

Harvesting the “Red Vineyard”: Catholic Religious Culture in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919

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After only six months of service in the Canadian Expeditionary Force as a chaplain, Father Bernard Stephen Doyle of Toronto was clearly unimpressed with the spiritual exercises of the men in his care. “I have become more firmly convinced,” he wrote to Archbishop Neil McNeil, “that war and soldier’s life do not promote the welfare of religion. The ordinary man is not any more fervent out here than he was at home.”¹ Doyle complained of fair-weather Catholics who seemed to eager go to the sacraments before the heat of battle but who also “forgot their good resolutions afterwards.” Soldiers, according to Doyle, were mired in irreligion, immorality, and blasphemy, and many were remiss in making their Easter duty during the war, continuing what seemed to be the bad habits they possessed well before they ever donned khaki. Such rotten fruit in the “red vineyard,” was, in Doyle’s mind the harvest of a domestic Church that had failed to nurture young men in the faith. His only words of hope came when he described Catholic youth from the Maritimes and the Ottawa Valley.²

What are we to make of Doyle’s observations? Did they reflect accurately the religious lives of Catholics serving in the Canadian Expeditionary force? One might attribute Doyle’s diatribe to his limited experience in the variety of postings typical to the life of a CEF chaplain.³ Perhaps his observations were evidence of the disappointment and shock experienced by a zealous young priest who, ordained less than four years, received a strong

¹ Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto [hereafter ARCAT], War Box, Doyle to Neil McNeil, 1 March 1918.

² The term “red vineyard” was coined by Catholic chaplain Benedict J. Murdoch in his *The Red Vineyard* (Cedar Rapids: Torch Press, 1923.)

³ National Archives [hereafter NA], RG 9 III, vol. 4622, CD-16, Bernard Stephen Doyle File, Lt. Colonel Commanding 11th Railway Troops to HQ, CRT, 08 May 1918. Requesting Doyle’s removal, the commandant complains that “This Chaplain is a young man who just finished his college course shortly before enlisting. He seems to be entirely without experience in his duties as chaplain for a battalion of mixed denominations. He is, apparently, a conscientious priest and looks after some fifty odd R.Cs [sic] in the battalion but makes no effort to do anything for members of other denominations.”

dose of reality in his first significant pastoral assignment.⁴ Whatever the difficulties of filtering Doyle's comments through the unrequited expectations of an eager and committed priest, his observations prompt some rather significant questions about the spiritual life of priests and Catholic laity in the CEF. How did priests serving as chaplains understand the nature of their ministry? How can one characterize their relations with the lay men and women serving in the CEF? How ardent were Catholic service persons in their reception of the sacraments? How closely did soldiers and nursing sisters maintain strict Catholic moral norms?

Contemporary historical writing on the Canadian Expeditionary Force is of little help when addressing the questions arising from Doyle's letter. Few military historians are concerned with the interplay of military life and spirituality. Even in his lucid and vividly detailed social history of Canadian soldiers, *When Your Number's Up*, Desmond Morton relegates the religious life of the CEF to a very brief statistical postscript.⁵ The implication of the virtual omission of religion from Morton's fine study is that religious life was a minor consideration of service personnel at best. Duff Crerar's recent tome *Padres in No Man's Land*, however, suggests otherwise. This richly documented study of the Canadian Chaplains Service reintroduces the religious element to the CEF and argues that the war did not create widespread religious disillusionment among the padres. Crerar also challenges the memoirs of such veterans as Charles Harrison and Will Bird, for whom the soldiers were "godless, cynical and profane," and their chaplains were "irrelevant."⁶ Despite this ground breaking study, however, several problems remain unresolved: how to decipher the conflicting reports of religious participation by Roman Catholic service personnel; how Catholic priests came to be more highly regarded than their Protestant colleagues in the myth and lore of the soldiers themselves; and how much truth there was in the rather unflattering portrait of Catholics painted by Father Doyle.⁷

In the face of conflicting testimony regarding Catholic religious life, this study attempts to blend the insights drawn from chaplains' reports, war diaries, and episcopal correspondence, with an extensive survey of the personnel records of Catholics who served in the CEF. For most of the 1,472 male Catholic service personnel and sixty Catholic nurses sampled for this paper, the military service file is the only personal evidence that remains of

⁴ Robert Joseph Scollard, csb., *They Honoured the Vestments of Holiness* (Toronto: Archdiocese of Toronto, 1990), 58.

⁵ Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1993), 279.

⁶ Duff Crerar, *Padres in No Man's Land: Canadian Chaplains and the Great War* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 5-7, 10 and 221.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 325, ff.63.

their participation in the Great War. The fact that soldiers' and nurses' attestation papers required a statement of religious affiliation, among other vital statistics, provides a unique opportunity to pinpoint Catholics in the CEF and compare their records of service with other denominations, while offering a possible counterweight to the observations made about them by the officer-priests who were their spiritual shepherds. The random sample groups of 1,133 and 1,532 themselves reflect the regional, ethnic, recruitment phase, and occupational profiles of Catholic Canadians between the ages of 17 and 45.⁸

When examined together, the manuscript and routinely generated evidence suggests a much more intricate portrait of Catholic religious life than advanced by Father Doyle. There was no typical Catholic soldier. Such variables as church affiliation prior to the war, one's region of origin in Canada, age, occupation, time at the front, and total length of military service affected a Catholic soldier's reception of the sacraments and adherence to strict Catholic moral norms. Most Catholic men – the churched and the previously “unchurched” – embraced the sacraments, although such participation did not guarantee a rigorous moral life, particularly with regards to the sixth commandment. The fear of death on the battlefield prompted even the unchurched to seek the sacraments from the “padre,” while this same fear, particularly among the youngest recruits, promoted a rather more relaxed attitude towards sexuality and temperance. As Doyle had suspected though, for some Canadian Catholic men, from particular regions of the country and specific occupational groups, such behaviour reflected a perpetuation of habits cultivated well-before the war began.

When war erupted in Europe in 1914, Canadian Catholics were as enthusiastic in their participation as any other subjects in the British Empire. Bishops in most of Canada's dioceses, both in and out of Quebec, endorsed the Imperial war effort as necessary for civilization and Christianity.⁹

⁸ The samples were derived from the sailing lists of a selection of battalions from all nine Canadian provinces during the war. There was an effort to select battalions recruited in urban and rural areas and in the early and late phases of voluntary recruitment. Depending on the battalion, every seventh or twelfth name was examined and, if available, matched with a personnel file at the National Personnel Record Centre. Parish rolls were selected based upon their availability. Many were removed during parish renovations in the 1960s.

