the Canadian government’s unwillingness to “turn anybody away because of his hassle with a draft

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Marjoribanks, “Draft Dodgers: What Makes Them Run?” *UCO*, 1 September 1968, 12.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Marjoribanks, “Draft Dodgers: What Makes Them Run?” *UCO*, 1 September 1968, 12.

board.”<sup>23</sup> While they often enquired about the education, skills, and job prospects of those seeking to enter, immigration officials had never been permitted to ask about military records. This was not the same as being welcomed with open arms, Marjoribanks stressed, but it was a start. From there, numerous aid organizations made available information about legal recourse, employment, housing, and further education. In its capacity as a referral agency, the TADP sought to meet the immediate needs of resisters,<sup>24</sup> including “a place to stay, a job and perhaps a few dollars to live on until he gets his first pay cheque.”<sup>25</sup> The chairman of the TADP also identified a deep hunger for friendship: the draft resister wanted ““to meet someone who will welcome him to Canada and talk to him, even though they are not concerned with the particular axe he has to grind.””<sup>26</sup>

Having spelled out the range of assistance demanded by this influx of immigrants, Marjoribanks reported that – whether in partnership with aid centres or independently – “[m]ost Canadian churches offer draft-dodgers *at least* the same kind of help they offer prostitutes and drunks.... Quakers, Unitarians and some concerned United Church clergy and laymen have been notably active in Canada.”<sup>27</sup> It is at this point in the article that the debate raging within the United Church comes closest to the surface. Rev. Gordon Stewart, Assistant Secretary of E&SS, is cited as framing the proffered support in the most diplomatic way possible:

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<sup>23</sup> Robert Marjoribanks, “Draft Dodgers: What Makes Them Run?” *UCO*, 1 September 1968, 14.

<sup>24</sup> Marjoribanks briefly mentioned that the matter of military deserters posed significant problems, and that some aid organizations were reluctant to openly offer support. They did, however, “discretely pass them on to anonymous ‘private citizens.’” See Robert Marjoribanks, “Draft Dodgers: What Makes Them Run?” *UCO*, 1 September 1968, 15.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Marjoribanks, “Draft Dodgers: What Makes Them Run?” *UCO*, 1 September 1968, 15.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Marjoribanks, “Draft Dodgers: What Makes Them Run?” *UCO*, 1 September 1968, 15.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Marjoribanks, “Draft Dodgers: What Makes Them Run?” *UCO*, 1 September 1968, 15. Emphasis added.

The function of the church... is to give moral support to the person, whatever his decision may be. We may violently disagree with the decision but we must accept him as a person. If we are going to be judgmental we ought to be judgmental about the society that takes youngsters and puts them in these impossible dilemmas.<sup>28</sup>

While he appeared to be shying away from the position of his colleague and superior on E&SS, Stewart was making an important distinction between agreeing with Ray Hord's perspective on Vietnam and supporting Hord's campaign on behalf of draft resisters. The prophetic priorities of social justice and compassion, Stewart implied, ought to trump such priestly considerations as purity of motives and past sins.

Indeed, Stewart's tack cast the widest possible net, because he insisted that the duty to help those in need was not contingent upon opposition to the Vietnam War, much less on support for civil disobedience. This humanitarian crisis was not of the resisters' making, and it demanded unconditional compassion. The same argument underlay Marjoribanks piece as a whole. In fact, he explicitly turned the tables on those prone to be critical of resisters by noting that, "despite discouraging experiences with religion," some so-called dodgers still had hope that the church would live up to its potential as a moral force.<sup>29</sup> Marjoribanks had put a human face on the problem, as well as dispelling false dichotomies, providing a thorough analysis of the breadth and depth of the need, and even deigning to shame the church into acting. In short, this overtly sympathetic article eschewed romanticism while insisting that its readers become involved in the cause.

It is probably not particularly significant that, even after Marjoribanks mentioned that his readers should refer to dodgers as "draft-resisters, if you want to be very polite,"

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<sup>28</sup> Robert Marjoribanks, "Draft Dodgers: What Makes Them Run?" *UCO*, 1 September 1968, 15.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Marjoribanks, "Draft Dodgers: What Makes Them Run?" *UCO*, 1 September 1968, 12.

he did not do so in his article.<sup>30</sup> He likely meant no disrespect. It is noteworthy, however, that by the early 1970s the more polite term was frequently used in *The Observer's* articles and editorials. In the interim, the majority of pieces about draft resisters were simple descriptions of new initiatives or funds devoted to the cause, whether by the United Church, other Christian denominations, CCC or WCC. There are a few major exceptions. In the 15 June 1969 issue, an article informed readers that the General Council executive had “called upon federal Immigration Minister Allan MacEachen to abandon ‘secret guidelines’ issued to immigration officers” that allowed the latter to effectively screen out military deserters.<sup>31</sup> MacEachen denied the existence of such secret guidelines, but various organizations and news sources claimed that they did, in fact, exist.<sup>32</sup> An accompanying editorial by Patricia Clarke recommended that the Canadian government trade in hypocrisy for transparency. While she clearly objected to the implication that “Russian deserters make good Canadians, and Americans deserters don’t,” she posited that if this was really the opinion of the federal government it should be codified in public law, rather than hidden in furtive hints to immigration officials. She also advanced *The Observer's* tradition of drawing distinctions: “You don’t have to — — — — — approve of welcoming United States army deserters to Canada to believe that the United Church did a worthwhile job in disclosing that secret guidelines keep them out.”<sup>33</sup>

In the 15 March 1970 issue, the cover of which had as its second headline, “A Deserter: ‘You Cannot Christianize War.’” The article in question was written by John C.

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<sup>30</sup> Robert Marjoribanks, “Draft Dodgers: What Makes Them Run?” *UCO*, 1 September 1968, 12.

<sup>31</sup> “Blast Secret Rules,” *UCO*, 15 June 1970, 31.

<sup>32</sup> “Blast Secret Rules,” *UCO*, 15 June 1970, 31.

<sup>33</sup> Patricia Clarke, “Parliament makes the laws,” *UCO*, 15 June 1969, 10.

Lott<sup>34</sup> and related the story of G.H.C. MacGregor, a young American man who abandoned the military after he realized that even his non-combatant role in the war was incompatible with his belief system. A nominal Presbyterian, MacGregor found it difficult to convince the draft board that his objection to service was born of a deeply-held conviction. His final appeal was before a retired brigadier general and Presbyterian elder who “had devoted his life to the war machine... [and] saw no inconsistency in this.”<sup>35</sup> Needless to say, 1-W status eluded MacGregor. During basic training as a 1-A-O, he realized that a conscientious objector “simply cannot be a soldier. The fact that he doesn’t carry a weapon is irrelevant.”<sup>36</sup> Any hope he had of bringing his own values to bear on those with whom he worked was dashed when MacGregor realized that, while he could play a role in injecting Christian values into a wide range of institutions, “no Christian, by his participation in it, can hope to Christianize war.”<sup>37</sup> He and his wife eventually became convinced that fleeing to Canada was their best option.

Much like Marjoribanks, Lott offered a sympathetic perspective of a much-maligned character. In fact, several aspects of the story work to refute the caricature typically drawn of the military deserter. First of all, MacGregor was quoted as specifically acknowledging that there is a time and place for national pride. His concern was that “in many cases patriotism has become a religion in itself.”<sup>38</sup> His decision to go against the grain of patriotic duty was therefore inspired by a desire to express greater allegiance to his religious values. Furthermore, MacGregor had followed all the

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<sup>34</sup> Lott also gave a sermon on the subject at Ottawa Mennonite Church in the fall of 1969. The text of his talk was printed in *The Canadian Mennonite*. See John C. Lott, “The Christian, his country, his conscience: an apology for non-cooperation,” *TCM*, 24 October 1969, 6,8.

<sup>35</sup> John C. Lott, “You Cannot Christianize War,” *UCO* 15 March 1970, 17.

<sup>36</sup> John C. Lott, “You Cannot Christianize War,” *UCO* 15 March 1970, 17.

<sup>37</sup> John C. Lott, “You Cannot Christianize War,” *UCO* 15 March 1970, 17.

<sup>38</sup> John C. Lott, “You Cannot Christianize War,” *UCO*, 15 March 1970, 17.

appropriate steps for obtaining 1-W status, seeking appeals as far as was possible. Despite his perseverance, the system failed him because it based its judgment on his denomination. The fact that both he and the brigadier general before whom he appeared were Presbyterian may have been highlighted in order to strike a cord with United Church people. MacGregor stated that he was prepared to face jail time rather than be deployed to Vietnam, but that a news story about Canadian immigration policies motivated him to change his mind. This detail suggests that MacGregor is not the stereotypical coward, but rather a man of conviction who is willing to pay the price for following his conscience. Finally, the mention of his concern for his wife and his family would likely go a long way to endear him to readers. Lott painted the picture of a devoted citizen and family man who had been forced by circumstance to make a very difficult decision – one with which he had wrestled and which had cost him much. This stood in stark contrast to the image so many Canadians seemed to have of the deserter, as will be shown below.

In November of the same year, Virginia Cunningham wrote a piece about her son, who had deserted the military after his attempts to obtain 1-W status failed. “Our son, the deserter” describes Cunningham’s son as a courageous young man who was willing to face a court martial rather than carry a gun. Once he had decided to desert, the author’s conviction was that she should do everything in her power to support her son. Cunningham expressed the belief that no deserter made such a decision lightly. They were painfully aware that they would be “cut off from all they have ever known. It is likely they will never be able to return to their country, their families, and their friends.”<sup>39</sup> She further encouraged readers to join her son and many others in asking, “What if there

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<sup>39</sup> Virginia Cunningham, “Our son, the deserter,” *UCO*, November 1970, 29.



were a war, and no one came?”<sup>40</sup> Cunningham’s inclusion in *The Observer* advances the editorial agenda of purging the United Church of any bigoted assumptions about the moral fibre, or lack thereof, of deserters. They were essentially victims of circumstance, forced by an unjust system to choose between two impossible alternatives.

An appeal to basic empathy was also present in the June 1971 issue. Acting editor Patricia Clarke wrote a profile of Robert Gardner, a veteran of the Second World War and minister to war resisters under the auspices of the Canadian Council of Churches. Clarke described the “45,000 or so” immigrants as unwilling to fight “at least not in Viet Nam.”<sup>41</sup> She also reported that the CCC consistently emphasized that Gardner’s ministry to resisters “implies no more moral approval... than it implies moral approval of crime to put chaplains in Kingston penitentiary.”<sup>42</sup>

Rather focussing only on Gardner, Clarke also highlighted stories of some of the men he supported. An especially striking example was that of a twenty-two year old man who “was training as a weather specialist. His job was to pick out clear sunny days on which to drop napalm on people. He felt a growing revulsion doing that” and deserted during a furlough to Canada.<sup>43</sup> The young man admitted to feelings of profound guilt; he was haunted by what he had done and was doing, and felt that he could not live with himself.<sup>44</sup> After describing some of the other motives for resisting the draft or deserting outright, Clarke asked why conscientious objectors did not simply seek legal recourse. Gardner responded that the outcome of a draft board hearing depended heavily on “the

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<sup>40</sup> Virginia Cunningham, “Our son, the deserter,” *UCO*, November 1970, 29.

<sup>41</sup> Patricia Clarke, “Robert Gardner: why a war veteran helps war resisters,” *UCO*, June 1971, 6.

