

*PRIESTS TO PROPHETS IN A POST-CHRISTENDOM  
CANADA?: A SURVEY ON VIEWS ON WAR*

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Hans Mol's "priests to prophets" is helpful for understanding the shifts that have taken place in regards to Canadian churches, the state, and war. These survey results confirm some of Mol's conclusions for the Canadian context, but they also indicate surprising nuances and subtleties to views held in pew and pulpit. First, the results indicate a range of perspectives, especially in regards to age and denominational affiliation—a caution to making sweeping statements about views of "the church." Second, the survey indicates a resiliency of the traditional just war position. Third, the results do indicate a resistance to associating a war effort with support from the pulpit, as well as show support for the churches' ongoing mission to engage the state in matters of foreign policy.

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The Canadian Day of Humiliation held on 11 February 1900 was a solemn ceremony to repent of the sins of empire, sins that were deemed to be hindering God's blessing on British arms against the Boers in the war raging in South Africa.<sup>1</sup> Acting as priests of the nation, many Canadian clergy offered prayers of repentance so that the "sin of Achan"<sup>2</sup> would no longer hamper the war effort, and imperial troops (including the Canadian contingent) could advance and bring the alleged blessings of British rule to the Boers and their African subjects. That priestly role during wartime remained a staple of Canadian culture up to the end of the Second World

War. But its days were numbered in the postwar years.

There is little doubt that the second half of the twentieth century has seen significant shifts in the established position of Christianity in Canada. The reality of what is often identified as “Post-Christendom” has led to a flood of books and blogging, and new innovative attempts by churches to connect with disenchanting or disconnected neighbors.<sup>3</sup> Almost everything in the churches is being re-thought, old ways are being challenged or outright abandoned, and new ways of living on the margins are being proposed. Some past activities and assumptions of the churches – such as the residential school system, or racist statements about citizenship – are an embarrassment and source of shame, and previous theological convictions about the legitimacy of church-state partnerships are often jettisoned. But what about Canadian churches and war? More specifically, how, if at all, have such changes impacted how the churches respond to Canada’s military engagements?

Canadian churches were avid nation-builders throughout the late-nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, with that nation-building ethos playing a role in their support for the nation’s war efforts.<sup>4</sup> Students in Christian educational institutions were often imbued with an ardent zeal for empire and its wars.<sup>5</sup> However, the 1960s were pivotal for the churches’ notions of nation-building, especially since the decade was marked by dramatic demographic shifts and a move to a post-Christendom Canada.<sup>6</sup> That shift impacted how churches participated in the political process,<sup>7</sup> and, in such a context, building (and fighting for) a “Christian” Canada became increasingly out of fashion.

Phyllis Airhart details how the United Church was forced to re-imagine its national vision in the face of dramatic swings away from traditional notions of the faith and national identity.<sup>8</sup> Gary Miedema identifies how the 1960s was a time when significant shifts occurred to the traditional understanding of Canada being a self-identified “Christian” nation, and how the churches needed to renegotiate and re-imagine life in an interfaith Canada.<sup>9</sup> One way of envisioning those changes is Hans Mol’s paradigm of seeing the churches transitioning from a “priestly” (legitimizing) role to a “prophetic” (critical) one.<sup>10</sup> Mol was writing in the 1980s, a time when he, along with others, were probing the changes becoming more readily apparent in Canadian religious life. He was seeking to make sense of the ways in which the churches were re-envisioning their cultural engagement,

and his “priests to prophets” metaphor is an attempt to explain how the churches moved to a more critical—what he calls prophetic—posture to the state. As such, it is a helpful tool of analysis when it comes to examining contemporary churches and their relationship to the state in times of war.

This particular focus of research began with discussions with theological students during a course I taught on Post-Christendom Canada. What began with a straw poll among those students ended up being a survey sent to Christian universities and seminaries across Canada. The results of the survey confirm some of Mol’s conclusions for the Canadian context, but they also indicate surprising nuances and subtleties to views held in pew and pulpit. First, the results indicate a range of perspectives, especially in regard to age and denominational affiliation – a caution to making sweeping statements about views of “the church.” Second, the survey indicates a resiliency of the traditional just war position, challenging assumptions about a move to the margins being concomitant with a move to pacifism.<sup>11</sup> Third, the results do indicate a resistance to associating a war effort with support from the pulpit, as well as showing support for the churches’ ongoing mission to engage the state in matters of foreign policy. In that regard, the responses reflect Mol’s conclusions in regard to a more prophetic vision for the churches. The churches may be on the margins, but, if the results reflect a larger picture, they do not intend to remain silent.

## PRIESTS TO PROPHETS PARADIGM

Mol notes the importance of sacralization, a process by which “beliefs, commitments, and rituals...are part and parcel of the national identity itself and strengthen it.”<sup>12</sup> Sacralization can be associated with things such as the monarchy, national anthem, flag, civil myths, iconic figures, as well as religion. In fact, churches often promote sacralization through something as simple as flying the national flag in a sanctuary. He argues that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Canadian Protestant churches (such as Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians) and the Catholic Church acted primarily in a priestly or “legitimizing” role by supporting conflict in a decidedly uncritical role. They provided transcendental assurance (love of God for nation), loyalties (flag in sanctuary), rites (prayers for monarchy and government), and theology (interpretation of national

events through scriptural traditions) for the nation-building enterprise. Mol argues that since the 1960s the churches “adopted a more autonomous and critical stance while maintaining their sense of responsibility for society at large.”<sup>13</sup> The increasing dividing line between church and state has led to opportunities for critique, for “[e]cclesiastical autonomy gives a much freer rein to the prophetic function of religion.”<sup>14</sup> Those who are leaders in the church increasingly envision themselves as prophets, and “[w]hitewashing is less and less part of the churches’ vocabulary.”<sup>15</sup> Priest to prophet is a helpful metaphor, used in a similar fashion by Allan Davidson in the New Zealand context.<sup>16</sup> Its appeal as a descriptor is that it conveys the public role of clergy in engaging the church’s relationship with national identity and function. Its weakness is that it can appear to portray things as a simple binary, a division which obscures the fact that priests can, at times, act like prophets, and prophets, at times, act like priests. Ultimately, both are involved in sacralization, for, as Mol notes, “in Christianity there is equal room for legitimation and critique, love and judgment, the priest and the prophet.”<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, it remains a helpful starting point for trying to identify shifts in the churches’ posture to the state.