⁹ Text of Pastoral Letter by Archbishops and Bishops of Ottawa, Quebec, and Montreal, *Catholic Register* 22 October 1914. *Register*, 20 and 27 August and 19 November 1914; Archives of the Diocese of London [ADL], Pastoral, 28 August 1914; and *Record*, 12 September 1914. Similar patriotic and spiritual effusions were noted from John T. McNally, Bishop of Calgary, Patrick Ryan, Auxiliary Bishop of Pembroke, Edward J. McCarthy of Halifax, and Louis O'Leary, Auxiliary Bishop of Chatham. Archives of the Archdiocese of Halifax [AAH], McNally Papers, Volume

Catholic newspapers, in both official languages, denounced the aggression of the “Hun,” the pillage of Belgium, and the malevolence of the Kaiser, and encouraged young Catholics to enlist in the service of “God and Country.”¹⁰ Priests and lay leaders throughout Canada endorsed the public pronouncements of the hierarchy and press by assisting in recruitment, raising companies for battalions, collecting for the Canadian Patriotic Fund and War Bonds, and by offering themselves as chaplains and officers.¹¹ The enthusiastic recruitment of English-speaking Catholics of Irish and Scottish descent underscored the degree to which Canadian-born generations of Catholics had come to identify with the principles, needs, and vision of Canada as an integral player in the British Empire. For French Canadians the task was to defend principles of freedom and religion, from those who valued neither.¹²

The call of Catholic leaders, which was sustained throughout most of the war’s voluntary enlistment phase, when combined with patriotism then evident in Canada’s anglophone Catholic communities, sparked considerable recruitment to the Canadian Expeditionary Force by Catholic men and women. The faltering economy of late 1914, and its accompanying levels of high unemployment, facilitated the decision of many working class Catholics to enlist for the attractive \$1 per day wage. By the end of voluntary recruitment in late 1917, some 51,426 Catholics had enlisted, and over 70% of these were non-francophones. Prior to the introduction of conscription, in late 1917, Catholics accounted for 14% of all recruits.¹³ By war’s end and the

V, documents 761, 771, 790, 791 and 798; McCarthy papers, Volume I, documents 80 and 81. Archives of the Diocese of Pembroke, Ryan Papers, Pastorals and Circulars, 1914-1919. O’Leary in *Register*, 27 May 1915.

¹⁰ *Register*, 10 September 1914; *The Casket* 13 August, 1 October, 12 November 1914; *Catholic Record* 15 and 22 August 1914, 13 and 20 February 1915; *New Freeman*; *Northwest Review*; *Canadian Freeman*.

¹¹ ARCAT, McNeil Papers, Circular, 25 August 1914, PC 01.02. Belgian Relief collections are praised in the *Casket*, 8 October 1914. J.J. O’Gorman at Ottawa (*Register*, 20 January 1916); John E. Burke, csp, in Toronto (ARCAT, McNeil Papers, Wt. M. Kennedy to McNeil, 28 March 1916). See also Charles G. Brewer, “The Diocese of Antigonish and World War I,” (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1975), 38.

¹² Jean Hamelin et Nicole Gagnon, *Histoire du Catholicisme québécoise. Tome 1, 1898-1940* (Montreal: Boreal Express, 1984), 300-1 and Mark G. McGowan, “To Share in the Burdens of Empire: Toronto’s Catholics and the Great War, 1914-1918,” in McGowan and Brian P. Clarke eds., *Catholics at the ‘Gathering Place’: Historical Essays on the Archdiocese of Toronto, 1841-1991* (Toronto: Canadian Catholic Historical Association, 1993): 177-207.

¹³ NA, RG 9 III, vol 4636, C-O-3, “O’Gorman Memorandum to the Archbishops and Bishops of Ontario,” October 1917, 10-11. Also RG 9 III, 4673, “Religious Statistics and RG 24,” vol 1249, HQ-593-1-77, 22 August 1916. The latter suggests

inclusion of many French-Canadian conscripts, the Catholic proportion of the CEF was close to 23%.¹⁴

The Catholic recruits themselves differed in several respects from other volunteers. By November 1918, Canadian-born personnel in the CEF constituted only a meagre 51.2% of the over 665,000 men and women who served. Catholics, on the other hand were overwhelmingly Canadian-born, comprising nearly 77% of the random sample used in this study. A small number of these Canadian-born attested in the first two months of the war, when generally British-born Canadians flooded into Valcartier to train for the defence of the motherland. Most Catholics, however, enlisted in 1915 and 1916, when recruitment was better organized in Canada and the propaganda machine had stirred up public outcry over German atrocities on the high seas and in Belgium, and their use of poisonous gas on Canadian troops in 1915, at Langemarck in the Ypres salient. Those Catholics who rose to the summons came from every region of the country, with Nova Scotia, Eastern Ontario, and Canadian cities experiencing high levels of Catholic enlistment. Given the regions of recruitment, most Catholic volunteers were blue collar workers, farmers, miners, and foresters, although cities like Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa provided high proportions of white collar workers. On the whole, at just over 25 years of age, Catholics were less than a year younger, on average, than the rest of the CEF.¹⁵

The war experience also provided unprecedented levels of integration of Catholic men and women with their non-Catholic compatriots. Those Catholics who were accustomed to separate Catholic health care, social services, fraternal organizations and, in some provinces, schools, would find few exclusive “systems” for Catholics in the CEF. Except for Montreal’s 22nd Battalion and its feeder battalions, there were no exclusively Catholic units raised in the period of voluntary recruitment, although several battalions raised in the Maritimes, Eastern Ontario and Western Quebec had large Catholic representation.¹⁶ Throughout the war, only the 5th Brigade could be seen as predominantly Catholic, encompassing the 22nd Battalion or “Van Doos,” and the 24th (Montreal), 25th (Nova Scotia) and 26th (New Brunswick) Battalions, which soon warranted an unprecedented second

the French Canadian recruits number about 13,000.

¹⁴ Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 279.

¹⁵ Morton, 279. See Appendices 1 and 2.

¹⁶ NA, RG 24, vol 1249, HQ 593-1-77, 30 August 1913. These units included 33rd (London); 37th (Northern Ontario), 58th (Central Ontario), 76th (Barrie, Orillia, Collingwood), 83rd (Toronto), 59th (Eastern Ontario), 8th CMR (Ontario), 77th (Ottawa), 40th (Nova Scotia), 55th (Sussex, NB), 60th (Montreal [one company of Irish Rangers]), 64th (NS, PEI, NB), 54th (BC), 51st (Edmonton), 63rd (Alberta), and 66th (Edmonton).

Catholic chaplain being appointed to the Brigade.¹⁷ On the whole, Catholics formed minorities in most Canadian battalions, often representing only the third or fourth largest denomination present. Thus Catholic troops were integrated into multi-denominational units, intermingling with men of similar class backgrounds, regional loyalties, and life experience. In such situations, with Catholic priests stretched thinly across the military grid and with so many alterations and disruptions to the regular rhythms of Catholic religious life, Catholics might have become more relaxed in their religious practice and acculturated to the shared experiences and ethos of male military culture than to the all-encompassing Christian life, within clearly prescribed Catholic boundaries.¹⁸

For Catholic recruits the most poignant visible reminder of the Catholic faith during the war was the presence of the Catholic chaplain. In the mind of the ultramontane Catholic the priest was “the first necessity of the Church.”¹⁹ Church leaders in Canada deemed it imperative that Catholic soldiers and nurses be able to continue their religious observances and obligations overseas without hindrance or danger to their faith. Thus, despite some initial difficulty with the military bureaucracy under the command of Sam Hughes, by November 1918, the Catholic bishops had secured 101 priests for the Canadian Chaplain Service.²⁰ In eastern Canada, where Catholic recruits were numerous, freshly enrolled Catholic soldiers immediately came into contact with a priest who had been recruited specifically for their battalion. Thus, Catholics in the 22nd Battalion (Montreal), 25th Battalion (Nova Scotia), 185th Battalion (Cape Breton), 105th (Prince Edward Island) and the 132nd Battalion (New Brunswick), had the services of a priest available to them throughout their basic training, and often until their arrival in England. Clergy in Canada and some Catholic officers complained to military authorities that without the assurance that the spiritual welfare of Catholics would be taken care of by battalion chaplains, Catholic families would be reticent to support enlistment of their young men. The Nova Scotia Highlanders were particularly indignant when their

¹⁷ Archives of the Diocese of Antigonish [hereafter ADA], Bishop James Morrison Papers, letter 3401, Father Wolston Workman to Morrison, 5 July 1916.

¹⁸ Thorough analysis of male military culture in the Great War is available in Denis Winter, *Death's Men: The Soldiers of the Great War* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978) and Richard Holmes, *Firing Line* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1985).