<sup>42</sup> Patricia Clarke, “Robert Gardner: why a war veteran helps war resisters,” *UCO*, June 1971, 6.

<sup>43</sup> Patricia Clarke, “Robert Gardner: why a war veteran helps war resisters,” *UCO*, June 1971, 6.

<sup>44</sup> Patricia Clarke, “Robert Gardner: why a war veteran helps war resisters,” *UCO*, June 1971, 6.

prejudices of [the] local board,” among them “a moral loathing for those who won’t ‘defend their country’.”<sup>45</sup>

As was mentioned above, most of *The Observer*’s coverage of the resister issue came in the form of short accounts of ongoing support offered by various Christian organizations. However, even these pieces drew attention to the cause. Coupled with the unapologetically tragic stories of draft evaders and deserters, it was evident where *The Observer* stood: solidly in favour of offering monetary and moral support to military resisters. Moreover, *The Observer* took a multi-pronged approach to convincing its readers to take a similar view. It appealed to *pathos* by invoking Cunningham’s heartbreak and the weather specialist’s grief. It tapped into the national *ethos* by demonstrating that veterans stood shoulder-to-shoulder with resisters, arguing that legal recourse often failed would-be conscientious objectors, and alluding to Canada’s role as a refuge for the displaced. Finally, for those who remained unconvinced, it offered the *logos* of distinguishing between approving of the immigrants’ decision and responding to a humanitarian crisis.

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### *The Survey*

Before *The Observer*’s position had had an opportunity to weave its way into articles and editorials, and thereby have some influence on its readers, the February 1968 “The Christian and Viet Nam” survey was released.<sup>46</sup> The last four questions concentrated on military resisters, and when the results were revealed in the March 15 issue the sub-headline zeroed in on this subject. It read, “The majority don’t want the United Church to help draft dodgers,” and the lead echoed the sentiment, explaining that

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<sup>45</sup> Patricia Clarke, “Robert Gardner: why a war veteran helps war resisters,” *UCO*, June 1971, 6.

<sup>46</sup> At this juncture, it is worth repeating the survey’s own caveat regarding the generalizability of its results: in all likelihood the findings describe only the opinions of those most interested in the issues at hand.

respondents “disapprove, some of them violently, of help for draft dodgers.”<sup>47</sup> These conclusions were based on the fact that, while many United Church people felt that alternative service options should be made available to conscientious objectors,<sup>48</sup> when asked whether they agreed that “Canadian churchmen are justified in extending support to refugees from the U.S. Selective Service,”<sup>49</sup> 54% of respondents answered in the negative.<sup>50</sup>

However, the headline was profoundly misleading not only because 54% is not a decisive majority, but because, as the accompanying article noted, this was the only question on which the laity and the clergy disagreed sharply. Sixty-three percent of ministers supported aid for military resisters, as did 52% of those under thirty-five. Older laity made up the bulk of respondents, and were solidly opposed to offering help.<sup>51</sup> In a follow-up piece – strikingly titled “How Much Does A Prophet Cost?” – Patricia Clarke remarked that Ray Hord’s message evidently resonated most with younger Canadians.<sup>52</sup> Despite the fact that half of the population was under thirty, however, the church was slanted toward older Canadians. Just as significantly, “as Hord himself pointed out, when we discussed the poll a few days before he died, there’s no one under 35 on the General Council’s executive.”<sup>53</sup> The Vacancies Committee that would work to find a successor for Hord also lacked any members under 35.<sup>54</sup> Meanwhile, nearly two-thirds of

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<sup>47</sup> “How You Vote On Vietnam,” *UCO*, 15 March 1968, 16.

<sup>48</sup> 78% of respondents. See “How You Vote On Vietnam,” *UCO*, 15 March 1968, 18.

<sup>49</sup> “The Christian and Viet Nam: a reader-opinion poll,” *UCO*, 1 February 1968, 4.

<sup>50</sup> “How You Vote On Vietnam,” *UCO*, 15 March 1968, 18.

<sup>51</sup> “How You Vote On Vietnam,” *UCO*, 15 March 1968, 18.

<sup>52</sup> No one seems to have taken stock of the fact that the under-35 demographic was unlikely to include war veterans. It is not unreasonable to assume that this fact had some bearing on the discrepancy between their responses and those of their elders.

<sup>53</sup> Patricia Clarke, “How Much Does A Prophet Cost?” *UCO*, 1 April 1968, 8.

<sup>54</sup> Patricia Clarke, “How Much Does A Prophet Cost?” *UCO*, 1 April 1968, 8.

respondents<sup>55</sup> expressed support for providing “information, aid and guidance to those who refuse induction on the grounds of religious conviction.”<sup>56</sup> The invocation of faith-based motivations appears to have made a significant impact, though it is unclear why.

If the numbers did little to justify the editor’s characterization of the reaction as “violent,” the comments offered by some respondents certainly clarified matters. A woman from Manitoba stated that military resisters “should get what they would get in North Viet Nam – the firing squad,” while another from Saskatchewan said that both evaders and those who help them “should be loaded on a cattle boat and shipped to Russia, or better, sunk on the way.”<sup>57</sup> Upon reading these “hysterical” statements among the results, a Saskatchewan man wrote in to question those respondents’ understanding of Christian philosophy.<sup>58</sup> Unfortunately, that revulsion toward military resisters was born out in an E&SS study the following spring which surveyed 239 laymen and 357 clergy and found that 56% of the former and 28% of the latter “did not think aid to draft resisters is a Christian action.”<sup>59</sup> This was a significant result because its wording was the inverse of that used in the 1968 study: the question was not whether Christian charity demanded that the church support military resisters but whether such support explicitly violated Christian principles.

### *The Inbox*

In light this starting point, it is unsurprising that responses to *The Observer*’s stand were mixed. Of twenty-three published letters to the editor, very few constituted a simple thumbs-up or thumbs-down – most offered their own arguments. Among those

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<sup>55</sup> “How You Vote On Vietnam,” *UCO*, 15 March 1968, 18.

<sup>56</sup> “The Christian and Viet Nam: a reader-opinion poll,” *UCO*, 1 February 1968, 4.

<sup>57</sup> “How You Vote On Vietnam,” *UCO*, 15 March 1968, 16.

<sup>58</sup> Jack Hopkins, “The Viet Nam poll,” *UCO*, 15 April 1968, 6.

<sup>59</sup> “What’s Christian?” *UCO*, 1 April 1969, 7.

who expressed support some felt that help should be offered on humanitarian grounds, while others sought to compensate for Canada's history of unswerving loyalty to the United States or to prevent nationalism from becoming sacrosanct. The overwhelming sense was the church should act in accordance with Christian values, rather than bending to the politics of the time. These readers appreciated the information *The Observer* was sharing with them, though some worried that the General Council was hedging too much by adopting a politically correct attitude.

In addition to the objections of The United Empire Loyalists Association of Canada, several dramatic complaints were lodged by *Observer* readers between 1968 and 1975. There was a wide range of reasons for opposing the position of *The Observer* and the Board of E&SS. To begin with, some readers advocated an isolationist approach: "No Canadian government, presbytery, United Church minister, or any citizen of Canada has the right to interfere with laws of another country, whether we agree with them or not,"<sup>60</sup> wrote one Saskatchewan reader. The other end of the spectrum was represented by a letter from a minister from Quebec who felt that *The Observer* and its readers were "actually being used as weapons of war on the psychological battle front, weapons aimed at the destruction both of ourselves and of those draft-dodgers whom we think we are helping."<sup>61</sup> Given the threat of Communist influence, the church should be educated in the dangers of "Marxist expansionism" in tandem with E&SS's campaign of mobilizing supporters for military resisters, he argued.<sup>62</sup> This sentiment was echoed by a reader who

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<sup>60</sup> R.G. Johnson, "Money for Draft Dodgers," *UCO*, 1 September 1968, 2.

<sup>61</sup> Rev. W. Charles Pelletier, "E&SS Board Fails Badly," *UCO* 1 September 1968, 2.

<sup>62</sup> Rev. W. Charles Pelletier, "E&SS Board Fails Badly," *UCO* 1 September 1968, 2.

had decided to cease all support of the United Church because some Communists had been involved in anti-draft protests. The simple overlap of their causes tainted the UCC.<sup>63</sup>

The more common objection was that draft resisters were essentially not good people. Readers suspected that, rather than being genuine conscientious objectors, those who fled were “just selective”<sup>64</sup> and would be “useless citizens in any country.”<sup>65</sup> It was not simply that they disagreed with E&SS policy: some readers found *The Observer*’s positive portrayal of such individuals deeply offensive, especially in light of Canada’s military history. “For your paper to take the stand it does is really a disgrace to all those who gave their lives and the thousands who were crippled in two world wars.”<sup>66</sup> In 1970, one reader opined that John C. Lott’s profile of G.H.C. MacGregor should have been titled, “You Cannot Christianize Desertion.”<sup>67</sup> Another cancelled her subscription, “disappointed and disgusted” that this “so-called Christian magazine [would] let a yellow coward renegade fill its pages with lies.”<sup>68</sup> A year later, another reader registered her displeasure with the work the Canadian Council of Churches was doing among resisters. “The church’s mission,” she wrote, “is to change the hearts of men, rather than to ‘dabble’ in politics.”<sup>69</sup> Finally, as late as 1975, despite *The Observer*’s profiles of men who had pursued every legal avenue to no avail, one reader suggested that those who preferred “not to participate in a ‘wicked war’ ... [should] register as conscientious objectors”<sup>70</sup> within their own country.

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<sup>63</sup> V. Foster, “Draft Dodger Money,” *UCO*, 15 September 1968, 4.

<sup>64</sup> T.K. Farmer, “More on Draft-Dodgers,” *UCO*, 15 October 1968, 2.

<sup>65</sup> Hugh M. Scott, “More on Draft-Dodgers,” *UCO*, 15 October 1968, 2.

<sup>66</sup> J.D. Pirie, “More on Draft-Dodgers,” *UCO*, 15 November 1968, 4.

<sup>67</sup> Bob McCracken, “Wrong title?” *UCO*, 15 May 1970, 4.

<sup>68</sup> M. Mayman, “Wrong title?” *UCO*, 15 May 1970, 7.

<sup>69</sup> Reita Hawkey, “Church’s mission,” *UCO*, March 1971, 8.

<sup>70</sup> H.E. Cather, “Our neighbor to the south,” *UCO*, February 1975, 2.

There is some evidence here that the information provided by *The Observer* was not always assimilated by its readers. Some had preconceived notions of how local draft boards operated or felt that the United States' status as a democracy safeguarded against being forced to serve in the military *à contre coeur*. Indeed, on paper, the process seemed to be straightforward. Moreover, the Supreme Court had found that religious conviction was not the only valid grounds for conscientious objection. In practice, however, legal recourse did not always yield the desired result. Not all readers – indeed, not all Canadians – were open to hearing the testimonies of those who had partaken in the process and been left disappointed.