## CONTEMPORARY ATTITUDES TO WAR

The history of Canadian churches and war in the second half of the twentieth century is a relatively undeveloped area of research. However, what is available indicates that assumptions about empire, race, and providence which were critical ingredients to previous views on war, became increasingly a thing of the past. There was also a trajectory towards a prophetic role, with churches often critical of the nation’s foreign policy, or proactive in seeking to shape policy in their own image.

### *The Closing Decades of the Twentieth Century*

During the 1960s both the United Church and Canadian Mennonites reassessed their relationship to the state. Efforts were made to aid draft dodgers who came to Canada during the Vietnam War.<sup>18</sup> During the same war, the United Church increasingly shifted from a priestly and supportive role to a prophetic and critical role in Canadian culture, whereas the Mennonites moved from their isolation to a more engaged and prophetic

role.<sup>19</sup> Ironically, the Mennonite trajectory was due to their entering into mainstream Canadian culture—away from the margins at a time when churches in general were moving to the margins.

Robert Matthews provides a helpful assessment of the churches and foreign policy during those difficult decades.<sup>20</sup> He notes how significant efforts were made attempting to get the Canadian government to ensure that the nation’s foreign policy was concerned with human rights and justice. He notes two major turning points: the Vietnam War and apartheid in South Africa. In both cases, many Canadians were disenchanted and distressed with Canada’s complicity in foreign affairs that were considered offensive and alarming. Increasingly the emphasis was on human rights in the developing world. Significant resources were committed to “an increasingly sophisticated and systematic” lobbying of government, but he concludes that the churches’ influence was “marginal.” However, despite being often ignored, he argues that “government cannot totally ignore the churches, as they are ‘too respectable and too substantial’ and their lobbying is, for the most part, extremely well organized and based on thorough research. But since the human rights goals of government and churches are often so far apart, the failure of government to respond to the churches should come as no real surprise.”

One example of the churches being ignored occurred during the debates over cruise missile tests. In the early 1980s, the United States, Canada’s North Atlantic Treaty Organization ally (and looming neighbor), expressed a desire to test cruise missiles in Canada’s Arctic North.<sup>21</sup> The similarity with Russian geography was obvious, and US officials wanted to test the unarmed new technology. As the Canadian government was considering the option, individual federal politicians of faith dissented from party lines to express their concern. In 1983, the Canadian Council of Churches sent a letter to churches urging members to write their members of parliament. Denominations and individuals also made efforts to dissuade participation in the test, something deemed to stoke nuclear tensions, escalate the arms race, and perhaps even provoke a war with the Soviet Union. Despite their efforts to influence matters, the churches were told by Prime Minister Pierre E. Trudeau to “mind their own business”—and the tests were granted. Regardless of the dismissive response of government, the churches’ efforts to mitigate the looming threat of nuclear war and nuclear proliferation reveals a growing ecumenism between churches and a budding grassroots movement

for peace.<sup>22</sup>

The track record of church influence was not entirely negative. In regards to South African apartheid, they appeared to be more successful. As Renate Pratt notes, the “efforts of the Taskforce on the Churches and Corporate Responsibility to influence Canadian banks, corporations, and the federal government to change their policies towards apartheid in Southern Africa constituted one of the most sustained social actions undertaken by the Canadian ecumenical community in recent history.”<sup>23</sup> Its efforts ran fifteen years (1975-1990) until the release of Nelson Mandela. She does note that one needs to be careful to avoid exaggerating the impact of the taskforce, for many other organizations and voices were speaking out against the oppressive system, not just churches.

The record of the United Church and its views on the Israel-Palestine conflict created controversy over not originally recognizing the right of Israel to exist, seeming to side with Palestinians, and appearing anti-Semitic.<sup>24</sup> As Alan Davies notes, the United Church’s position on the matter continues to provoke controversy for its seemingly one-sided support for Palestinians.<sup>25</sup> In a less controversial initiative, the United Church peacemaking fund was a concerted effort to raise funds for various peace projects, as well as stimulate theological education among its members leading to its *Statement of Faith on Peace in a Nuclear Age*.<sup>26</sup> Other issues of note were how non-pacifist evangelicals “diluted” the peace witness of historic peace churches,<sup>27</sup> how contemporary pacifists remain divided on issues related to Canada’s former treatment of Indigenous peoples,<sup>28</sup> the risks radical social activists took if their prophetic recommendations moved beyond the comfort level of those in power and in the pews,<sup>29</sup> and the culpability of Christianity in the Rwandan genocide.<sup>30</sup>

#### *The First Two Decades of the Twenty-First Century*

In the First Iraq War (1990-1991), the Canadian military participated in the coalition formed to liberate Kuwait. As of yet, however, no research has been carried out on the Canadian churches’ response to the war, a startling lacuna since that was probably the first time that the Canadian churches widely resisted or at least were lukewarm to the nation’s war effort. The events of 9/11 triggered a dramatic shift in Canadian military engagement, primarily in Afghanistan (but with covert operations in Iraq, Syria, and perhaps elsewhere). Churches sought to influence foreign policy, as attested to by

the wide variety of Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) statements to Prime Ministers and parliamentarians addressing subjects such as terrorism, war in Afghanistan, involvement in Iraq, and the crisis in Darfur.<sup>31</sup> Events leading up to the 2003 American invasion of Iraq indicate that churches in general had a very limited amount of direct influence in the formation of foreign and domestic policy.<sup>32</sup> In fact, it seems that any correlation between government action and the recommendations of the churches was due to the government already deciding to do said action; military and political necessity usually trumps listening to prophets.