¹⁹ Alfred E. Burke, “Need of a Missionary College,” in Francis C. Kelley, ed., *The First American Catholic Missionary Congress* (Chicago: J.S. Hyland and Co., 1909), 80.

²⁰ Duff Crerar, “Bellicose Priests: The Wars of the Canadian Catholic Chaplains, 1914-1919,” *CCHA Historical Studies* 58 (1991): 21-39

chaplain, Michael Gillis, was transferred, because the CCS allowed for only one Catholic chaplain per brigade of four battalions.²¹

Once overseas, Catholic chaplains were stationed in most base camps, reserve units, and army hospitals, so that the sacraments could be available to the broadest number of Catholic personnel possible. As Catholic soldiers moved from “blighty” to France and Flanders, they would have the opportunity to see the padre at base camps, casualty clearing stations, and the front itself, where there was at least one Catholic priest per brigade. Chaplains often complained, however, that they were responsible for too wide a district in England, too many hospitals, or too many combatants, to give each man the kind of spiritual attention that he deserved. What exacerbated this feeling of stress and overwork was the fact that non-Catholics appeared not to appreciate the fact that the sacerdotal nature of the priests’ ministry consumed most of their waking hours and left them precious little time to organize other activities or even censor the mail of the “other ranks.”²²

Awareness of the primary importance of the priests’ sacerdotal ministry was intimately linked to the manner in which the Catholic men and women responded to the padres. In the popular lore of the Great War, one enduring myth is that Catholic padres were more popular among the men than their Protestant counterparts because priests were anxious to follow the men to the trenches.²³ In a minor way, the Catholic chaplain’s sense of urgency to be on the firing line with the boys was a product of their patriotic fervour, and perhaps a desire to emulate the celebrated veteran chaplain of the Boer War Father Peter M. O’Leary.²⁴ It is more likely that Catholic padres were motivated by a self-understanding that their primary mission as priests was to dispense the sacraments – those visible signs of God’s grace, essential in Catholic belief for the salvation of souls. Their seminary training and on-going professional development as priests would have convinced them that

²¹ ADA, Morrison Papers, Letter 4331, Draft of Catholic Officers of the 185th Battalion to Senior Chaplain, c. April 1917; Letter 2336, Morrison to Senator Loughheed, Acting Minister of Militia, 13 August 1915; letter 2303, Father J.J. MacNeil (Dominion #4) to Morrison, 11 April 1915.

²² ADA, Morrison Papers, letter 2618, Donald MacPherson to Morrison, 16 September 1915; letter 3410, Miles Tompkins to Morrison, 11 June 1916. NA, RG 9 III, vol. 4620, C-8, Thomas L. Cooney File, Cooney to Canon Sylvestre, 19 December 1918; Murdoch, *The Red Vineyard*, 36.

²³ John Baynes, *Morale: A Study of Men and Courage, The Second Scottish Rifles at the Battle of Neuve Chapelle*, 1915 (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), 205-8.

²⁴ Duff Crerar, “In the day of Battle: Canadian Catholic Chaplains in the Field, 1885-1945,” *CCHA Historical Studies* 61 (1995), 56.

in order to hear confessions and administer extreme unction they had to be as close to the action as possible. This was their calling as priests, regardless of the risk to their life and limb.²⁵ Many priests came to recognize that the dangerous work of anointing the mangled bodies of dying men at the front, and comforting the wounded elsewhere was not only their duty, but the most rewarding pastoral work they had ever done. Miles Tompkins of the Diocese of Antigonish, considered by some to be “the most popular chaplain at the front,”²⁶ was adamant about his responsibilities to the men and his need to be at the firing line: “this is the very worst part in the whole British Front. If the Bishop calls me back, I suppose I shall have to go, but much against my will.”²⁷

The imperatives imposed upon a Catholic chaplain by the nature of his ministry were not lost on the men, nor were they unique to the Canadian Corps. Ambrose Madden garnered considerable attention and respect for all padres when he won the Military Cross for bravery. Other Catholic priests in the Canadian, American, and Australian Expeditionary Forces, disregarded personal safety, and sometimes orders, by ministering to their men in the line of fire.²⁸ Such risks could result in fatalities. The death of a padre in the heat of battle brought to the fore the connectedness between the priest’s sacerdotal role and the respect given the priest by Catholic soldiers.

²⁵ NA, RG 9 III, vol. 4621, CD-7, Maurice de la Taille File, de la Taille to W. Workman, 7 April 1918. ADL, Michael Francis Fallon Papers, Circular Letter, 21 November 1917. J.J. O’Gorman, cited in John R. O’Gorman, *Soldiers of Christ: Canadian Catholic Chaplains, 1914-1919* (Toronto, 1936), 21-22. Archivio Segreto Vaticano [hereafter ASV], Apostolic Delegate’s Correspondence, Canada [hereafter DAC], L.N. Begin to Pellegrino Stagni, 7 March 1916. The sacerdotal importance of the priesthood is explicit in Bernard Ward, *The Priestly Vocation: A Series of Fourteen Conferences Addressed to the Secular Clergy* (New York: Longman’s, Green and Co., 1918), 86-101 and Henry Edward Manning, *The Eternal Priesthood* (Baltimore: John Murphy & Co., 1883), 9-32.

²⁶ ADA, Morrison Papers, Letter 4330, R.C. MacGillivray to Morrison, 21 April 1917. NA, RG 9 III, vol. 4644, C-T-6, Miles Tompkins File, Workman to Bishop Morrison, 17 February 1919.

²⁷ Beaton Institute Archives, University College of Cape Breton, MG 10, 2, 1a, James Tompkins Papers, Miles Tompkins to James, from 60th Battalion, 13 June 1916.

²⁸ Michael McKernan, *Padre: Australian Chaplains in Gallipoli and France* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 35-6. Australian priest, John Fahey, joined his men during their assault on Galipoli. Cobourg, Ontario, native Francis P. Duffy earned the DSO, DSM, Legion of Honour, Croix de Guerre with Palm for his service at the Front with the American 165th Battalion. Ambrose Madden won the Military Cross for “conspicuous bravery under heavy fire” as he dug to free men buried alive in the trenches. NA RG 9 II C15, vol 4649, “Ambrose Madden” and vol. 4665, Madden’s Diary, 1917.

On April 6, 1918, 38 year-old Father Rosario Crochetière of Nicolet was blown to bits when serving at a first aid station about 1000 yards from the front line. Father Ewan MacDonald, who was first on the scene after the explosion, and who removed the eucharist and holy oils from Crochetière's remains, eulogized his fallen comrade as being "a priest who died doing a priest's work and no more need to be said." MacDonald added, nevertheless, that "One expression was used by many of his boys and may serve to show us as priests how our work is appreciated if done properly – 'He was a real Father to us' – 'he worked *for us* and we never had to go without Mass or the Sacraments.'"²⁹ Such thoughts were forthcoming from A.J. Lapointe, a signaller in the 22nd Battalion, for whom the death of his padre was "une grande perte." In his journal, Lapointe remembered Crochetière as "le Bon Père" who risked his life to hear confessions during the heat of battle.³⁰ The wounded and those at "the hour of death" called for the priest, for absolution and the viaticum; the presence of clergy offered peace of mind for the soldier and, perhaps, solace for the soldier's family; one of the dying told Father Benedict Murdoch to console his family by telling them that "[he] had the priest."³¹

Priests and lay persons in the CEF would also have to adjust in the way in which the Mass was celebrated. The exigencies of war, availability of chaplains, and the physical environment, provided extraordinary circumstances for the saying and hearing of the Mass. Men and women could attend mass on weekly basis in the base camps and hospitals, either in formal open-air church parades, in hastily arranged barracks, or even in curtained off areas of noisy canteens.³² At the front, Catholics could hear Mass only when out of the front lines, perhaps as often as every two weeks, sometimes at a local French church, although Peterborough-born artillery officer William O'Brien noted that the times between receiving communion could last up to three months.³³ Priests who had been accustomed to offering a Mass only

²⁹ NA, RG 9 III, vol. 4620, CC-21, Rosario Crochetière File, Wolston Workman to J.S.H. Brunault, Bishop of Nicolet, 19 April 1918.