#### Mennonites and Military Resisters: A Table Turned

Throughout its duration, the Vietnam War received considerable coverage in *The Canadian Mennonite*. Just as the Canadian Mennonite position on Vietnam was expressed in tandem with its American counterparts, the church's response to military resisters was shaped by the work of the MCC south of the border. Coverage in *TCM* was likewise heavily influenced by activity within the American Mennonite community. The attention drawn to the draft dealt with three broad concerns: first, *TCM* continued its tradition of reporting on the experiences of conscientious objectors, either as they contributed to alternative service or as they went to prison for their beliefs. Secondly, the contemporary American situation was described, from the mechanism of the draft, increased military education, and the advent of ROTC programs in high schools, to the joint efforts of NSBRO and the Mennonite Central Committee Peace Section to combat the trend toward militarization. Thirdly, there was the Canadian dilemma of how to deal with the flood of draft-age immigrants, including – to the surprise of many readers –

some Mennonites. Because *TCM* reported on those first two issues, this study considers that American news and its Canadian coverage to be relevant. Furthermore, *TCM*'s coverage helped shape the Canadian response to the war resisters, and therefore helps to contextualize the third concern.

### *Alternatives to Induction: Supply*

The first cluster of articles is the least relevant to the present study, but deserves a brief mention. Many of the column inches devoted to discussion of the draft were filled with descriptions of various alternative service programs both under the auspices of the Mennonite church and independent of it. Changes to draft policies were also interpreted in terms of their impact on such programs. In 1969, the practice of inducting the oldest candidates first was to be amended. *TCM* reported that alternative service programs were "best suited for young men of greater maturity and preferably with college background."<sup>71</sup> A shift in the demographics of incoming conscientious objectors would demand a commensurate restructuring of service projects.

The subtext of *TCM* coverage was that alternative service was not merely an escape from the draft. It was a meaningful way of contributing to the needs of others, acquiring practical skills, and fostering lifelong friendships. One early editorial even discussed the benefit that would result from formal national recruiting of young volunteers into the public service sector, in parallel to military induction.<sup>72</sup>

In January 1966, *TCM* reported that between 1952 and 1 March 1965 a total of 16,375 men had participated in alternative service. Of these, over 68% expressed a clear

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<sup>71</sup> "Proposed draft changes may pose problems for service agencies," *TCM*, 20 May 1969, 1.

<sup>72</sup> "Soldiers Without A Heart," *TCM*, 20 January 1956, 2,6. The tentative recommendation was that Canadian young people should sacrifice a few years in service of others, matching the military draft's requirement of two years of active service and six years in the reserves.



affiliation with a historic peace church.<sup>73</sup> A very small percentage had no religious affiliation of any kind. In mid-1965, the 1-W program had 2,448 participants. Three months later, *TCM* pointed out that there was a sharp increase – up to 40% - in the number of attendees at orientation sessions.<sup>74</sup> The numbers continued to climb, and four years later Selective Service anticipated that the number of conscientious objectors in the field in 1970 would reach 17,000. By comparison, in 1969 there were only 5,000 or so 1-Ws in civilian work assignments.<sup>75</sup> At the beginning of 1970, the number of 1-Ws acquiring Selective Service credit specifically through Mennonite and Brethren in Christ programs reached its peak at 1,200.<sup>76</sup>

Not only did conscientious objectors invest time and energy in hospitals, homes for the disabled, and other social service providers, but the *TCM* considered them to be effective witnesses for the cause of peace.<sup>77</sup> By printing pieces about the experiences and contributions of COs at least once a year, *TCM* lent its megaphone to that witness, and implicitly encouraged other Mennonite young people to consider similar alternatives to serving in the military.

*TCM* also faithfully highlighted cases of conscientious objectors who had failed to escape the draft through legal avenues. In 1954, for example, it reported that three Mennonites from Indiana had been sentenced to two-year prison terms “for refusal of

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<sup>73</sup> “Young People At Their Best: Over 16,000 Men Served In Alternative Service Since 1952,” *TCM*, 4 January 1966, 11.

<sup>74</sup> “Draft Responsible: Sharp Increase in VSers,” *TCM*, 5 April 1966, 8.

<sup>75</sup> “SS strives to handle influx of CO personnel,” *TCM*, 2 October 1970, 1.

<sup>76</sup> “Peace Section serves 33% of 1-Ws,” *TCM*, 6 November 1970, 2. Oddly, this article claims that those 1,200 men constituted a third of the total number of 1-Ws. This does not correspond with the statistics released in “SS strives to handle influx of CO personnel,” *TCM*, 2 October 1970, 1,9, which claimed that there were more than 5000 such men serving in civilian posts throughout 1969.

<sup>77</sup> “C.O.’s In Denver: Draft-Age Mennonite Youths Witness In Large Colorado City,” *TCM*, 17 February 1956, 6.

induction. They were unable to secure recognition as conscientious objectors.”<sup>78</sup> This was on the heels of two Iowans who were still serving three-year sentences. As the Vietnam War escalated, there were more reports of Mennonites who were arrested for refusing to be inducted. In 1966, there was even a retrospective on young Austin Regier, who had refused his peacetime induction in 1949 and served a year in prison.<sup>79</sup> In this reprint of an article from *The Mennonite*, the reader discovered how Regier’s lawyer had argued that his client’s relatives had fled Russia to “escape militarism and conscription” and that Regier shared their conviction. The piece emphasized that the Mennonite was convicted at the same time as a bank robber and that the two were handcuffed to each other as they were escorted from the courthouse. Throughout the article, allusions to Jesus on the cross between two thieves abounded. The same issue contained Regier’s reflections on his experience in a full-page apology for both pacifism and non-cooperation with Selective Service.<sup>80</sup> He had specifically refused to even seek conscientious objector status because by registering he would be giving “assent to military conscription,” and because he “could not accept the special privilege granted to me as a ‘religious’ objector, but denied to other men whom I believe to be equally conscientious but do not share my particular religious beliefs.”<sup>81</sup> The rhetorical function of including such pieces is hard to miss: by

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<sup>78</sup> “Three Mennonite C.O.’s Sentence to Prison,” *TCM*, 19 February 1954, 1.

<sup>79</sup> Erland Waltner, “News From Yesterday (1949): He was Numbered With the Convicts: An Eyewitness Report of a Trial,” *TCM*, 1 November 1966, 1. Reprinted from the 1 February 1949 issue of *The Mennonite*.

<sup>80</sup> Austin Regier, “When Christians Are Criminals: Civil Disobedience for Christ: A CO’s Witness To His Faith,” *TCM*, 1 November 1966, 8. Reprinted from the 15 February 1949 issue of *The Mennonite*.

<sup>81</sup> Austin Regier, “When Christians Are Criminals: Civil Disobedience for Christ: A CO’s Witness To His Faith,” *TCM*, 1 November 1966, 8.

underscoring that other Mennonites have had the courage to cling to their convictions and pay the price, *TCM* encouraged youth to do the same.<sup>82</sup>

There were also great legal triumphs during the Vietnam period. In the 10 July 1970 issue, the resolution of the Penner case was reported by *TCM*.<sup>83</sup> Jerry Allen Penner of Oklahoma had spent three years trying to obtain a 1-O status when he was suddenly classified as 1-A, ostensibly because there was some circumstantial evidence that Penner did not hold to some other core Mennonite doctrines. He refused induction and was later sentenced to five years in prison. The case went to the Supreme Court, where his attorney asked for a clear ruling as to whether “a conscientious objector must be a saint, or whether it is sufficient to be an ordinary man who is, by reason of religious training and belief, conscientiously opposed to participation in war in any form.”<sup>84</sup> Solicitor General Ervin N. Griswold came to Penner’s defence, and the Supreme Court overturned the conviction. *TCM*’s coverage of such legal battles illuminated the fact that draft boards were essentially reluctant to classify potential inductees as 1-O. Moreover, not all those who were denied the classification had the means to contest the finding until a desirable result was achieved. If Mennonites wanted to prevent anyone from having to serve *à contre coeur*, they had to address the demand side of the problem in parallel with their interference on the supply side.

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<sup>82</sup> This message apparently did need to be reinforced. Although there are no statistics about the Canadian context, an article in *TCM* stated that “[o]nly about half of [American] Mennonite young men take the conscientious objector position” and those who did seek 1-W classification did not always “do so with unswerving motives.” See David Klaassen, “MB office says: Now is the time to speak for peace,” *TCM*, 25 July 1967, 2.

<sup>83</sup> Waltor Hackman, “Five-year sentence dismissed: Penner case overturned by Supreme Court,” *TCM*, 10 July 1970, 1.

<sup>84</sup> Waltor Hackman, “Five-year sentence dismissed: Penner case overturned by Supreme Court,” *TCM*, 10 July 1970, 1.

*Fighting Conscription: Demand*

MCC and MCC (Canada) were well aware that they needed to focus some of their efforts beyond the scope of Mennonite draftees. In 1955, *TCM* outlined the history of Mennonite pacifism and their hard-fought victory over mandatory military service in Canada and the United States. This article also pointed out that Washington was seeking to extend the draft<sup>85</sup> and “to give approval to the President’s Universal Military Training plan.”<sup>86</sup> In response to this trend, MCC Chairman C.N. Hostetter, Jr. appeared before the House Armed Services Committee to register the objections of American Mennonites. The effects of the Cold War were bound to be felt in Canada, *TCM* argued in April 1955, and Mennonites ought to brace themselves for the reinstitution of the draft. Government sources anticipated an “expansion of North America’s defences” which would reportedly require “an increased supply of manpower.”<sup>87</sup>

When MCC representative Esko Loewen appeared before the US House Armed Services Committee in early 1959 to testify regarding a bill extending the draft and universal military training,<sup>88</sup> he assumed that the rights of conscientious objectors would continue to be protected. It was the nation as a whole that he was concerned about, he said, “[f]or I see in the continuation of the present legislation the gradual acceptance within the life of my country of a principle – conscription and militarism – which historically has been disastrous to every great nation that has followed this course.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> HR 3005.

<sup>86</sup> “Witness In Washington,” *TCM*, 25 February 1955, 2.

<sup>87</sup> “Canadian Scene,” *TCM*, 1 April 1955, 1. Indeed, in 1961, in anticipation of the escalation of Cold War hostilities, *TCM* reported that pre-draft materials were being mailed out to Canadian youth. This “peace mailing” outlined the non-resistant position and provided resources to would-be conscientious objectors. See “Canadian Youth To Receive Peace Mailing,” *TCM*, 10 March 1961, 1.

<sup>88</sup> HR 2260.

<sup>89</sup> “Witness in Washington: Conscription & Militarism Is Always a Disastrous Policy,” *TCM*, 6 February 1959, 1.

Speaking the Committee's language of global optics, Loewen noted that there were many in the world who "abhor Communism but they also seriously question our goodwill."<sup>90</sup> MCC Peace Section sent Executive Secretary Edgar Metzler to address the House and Senate Armed Services Committees in March 1963 regarding the extension of the draft.<sup>91</sup> Along with ten other witnesses, Metzler asked that the definition of "conscientious objector" be broadened. He also emphasized that Mennonites "seek no special privilege for ourselves."<sup>92</sup> Alvin Beachy, then a Mennonite pastor in Pennsylvania, added that conscription jeopardized post-secondary education, nurtured an over-reliance on the military-industrial complex, funnelled funds away from the alleviation of suffering, and fashioned the United States "in the mold of the totalitarian regime of Communism, whose plan for world domination we are now committed to resist."<sup>93</sup> He also pointed out that SSS had policies that were, in practice, highly discriminatory. To their credit, both Metzler and Beachy made wise rhetorical choices: they presented pragmatic arguments, rooted not in the essential pacifism of Anabaptism, but in values that were common to all Americans. Despite this testimony, however, both Committees voted unanimously to recommend the bill, and the House passed it with only three nay votes.