Scant research has been carried out tracing the views of churches in the new century. Reginald Bibby notes how post-9/11 attitudes to war have shifted to an increasing number supporting the just war tradition, with roughly forty percent agreeing with the statement “war is justified when other ways of settling international disputes fail.”<sup>33</sup> Bibby’s research is helpful, but it is not focused specifically on Christians. A few works have dealt specifically with the churches and war. David Schroeder’s reflections on the experience of Mennonites in Canada since the Second World War is marked by optimism over the denomination’s increasing engagement with issues of peace and justice, as well as by concern over the corrosive effects of secularism and capitalism, along with fear, that is hindering the historic peace church witness.<sup>34</sup> The most significant work on the Canadian churches and war in the post-9/11 years is Gary D. Badcock and Darren C. Marks’ *War, Human Dignity and Nation Building: Theological Perspectives on Canada’s Role in Afghanistan*.<sup>35</sup> This compilation of essays primarily focuses on Canada’s role in the war in Afghanistan, asking critical questions related to the justice of the cause, the justice of the means by which the war was being fought, as well as issues related to reconciliation, treatment of detainees, neo-imperialism, inter-faith relations, and polity formation. One particularly relevant chapter for this research is Ernie Regehr’s summary of the response of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) to 9/11 and its “basic principles” to shape a Canadian response to the crisis.<sup>36</sup> The statements of the churches were prophetic in that they urged a circumspect use of force, and called for prioritizing diplomacy, reconciliation, peacemaking, and the protection of human life. He also notes how those principles shaped the CCC’s ongoing engagement with the government in subsequent years, an engagement that was “especially critical of Canada and of the international community” for its quick use of military force and failure to achieve

reconciliation and peace through other means. Such a tone and tenor were a far cry from uncritical priestly prayers for national and imperial success on the battlefield. But what of those in the pulpits and pews? What do they think of war and peace, and how—if at all—a shift to a post-Christendom culture reflected an evolution to “priests to prophets”?

## SURVEY RESULTS

In 2015, surveys were sent to thirteen Christian educational institutions across Canada, with seven submitting results. All but one of the schools was located in Ontario, all were Protestant, mainly evangelical, three Baptist, and all but one graduate level.<sup>37</sup> While the schools that responded were all Protestant of some sort or the other, they had fairly diverse student bodies in regards to denominational mix. One hundred and fifty-eight students responded to the survey. Ninety-six students identified as male, 58 as female, and 5 as other/prefer not to answer. Thirty-four students identified as pastor, priest, or minister. The largest religious affiliation category was evangelical (93), followed by mainline (36), not sure/don't care (22), and Roman Catholic (8). One hundred and seven students were born in Canada, and 51 were born outside of Canada.<sup>38</sup>

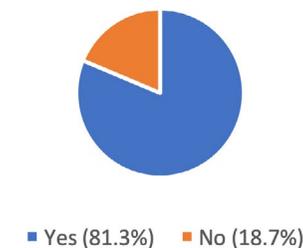
The survey had six questions. Respondents were anonymous and were invited to answer either “yes” or “no” to the following questions. (There was no opportunity for comments.)

- Is it ever acceptable for a nation to go to war?
- Is it ever acceptable for a Christian to participate in war and engage in combat?
- Should a church leader ever preach a sermon that supports the nation's war effort?
- Should a church leader ever preach a sermon that criticizes the nation's war effort?
- Should denominations make official statements on whether or not they support a war?
- Should churches seek to influence Canada's foreign policy in regards to military affairs?

The numbers do not add up at times due to some respondents opting out of responding to a particular question. Categories with under ten respondents are not statistically significant, making it difficult to draw conclusions about the impact of categories of “other/prefer not to answer” and “Roman Catholic” on answers.<sup>39</sup> The following is a summary and analysis of the data.

### #1: Is it ever acceptable for a nation to go to war?

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Question #1: Is it ever acceptable for a nation to go to war?	Yes		No	
	#	%	#	%
<i>Overall Number of Respondents: 158</i>	<b>#126</b>	<b>79.7%</b>	<b>#32</b>	<b>20.3%</b>
Age Under 45	#91	77.8%	#26	22.2%
Age Over 45	#35	85.4%	#6	14.6%
Male	#82	86.3%	#13	13.7%
Female	#41	70.1%	#17	29.3%
Other/Prefer Not to Answer	#3	60%	#2	40%
Priest/Pastor/Minister	#27	81.8%	#6	18.2%
Not a Priest/Pastor/Minister	#98	79%	#26	21%
Mainline Protestant	#25	69.4%	#11	30.6%
Evangelical Protestant	#84	91.3%	#8	8.7%
Roman Catholic	#4	50%	#4	50%
Not Sure/Don't Care	#13	59.1%	#9	40.9%
Born in Canada	#90	84.1%	#17	15.9%
Born outside Canada	#35	70%	#15	30%

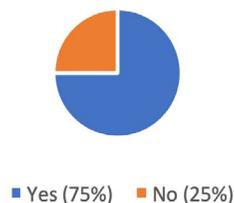
A large majority of respondents supported in principle the right and responsibility of a nation going to war (79.7%). The question did not ask for clarification as to what type of war would be tolerable,<sup>40</sup> but the significant

majority believed that certain events made waging war acceptable. While the terms “just war” or “pacifism” were intentionally not introduced in the survey, the way in which the question was asked reveals that a large majority of the students seemed to support the just war tradition in some fashion or another.