³⁰ A.J. Lapointe, *Souvenirs et impressions de ma vie de soldat (1916-1919)* (St-Ulric, Quebec: np, 1919), 81.

³¹ Murdoch, *The Red Vineyard*, 174; ARCAT, FW GC 01.03, War Box, Letter from Howard to his Mother, 19 July 1915; NA RG 9 III, vol. 4665, R.C. MacGillivray to Workman, c. September 1917.

³² ADA, Letter 2361, Morrison Papers, Duncan MacPherson to Morrison, 27 April 1915. MacPherson describes hearing confessions and saying mass in the hold of a ship for the 25th and 22nd Battalions.

³³ William J. O'Brien Diary, "Call Out the Army and the Navy," Sunday, 10 December 1916. Used with the permission of the O'Brien Family, with many thanks. NA RG 9 III C15, vol 4667, Chaplain's Reports, Michael Gillis, 4th Divisional Artillery, 19 May 1918.

from the secure and sacred space in front of the altar rail of the parish church, now found themselves partially vested, often without even a Roman collar, saying Mass in the most unusual of places. At the front, priests toted portable altars, complete with candles, plate, cruets, and linens, and the bare minimum of vestments. Sometimes propped up on two bayonets, the altar would be the focus of Mass in a barn, a field, a railway siding, burned-out building, hospital ward, an old tent, or even a chalk cave carved out from under the lines of fire.³⁴ Priests and men were dispensed from the required fast before communion and, as was the case even at parade, the sermons were brief so that attention could be placed on the eucharist.³⁵ No doubt the rank-and-file appreciated the economy of preaching, as evidenced by the relatively few Catholic soldiers indicted for the crime of “absent from parade” on the sabbath.³⁶

Chaplains reports and religious statistics from individual units indicate that Mass attendance in the CEF was high.³⁷ French Canadian Catholics and the Chinese were cited for their exemplary attendance and, Bishop Fallon went so far as to comment on the high quality of the congregational singing of the former.³⁸ Private Arthur Lapointe consistently noted the high levels of French-Canadian Catholic attendance at Sunday masses and special feast

³⁴ NA RG 9 III c15, vol 4321, Maurice de la Taille File, Invoice of Mass Kit, 10 March 1916; vol. 4621, Ivor James Edward Daniel File, Daniel to Workman, 31 July 1917. ADA, Morrison Papers, letter 5562, Donald MacPherson to Morrison, 4 September 1918. Murdoch, *The Red Vineyard*, 173.

³⁵ NA, RG 9 III, vol. 4622, GE-1, Bishop Emard File, Canon Sylvestre to Emard, 23- October 1918, indicates that Catholic soldiers had been dispensed from all fasting except on Good Friday. This dispensation included troops in Canada, Archives of the Diocese of Peterborough [ADP], Michael O’Brien Papers, Neil McNeil to O’Brien, 25 February 1916.

³⁶ A survey of 1073 personnel records of Catholic service persons indicates few AWL on Sundays, but rather high levels on other days, depending on the specific unit or region of origin. At least 22 % of the 104 men surveyed from Quebec’s 22nd and 163rd battalions were indicted for absence without leave. Among the 129 men surveyed from New Brunswicks’ 26th and 132nd battalions, however, the cases of AWL amounted to only 14%..

³⁷ ADA, Morrison Papers, Ronald MacGillivray to Morrison, 14 March 1916. NA, RG 9 III C15, vol 4618, C-B-30, A.E. Burke File, Burke to Colonel Steacy, c. 1916; vol. 4636, C-0-3, J.J. O’Gorman File, O’Gorman to Colonel Steacy, 26 June 1916. O’Gorman states that 95% of Catholics are communicants; vol. 4665, Reports of the Chaplains, H.E. Letang, 23 June 1918; James Fallon, 28 April 1919; Roderick Macdonnell, 3 Janaury 1918. *Antigonish and the Great War*, 219.

³⁸ ADL, Fallon Diary, 30 June 1918. He added, however, “There is much carelessness among Caths. [sic.] and no religion among the Protestants.” The Chinese Catholics were praised by Father Francis Michael Lockary, NA RG 9 III, vol. 4665, Chaplains Reports, FM Lockary, 2 December 1917.

days. Lapointe's memoirs also reveal his own religious discipline and devotion, which included participation in Sunday liturgies, attendance at Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve, and special visitations to the Eucharist when he was in need of spiritual and emotional strength – "le courage de pouvoir supporter vaillamment toutes mes épreuves."³⁹

Notable in their ability to muster troops to Church parade and Mass were Catholic officers and nursing sisters. In hospitals, Catholic nursing sisters were praised for their diligence in preparing the sacred spaces needed for the administration of the sacraments and for rounding up Catholic patients, whether they were so inclined to celebrate the sacred mysteries or not.⁴⁰ Similarly, officers like William O'Brien gathered the men of his unit for Sunday service when out of the line, and personally attended Mass as often as he could, in addition to services on Good Friday, Easter Sunday, or Christmas Eve. On Easter Sunday, March 1918, however, O'Brien lamented in his diary that the guns "blazed" all day and "for the first time" he missed Easter Sunday Mass.⁴¹ The son of a prominent Ontario Catholic school inspector and, himself, a promising law student, and confidant of many priests and alumni of St. Michael's College, O'Brien was one of a cadre of middle-class officers who offered themselves as examples of "practical" Catholics to the men in their units. Some lay officers were known to upbraid a priest if Mass had not been said in his unit or area for some time. In 1918, the efforts of padres and lay leaders appeared successful when Father Ludger Adolph Sylvestre, the Assistant Director of the Chaplain Service (RC) Canada, reported to the Apostolic Delegate that 90% of Canadian soldiers approached the sacraments regularly.⁴²

According to the chaplains' reports, the hearing of confessions was perhaps the most time consuming chore of a padre, particularly on the eve of units' departure to the trenches. Father Constant Doyon reported that on one Saturday evening alone, between 4 pm and 10:15 pm he heard 204 confessions, an average of one penitent heard every one minute and fifty-one seconds.⁴³ Motivated by the fear of death, the need of a clear conscience, and

³⁹ Lapointe, *Souvenirs et impressions*, 16, 10, 13, 23, 36, 40 and 47-8.

⁴⁰ Murdoch, *The Red Vineyard*, 95; NA, RG 9 III, vol. 4620, CC-16, Frederick R. Costello File, Costello to Workman, #3 Canadian General Hospital, the Field, 24 May 1918.

⁴¹ O'Brien diary, 104. Great praise of the laity leading each other to the sacraments is given in ADA, Morrison Papers, letter 2963, Ronald MacGillivray to Morrison, 5 January 1916.

⁴² ASV, DAC, 130.1, Sylvestre to Apostolic Delegate to Canada, 15 November 1918.