In 1965, *TCM* reported that more than two hundred American high schools had ROTC units, with another two hundred more to come within five years. Until recently, ROTC units were only permitted on college campus. Moreover, the paper predicted that the draft age would soon be dropped from twenty-one to nineteen, and that student

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<sup>90</sup> "Witness in Washington: Conscription & Militarism Is Always a Disastrous Policy," *TCM*, 6 February 1959, 4.

<sup>91</sup> HR 2438.

<sup>92</sup> "Leaders Oppose Draft Extension," *TCM*, 22 March 1963, 1.

<sup>93</sup> "Leaders Oppose Draft Extension," *TCM*, 22 March 1963, 1.

deferments would be increasingly hard to come by.<sup>94</sup> That fall, changes to draft policy placed newlyweds on the same level as bachelors. While married fathers were still not eligible for the draft, “student deferments are being scrutinized more carefully.”<sup>95</sup>

When the draft was up for renewal again in 1967, the MCC Peace Section presented a statement of concern to the US House and Senate Armed Services Committees, addressing Selective Service Director General Hershey and pleading the case of those whose objections were specific to Vietnam, as well as citizens who did not believe in a Supreme Being.<sup>96</sup> John E. Lapp testified that the MCC wished to see its privileges extended to all conscientious objectors, irrespective of denomination. On behalf of all Mennonites, he took responsibility for their historical failure to address the causes of war. “We confess that we have not always responded to the need to take away the occasion for war as we should and that we have not used every available opportunity to encourage and perform voluntary service in the cause of peace.”<sup>97</sup>

### *Flight*

*TCM* and its American counterpart, *The Mennonite*, reported that the willingness of the MCC Peace Section, American Friends Service Committee, and NSBRO to facilitate successful meetings with local draft boards did not ensure that all legitimate objectors acquired 1-O classification. *TCM* had also described the courageous stories of Mennonites who faced prison terms rather than register with SSS. All of this coverage ought to have served as sufficient context for the impending influx of draft resisters. In

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<sup>94</sup> “US Churches Concerned: Military Draft Is Accelerated As Military Education Expands,” *TCM*, 24 August 1965, 3.

<sup>95</sup> Edgar Metzler, “In USA: How Recent Draft Changes Affect The CO,” *TCM*, 28 September 1965, 3.

<sup>96</sup> “COs on the increase: Military draft presents major problem to USA and peace groups,” *TCM*, 25 April 1967, 2.

<sup>97</sup> “Equal privileges for all Cos: Bishop appears before US committee to testify on military draft laws,” *TCM*, 23 May 1967, 5.

addition to offering moral support to Mennonite embroiled in court cases and facing incarceration, *TCM* was subtly laying down the groundwork for a full-out appeal to Canadian Mennonites: as pacifists, they must provide assistance to military resisters and mitigate the devastating costs of maintaining one's integrity in wartime. Despite having been given ample evidence to the contrary, however, many members of the peace churches maintained that there were legitimate avenues by which one could avoid military service, and that neither quiet noncooperation nor outright belligerence were in keeping with Anabaptist values. In 1968, the Ontario Brethren Conference declared that it

cannot support the activities of individuals or groups who would give encouragement and aid to draft-dodgers from the United States to come to Canada in order to evade responsibilities in the US[. W]here conscience does not allow participation in war, effort should be made to direct such individuals to make a clear statement of conscience and to accept the alternative avenues of service which the US government has provided. The Conference also encourages the Peace Section of MCC Ontario to continue rejecting all MCC involvement in marches or similar expressions of protest. Let us continue in our commitment to witness in word, life, and practical service to mankind.<sup>98</sup>

This fundamental suspicion of anti-establishment behaviour, combined with an unswerving trust in the justice system, was fairly characteristic of the common sensibility among Mennonites until the following summer.

In August 1969, *The Canadian Mennonite* gave front page coverage to the General Conference in Turner, Oregon, which had witnessed a dramatic shift in church policy, as well as a time of much-needed healing. The assembly was addressed by fifteen young Mennonites who were evading the draft and expressed what a few lonely voices had been saying for the past five years. Previous to this event, draft resister Sam Steiner wrote a letter to the editor of the *Gospel Herald* asking,

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<sup>98</sup> R.F. Bartel, "Ontario MBs meet: Prepare statement on draft-dodgers, protests," *TCM*, 2 July 1968, 1.

Can the white in good conscience accept the battle 'exemption' that, despite the law, is virtually unavailable to his black brother?<sup>99</sup> Or can the Mennonite, espousing brotherly love, allow the condemnation of a Catholic brother to a Vietnam grave because the Catholic can only say with conviction that *this* war is wrong?<sup>100</sup>

This discrepancy deeply disturbed some Mennonites, who became uncomfortable with holding a position of relative privilege. Moreover, objectors began to wonder whether cooperation with Selective Service might constitute a contribution to, and therefore tacit approval of, the war effort. It was simply no longer sufficient to secure one's own escape from induction.

The draft resisters testified before the Conference that they were "led by conscience and Christian compassion to refuse to cooperate with the US Selective Service, which we see as an arm of the military complex."<sup>101</sup> They then asked that the church might "consider noncooperation as legitimate expression of our nonresistance."<sup>102</sup> By the end of the conference, much reconciliation had taken place, and the Peace and Social Concerns Committee recommended that the Mennonite church acknowledge the complexity of the issue by sanctioning non-cooperation.

The resulting document, *Response to Conscription and Militarism*, addressed Mennonite draft resistance and acknowledged that cooperation with the Selective Service, even in a 1-O capacity, was beginning to appear problematic on two fronts. First, as the draft resisters had explained, SSS was an intrinsically militaristic body, the

<sup>99</sup> Due to college deferments and connections, white or wealthy Americans legitimately managed to escape the draft with far greater success than black or poor Americans.

<sup>100</sup> Steiner, Sam. Letter to the editor. *Gospel Herald*, 61.33 (August 20, 1968) 762. Hist.Mss. 1.138.1 Samuel Jay Steiner Collection, folder 1. Original emphasis.

<sup>101</sup> Albert Zehr, "Plead for non-cooperation: 'Mennonite hippies' take daring and prophetic stance at OM conference," *TCM*, 29 August 1969, 1.

<sup>102</sup> Albert Zehr, "Plead for non-cooperation: 'Mennonite hippies' take daring and prophetic stance at OM conference," *TCM*, 29 August 1969, 1.



function of which was “to channel men into various vocations related directly or indirectly to killing.”<sup>103</sup> Secondly, the *Response* argued, one cannot be conscripted into good works. The use of coercion “interferes with Christian vocation as we understand it. Christian service and a witness of peace cannot be coerced. They must be spontaneous in nature, and motivated by Christian love and concern for the individual and society.”<sup>104</sup>

Without sanctioning rebellion against the state or embracing noncooperation as the official posture of the Mennonite Church, a ten-point resolution was ratified in light of this new understanding of the Selective Service and the implications of cooperation. This resolution emphasized the continuity of present views with the historical positions of the church, as articulated in 1937 and 1951, expressed a renewed commitment to peace education, and commissioned the Peace and Social Service Committee and MCC Peace Section to revisit the policy on the Selective Service System. In a departure from the *status quo*, it also recognized “the validity of noncooperation as a legitimate witness and pledge the offices of our brotherhood to minister to young men in any eventuality they incur in costly discipleship.”<sup>105</sup> Draft counselling would henceforth be made available to any young man seeking to emigrate from the United States for reasons of conscience, whether Mennonite or not.

Lest it be assumed that the Mennonite Church made a hairpin turn during the course of this General Conference, the response document intentionally allowed not only for a variety of positions on non-cooperation, but also for the inherent complexity of each position. Recent revelations notwithstanding, those who maintained 1-O status and

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<sup>103</sup> Mennonite Church, “Response to Conscription and Militarism (Mennonite Church, 1969),” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. Online: [http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/R484\\_1969a.html](http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/R484_1969a.html), line 13.

<sup>104</sup> Mennonite Church, “Response to Conscription,” lines 14, 15.

<sup>105</sup> Mennonite Church, “Response to Conscription,” line 26.

sought alternative service were not to be condemned, for “we will support anyone who is willing to affirm the preservation and enrichment of life over the destruction of life.”<sup>106</sup>

After striving to extricate Christian service from the divisive context of conscription, the document concluded with a call to submit to authority insofar as it does not conflict with Christian conscience. This final recommendation, with its allusion to violence, was likely an admonition of drastic forms of protest.

As a result of the General Conference of 1969, the church reiterated the Mennonite belief that military service was unconscionable for a Christian, while acknowledging that, both philosophically and practically, finding alternatives to induction was a nuanced journey. Implied in the *Response to Conscription and Military Service* was the notion that this duty to discover relevant articulations of the peace witness belonged to the church as a whole. In November of that same year, the Peace Section made this explicit by stating that the “burden of objection to war and militarism [was] the responsibility of the entire brotherhood and not only the young who face the responsibility of conscription.”<sup>107</sup>

An editorial in *TCM* questioned the magnitude of this victory. Changes at the level of official policy did not always trickle down to the daily life of the congregation and “many, perhaps most, local churches still resist an open-hearted acceptance of their most outspoken young members.”<sup>108</sup> As if to drive home the point, that same fall, a letter to the editor accused coverage of the OM conference had been slanted, and that it was entirely appropriate for the assembly to be shocked by the fact that some young Mennonites were adopting hippy culture. It was, after all, a sign of piety to be shocked by

<sup>106</sup> Mennonite Church, “Response to Conscription,” line 31.

<sup>107</sup> “Peace Section sponsors consultation on conscience and conscription,” *TCM*, 12 December 1969, 9.

<sup>108</sup> “Hollow victory for youth?” *TCM*, 29 August 1969, 4.

sin.<sup>109</sup> In any case, it appeared that the Mennonite Church was finally becoming open to the idea that silence and isolation were not fruitful options. In the past, individual purity was sought through the acquisition of non-combatant or conscientious objector status. More than avoiding the sin associated with military service, Mennonite draft resisters were striving to undermine the militarism of their culture for the sake of others, and their faith community embraced the collective burden.

*Bringing American Policy into Canadian Practice*

It has been necessary to offer a thorough description of changes south of the border for two reasons: first, unlike the United Church, the various Mennonite conferences had American counterparts with whom they sought agreement on a wide range of issues, including politics. Knowledge of these events provides the necessary context for Canadian decision-making. Secondly, for just that reason, *The Canadian Mennonite* itself covered American developments on the resister question. There was a profound sensitivity to the fact that the fates of the nations were deeply intertwined as far as militarization and the protection of conscientious objectors were concerned. Moreover, *TCM* was concerned that when Canadian Mennonites debated the appropriate response to the deluge of draft-age immigrants, they would understand what they were dealing with: who these “dodgers” were, why they needed support, and what form that support should take.

In 1970, a twenty-six year old Mennonite named Eli Hochstedler resigned his 1-O membership in the Selective Service System. Rather than joining the military, Hochstedler had agreed to alternative service in Bolivia as a Paxman. Six years later, having come to realize that “the primary purpose of the SSS is to force young men into

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<sup>109</sup> Rufus Jutzi, “Can still be ‘shocked,’” *TCM*, 26 September 1969, 4.

voluntary or involuntary servitude to a military system which uses as one of its major methods the killing of live human beings,”<sup>110</sup> he returned his paperwork, marked with a drop of his blood as an act of contrition and a symbol of his noncooperation. When Jim, Eli’s brother, faced the inevitable registration notice, he joined Eli in rejecting the option of alternative service.