Age and pastoral identity seemed to have no significant bearing on the issue. However, notable influences on responses can be seen in three areas. First, the majority of both males and females answered “yes,” but there was a noteworthy difference in degrees of support; 86.3% of males answered “yes,” whereas only 70.1% of females answered “yes.” This was one of the two times in the survey where a significant male/female difference was observed. Second, the percentage of “yes” answers was higher among Canadian-born students, with 84.1% selecting “yes” to 70% of born-outside Canada answering “yes.” Third, there was a significant range of opinion among denominational identity. Evangelicals were the most supportive of the concept (91.3%), those identifying as mainline Protestant next in level of support (69.4%), followed by the category of not sure/don’t care about religious affiliation (59.1%). As will be seen below, this range of views among religious affiliation can be seen in answers to all six questions.

**#2: Is it ever acceptable for a Christian to participate in war and engage in combat?**

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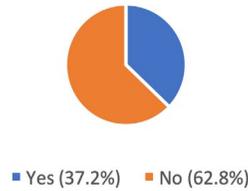
Question #2: Is it ever acceptable for a Christian to participate in war and engage in combat?	Yes		No	
<i>Overall Number of Respondents: 157</i>	<b>#117</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>#39</b>	<b>25%</b>
Age Under 45	#89	73.6%	#32	26.4%
Age Over 45	#29	90.6%	#7	19.4%
Male	#74	78.7%	#20	21.3%
Female	#41	70.7%	#17	29.3%
Other/Prefer Not to Answer	#3	60%	#2	40%
Priest/Pastor/Minister	#23	71.9%	#9	28.1%
Not a Priest/Pastor/Minister	#94	75.8%	#30	24.2%
Mainline Protestant	#25	69.4%	#11	30.6%
Evangelical Protestant	#75	82.4%	#16	17.6%
Roman Catholic	#5	62.5%	#3	37.5%
Not Sure/Don't Care	#13	59.1%	#9	40.9%
Born in Canada	#80	74.8%	#27	25.2%
Born outside Canada	#34	69.4%	#15	30.6%

A majority of respondents replied affirmatively to the question of a Christian participating in war and engaging in combat (75.2%). Again, much like the first answer, the circumstances for such involvement in war were not stated—and they may vary from person to person—but it can fairly be assumed that the criteria for such involvement would fit within the rubric of the just war tradition (even if not formally defined as such by the student).

There are some minor differences in the responses related to male/female, pastoral identity, and born in/outside Canada, but the most significant differences occur when looking at the range of views related to age and religious affiliation. In regards to age, the 45+ category is very high in affirming the statement (90.6%) compared to those in the -45 category (73.6%). Noteworthy is that the 18-24 age is virtually the same as the 25-44 age range. As for religious affiliation, as with that above for question #1, evangelicals have the highest score in the “yes” category (82.4%), followed by mainline Protestant (69.4), and the not sure/don’t care (59.1%).

**#3: Should a church leader ever preach a sermon that supports the nation's war effort?**

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Question #3: Should a church leader ever preach a sermon that supports the nation's war effort?	Yes		No	
<i>Overall Number of Respondents: 157</i>	<b>#58</b>	<b>36.9%</b>	<b>#99</b>	<b>63.1%</b>
Age Under 45	#42	34.4%	#80	65.6%
Age Over 45	#16	45.7%	#19	54.3%
Male	#34	36.2%	#61	63.8%
Female	#21	36.2%	#37	63.8%
Other/Prefer Not to Answer	#3	60%	#2	40%
Priest/Pastor/Minister	#13	38.2%	#21	61.8%
Not a Priest/Pastor/Minister	#44	35.8%	#79	64.2%
Mainline Protestant	#15	41.7%	#21	58.3%
Evangelical Protestant	#33	35.9%	#59	64.1%
Roman Catholic	#2	25%	#6	72%
Not Sure/Don't Care	#8	36.4%	#14	63.6%
Born in Canada	#41	38.7%	#65	61.3%
Born outside Canada	#18	34.6%	#34	65.4%

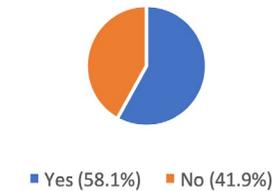
While the majority of responses above to questions #1 & #2 are “yes”, the majority of responses to this question are “no” (63.1%). Apparently, one can support a war effort, and even participate in it, but the majority oppose clergy preaching in support of such wars.

The identities of male/female, pastoral identity, and born in/outside Canada make little difference when it comes to choices. The only noteworthy items are as follows. First, the older one becomes the more willing one is to approve of a sermon preached in support of the nation's war effort; 34.4% of under forty-five said “yes” whereas 45.7% of forty-five and over said “yes.” However, the majority of all ages were opposed to a sermon being preached in support of the war effort. A second noteworthy factor is that evangelicals were the lowest in their support for such a practice (35.9%), despite their

being the highest in their support for a nation having the right to wage war and a Christian's freedom to participate in it.

**#4: Should a church leader ever preach a sermon that criticizes the nation's war effort?**

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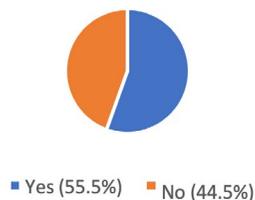
Question #4: Should a church leader ever preach a sermon that criticizes the nation's war effort?	Yes		No	
<i>Overall Number of Respondents: 155</i>	<b># 90</b>	<b>58.1%</b>	<b># 65</b>	<b>41.9%</b>
Age Under 45	#67	55.8%	#53	44.2%
Age Over 45+	#23	65.7%	#12	34.3%
Male	#57	60%	#38	40%
Female	#30	54.5%	#25	45.5%
Other/Prefer Not to Answer	#3	60%	#2	40%
Priest/Pastor/Minister	#22	68.8%	#10	31.2%
Not a Priest/Pastor/Minister	#67	54.9%	#55	45.1%
Mainline Protestant	#26	72.2%	#10	27.8%
Evangelical Protestant	#48	53.9%	#41	46.1%
Roman Catholic	#5	62.5%	#3	37.5%
Not Sure/Don't Care	#11	50%	#11	50%
Born in Canada	#60	60%	#40	40%
Born outside Canada	#30	54.5%	#25	45.5%