⁴³ NA RG 9 III, vol. 4621, C-D-12, Doyon File, Doyon to Father Workman, 2 April 1918.

the security of being absolved, Catholic soldiers made Confession the most frequented of the sacraments. At their own insistence men could confess anywhere, behind the lines, in the trenches, at the aid post, or if fortunate enough to have the padre near-by, in the mud as life slipped away from them. On the field of battle the padre could hear a confession, offer the Viaticum – the consecrated hosts carried by many priests and administer the last anointing. To “have the priest” was to have the assurance – that one was prepared to meet one’s maker.⁴⁴ During the war, the necessity of all men making their Confession before battle was made easier by the Vatican’s permission to use General Absolution. In times of great urgency, crowds of soldiers could be absolved without having to bare their souls in private auricular confession. Thus, this expeditious form of the sacrament was popularly attended.⁴⁵

Catholic soldiers could be particular about their confessors. Troops insisted on padres who shared similar cultural values and language skills. English-speaking Catholics in the 5th Brigade were reluctant to visit Father Doyon, the padre attached to the 22nd Battalion, and one noted for his poor command of English. Continuous complaints from Maritimers and central Canadians who comprised about half the brigade’s Catholic population resulted in the appointment of an additional priest who spoke English as his mother tongue.⁴⁶ Conversely, French-Canadian Catholics in the 5th were angered when the CCS replaced their chaplain with Belgian-born priest Jules Pirot, who despite distinguished service in the missions of Canadian Prairies, was accused of being too culturally dissimilar to be effective among the French Canadians in the Brigade. In perhaps the most articulate defense of a French-Canadian priest for French-Canadian troops, Major J.A. Filiatrault of the 23rd Reserve Battalion argued:

You know the great influence of the clergy on the population of the countryside in the province of Quebec. The curé there is not only the spiritual guide of the flock but also their counsellor paid attention to in all difficulties. It is with this spirit that our young soldiers arrive ... It is necessary for us to have a chaplain who understands the French-Canadian mentalité, who speaks fluent French, who takes an active interest in the

⁴⁴ *Catholics of The Diocese of Antigonish, Nova Scotia, and the War, 1914-1918* (Antigonish: St. Francis Xavier University Press, n.d.), 200.

⁴⁵ ADA, Morrison Papers, letter 3491, Miles Tompkins to Morrison, 14 May 1916.

⁴⁶ NA, RG 9 III, vol. 4623, C-F-6, Michael Francis Fallon File, 5 September 1916; vol. 4618, A.E. Burke File, Burke to Colonel Steacy, 26 November 1916 indicates Doyon spoke English inadequately. vol. 4636, C-0-3, J.J. O’Gorman File, O’Gorman to Colonel Steacy, 15 June 1916. ADA, Morrison Papers, letter 2963, Ronald MacGillivray to Morrison, 5 January 1916; letter 3360, MacGillivray to Morrison, 2 June 1916.

spiritual and material well-being of the the men. I have nothing against Father Samon [Sammon] our current chaplain. But unfortunately he fulfills none of the conditions that I have enumerated above.⁴⁷

Clearly, given the intimacy of the sacrament of Confession men demanded that they be heard, understood, and appreciated in the own tongue and within the context of their own culture. While bilingual priests appeared to be a suitable compromise to the English-speaking Catholic leaders, they were not seen as such by French Canadians. In a similar display of cultural pride, some officers from Cape Breton demanded a Gaelic-speaking padre.⁴⁸ Such linguistic and cultural tension persisted within the Catholic ranks throughout the war.⁴⁹

In the absence of the priest, many Catholic soldiers carried with them tangible reminders of the faith. Chaplains reported that their supplies of prayer books, prayer cards, sacred heart badges, blessed medals, scapulars, and rosary beads were quickly exhausted.⁵⁰ Each of these items provided a sacred presence, offering spiritual comfort and, perhaps, even a greater sense of security in the line of fire. Belief in the protective power of scapulars was fairly widespread in the popular Catholicism of the day, when stories abounded of men being saved from death by the wearing under their shirts of the sacred emblems, sewn on long strips of cloth.⁵¹ For others like gunner William O'Brien, the praying of the rosary was used as a devotional substitute when action at the front prohibited him from attending Mass.⁵² Hundreds of Catholic soldiers also formed branches of the Holy Name Society, a fraternal devotional association dedicated to abstinence from blasphemy, profanity, and "lewd talk." Sir Arthur Currie, commander and chief of the Canadian Force, was so impressed with the vision and effects of

⁴⁷ NA, RG 9 III, vol. 4641, John Joseph Sammon File, Filiatrault to Workman, 30 January 1919. (My translation.)

⁴⁸ ADA, Morrison Papers, letter 4331, draft of Catholic Officers to Senior R.C. Chaplain France, c. April 1917.

⁴⁹ Archives of the Archdiocese of Ottawa [AAO], J.J. O'Gorman Papers, O'Gorman to Archbishop Charles H. Gauthier, 4 January 1918. AAH, John T. McNally Papers, Father A. Bernard MacDonald to McNally, Bishop of Calgary, 5 August 1918.

⁵⁰ NA, RG 9 III, vol. 4623, C-F-4, Patrick James Fallon Papers, Fallon to Workman, 17 May 1917 and 11 July 1917. ADL, Fallon Papers, Diary 5 June 1918.

⁵¹ Murdoch, NA RG 9 III, vol. 4667, Chaplains Reports, Robert Moore, #3 Casualty Clearing Station, 28 May 1918 and Ewen MacDonald, 4th Brigade, 18 May 1918.

⁵² O'Brien Diary, Sunday, 28 April, 1918; Sunday, 12 November 1916; Saturday, 10 August 1918; and Wednesday 14 August 1918.

the Society, that he wished membership personally, and commended the principles of the Holy Name Society to non-Catholic service personnel.⁵³

The large numbers of soldiers thumbing their beads, carrying copies *God's Armour is Prayer* in their breast pockets, and frequenting the sacraments, however, gives testimony to only one aspect of Catholic religious life in the CEF. Reports of chaplains, religious statistics, and the personnel records of the men indicate that there were individual cases and, in fact large pockets of dissent from the re-created Catholic culture in military life. Forestry units and companies of Railway Troops, consisting of men accustomed to labours in Canada far from the arm's reach of the curé, were noted for their "irreligion." Because these labour battalions were stretched thinly from the front lines to the interior of France, the assigned chaplains found it very difficult to make regular visits to the loggers and naavies of the CEF. When they did make occasional visitations, the priests were appalled at the religiosity of these labourers, whom they described as indifferent, if not "impossible" soldiers, led by officers who were clearly hostile to the meddling of the chaplain.⁵⁴ In these forestry and railway companies, as well as in the base and reserve camps,⁵⁵ and in the front lines, chaplains were equally horrified by the numbers of Catholics who had not made their "Easter duty," not just during wartime, but for long periods of time before the war. There were numerous instances of young men requesting spiritual succour in this time of crisis, who had originally left the Church after engaging in an interfaith marriage, or who had never been confirmed, never made their first communion and, in rare cases, never had been baptized although raised as nominal Catholics.⁵⁶ Even a remorseful General A. C. "Batty Mac" Macdonell, confided in "a heart to heart" to Bishop Fallon during his tour of the front, that he had been baptized Catholic but raised Protestant.⁵⁷

⁵³ ASV, DAC, 130.1, Catholic Army Huts, Overseas Directors Report, W.T. Workman, ofm, 3 April 1919. NA, RG 9 III C15, vol 4667, Chaplain's Reports, F.M. Lockary, 1st Brigade, 1 June 1918.

⁵⁴ NA, RG 9 III, vol. 4632, Robert John Moore File, Moorre to Workman, 7 May 1918; vol. 4637, John Robert O'Gorman File, O'Gorman to Workman, 7 June 1917.