As significant and moving as their story was, just as noteworthy was the fact that *The Canadian Mennonite* featured the correspondence between the Hochstedlers in a two-page spread. In fact, the 22 May 1970 issue of the newspaper was largely devoted to news, anecdotes, and editorials directly related to the draft. The change that was codified at the General Conference in Oregon was trying to make its way into Canada. This is not to say that leading Canadian Mennonites had not been active in aiding war resisters prior to 1970. Indeed, for several years *TCM* had been providing thorough and consistent coverage – some polemical, some informative – of the plight of conscientious objectors. As early as 1968, Frank H. Epp had tied the fate of draft evaders with the response of Canadians.<sup>111</sup> However, the dedicated May 22 issue signified a redoubling of efforts to convince the Mennonite in the pew that this cause resonated with his most cherished values.

In early 1970, the MCC Canada strove to catch up to other more active Christian denominations by commissioning Leonard Epp to conduct a six-week study of the deserter and draft resister problem and recommend options. His findings were summarized in that May 22 issue of *TCM*, as well as being circulated independently. Epp took great strides to combat misconceptions about draft-age immigrants, repudiating the

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<sup>110</sup> Eli Hochstedler and Jim Hochstedler, “I had to follow my conscience,” *TCM*, 22 May 1970, 6.

<sup>111</sup> Frank H. Epp, “American draft-resisters and Canadian Mennonites,” *TCM*, 30 April 1968, 1,2.

common charge that they were lazy, irresponsible anarchists. He emphasized that, while young American men refused military service for diverse reasons, “many of the young refugees have an apocalyptic view of American society. They are quite convinced that the West’s misuse of other nations will create a universal upheaval.”<sup>112</sup> There were political and social costs to embracing the immigrants, and while Epp enumerated those his call for the church to do more<sup>113</sup> was unequivocal.

In April 1970, shortly after Leonard Epp had completed his investigation, the MCC Canada News Service released extensive information about the scope of the war resister problem.<sup>114</sup> This detailed document outlined the resisters’ reasons for choosing to flee their country, their legal status, the process involved in immigration, the help required, and which agencies were giving it. At the same time, the MCC Ontario planned a meeting featuring talks by Frank Epp and Walter Klaassen, as well as the testimonials of draft resisters and deserters. The CCC was invited to participate but questioned the motives of the organizers, wondering if the goal was “to come up with a nice resolution so the MCC Ontario can say ‘we too are speaking to the issue’”<sup>115</sup> or to act decisively based on the information shared.

Scepticism came from within Mennonite ranks as well: the meeting was intended to take place on 25 April 1970 at the Scott Street Mennonite and Brethren Church in St. Catherine’s. On 19 March, Pastor Henry Penner wrote to Donald Snyder of the MCC Ontario, letting him know that permission had not been secured from his congregation.

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<sup>112</sup> Leonard Epp, “Canada: refuge from militarism?” *TCM*, 22 May 1970, 2.

<sup>113</sup> Leonard Epp, “SOS: for food, housing, jobs, friends,” *TCM*, 22 May 1970, 4.

<sup>114</sup> MCC (Canada) News Service. “Questions and Answers About the U.S. Draft Refugees and Other War Resisters.” April 13, 1970. XIV - 3.1.3.8 MCC (Ont.), folder 11. The Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Conrad Grebel.

<sup>115</sup> Jim Wert, Canadian Council of Churches. Letter to Donald Snyder, Mennonite Central Committee (Ontario). March 17, 1970. XIV - 3.1.3.8 MCC (Ont.), folder 11. The Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Conrad Grebel.

To my knowledge this is the first time that they have done such a thing. But they told me that they refuse to be associated in this way. They feel that in this case MCC is trying to offer assistance to a group of people that brings *a false slant to the peace witness*. Rev. I. Toews has a daughter working this area in the States and he claims that there are ample provisions for a real conscientious [sic] objector, and *if there are those who come here for rebellious reasons, we should keep our hands off*. If we have a meeting, I believe that the ones bringing the papers should investigate what provisions there are in the States. I believe that there are some theological implications here that could easily curb the joy of participation in some other areas, and wish that we could major on things upon which we agree.<sup>116</sup>

Such unwelcoming behaviour was no doubt surprising, especially from a Mennonite community. So suspicious was the Scott Street congregation of the war resisters' motives that they were unwilling to host a meeting the aim of which was to disseminate information and clear the air. Their reticence might raise questions about the efficacy of holding the meeting at all: without some degree of openness to draft resisters and military deserters, it was unlikely a parishioner would be motivated to attend. It is fair to wonder, then, if to some extent Frank Epp and Walter Klaassen would be preaching to the converted when they addressed the April 25 meeting.

Nevertheless, the Consultation on Draft Resisters was moved to Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church in Kitchener-Waterloo and held as planned. Given the heat of the debate, it is clear that not all attendees counted themselves among "the converted." Indeed, some "felt that resisters were 90% disobedient to all governments... [W]e would be destroying our peace witness and... seeking a 'power situation' in Canada. They stressed that 'our people will not be with us if we start political action.'"<sup>117</sup> Epp and

<sup>116</sup> Harry Penner, Pastor of The Scott Street Mennonite Brethren Church, St. Catharines, ON. Letter to Douglas Snyder, Mennonite Central Committee (Ontario). March 19, 1970. XIV - 3.1.3.8 MCC (Ont.), folder 11. The Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Conrad Grebel. Emphasis added.

<sup>117</sup> "Consultation on Draft Resisters," Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church. April 25, 1970. XIV - 3.1.3.8 MCC (Ont.), folder 11. The Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Conrad Grebel. It is noteworthy that the

Klaassen offered a two-fold refutation to this concern; it was an argument they had been putting forward for years, not least in the essays collected by Epp in *I Would Like to Dodge the Draft Dodgers, But...* and in the pages of *TCM*.

*Love Your Neighbour, Period.*

For a Mennonite, encouraging a young person to undertake the costly task of refusing military service should have come naturally. Unfortunately, questions around the purity of war resisters' motives were interfering with this pacifist instinct. The primary argument put forward by Epp and Klaassen, therefore, was that the requirement to show love for one's neighbours came with no preconditions. Epp "distinguished between helping the right kind of people, which is not New Testament practice, and giving the right kind of help, which is,"<sup>118</sup> while Klaassen would later observe that "Jesus taught us to help people because they are in need and not first determine their qualifications or motives. In fact he told us to love our enemies without qualification. Are we to do less for these people who are not our enemies and who need help?"<sup>119</sup> Given the temporal proximity of the Stirling Avenue meeting and his article in *TCM* (22 May 1970), itself an excerpt of his chapter of *I Would Like to Dodge the Draft-Dodger, But...*, it is likely that Klaassen's argument at the Consultation on Draft Resisters was similar to his published work. The core of it is consolidated here.

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Mennonite community eschewed wading into the power dynamics of the nation, while this has been viewed as a conscious, though not principal, motivation for the United Church's involvement in anti-Vietnam protest. A thorough comparison of the two denominations' actions and goals during this period is certainly in order.

<sup>118</sup> "Consultation on Draft Resisters," Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church, 25 April 1970, XIV – 3.1.3.8 MCC (Ont.), folder 11. The Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Conrad Grebel.

<sup>119</sup> Walter Klaassen, "Why should we care about draft resisters?" *TCM*, 22 May 1970, 5.

First, Klaassen identified Mennonite isolation as a root cause for the present reluctance to act.

We have had a good deal of experience with giving the cup of cold water and the slice of bread in recent decades, but it has usually been at a distance where few of us had any inkling of the political and social ambiguities that had to be faced by our representatives in the field or in the administrative offices. We were able to give our dollars, can our beef, and make our blankets with little awareness of the compromises necessary to get the stuff distributed.<sup>120</sup>

Now that the need was immediate, the complexities had become apparent, and Mennonites began to second-guess the charity of the past. The burden was infinitely greater this time, because the Samaritan could not leave the beaten Jew at the inn and pay the bill – he had to bring him into his own home. As a result, the motives and character of each war resister became relevant to the discussion. Klaassen also suspected that some within the Mennonite Church feared losing the privileged of being exempted from military service in Canada, as a consequence of supporting war resisters. Drawing parallels between this attitude and that of German Christians under Hitler, Klaassen called his church to follow the teachings of Jesus, regardless of the cost.

After reiterating Jesus' emphasis on treating others as one would like to be treated, extending love to those outside one's own tribe, and helping those in need without any expectation of repayment, Klaassen observed that this does not imply a suspension of critical thought. "To call for a readiness to help these new refugees without discrimination is not a call to act without making judgments"<sup>121</sup> as to the relative urgency of one cause over another, for example. There was, as always, room for discussion and debate. The matter to be discussed, however, was not whether, but how, to act. Alluding

<sup>120</sup> Frank H. Epp, ed., *I Would Like to Dodge the Draft-Dodgers But...* (Waterloo-Winnipeg: Conrad, 1970): 61.

<sup>121</sup> Epp, *I Would Like*, 67.



to the false dichotomy often presented between faith and works, Klaassen concluded that “faith gives us the freedom to act.”<sup>122</sup>

*As Yourself: My Father Was a Wandering Aramean...*

Complementing Walter Klaassen’s biblical foundation for action was Frank Epp’s exegesis of Mennonite history. All Canadians carried within them the virtual genes of immigration; whether recently or in the distant past, everyone had come from somewhere else. All citizens were at one time at the mercy of an established community that feared demographic change and the inevitable power shift it might bring. As early as 1968, Frank Epp had been working to remind Mennonites in particular that they ought to empathize with the plight of military refugees, having experienced it themselves. At the Stirling Avenue meeting, Epp no doubt drew on his writings as he illuminated the parallels between the current situation and his forebears’.

During the First World War, many American conscientious objectors served prison terms rather than be inducted into the military. Those who managed to get a deferment suffered dire social penalties. Mainline Protestants supported the war effort and had little sympathy for those in society who were less patriotic. In 1919, pacifists in the United States and Europe turned their eyes to Canada, hoping that its more liberal political landscape would welcome members of the peace church. Instead, the Great War Veterans Association and other groups lobbied against allowing “so-called shirkers of citizenship duties”<sup>123</sup> into their country, and an Order-in-Council banned Mennonites, Doukhobors, and Hutterites “absolutely and completely”<sup>124</sup> from entering Canada. In the

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<sup>122</sup> Epp, *I Would Like*, 67.

<sup>123</sup> Frank H. Epp, “Strange repetitions of history,” *TCM*, 27 June 1969, 9.

<sup>124</sup> Frank H. Epp, “Strange repetitions of history,” *TCM*, 27 June 1969, 9.

wake of the Bolshevik Revolution, Russian pacifists were seeking refuge from a militaristic state, and Canada rejected them.

In so doing, Epp argued, “Canadians forgot the extent to which escape from militarism and the draft had been a fundamental feature in Canadian immigration history.”<sup>125</sup> He described the influx of British Loyalists as an expression of their desire to seek out a new life rather than “take up arms against Great Britain.”<sup>126</sup> While the veracity of characterizing that event as an expression of conscientious objection is certainly questionable, it was rhetorically brilliant: Canadians had neglected the lessons of the past, and Mennonites were on the brink of doing the same.