While question #3 indicates that the majority were opposed to a sermon in support of a nation's war effort, the results of question #4 indicates that a slim majority (58.1%) were in support of a sermon *criticizing* the war effort. There are a number of factors that influenced how one answered. First, the older the person the more willing the person was to answer “yes”; the majority of those in the 18-24 category did not support it (48%), whereas a strong majority of the 45+ category did support a church leader preaching a

sermon that criticized the nation’s war effort (65.7%). Second, pastors were more willing to support the notion of preaching against a nation’s war effort (68.8%) than lay people (54.9%). Third, there were significant variations among different religious affiliations. Those identifying as mainline Protestant were most supportive of a sermon criticizing the war effort (72.2%), followed by evangelicals (53.9%), and not sure/don’t care (50%).

**#5: Should denominations make official statements on whether or not they support a war?**

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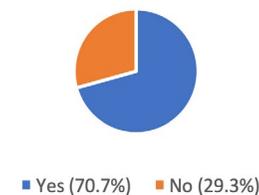
Question #5: Should denominations make official statements on whether or not they support a war?	Yes	No
<i>Overall Number of Respondents: 155</i>	<b>#86 55.5%</b>	<b># 69 44.5%</b>
Age Under 45	#65 53.7%	#56 46.3%
Age Over 45	#22 64.7%	#12 35.3%
Male	#55 57.9%	#40 42.1%
Female	#28 50.9%	#27 49.1%
Other/Prefer Not to Answer	#3 60%	#2 40%
Priest/Pastor/Minister	#23 69.7%	#10 30.3%
Not a Priest/Pastor/Minister	#62 51.2%	#59 48.8%
Mainline Protestant	#24 68.6%	#11 31.4%
Evangelical Protestant	#46 51.1%	#44 48.9%
Roman Catholic	#6 75%	#2 25%
Not Sure/Don't Care	#10 45.5%	#12 54.5%
Born in Canada	#59 56.7%	#45 43.3%
Born outside Canada	#26 52%	#24 48%

A majority—by a slim margin—indicate a positive response to the question of a denomination making an official statement on its support for a war (55.5%). There were a number of influences on the answers, with quite a range in the categories of age, priest/lay, and religious affiliation. First, those who were older tended to support the making of such official statements

(64.7%), almost twenty percentage points higher than the 18-24 category (45.5%). Second, priests (69.7%) were more supportive of such statements than the laity (51.2%). Third, those who identify as mainline Protestant were most supportive of denominational statements (68.6%), followed by evangelicals (52.2%), and not sure/don’t care (45.5%).

**#6: Should churches seek to influence Canada’s foreign policy in regards to military affairs?**

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Question #6: Should churches seek to influence Canada’s foreign policy in regard to military affairs?	Yes	No
<i>Overall Number of Respondents: 157</i>	<b>#111 70.7%</b>	<b>#46 29.3%</b>
Age Under 45	#85 69.1%	#38 30.9%
Age Over 45	#26 76.5%	#8 23.5%
Male	#64 66.7%	#32 33.3%
Female	#43 76.8%	#13 23.2%
Other/Prefer Not to Answer	#4 80%	#1 20%
Priest/Pastor/Minister	#23 69.7%	#11 33.3%
Not a Priest/Pastor/Minister	#87 71.3%	#35 28.7%
Mainline Protestant	#28 77.8%	#8 22.2%
Evangelical Protestant	#66 71.7%	#26 28.3%
Roman Catholic	#5 62.5%	#3 37.5%
Not Sure/Don't Care	#12 57.1%	#9 42.9%
Born in Canada	#77 73.3%	#28 26.7%
Born outside Canada	#33 64.7%	#18 35.3%

A significant majority was in favour of churches influencing Canada’s foreign policy (70.7%). Age was a factor, with the older being more in favour of such a practice (76.5%), and the age category of 18-24 only being 60% in favour. Females were more likely to support influencing foreign policy (76.8%) versus males (66.7%), and this was the second of two times in the survey

where the male/female difference was noteworthy. Mainline Protestants (77.8%) and evangelicals (71.7%) were closely aligned with their responses, with the not sure/don't care category being significantly lower at 57.1%.

## PRIESTS TO PROPHETS

What follows are some preliminary conclusions based on survey results. In brief, the results indicate that a number of traditional views on war and peace remain unchanged from previous generations, and that a move to post-Christendom does not—at least at the present time—indicate a dramatic departure from the just war tradition. However, there are indications of a willingness to critique and/or provide input to the state's response to war and foreign policy, a willingness that seems to resonate with Mol's priest to prophet paradigm in a post-Christendom context.

The answers to the first two questions indicate that the just war tradition continues to resonate with a significant majority of respondents (although the just war tradition was not overtly identified as such). In fact, Bibby's statistic of 40% supporting the just war tradition in the post-9/11 years is remarkably low when compared to this 2015 survey. Just under 80% of the recent results align with the just war tradition, and 75.2% responded in the affirmative to the question "Is it ever acceptable for a Christian to participate in war and engage in combat?" Both of these responses are a far cry from being prophetic through the embracing of pacifism in one form or another, a reminder not to conflate a rise of being prophetic with a decline of the just war tradition. In fact, there is little indication of a return to some sort of pre-Constantinian pacifism.<sup>41</sup>

The final four questions all relate to being prophetic by acting with a degree of autonomy and willingness to criticize, yet also acting by engaging the nation's foreign policy through various channels of influence.