⁵⁵ ADA, Morrison Papers, letter 2363, Duncan MacPherson to Morrison, 30 July 1915.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, and also NA, RG 9 III, vol. 4623, James Fallon File, Fallon to Workman, 2 November 1917 and 22 February 1918; vol. 4667, Chaplain's Reports, Miles Tompkins, 3rd Brigade CFA, 22 September 1918 and James Fallon, 1st Canadian CCS, 30 September and 31 October 1918. ADP, A.B. Coté to Bishop O'Brien, East Sandling Camp, 27 February 1917.

⁵⁷ ADL, Fallon Diary, 24 May 1918, p. 31.

The “unchurched” soldiers excused their neglect of the Mass and other sacraments on grounds that there were never any priests around.⁵⁸ This kind of special pleading wore thinly with the Catholic Chaplains, particularly in the closing months of the war, when Catholic Army Huts were being built in England and France and the Catholic chaplaincy was well organized and exponentially larger than it had been in the early phases of the war. Facing the problem of the unchurched with the zeal of missionaries, Catholic padres used the dangerous context of war to reconcile lapsed Catholics to the Church. Father Benedict Murdoch likened this pastoring in the front lines to a labourer working in “the red vineyard,” while another triumphantly spoke of bringing men back to the sacraments “after many years of estrangement from God.”⁵⁹

The presence of the unchurched suggested to many chaplains, Doyle included, that serious problems existed in the domestic Church. Young men were slipping through the care and shepherding of local pastors – and this was happening all over Canada, but notably in Ontario and in the West.⁶⁰ During the demobilization process in 1918-1919, for example, chaplains attempted to place the boys back in their home parishes by means of a letter to their home pastor. At St. Mary’s Cathedral in Calgary, where one of the only collections of these letters remains, it was clear that dozens of Catholic veterans were referred to the Cathedral parish because these men could not identify either their parish of origin or even the name of a local priest.⁶¹ This was not just a problem brought on by war, it was a signal perhaps of a deeper malaise within the Canadian church.

What is clear is that the “churched” and the previously unchurched had their Catholic religious practices continually challenged by the physical, emotional and psychological stresses of trench warfare. One’s fidelity in frequenting the sacraments did not always translate into moral behaviour that reflected the spirit and the letter of Canon Law. While their prayer books and catechisms taught otherwise, high numbers of Catholic soldiers went on report for drunken and disorderly behaviour, insolence toward superiors,

⁵⁸ NA RG 9 III C15, vol. 4665, Chaplain’s Reports, JP Fallon, West Sandling, 7 October 1917.

⁵⁹ Murdoch, *The Red Vineyard*, 29 and 150.

⁶⁰ ADP, Michael O’Brien Papers, Father A.B. Côté to O’Brien, East Sandling Camp, 29 November 1916. Côté claims that 50% of the Ontario Catholics there had not made their Easter duty “for periods of from five to twenty five years.”

⁶¹ Archives of the Diocese of Calgary [ADC], St. Mary’s Cathedral Records, D. Warner to Reverend A. Newman, 21 March 1919. Included were letters of introduction for forty-three men, dated 25 September 1918.

disobedience of orders, and absence without leave.⁶² Such misdemeanours were typical in military life and not unexpected given the brutal carnage that these young men faced on a daily basis as they watched friends and brothers torn to pieces by shrapnel or lost forever amidst explosions, mud, twisted wire and putrid ooze of the battlefield. When on leave, or back in base camp there were too many temptations to relieve the stress levels that had sent numerous men into shell shock and others to risk the death sentence by deserting their posts.⁶³ Cases of drunkenness, insubordination, and AWL (absent without leave) were high in French-Canadian Catholic units, where British military traditions were foreign, and where linguistic and cultural tensions seemed rather close to the surface. Members of the Van Doos and Olivar Asselin's 163rd Battalion fought with distinction, but nevertheless had very high rates of infractions against military regulations.⁶⁴ Even their chaplain, Constant Doyon, bickered with his anglophone Catholic superiors who, at times, were perceived as being unsympathetic to the special needs of francophone Catholic troops.⁶⁵

Averting temptations of fighting, cussing, drinking, and riotous behaviour sometimes was helped by a diligent priest. When tired, bored, and fed up, Canadian troops awaiting demobilization rioted in Kinmel Park Camp, at Rhyl, Wales, in 1919, Catholics were conspicuously absent. Chaplain Ivor Daniel, an Oblate from Alberta, having noticed the ugly riot fomenting, gathered Catholics together for a Ash Wednesday service in the meeting hall, where they remained as the melee erupted all around them. Daniel reported how pleased he was by the Catholics' behaviour, particularly how the "F.C. element" kept out of the fight. In fact, he boasted a record number of communions that day.⁶⁶ Father Daniel was obviously aware of the many temptations to enlisted men that abounded in the camps, and in areas frequented by men on leave. Whether his troops would have joined the fracas without his intervention remains a mystery.

⁶² *God's Armour is Prayer*, edited by Neil McNeil, Archbishop of Toronto (Toronto: Catholic Truth Society, n.d.), 33.

⁶³ Several commuted death sentences (generally for desertion or disobedience) were noted in the confidential personnel files of 1073 Catholic recruits.

⁶⁴ NA, RG 9 III C15, vol. 4621, C-D-12, Constant Doyon File, Doyon to Workman, 28 March 1918. Jean-Pierre Gagnon, *Le 22e Bataillon* (Ste-Foy: Les presses de l'université Laval, 1986), 139-87 and 379-80; Archives of the Diocese of Montreal, File Group 732, Archbishop Paul Bruchesi Papers, doc. 225-915, Constant Doyon to Bruchesi, 27 March 1915.

⁶⁵ NA, RG 9 III, vol. 4621, Constant Doyon File, Doyon to Workman, 1 March 1918 and 7 March 1918; Workman to Doyon, 2 March 1918 and 26 March 1918.

⁶⁶ NA, RG 9 III, vol. 4621, C-D-6, Ivor Daniel File, Daniel to Workman, 7 March 1919.

One does get the impression that priests like Daniel, having heard so many confessions, were not under the illusion that Catholic soldiers were plaster saints. Priests seemed aware that those Catholics who obeyed the first and second commandments could be fairly lax in honouring the sixth, among others. Manuals for confessors indicate that there was an awareness that soldiers would be seeking absolution from every manner of sexual encounter: “Have you made indecent actions? (a) Alone. (b) with men. (c) with women. (d) with animals. How many times?”⁶⁷ Casual sexual liaisons – indecent actions – could leave long-lasting moral and physical damage. In 1918, the chaplains who conferred with Bishop Fallon were perplexed by the spread of venereal disease among the Canadian troops and were troubled in particular by the comment that “the percentage of Catholics who have contracted the disease is as high as the general average.”⁶⁸ Indeed the CEF recorded the highest levels of venereal disease among all the Allied troops. In 1915, alone, 28.7% of the men in the CEF had been diagnosed with gonorrhea, chancroids, or syphilis. By war’s end there were 66,083 cases of VD in the CEF, or roughly 15.8% of the men had been infected with a strain of the disease.⁶⁹ Soldiers contracted the disease by means of sexual contact with prostitutes while waiting for embarkation in Halifax, in the reserve camps in England, on furlough in London and Edinburgh, or on leave in France.⁷⁰ The various means of controlling the outbreak – clamping down on prostitution, providing “blue light stations” for prophylactic washes, the inclusion of prophylactic kits in a soldier’s equipment allotment, among other things, did not arrest the Canadian pastime significantly. Treatment was uncomfortable and embarrassing, and men were not forthcoming with names of their partners.⁷¹

As was evidenced at the chaplain’s meeting with Fallon, Catholics could not turn a blind eye to the problem, taking comfort in the high numbers of men frequenting the sacraments. Among a sample of 1073 Catholic soldiers,

⁶⁷ ASV, DAC 130.1, [Instructions to French-speaking confessors of English Troops], Edmund Surmont, Vicar General, Westminster, 16 September 1915.