The parallels between 1919 and 1969 were brought into sharp relief in Epp’s analysis. As before, a group of conscientious objectors sought a safe home and feared political retribution. Epp contended that “it was easier for Mennonites to obtain exemption in the USA before 1919 than it is for non-Mennonites in 1969.”<sup>127</sup> This time, however, it was the mainline Protestant church, not least the United Church of Canada, that “stuck out its neck for the rights of the misunderstood and discriminated against minority.”<sup>128</sup> Additionally, the Canadian government turned a blind eye to draft-age immigrants. Meanwhile, the Mennonite Church clung to its own, unprepared to engage the needs of the rapidly changing local community. The charges lobbed against Mennonites after the First World War were spoken by Mennonites now: War resisters could not be expected to be loyal citizens: they evaded responsibility, had no respect for authority, and sought to upset the fabric of society.

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<sup>125</sup> Frank H. Epp, “American draft-resisters and Canadian Mennonites,” *TCM*, 30 April 1968, 1.

<sup>126</sup> Frank H. Epp, “American draft-resisters and Canadian Mennonites,” *TCM*, 30 April 1968, 1.

<sup>127</sup> Frank H. Epp, “Strange repetitions of history,” *TCM*, 27 June 1969, 9.

<sup>128</sup> Frank H. Epp, “Strange repetitions of history,” *TCM*, 27 June 1969, 9.

That history was repeating itself was not especially surprising; human nature is governed by some fairly predictable forces which interact in fairly predictable ways. The shock was that the Mennonite Church had somehow ended up on the wrong end of the debate. How could this have happened? It is first of all possible that Mennonites, far from forgetting their history, were still living it. Wounds of rejection cut deep and wholesale discrimination is difficult to forget. The Canadian government had come a long way, not only accepting but even privileging Mennonite pacifism. Klaassen's charge that some within the peace churches feared losing easy access to CO status may have been damning, but it also revealed that there was perhaps some lingering uncertainty about the relationship between the church and the state. Secondly, and perhaps contrarily, by the 1960s and 70s, the Mennonites had benefitted from a stable Canada for some time. They had much to lose by aligning themselves with young, detached radicals. Granted, the peace movement of the Vietnam era was more vocal, political, and explosive than the quiet migration of Mennonite families during the early twentieth century. There were few cultural parallels, and there may have been a visceral anxiety among Mennonites at the thought of about joining forces with protestors.

Whatever the underlying cause, Frank Epp spoke clearly into the din: Mennonites ought to know better than anyone that pacifism, whether blanket or specific, was by no mean a mark of a flawed character – quite the opposite. Moreover, even if it were the case that the vast majority of immigrants fled the United States out of fear rather than deep-seated conviction, the Mennonites' own experience and their pacifist perspective ought to compel the church to offer refuge. To do otherwise would constitute a refusal to learn either from the mistakes of others or from the hurts of the past.

## CHAPTER THREE

### VIETNAM: A DISASTER ZONE

In the wake of internal displacement, apparently haphazard bombings, the destruction of farms, and the establishment of an *ad hoc* economy that was completely reliant on the patronage of American soldiers, Vietnam was unrecognizable to missionaries who had spent time there before the current war. Many North American churches and para-church organizations took notice of the devastation and took action. The World Council of Churches began to solicit funds from its members, funnelling the donations into well-established relief programs on the ground, among them the Vietnam Christian Service, staffed in large part by Mennonites. However, at a time when the focus should have been the suffering of the Vietnamese, political questions inevitably arose.

#### The United Church and the Politics of Humanitarian Aid

Unlike the Mennonite Church of Canada, the United Church did not deploy workers to Vietnam, nor was it directly involved in the establishment of aid organizations on the ground. As a member of the CCC and WCC, however, UCC contributed to relief work in Vietnam. *The Observer* regularly informed its readers of the activities and funds dedicated to this mission and, perhaps more significantly, painted a vivid picture of the economic, spiritual, and physical devastation experienced by the Vietnamese.

Having captured the readers' attention, *The Observer* often listed specific needs that could be met through donations: canned goods, sewing materials, medical and school supplies, and so on. In addition, the demand for relief workers and interest-free loans was mentioned. Among the letters to the editor were notes from Canadian Aid to Vietnam

Civilians and Canadian Red Cross Society which listed avenues for giving and thanked *The Observer* for being a source of valuable information to its readers. As further encouragement, when WCC, E&SS, or United Church congregations made sizeable donations, the contribution received a mention in *The Observer*. A conservative estimate suggests that \$45,000 was collected by United Church people.<sup>1</sup> E&SS also urged the federal government to open the door to Vietnamese civilians who sought medical care in Canadian hospitals.<sup>2</sup>

James A. Gittings was among those *Observer* contributors who emphasized the social and economic impact of the war. In May 1966 and September 1967 he wrote about the erosion of farm life, the horrors of war, and the impact of R&R breaks on the economies and social fabric of Saigon, Bangkok, and Manila. He also specifically called for a program to assist Asian women who were left pregnant by American soldiers.<sup>3</sup>

In the 1 June 1967 issue, Ben Smillie confronted Canadian complacency by emphasizing the scope of the need: “perhaps half of the civilian victims of what United Nations Secretary-General U Thant has called one of the most barbarous wars in history are children.”<sup>4</sup> “We *can* do something about Viet Nam” proposed that a hospital ship be

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<sup>1</sup> It is well nigh impossible to determine just how much money UCC people contributed to the humanitarian crisis in Vietnam. First, there may be overlap between various *Observer* reports. When a congregation held a dedicated fundraiser and passed the money along to E&SS, this would be mentioned. When, months later, E&SS forwarded pooled funds on to WCC, this would receive further coverage. Moreover, there were doubtless private donations made directly to relief organizations. Moreover, countless in-kind donations were received from the United Church congregations.

<sup>2</sup> “Treat Viets here?” *UCO*, 15 May 1967, 32.

<sup>3</sup> James A. Gittings, “Through Enemy Territory,” *UCO*, 15 May 1966, 19,20,46. See also James Gittings, “Beyond the red lights?” *UCO*, 1 September 1967, 24-26.

<sup>4</sup> Ben Smillie, “We *can* do something about Viet Nam,” *UCO*, 1 June 1967, 20. Original emphasis in title of article. This quasi-statistic is potentially misleading. As Smillie mentioned later in the same article, all men over the age of sixteen were compelled to fight for one side or the other. As a result, women and children were the only civilians. In other words, children were not necessarily disproportionately affected by the war. His inclusion of this bit of information does serve a legitimate purpose, however: when readers heard statistics as to the total number of casualties, they would henceforth be aware of how many children that represented.

commissioned either by the Canadian Red Cross or through the cooperation of Canadian churches. The mobility of such a ship would enable patients in both North and South Vietnam to gain access to medical assistance. Smillie described the Canadian Department of External Affairs as “so diplomatically cautious that it is impotent,”<sup>5</sup> and called on Christians to take up the cause in the absence of government action.

### *Who Gets Help?*

In the late 1960s, the magazine drew attention to the fact WCC’s Division of Inter-Church Aid, Refugee, and World Service was providing relief to those affected by the war in both North and South Vietnam.<sup>6</sup> This was questioned by a reader in the 1 February 1968 issue: “While I am fully aware that such people, particular civilians, may need help I fail to understand why our church should support *in any way* a government which is anti-God, anti-Christ, and anti-freedom.”<sup>7</sup> Although it was not common practice to do so, the editor did briefly reply to this letter. He began by tactfully clarifying that not everyone saw the civil war in Vietnam as a simple black and white issue. Moreover, there were some among those “who are as enthusiastic for the south as Mr. Higgins [the author of the letter] is, who still believe the Red Cross should help ease the suffering of the innocent regardless of their governments.”<sup>8</sup> In June 1972 *The Observer* explained that, despite the fact that the WCC support to South Vietnam outpaced aid to the North at a ratio of 6:1, “U.S. critics called it traitorous.”<sup>9</sup> In fact, when *The Observer* recorded that a sum of money was being divided between projects in the North and in the South, the

<sup>5</sup> Ben Smillie, “We *can* do something about Viet Nam,” *UCO*, 1 June 1967, 21. Original emphasis in title of article.

<sup>6</sup> As early as 1965: See “Church helps Viet Nam,” *UCO*, 15 September 1965, 29. See also “Help both sides,” *UCO*, 1 October 1966, 19.

<sup>7</sup> E.B. Higgins, “Help to North Viet Nam,” *UCO*, 1 February 1968, 2. Emphasis and strange Christology are original.

<sup>8</sup> “Help to North Viet Nam,” *UCO*, 1 February 1968, 2.

<sup>9</sup> George W. Cornell, “Seas stormy for World Council of Churches,” *UCO*, June 1972, 46.

latter typically received a higher percentage of the funds. This did not stop some constituents from questioning the validity of relief projects in the North.

### *Rebuilding Vietnam*

In June 1969, *The Observer* reported that the Coordinating Conference for Reconstruction in Viet Nam was set to meet that October.<sup>10</sup> It is unclear whether this timing was an expression of optimism as to when the war would end or pessimism as to how long it would take to mount a recovery plan. Two years later, Don Luce, former director of International Voluntary Service in Vietnam contributed a summary of the work to be done “[w]hen the Yanks get out of Viet Nam.”<sup>11</sup> The sheer magnitude of this enterprise was sure to leave an impression on readers.

The land must be put back into production; canals, roads, and houses must be rebuilt; people who have fought one another for 25 years must settle down peacefully as neighbors; world markets for rubber, rice and tea must be developed again; the generation gap intensified by war, must be closed.<sup>12</sup>

Two hundred thousand bargirls, prostitutes, and “temporary wives” would suddenly be themselves unemployed, as would “the million men in the Saigon army and the 300,000 in the NLF army,”<sup>13</sup> along with 130,000 civilians employed by American offices. “There will be too many typists, interpreters, bargirls, soldiers, shoeshine boys, cooks, drivers, and money-changers for an agricultural country to support,”<sup>14</sup> Luce predicted. Without a robust back-to-farm program and a dramatic reversal of the urbanization trend, it was hard to imagine how the country would survive. Luce observed that “[f]oreign aid to date has done little more than build roads primarily for military purposes and increase the

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<sup>10</sup> “Plan for after War,” *UCO*, 1 June 1969, 32.

<sup>11</sup> Don Luce, “When the Yanks get out of Viet Nam,” *UCO*, June 1971, 17.

<sup>12</sup> Don Luce, “When the Yanks get out of Viet Nam,” *UCO*, June 1971, 17.

<sup>13</sup> Don Luce, “When the Yanks get out of Viet Nam,” *UCO*, June 1971, 18.

<sup>14</sup> Don Luce, “When the Yanks get out of Viet Nam,” *UCO*, June 1971, 18.

desire for luxuries such as television, air-conditioning and John Walker whisky.”<sup>15</sup> He did not clarify whether he was referring to NGO aid or foreign aid funnelled in through the United States government.

There was virtually no mention of long-term investment in Vietnam until June 1975, when *The Observer* described United Church’s intercession in the wake of the evacuation of Western embassies in Saigon. The UCC had sent a telegram to the Canadian government expressing “concern about the Vietnamese refugees left behind.” As of the December issue from the same year, the matter had received no further coverage.