The answers to question #3 indicate that one must also be careful not to conflate the just war tradition with uncritical and jingoistic support for war from the pulpit. In fact, there was notably low support for a pastor preaching a sermon in support of the war effort.<sup>42</sup> It could be fairly argued that this aversion to preaching a sermon to bolster the war effort is a noteworthy departure from preaching during the wars of the early twentieth century, but without statistics from earlier generations one can only conjecture how

much of a shift it actual is.<sup>43</sup> What one can state with certainty is that the majority of clergy and lay people—even those from the just war tradition—are reticent to use the pulpit to advance the nation's war effort and are unwilling to have the pulpit co-opted by military or political necessities.

Interestingly, question #4 indicates that a majority of clergy were willing to use a sermon in wartime, but only for the purpose of criticizing the nation's war effort. In this matter, those who responded "yes" reveal a desire to preserve a prophetic role for the church. Clergy, who ranked the highest (68.8%) in support of a sermon being used to criticize the nation's war effort, indicated a self-identity that is marked by autonomy and an unwillingness—in the words of Mol—to "whitewash" the nation's military conduct. In that sense they see themselves more as prophets who hold the state to account rather than priests who bless what is being done. Seemingly most (by a slim margin) non-clergy agree with that identity.

In question #5 a slight majority (55.5%) supported the notion of a denomination making an official statement in regards to whether or not it supported a war. Clergy were even higher on the scale of support, with 69.7% in favour. In both cases, the assumption is of a denomination engaged in shaping public and political views on war and peace, even when the denomination is opposed to the war effort. Official statements are often expected during times of war, and denominations were always quick to state their loyalty in past world wars such as the South African War, or the two World Wars. However, here the expectation is that denominations speak even when their message is not going to be appreciated by a government seeking to wage a war—a potentially dangerous, unpopular, and even illegal option for churches.

Churches in a post-Christendom context may be on the margins of power and influence, but the response to question #6 indicates a willingness to speak to public issues. A significant majority (70.7%) answered "yes" to the question "Should churches seek to influence Canada's foreign policy in regards to military affairs?" This survey indicates that the principle of engagement continues to have significant support, and the assumption of the churches for the past few decades that they are to engage the state in matters of foreign policy has substantial support. Whether or not the government listens to the churches is not the issue—most are convinced that the churches need to speak into the trajectory of the nation's military affairs.

There are a few noteworthy items in regards to demographics. First, clergy were more likely than lay people to select “yes” to a sermon criticizing a war, and for denominational statements in support for a war. In other areas there was no significant difference. Second, the oldest category of respondent was more willing to select “yes” to support a nation’s right to engaging in war, support a Christian’s liberty to engage in war, support the preaching of a sermon in support of war, support the preaching of a sermon critical of the war, support denominations making statements on their views of war, and support for engaging foreign policy. In every case, the older the person, the more likely a “yes” in the survey.

Third, religious affiliation played an interesting sometimes counter-intuitive role. Evangelicals had the highest support for a nation’s right to engage in war, and the highest support for a Christian to engage in a military conflict and even combat. However, that strong support in those categories did not translate into support for jingoistic preaching—in fact, they had the lowest support for sermons being used to bolster the nation’s war effort. In another interesting demographic twist, the mainline Protestant respondents had the highest support for a sermon being used to bolster the war effort, but also the highest support for a sermon being used to criticize the war effort. They also had the highest numbers when it came to supporting denominational statements and involvement in shaping the nation’s foreign policy. In all these cases, mainline Protestants seem to be most consistent with the priestly nation-building ethos of Christendom, but also had elements of the identity and ethos of Mol’s prophetic category. This seeming dissonance raises questions about the explanatory power of Mol’s paradigm in every instance. The not sure/don’t care category was always on the extreme end of answers. They were the least likely to support a war effort, least likely to support Christians engaging in war, least likely to support a sermon for war, least likely to support preaching against a war, least likely to support a denomination making statements on war, and least likely to support influencing foreign policy. The correlation between “not sure/don’t care” and “least likely” may be explained by the degree of uncertainty surrounding the issues—for it is hard to be enthusiastic supporters of a cause when theological clarity or motivation are lacking—but undoubtedly qualitative interviews would better help understand the correlation.

## CONCLUSION

Canada has changed to reflect a post-Christendom reality, a relatively new context for the nation’s churches. However, while Christendom may be gone and churches have moved to the margins, the reality of ongoing military conflicts means that churches continually need to face pressing and vexing theological, ethical, and political issues. Mol’s paradigm of priests to prophets—a move to a more autonomous and critical posture to the state—is a helpful paradigm for understanding the shifts that have taken place in regards to the churches and the state in times of conflict. These survey results confirm some of Mol’s conclusions for the Canadian context, but they also indicate surprising nuances and subtleties to views held in pew and pulpit. First, the results indicate a range of perspectives, especially in regards to age and denominational affiliation—a caution to making sweeping statements about views of “the church.” Second, the survey indicates a resiliency of the traditional just war position, challenging assumptions about a move to the margins being concomitant with a move to pacifism. Third, the results do indicate a resistance to associating a war effort with support from the pulpit, as well as showing support for the churches’ ongoing mission to engage the state in matters of foreign policy. In that regard, the responses reflect Mol’s conclusions in regards to a more prophetic vision for the churches. The churches may be on the margins, but, if the results reflect a larger picture, they do not intend to remain silent.