⁶⁸ ADL, Fallon Papers, John J. O’Gorman to Workman, [Report of the Meeting of Catholic Chaplains of the Canadian Corps with Bishop Michael Fallon], France, 24 May 1918.

⁶⁹ Jay Cassel, *The Secret Plague: Venereal Disease in Canada, 1838-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 122-3.

⁷⁰ ADL, Fallon Diary, 6 June 1918. Father Gauvreau, OMI, blames the French women; 27 May 1918. Civil authorities in London and Paris are implicated. AAH, A. Bernard MacDonald to John T. McNally, Bishop of Calgary, 5 August 1918. MacDonald rejects the idea that England is a “Christian land.”

⁷¹ Cassels, *The Secret Plague*, 122-44. NA RG 9 III C15, vol 4647, C-W-5, Wolston Workman File, Memorandum, 12 March 1918. Catholic chaplains protested the use of the prophylactic pack as merely encouraging the evil.

15.8% were diagnosed at least once with having VD – the identical rate as the entire CEF. Some units like the 163rd battalion, raised in Montreal and then merged into the Van Doos, had a staggering infection rate of 24%. Even the Fifth Brigade, with its Catholic majority from Quebec, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick, and under the watchful eyes of two priests, exceeded the CEF rate with levels of 18% and 16% recorded by the 22nd and 25th battalions respectively. Catholics became as conspicuous as their non-Catholic colleagues, in what Bishop Fallon described as a nearly a “hopeless” situation underscored by a “lack of the sense of the supernatural.”⁷² In an effort to address the VD plague and segregate the infected, the Canadian Army Medical Corps established a special Canadian VD hospital at Etchinghill in 1916, where a high percentage of Catholic soldiers, notably of men from French-Canadian units, became patients in the last years of the war.⁷³

Evidence from the personnel records provides a profile of the Catholic man who was diagnosed with VD. Transgressors of the sixth commandment who became infected fell into clearly defined categories: they were younger than the average age of troops, usually between 18 and 23; they were Canadian-born, 82% of the sample; they had little previous military experience; they came from all regions although troops from the West, Quebec and the upper Ottawa Valley had the highest rates; many were unskilled labourers, forest workers, miners, and farm labourers – by no small coincidence the largest occupational group among all recruits; and there were higher rates of VD among those whose religious participation before the war is unconfirmed or who are suspected of being unchurched. In the St. Mary’s group from Alberta, those recommended by the CCS to the rector at war’s end had a rate of VD four times higher than those “churched” parishioners the pastor had included on the roll of service during the war. Across the country random samples taken from parish lists had much lower rates of VD, than the random samples from battalion lists, where church participation is not a given.

Indeed, amidst the crisis over VD there were some bright spots, where self-discipline, obedience to superiors, and high moral standards were evident. Hundreds of Catholics secured commendations for their “good

⁷² ADL, Fallon Diary, 12 June 1918. See Appendix 3.

⁷³ ADP, A. Coté to Bishop O’Brien, 27 February 1917. He reports that perhaps as many as 14% of patients at Etchinghill are Catholic. Morton, *When Your Number’s Up*, 200-1. Cassel, *The Secret Plague*, 130. My own sampling of patient lists for 1917 yields a figure of close to 20% of patients as RCs. NA RG 9 III, B2, vol. 3718, 30-13-5 vol. 3, Canadian Special Hospital, Etchinghill, Nominal Roll of Patients over Two Months, c. October 1917; vol 3718, file 30-13-5, Etchinghill Hospital For Venereal Disease. See Appendix 3.

character,” with many earning good conduct badges. Most notable in this regard were Catholic nursing sisters, who under the command of chief matron Margaret C. MacDonald, a Catholic from the Diocese of Antigonish, had an exemplary record of service. Although the German air raids, spread of infectious disease, and the constant spectacle of the wounded, mangled, and dying youth in their wards took their toll on many young women – leaving nerves worn thin and emotions close to the surface – the nursing sisters’ records were exemplary. By war’s end close to 25% of the nurses sampled had been decorated for their efforts.⁷⁴ Elsewhere, the Ojibwa Catholics from the Cape Croker and Saugeen Reserves defied contemporary racist stereotypes of “drunken Indian” that stigmatized them as they marched with the 160th Bruce Battalion through the towns and fields of western Ontario *en route* to war. Eight of the 30 recruits sampled won good conduct badges and one earned the Military Medal for bravery; only one was ever cited for being intoxicated. The Jesuits who ministered to their reserves had encouraged recruitment and proudly reported the progress of their “warriors.”⁷⁵

Given the disparity in the reporting of Catholic behaviour during the war, the one thing that appears clear is that defining the religious culture of Catholics in the CEF is a complex and frustrating undertaking. The anomaly pointed out by Doyle earlier – sacramentality, yet immorality – is at the heart of understanding Catholicity in the CEF. The same Catholic men who frequented the sacraments, for the most part, seemed unable to translate this personal religiosity into moral scrupulousity – particularly regarding extra-marital sex. The chaplain at Etchinghill noted the devotion of the many Catholic patients and their zeal for the sacraments. Such contradictions in conduct are not easily explained. Perhaps both the stresses of military life and the social profile of these men may hold keys to their behaviour. The anxiety and uncertainty that propelled many Catholic men, particularly the “unchurched” into the care of the chaplains, may very well have also prompted them to take risks that they may not normally have taken. Not to be ruled out is the peer pressure inherent in a male military culture characterized by the cohesiveness of units and regiments, “group narcissism,” ostentatious masculinity, and an “almost universal preoccupation with

⁷⁴ NPRC, Selection of 60 files indicates 10 Royal Red Crosses Awarded and 4 Médaillées des Epidémies. Some nurses were taken from parish honour rolls in Nova Scotia, British Columbia, and Ontario. Others were sampled from the Laval and St. Francis Xavier Hospital Units. RG 9 III B2, vol. 3737, #6 Canadian Stationary Hospital, Nominal Roll, 1917.

⁷⁵ NA, RG 9, 160th Battalion Sailing List; NPRC, Personnel Records of a sample of 73 Catholics of the 160th Bruce Battalion, Confidential; Archives of the Jesuits of the Upper Canada Province, Cape Croker Diary, 1917-18.

sex.”⁷⁶ Thus, both the pressures of a culture that urged one to test one’s sexual prowess, and the psychological stress that came as a result of being the witness to the human carnage at the front, prompted many men to partake of passions of the flesh proscribed by the Catechism.⁷⁷ Many of the Catholic men infected were young, unmarried, away from home for the first time, and for many of the French-Canadians so described earlier by Major Filiatrault, separated from the security and strict moral boundaries of their parish life and curé. Their social status, when combined with the realities of military life and fear of not knowing if “their number was up,” makes their moral indiscretion understandable. If they lived, there was always absolution awaiting them from the priest. Their sin would be forgiven.

Such reasons may not have been so easily understood by a priest as new to his vocation as Father Doyle. Others, however, remarked on the need for compassion when dealing with the infected men. For Fathers James Patrick Fallon and Antoine Lamarre, a sexual indiscretion was not necessarily evidence of a lost soul. Etchingill became Fallon’s opportunity to exercise compassion and love to the Catholics and non-Catholics in his care, men whom even the Red Cross would not send packages. There, the church and previously unchurched re-created the devotional and symbolic universes inherent to ultramontane Catholicism – dutiful attendance at Mass, frequent confession, and the practice of individual acts of piety.⁷⁸ Ironically, Etchingill underscored the stark contrasts of Catholic religious culture in the CEF: the missionary zeal of priests, participation in the sacramental and devotional life of the Church, and the reminder of the fragility of the human condition when it came to upholding the demands of Catholic morality.