#### Mennonite Relief Work: “There is No Treason in the Church”

MCC involvement in Vietnam predated official American military engagement in the region. Following the partition of Vietnam, there had been a mass migration in 1954: as many as 800,000 refugees fled from the North to the South. This event coincided with “the inauguration of the Mennonite Central Committee program” in Vietnam.<sup>16</sup> From the beginning, the indigenous population was suspicious of medical aid, religious doctrine, and new infrastructure that was seen as essentially foreign and, therefore, an expression of Western domination. Everett Metzler argued that the best hope for the Christian mission in Vietnam – both for its evangelistic and humanitarian aims – was to “de-Westernize” the faith.<sup>17</sup> As the hostilities intensified in Indo-China, *The Canadian Mennonite* regularly provided its readers with updates on impact the war was having on both Mennonite missionaries and the Vietnamese people.

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<sup>15</sup> Don Luce, “When the Yanks get out of Viet Nam,” *UCO*, June 1971, 18.

<sup>16</sup> Willard Krabill, “The Challenge of Vietnam,” *TCM*, 29 April 1960, 7.

<sup>17</sup> Everett G. Metzler, “Many Questions About Christianity In Vietnam: Part of Missionary Task Is To De-Westernize Faith,” *TCM*, 6 October 1961, 10.



*“Asia At Our Doorstep”*

In 1966, Frank H. Epp took a trip to Asia as an expression of the church’s “vested interest in the international community and its affairs” and an acknowledgement of the increasing importance of that continent for North American Mennonites.<sup>18</sup> Epp was terribly concerned about the mounting confidence with which American Evangelicals equated the prosecution of the Vietnam War with Christian service, and longed to discover how the hostilities were affecting the Vietnamese, Mennonite missionaries, and the people in the surrounding countries. His travels inspired a regular *TCM* series called “Asia At Our Doorstep.” Many of the articles were written by Epp himself, while a few others were submitted by Atlee Beechy, newly-appointed director of the Viet Nam Christian Service, or by other Mennonites involved in relief or missionary work on that continent. In the spring of 1966, it described the natural beauty and resources of Vietnam, as well as home-grown strife between religious ethnic groups; it drew parallels between the Vietnamese veneration of national heroes who had sought to throw off Chinese occupants and ongoing revulsion toward foreign domination;<sup>19</sup> it explained how Vietnam had been thrown into disarray after the Second World War and how bitter disappointment with the ostensibly democratic Diem led to the formation of the National Liberation.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Frank H. Epp, “The Church Must Be Active in International Affairs,” *TCM*, 8 March 1966, 1.

<sup>19</sup> Epp had witnessed a celebration of Trung Trac and Trung Nhi, two freedom fighters who had committed suicide in 43 CE following their failure to throw off Chinese domination.

<sup>20</sup> Frank H. Epp, “The Church Must Be Active in International Affairs,” *TCM*, 8 March 1966, 1; Frank H. Epp, “A Land Of Beauty And Plenty Ravaged By Generation Of War,” *TCM*, 10 May 1966, 7; Frank H. Epp, “The Problems Of A Nation Many Years In The Making,” *TCM*, 17 May 1966, 7; Frank H. Epp, “The ‘Christian and Democrat’ Became The ‘Worst Regime,’” *TCM*, 31 May 1966, 6. See also Frank H. Epp, “Much Is Said And Written, But Not Nearly All Is Known,” *TCM*, 8 March 1966, 1,2. For a history of Roman Catholic involvement in the region, see also Frank H. Epp, “The Church Was There When The Crisis Came,” *TCM*, 16 August 1966, 7.

One article briefly related the history of American intervention in the country and another described the scope and impact of that involvement.<sup>21</sup>

Throughout his reporting, Epp put a human face on the conflict: “The first thing to remember... is that the VC are ordinary Vietnamese people who are of a particular position persuasion and dedicated to a particular cause. They are primarily South Vietnamese people. Their political cause is nationalism, independence, reform and unity for Vietnam.”<sup>22</sup> Through his reporting Canadian Mennonites became aware that draft-dodging was not only an American phenomenon. In fact, it was “widespread among Vietnamese youths... The military prison in Saigon holds over 600 youths who have refused to fight when drafted. Some of these are Christian COs.”<sup>23</sup> The fact that these Vietnamese were detained in Saigon indicates that they were evading service in the South Vietnamese military.

In June 1966, Lance R. Woodruff contributed to the series through his recounting of the economic impact of the war. Bartending and prostitution were lucrative career options for young Vietnamese women, but they were entirely out of step with traditional Vietnamese mores. Epp followed up on the theme of moral degradation by emphasizing the rampant corruption visible in Vietnam, as well as the ethically dubious behaviour of American soldiers. Given the human casualties and economic uncertainty created by the war, Epp wondered whether the conflict might “not compound the very problems it was meant to solve, including the growth of communism.”<sup>24</sup> Throughout the following fall, articles by Epp and Woodruff began to focus on the work of the Christian medical staff,

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<sup>21</sup> Frank H. Epp, “How And When The USA Got Involved In Vietnam,” *TCM*, 5 July 1966, 10; Frank H. Epp, “The Methods And Goals Of The War In Vietnam,” *TCM*, 12 July 1966, 8.

<sup>22</sup> Frank H. Epp, “The Fierce Determined Fight of the National Liberation Front,” *TCM*, 7 June 1966, 7.

<sup>23</sup> Frank H. Epp, “Mission Board Followed Relief Agency To Saigon,” *TCM*, 23 August 1966, 7.

<sup>24</sup> Frank H. Epp, “War Compounds The Problems It Was Meant To Solve,” *TCM*, 9 August 1966, 7.

including the correction of indigenous superstitions that led to malnutrition and self-neglect. Among tribal Vietnamese, medical missions also served as education campaigns.<sup>25</sup> This would have been welcome news among those readers who were not yet convinced of the wisdom of offering medical assistance to the enemies of the Western world.

### *Viet Nam Christian Service*

In 1966, the Viet Nam Christian Service (VCS) was established as the umbrella under which Lutheran World Relief, Church World Service, and MCC work would be done. On the home-front, MCC proliferated information about its relief programs through lectures and filmstrips. The organization had “been given an unparalleled responsibility in Vietnam” and wanted Mennonites to realize the magnitude of its work.<sup>26</sup> *TCM* was an ally in this mission, and reported not only on the scope of that ministry but also on the collateral damage of the war. Shortly after his appointment to the directorship of VCS, Dr. Atlee Beechy was criticized for not having the appropriate knowledge-base for the post. In particular, some within and without VCS felt that Beechy was not the ideal candidate because he had never lived under Communism himself. *TCM* ran an editorial defending Beechy’s leadership and observing that a wide range of experiences may prepare someone for such a crucial role in Saigon.<sup>27</sup> Many Westerners were concerned that relief work in Vietnam easily lent itself to aiding the enemy.

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<sup>25</sup> See Frank H. Epp, “From Dawn To Dusk The Sick And Dying Come,” *TCM*, 6 September 1966, 7. See also Lance R. Woodruff, “A New Influence Comes To A Hill In The Highlands,” 13 September 1966, 7.

<sup>26</sup> “Filmstrips On Vietnam,” *TCM*, 8 March 1966, 11.

<sup>27</sup> “Knowledge From Experience,” *TCM*, 19 April 1966, 5. For more coverage of Beechy’s appointment, see “Vietnam Director Named,” *TCM*, 4 January 1966, 1, 16. See also “Convocation Of Compassion: A Man Was Commissioned To Head Up Christian Service For Vietnam,” *TCM*, 15 February 1966, 5.

Beechy himself also wrote for *TCM*: he described how the fluidity of the military front and the migration of refugees complicated the mobilization of relief personnel and supplies, as well as listing the wide range of needs met by VCS staff.<sup>28</sup> A nurse stationed with VCS penned an article describing the napalm burns, malnutrition, and injuries she was treating at Quang Nai. Her sympathy for the plight of the Vietnamese was best expressed in this explanation for the ongoing hostilities: “To stay alive, they give their allegiances to whichever side happens to be in control.”<sup>29</sup> In the following issue, the work of a Baptist pacifist from Saskatoon was applauded. The headline for that short piece emphasized that VCS projects “helped people to help themselves.”<sup>30</sup> A great deal of funding for VCS and for shipments of much-needed supplies to Vietnam came from dedicated giving from Mennonite schools and churches, rather than from the MCC budget itself.<sup>31</sup> These fundraisers tended to openly describe the intended recipients of the aid as Vietnamese in both the north and the south. In each of these articles, the relationship between relief work and its political implications was implicit.

The issue became explicit in 1967 when *TCM* reported that Don Luce, the director of International Voluntary Service in Vietnam and nine-year veteran of that relief effort, had resigned along with three other leaders of the organization, including two Mennonites. Their resignation was intended as an act of protest against US policy in Vietnam.<sup>32</sup> A *TCM* editorial by Paul Longacre, MCC Acting Director for Asia, explored the difficulties of establishing and maintaining a neutral presence in Vietnam. “Seldom in

<sup>28</sup> See Atlee Beechy, “The Work Of Relief In A Land At War,” *TCM*, 3 May 1966, 7. See also Atlee Beechy, “The Needs In Vietnam And How We Meet Them,” *TCM*, 20 September 1966, 7.

<sup>29</sup> Pat Hostetter, “The children of Vietnam: Victims of ideological struggle which they do not understand,” *TCM*, 24 January 1967, 10.

<sup>30</sup> “Young people at their best: Saskatoon volunteer in Saigon helps people to help themselves,” *TCM*, 31 January 1967, 3.

<sup>31</sup> See, for instance, “Students Sacrifice For Vietnam Relief,” *TCM*, 24 May 1966, 4.

<sup>32</sup> “Resign Vietnam service posts to protest war,” *TCM*, 26 September 1967, 1.

the history of the Mennonite church,” Longacre wrote, “have we found it so difficult to resolve a dilemma of our relationship to government.” Heavy was the weight of the perception that aid workers paid some allegiance to the American military agenda. “From the beginning of our work, [our workers] have sensed the dilemma of seeing and serving the needy while at the same time being identified to some degree with the very cause of the needs.”<sup>33</sup> Longacre sympathized with those who had resigned from the leadership of International Voluntary Service and called on North American Mennonites to speak out in opposition of the war so that relief workers would not be burdened by the dilemma for much longer.

As a relief organization courting the trust of the Vietnamese people, the VCS strove to establish its independence from the American military.<sup>34</sup> In April 1967, Longacre had noted that as the American presence leeched autonomy away from the Vietnamese, there was “a growing anti-American feeling.”<sup>35</sup> In November 1967, a group of MCC representatives wrote to President Nixon, protesting that “we cannot serve the victims of war in Vietnam without seriously questioning those activities of the US which cause the suffering we seek to alleviate.”<sup>36</sup> Military and political authorities pressured VCS to “join the American team,”<sup>37</sup> and there was even an attempt to remove a

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<sup>33</sup> Paul Longacre, “Vietnam: the church’s dilemma,” *TCM*, 3 October 1967, 4.