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## ENDNOTES

1. Such days of prayer, repentance, and humiliation during times of war (or famine or plague) had a long pedigree among Christian nations. The intent was to repent of sins that were deemed to have caused God to judge the people by letting them experience defeat on the battlefield. The underlying assumption was that God would forgive the people—and aid their military cause—if they would only repent of their sins and seek God’s blessing. See Gordon L. Heath, “Sin in the Camp: The Day of Humble Supplication in the Anglican Church in Canada in the Early Months of the South African War,” *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society* 44 (Fall 2002): 207-226.
2. A reference to Joshua 7, a passage that describes how Achan’s sin led to God punishing the Israelites through military defeat.
3. Christendom is when the majority of citizens self-identify as Christian, the nation calls itself a Christian nation, the laws are predominately shaped by Christian ethical mores, and the church is privileged by the state. Post-Christendom is a shift away from that situation, with the church moving to the margins of power, without privilege and with decreasing numbers. For various works on the move to post-Christendom, see Lee Beach, *The Church in Exile: Living in Hope After Christendom* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2015); Charles Fenshaw, *Emerging from the Dark Age Ahead* (Toronto, ON: Clements, 2011); Jonathan R. Wilson, *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World: Lessons for the Church from MacIntyre’s After Virtue* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997); Douglas Hall, *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003); Douglas Hall, *The Future of the Church: Where Are We Headed?* (Toronto, ON: UCC Publishing House, 1989).
4. For a summary of research related to the churches and war, see Gordon L. Heath, “Canadian Churches and War: An Introductory Essay and Annotated Bibliography,” *McMaster Journal of Theology and Ministry* 12 (2010-2011): 61-124. For commentary on the churches and public life, see Marguerite Van Die (ed.), *Religion and Public Life in Canada: Historical and Comparative Perspectives* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2001); David Lyon and Marguerite Van Die (eds.), *Rethinking Church, State, and Modernity: Canada Between Europe and America* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2001); Gary Miedema, *For Canada’s Sake: Public Religion, Centennial Celebrations, and the Remaking of Canada in the 1960s* (Montreal, PQ / Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005); Gordon L. Heath and Paul Wilson (eds.), *Baptists and Public Life in Canada*. (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012).
5. Gordon L. Heath, “‘Citizens of that Mighty Empire’: Imperial Sentiment among Students at Wesley College, 1897-1902,” *Manitoba History* (June 2005): 15-25; Adam D. Rudy, “‘The Protagonist of Justice Against the Forces of the AntiChrist’: Christian Democracy and the Second World War in The Silhouette and *The Recorder*,” in *Christian Higher Education in Canada*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Bruce G. Fawcett (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020), 13-39.
6. Brian Clarke and Stuart Macdonald, *Leaving Christianity: Changing Allegiances in Canada since 1945* (Montreal, PQ / Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017).
7. Gordon L. Heath, “Dissenting Traditions and Politics in the Anglophone World,” in *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions: Volume V; The Twentieth Century: Themes and Variations in a Global Context*, ed. Mark P. Hutchinson (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018), 61-90.
8. Phyllis D. Airhart, *A Church with the Soul of a Nation: Making and Remaking the United Church of Canada* (Montreal, PQ / Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014).
9. Miedema, *For Canada’s Sake: Public Religion*.
10. Hans Mol, *Faith and Fragility: Religion and Identity in Canada* (Burlington, ON: Trinity Press, 1985).
11. The just war tradition has two fundamental concerns for justice: *jus ad bellum* (the justice of war—or “just cause”) and *jus in bello* (justice in war—or “just means”). A third category has recently been added, that of *jus post bellum* (justice after war). The goal of all categories is the right use of force in terms of what one is fighting for, and the right use of force as to how that force is used. It is not meant to end all wars, but to curb as much as possible state-sanctioned abuses of violence.
12. Mol, *Faith and Fragility*, 255.

13. *Mol, Faith and Fragility*, 260.
14. *Mol, Faith and Fragility*, 263.
15. *Mol, Faith and Fragility*, 263.
16. Allan Davidson, "Chaplain to the Nation or Prophet at the Gate," In *Christianity, Modernity and Culture: New Perspectives on New Zealand History*, ed. John Stenhouse (Adelaide, AU: ATF Press, 2005): 311-331.
17. *Mol, Faith and Fragility*, 263.
18. Frank H. Epp, *I Would Like to Dodge the Draft-Dodgers, but ...* (Waterloo, ON: Conrad, 1970); Donald W. Maxwell, "Religion and Politics at the Border: Canadian Church Support for American Vietnam War Resisters," *Journal of Church and State* 48 (2006): 807-829.
19. Mara Apostol, "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," MA thesis, McMaster Divinity College, 2010.
20. Robert O. Matthews, "The Christian Churches and Foreign Policy: An Assessment," In *Canadian Churches and Foreign Policy*, ed. Bonnie Greene (Toronto, ON: James Lorimer & Company, 1990), 161-179.
21. This material on the churches taken from Bill Blaikie, "The Cruise Missile Debate in the Canadian Parliament," In *North American Churches and the Cold War*, ed. Paul Mojzes (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 53-63.
22. Lois Wilson, "Canadian Churches and the Cold War, 1975-1990", in *North American Churches and the Cold War*, ed. Paul Mojzes (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 14-27; Brian McGowan, "The Churches Talk Peace," *Grail* 2 (1986): 7- 21.
23. Renate Pratt, *In Good Faith: Canadian Churches against Apartheid* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier Press, 1997), 337.
24. Haim Genizi, *The Holocaust, Israel, and the Canadian Protestant Churches* (Montreal, PQ / Kingston, ON: McGill- Queen's University Press, 2002).