<sup>34</sup> For more on the implications of the VCS experience for political neutrality in pacifist relief projects, see Perry Bush, “The Political Education of Vietnam Christian Service, 1954–1975,” *Peace and Change*, 27,2 (April 2002): 198–224. Bush contends that the relief work conducted in Vietnam was subject to political pressures, and that the lesson to be gleaned from VCS’s struggle is that the ideal of “pure charity” is no longer tenable.

<sup>35</sup> Paul Longacre, “The view from Vietnam: The time for negotiation is now,” *TCM*, 4 April 1967, 1.

<sup>36</sup> Mihevc, “The Politicization,” 352.

<sup>37</sup> Mihevc, “The Politicization,” 352.

Mennonite relief worker from Vietnam because he was “not supportive of American policies.”<sup>38</sup>

When VCS came under questioning for offering aid indiscriminately, representative Paul Leatherman said, “[w]hen people come for assistance, we don’t ask to see their identification or ask their political persuasion.” After it was pointed out to him that assisting the Viet Cong was treason, Leatherman responded that “[t]here is no treason in the church. We help all those who come for help.”<sup>39</sup>

Due to the explicit pro-American sentiment among their fellow relief groups within VCS, MCC formally pulled out of the organization in the late 1960s. The Mennonite contingent in Vietnam was committed to remaining politically neutral and hoped to gain access to North Vietnam. Ben Redekop has observed that “these developments represented an expanded political conscience – the removal of MCC from a cooperative role with the US military was itself a political act.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Martin, Luke S. “An Evaluation of a Generation of Mennonite Mission, Service and Peacemaking in Vietnam, 1954-1976: Vietnam Study Project.” Mennonite Central Committee and Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1977, 102.

<sup>39</sup> Martin, “An Evaluation,” 102.

<sup>40</sup> Redekop, “Mennonite Peace,” 108,109.

## CONCLUSION

In the 1960s and 70s, there was cause for grave concern among Canadian Christians who followed world events: Israel went to war twice, hostilities erupted between colonial powers and liberation movements in Angola and Mozambique, and tensions in Nigeria erupted into civil war. Closer to home, civil rights leaders and politicians were assassinated, the death penalty was reconsidered, and universal health care was introduced. The Christian denominations at the core of this study were also busy: The United Church was embroiled in merger negotiations with the Anglican Communion, and Canadian Mennonites were giving thoughtful attention to the development of their post-secondary schools. In the midst of this tumult, the Vietnam War introduced volatile elements into Canadian society, and these trickled into the church quite organically. When confronted with burning monks, crying children, displaced teenagers, and the extraordinary success of the home-grown defence industry, Canadians could not dare to hope that they would be immune to the judgement of history.

\_\_\_\_\_ The pages of the *United Church Observer* and *The Canadian Mennonite* reveal \_\_\_\_\_ that there was an ongoing battle within the churches: one side charged that the other was paralyzed by paranoia, and this was countered by suspicions that opponents of the war were being manipulated by Communist propaganda. Those who critiqued American policy in Vietnam, including the editors of both publications, expressed a profound belief that they were witnessing a coincidence of the flagrant deprivation of the rights of the Vietnamese to self-determination, the devastation of an entire people, their land, and their economy, and the dragooning of the entire Western world into an ever-more-precarious

geo-political catastrophe. The Vietnam War was an affront to democratic, humanitarian, and strategic imperatives that the United States had sworn to protect and that many Canadians also valued.

Even among those who were united in their opposition to the war, however, there was debate as to the propriety of publicly expressing that opinion. By daring to address these issues in their newspapers, the editors of *UCO* and *TCM* demanded that their constituents make up their minds about Vietnam and act on their convictions. As has been demonstrated in this thesis, the linchpin of church action on the Vietnam War was the debate over the evolving church-state dynamic.

Both lobbying and protesting were contentious options – all the more so when the churches themselves participated and when the denominational publications supported them. Both *UCO* and *TCM* contended that their churches had a history of petitioning on moral issues and rebuked those who selectively appealed to separation of church and state on this issue. Some readers expressed sincere doubts as to whether it was the church's place to dictate foreign policy, and the publications defended political action on the grounds that the church ought to use whatever influence it had to intercede on behalf of others.

Besides the philosophical problem inherent in church-sanctioned political action, the advent of participation in protest marches brought practical considerations to the fore: some readers of *TCM* and *UCO* argued that such events circumvented democratic protocols and bypassed lobbying proper; they were unruly and could lead to violence; they implied disrespect to war veterans; they were well-attended by Communists, “hippies,” and “beatniks,” and it was a well known fact that bad company would



inevitably corrupt good morals. Moreover, even if the “pinko philosophies” of other protesters did not influence United Church or Mennonite marchers, the reputation of the church would be adversely affected by its apparent cooperation with Communist-sympathizers. Even among those who embraced public demonstrations as legitimate expressions of dissent, many admitted that it was a drastic measure, mitigated only by desperate times.

Debates about draft evaders and military deserters clearly showed that within both denominations there were sincere people who had reasonable concerns about the precedent that would be set if Canadians came to the rescue of American immigrants who were, in simple terms, criminals. This argument was combated by appeals to the larger context: both the Mennonites and the United Church had celebrated roots in military evasion, the former throughout their history and the latter through their Loyalist ancestry.<sup>1</sup> Powerful voices in both denominations defended the choice made by war resisters, but also contended that the influx of displaced youth was tantamount to a humanitarian crisis and demanded unconditional compassion.

The editors of the *United Church Observer* and *The Canadian Mennonite* urged their readers to re-imagine the church’s witness to society, quelled suspicion of subversive behaviour, and finally offered support to military resisters on the basis of loving one’s neighbour as oneself. Through their denominational publications, Mennonites and United Church people alike also became aware that relief work in such a complex and splintered context as Vietnam was both a moral imperative and an intrinsically political act. Efforts at maintaining neutrality and hopes of hovering above

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<sup>1</sup> As has already been mentioned, revisionist – even quasi-mythological – interpretations of Loyalist history abound. Regardless of the veracity of these depictions, invoking that ancestry served as a powerful rhetorical device. See page 79, note 20.

the divisive climate were largely futile and essentially political themselves. Not only was it virtually impossible for the church to restrict itself to relief work and stay out of politics entirely – as if the two were discrete spheres – but the presence of aid workers and missionaries in Vietnam placed an added responsibility on North American Christians to help shape American policy in the region. If the rich descriptions of the devastation in Vietnam and in the hearts of war resisters had not succeeded in moving readers to empathize, the publications contended that, in both cases, Jesus had the final word with his unambiguous call for his followers to love even their enemies.

While the arguments advanced by the editors of *UCO* and *TCM* moved steadily in the direction of political engagement, the letters contributed by the readership and the policies enacted by their respective churches told a different story. Neither the leadership of the United Church nor that of the various Canadian Mennonite conferences embraced the periodicals' agenda wholeheartedly. The readership even less so. Yet the tenor and the content of their objections demonstrate that for these two Canadian denominations the Vietnam War was the catalyst for much debate about the relationship between the church and state.

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The Mennonites in particular had undergone dramatic changes in just a few decades. Having begun as a small group committed to living peacefully, quietly asserting their democratic rights where they could, the Mennonite Central Committee and the local parishes were in a position to effect change. The reluctance with which action was taken betrayed a rift between the church's official separatism and its awareness of the power it now had at its disposal. Many Mennonites were still operating as if it were a marginalized minority.

As a catalyst for accelerated evolution within the church, the Vietnam War highlighted the need for clearer parameters for the Mennonite peace witness, emphasized looking beyond one's own purity to the national interest, reiterated the need for unconditional love, and brought to bear the lessons of the past. Sam Steiner's letter to the *Gospel Herald* observed that the Mennonite Church had come to a fork in the road: it could "continue on the traditional path... Or the church can become dangerous... It can support the right of free conscience for the brother whose skin isn't white, last name isn't Miller, and faith isn't Mennonite."<sup>2</sup> It is quite certain that the church was not prepared to describe itself as "dangerous." However, with affirmations of its secure place in Canadian society, vehement promptings as to its ethical obligations to the least and the lost, and the benefit of a rich history and faith, the Mennonite Church gained the freedom to imagine a peace witness which was nuanced, engaged, and, perhaps, not so quiet.

#### Final Thoughts and New Directions

Notwithstanding the argument proposed and defended herein, there is evidence that disputes about the role of the church vis-à-vis the state were not always entirely sincere. Throughout the war, there were critical voices whose fundamental objections were to the churches' anti-war stances, the provision of aid for war resisters, or relief programs which did not discriminate between Viet Cong and everyone else. Some of those protests were explicit, while others were quietly buried within classic appeals to separation of church and state. By providing a theological and historical defence of *universal* inaction, opponents of political engagement on *particular* issues circumvented the real debates. Although such people existed within both churches, this thesis has soundly demonstrated that there were myriad legitimate and meaningful discussions

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<sup>2</sup> Steiner.

about separation during this period, and that such debates formed the basis for significant changes in church policy. Furthermore, regardless of what proponents of the war actually believed their church's political theology should have been, the fact that so many invoked separation of church and state as a reason for lending tacit support to American foreign policy is itself dispositive. Clearly, shifts in the church-state dynamic had a tremendous impact on the debate. While it may therefore be concluded that those who merely hid behind the church-state issue were outliers, these purely rhetorical approaches to complex and controversial decisions do merit further study.

Likewise, there is a need for research that might complement the thesis in hand by elaborating on the rift between denominational elites, editors of publications, ministers, and congregations. The conclusions made in this work by no means imply that either denomination was a monolith. Serious disconnects subsisted among decision-makers, and the debates were heated. It behoves those interested in the development of the political theologies of either the Mennonite or the United Church to investigate further the perspectives of the so-called average adherent. This thesis anticipates and welcomes further explorations of the practical relevance and rhetorical efficacy of the agendas advanced by *UCO* and *TCM*.

Is it appropriate to engage agents of power, at least long enough to whisper the truth? This thesis has demonstrated that, even amongst those Mennonites and United Church people who agreed on what the truth was, this was a highly contentious matter. Part of the reason that dilemma was so complicated for those in the United Church was that Canada's largest denomination no longer had access to the same dynamic, organic social power it had wielded for generations. It was still a force to be reckoned with, but

by the 1970s the United Church was no longer fulfilling the role of a national priest. Meanwhile, Mennonites had never before been in a position to intercede on behalf of others – so much of their history involved pleading for their own rights. Having established a solid foundation in Canada, the martyr had to rethink the scope of its gospel, including its political ramifications. Now neither privileged nor marginalized, the churches spent the 1960s and 1970s responding to novel opportunities and responsibilities in the political sphere. Neither priests nor martyrs, the United Church and Canadian Mennonites followed a tentative but hopeful trajectory toward their roles as critical, compassionate prophets.

The *United Church Observer* and *The Canadian Mennonite* did more than argue that their constituents had a duty to speak truth to power. In perhaps their greatest contribution to the ideological battles of the Cold War, these publications illuminated one salient fact: in a thriving democracy predicated on liberty, citizens are themselves agents of power. This question of reinterpreting participatory democracy was not only faced by Christians. Indeed, the developments described within this thesis were a microcosm of the evolution of Canadian civic culture more generally. Churches continually face idiosyncratic crises in the course of establishing their political theology, but the events of the Vietnam era demanded that *all* Canadians carefully consider the nature and implications of their citizenship. The experiences described in *UCO* and *TCM* were both manifestations and agents of that newfound awareness.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is from the new *Canadian Mennonite*, founded in 1998.

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