25. Alan Davies, "Jews and Palestinians: An Unresolved Conflict in the United Church Mind," in *The United Church of Canada: A History*, ed. Don Schweitzer (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2012).
26. Shirley Farlinger, *A Million for Peace: The Story of the Peacemaking Fund of the United Church of Canada* (Etobicoke, ON: United Church Publishing House, 1996).
27. Lucille Marr, "Peace Activities of the Canadian Conference of the Brethren in Christ Church, 1945-1982," *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 8 (1985): 13-36.
28. Lisa Martens, "Christian Peacemaker Teams as a Current Version of Conscientious Objection," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 25 (2007): 205-13.
29. Gayle Thrift, "'Has God a Lobby in Ottawa?' The Protestant Left in the United Church of Canada during the Vietnam War, 1966-1968," in *North American Churches and the Cold War*, ed. Paul Mojzes (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 28-52.
30. Kate Bowler, "'We Wish to Inform You': Canadian Religious Reporting of the Rwandan Genocide," *Canadian Society of Church History Papers* (2008): 175-195.
31. For instance, see Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) to Prime Minister Jean Chrétien on 9/11 (21 September 2001); CCC to Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs & International Trade and National Defence & Veterans' Affairs on Afghanistan (16 January 2002); CCC to Prime Minister Jean Chrétien on Iraq (25 September 2002); CCC to President George W. Bush on Iraq (25 September 2002); CCC to Prime Minister Jean Chrétien on Iraq (20 December 2002); CCC to Prime Minister Jean Chrétien on Iraq (28 February 2003); CCC to Prime Minister Jean Chrétien on Iraq (26 March 2003); CCC to Prime Minister Jean Chrétien on Democratic Republic of Congo (4 July 2003); CCC to Prime Minister Paul Martin on Nuclear Disarmament and Missile Defence (15 March 2004); CCC to Prime Minister Paul Martin on Darfur (16 January 2006); CCC to Prime Minister Stephen Harper on Darfur (29 June 2006); CCC to Prime Minister Stephen Harper on Afghanistan (16 August 2007); CCC to

- Prime Minister Stephen Harper on Afghanistan (10 December 2007); CCC to Prime Minister Stephen Harper on Middle East (17 May 2013); CCC to Minister John Baird on Syria (19 September 2013); CCC to Prime Minister Stephen Harper on Iraq and Syria (7 April 2015). *An extensive Ecumenical Brief on Canada's Role in Afghanistan* was presented to the House of Commons Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan (10 December 2009). All of the above documents can be accessed through the CCC website.
32. For instance, despite almost universal worldwide opposition among churches to the war in Iraq, the United States went ahead with its invasion in 2003. For some examples of this opposition, see World Council of Churches United Against War in Iraq [www.wcc-coe.org/pressreleaseen.nsf/index/03-02.html](http://www.wcc-coe.org/pressreleaseen.nsf/index/03-02.html); Churches for Middle East Peace [www.cmep.org/letters/2002sep12\\_BushReIraq.htm](http://www.cmep.org/letters/2002sep12_BushReIraq.htm); Worldwide Alliance of Reformed Churches [www.warc.ch/dcw/iraq](http://www.warc.ch/dcw/iraq); Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and All the East [www.antichian.org/print/news/Release20030324PatriarchalStatement.htm](http://www.antichian.org/print/news/Release20030324PatriarchalStatement.htm); Middle Eastern Catholic Patriarchs [www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa3861/is\\_200301/ai\\_n9235062](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3861/is_200301/ai_n9235062); Pope John Paul II [www.cjd.org/paper/jp2war.html](http://www.cjd.org/paper/jp2war.html); Patriarch of Moscow [www.russian-orthodox-church.org.ru/ne303171.htm](http://www.russian-orthodox-church.org.ru/ne303171.htm); Coptic Church [www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/030312/2003031226.html](http://www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/030312/2003031226.html); Patriarch of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church [www.melkite.org/sa45.htm](http://www.melkite.org/sa45.htm);
  33. [http://www.reginaldbibby.com/images/TERRORISM\\_WAR.pdf](http://www.reginaldbibby.com/images/TERRORISM_WAR.pdf).
  34. David Schroeder, "Theological Reflections of a CO: Changing Peace Theology since World War II," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 25 (2007): 183-193.
  35. Gary D. Badcock and Darren C. Marks (eds.), *War, Human Dignity and Nation Building: Theological Perspectives on Canada's Role in Afghanistan* (Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010). There are a number of helpful works examining military and/or political perspectives, but they do not include Canadian churches in their analysis. See James Fergusson and Francis Furtado (eds.), *Beyond Afghanistan: An International Security Agenda for Canada* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2016); Jean-Christophe Boucher and Kim Richard Nossal, *The Politics of War: Canada's*

- Afghanistan Mission, 2001-14* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2017); Stephen M. Saideman, *Adapting in the Dust: Lessons Learned from Canada's War in Afghanistan* (Vancouver, BC: University of Toronto Press, 2016); Jack Cunningham and William Maley (eds.), *Australia and Canada in Afghanistan: Perspectives on a Mission* (Toronto, ON: Dundurn Press, 2015).
36. Ernie Regehr, "Reconciliation and the 'War' on Terror: Canadian Churches Respond to 9/11 and the War in Afghanistan," in *War, Human Dignity and Nation Building: Theological Perspectives on Canada's Role in Afghanistan*, eds. Gary D. Babcock and Darren C. Marks (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 231-252.
  37. The following schools were represented in this study: Emmanuel College, Toronto, ON; McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, ON; Toronto Baptist Seminary, Toronto, ON; Knox College, Toronto, ON; Tyndale University, Toronto, ON; Heritage Seminary, Cambridge, ON; Trinity Western University, Langley, BC. The limits of this study which includes only students from Protestant schools are obvious, and any future survey should include students from Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox schools. What should also be included are students from institutions within the historic peace church tradition (such as Mennonite).
  38. Citizenship was not asked – something that could be added to a future survey.
  39. As noted above in footnote #37, a future survey will need to include a larger number of Catholics in order to gain a better sense of Catholic attitudes on such issues.
  40. That is something that could be clarified for the next iteration of the survey.
  41. That said, there is extensive debate over just how "pacifist" was the pre-Constantinian church.
  42. That being the case, roughly 37% believed that it was okay to preach such a sermon.
  43. It is difficult to know just how many pastors/priests preached a sermon in support of past wars. The fact that many did seems beyond dispute.

However, how many actually did? Polemical pacifist works such as Ray H. Abrams, *Preachers Present Arms: The Role of the American Churches and Clergy in World War I and II with Some Observations on the War in Vietnam* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1969) complicate the matter. More scholarly attention needs to be directed to the subject of wartime sermons, such as that carried out by Melissa Davidson, “Preaching the Great War: Canadian Anglicans and the War Sermon, 1914-1918,” McGill University, Masters thesis, 2012.