When assessing the religious life of the Catholic laity in the CEF, however, Church officials recognized a problem that they may have been reluctant to acknowledge in civilian life. Given the numbers of the unchurched to whom they ministered in the CEF, it was clear to chaplains and bishops alike that the domestic Church was failing in its efforts to secure the fidelity and regular religious practice of young Catholic men. The difficulties of the chaplains in labour, railway and forestry battalions, the sacramental indifference of many recruits from the West, and significant levels of disciplinary infractions and VD among those soldiers sampled from lists not generated by parishes, is perhaps as much a statement about popular male Catholic religious culture in Canada itself, than just a matter germane to life

⁷⁶ Holmes, *Firing Line*, 93-4 and 46-50.

⁷⁷ *The Catechism of the Ecclesiastical Provinces of Quebec, Montreal and Ottawa* (1888), Question 432. ADP, A. Coté to Bishop O’Brien, 27 February 1917.

⁷⁸ NA, RG 9 III, 4623, CF-4, James Fallon to Workman, 27 November 1917; also vol. 4630, C-L-24, Antoine Ambrose Lamarre File, Lamarre to Colonel W. Beattie, 30 September 1919.

in the CEF. Doyle and others suggested that the crisis they faced was rooted in the domestic Church. It is no coincidence that the tough observations of chaplains came at a time when Bishop Emile Legal of St-Albert complained of negligence and indifference among many Catholics in his diocese, and the newly appointed Archbishop of Winnipeg, Alfred Sinnott, begged his friend Archbishop Edward McCarthy of Halifax for just one priest to help save his troubled territory. “The indifference to religion in this part of many,” observed Sinnott, “cannot be described as anything but astounding.”⁷⁹ While the appearance of the unchurched in the CEF, according to Bishop Fallon offered the opportunity for “missionary work” which yielded “very favourable results,” this harvest of the Red Vineyard had been sown elsewhere.⁸⁰ It was time the reapers of a church “militant and triumphant” turned their attention to home. It may behove historians of popular religious culture to do the same.

⁷⁹ Provincial Archives of Nova Scotia, Edward McCarthy Papers, Vol II, # 116, Sinnott to McCarthy, 1 March 1917. ASV, DAC, 130.1, A.E. Burke to Stagni, 24 August 1916, mentions “poor Sinnott alone in Winnipeg to face many problems”; ADC, Emile Legal Papers, Legal to Stagni, 5 December 1911; NA, RG 9 III, vol. 4620, C-8, Thomas Cooney to Ludger Sylvestre, 14/15 March 1918. Cooney says Catholicism in Victoria is “in a poor state.”

⁸⁰ ASV, DAC, 130.1/2, Fallon to Stagni, 7 October 1915.

Appendix 1
Catholic Recruits by Unit
and Place of Birth

REGION	CANADA	IRELAND	BRITAIN	OTHER	TOTAL
Nova Scotia	138	3	10	11	162
New Brunswick	118	6	8	5	129
P.E.I.	28	0	0	0	28
Quebec (Franco- phone)	96	0	0	8	104
Quebec (Anglo- phone)	44	7	3	4	58
Eastern and Northern Ontario	317	12	32	12	373
Toronto Region	234	30	50	28	342
Western Ontario	71	1	6	2	80
Manitoba and Saskatchewan	37	17	12	11	77
Alberta	26	4	15	22	67
British Columbia	21	10	8	5	44
Nurses All Regions	56	1	2	1	60
TOTAL	1186	91	146	109	1532
PERCENTAGE	77.4	6.0	9.5	7.1	

Note: Each regional designation includes samples taken from both parish honour rolls, war memorials, and the sailing lists of regional infantry battalions. See Appendix 3 for the specific sample studies involved.

Appendix 2

Average Age of Catholic Recruits at the Time of Enlistment

UNIT	REGION	AGE
25th Battalion	Nova Scotia	24 years, 6 months
85th Battalion	Nova Scotia	27 years, 3 months
26th Battalion	New Brunswick	24 years, 7 months
132nd Battalion	New Brunswick	23 years, 4 months
105th Battalion	Prince Edward Island	24 years, 6 months
199th Battalion	Quebec, anglophone	26 years, 9 months
22nd Battalion	Quebec, francophone	24 years, 5 months
163rd Battalion	Quebec, francophone	25 years, 5 months
St. Patrick's Parish	Ottawa, Ontario	25 years, 10 months
St. Joseph's Parish	Ottawa, Ontario	25 years, 5 months
St. John the Baptist P.	Perth, Ontario	24 years, 0 months
St. Andrew's Parish	Port Arthur, Ontario	27 years, 10 months
Renfrew Memorial	Renfrew, Ontario	23 years, 0 months
240th Battalion	Ottawa Valley	24 years, 2 months
38th Battalion	Eastern Ontario & Western Quebec	26 years, 1 month
77th Battalion	Eastern Ontario & Western Quebec	26 years, 11 months
St. Helen's Parish	Toronto, Ontario	25 years, 5 months
St. Helen's Group B	Toronto, Ontario	26 years, 6 months
St. Paul's Parish	Toronto, Ontario	26 years, 6 months
St. Paul's Group B	Toronto, Ontario	25 years, 5 months
St. John's Parish	Toronto, Ontario	24 years, 8 months
208th Battalion	Toronto, Ontario	30 years, 2 months
160th Battalion	Western Ontario	25 years, 1 month
Various Parishes	Bruce-Grey, Ontario	23 years, 3 months*
100th Battalion	Manitoba	27 years, 5 months
184th Battalion	Manitoba	29 years, 7 months
68th Battalion	Saskatchewan	23 years, 10 months
46th Battalion	Saskatchewan	26 years, 0 months
Diocese of Calgary	Southern Alberta	28 years, 6 months
St. Andrew's Parish	Victoria, BC	24 years, 3 months
121st Battalion	Vancouver, BC	30 years, 5 months

*Included in the sample are recruits from Sacred Heart Parish (Walkerton), St. Michael's Parish (North Brant), and St. Francis Xavier Parish (Carlsruhe).

Appendix 3

Catholics Recruits and Venereal Disease

UNIT/PARISH	REGION	ALL RECRUITS			CANADIAN-BORN			AVE AGE
		TOTAL	VD	%	CDN	VD	%	
25th Battalion	NS	87	14	16.1	74	1	13.5	22y 5m
85th Battalion	NS	75	12	16.0	64	9	14.1	22y 9m
26th Battalion	NB	54	5	9.3	47	5	10.6	20y 11m
132nd Battalion	NB	75	15	19.7	71	15	21.1	22y 5m
105th Battalion	PEI	28	2	6.9	28	2	6.9	25y 2m
199th Battalion	QUE-Ang	58	10	17.5	44	8	18.2	29y 6m
22nd Battalion	QUE-Fre	61	11	18.0	58	9	15.5	24y 4m
163rd Battalion	QUE-Fre	43	11	25.6	38	9	23.7	22y 10m
240th Battalion	QUE-ONT	33	6	18.2	28	6	21.4	24y 8m
St. Patrick Par.	ONT-Est	54	5	9.3	45	5	11.1	25y 10m
St. John Par.	ONT-Est	22	4	18.2	22	4	18.2	21y 3m
77th Battalion	ONT-Est	82	21	25.6	62	19	30.7	24y 11m
St. Helen Par.	ONT-Cen	83	6	7.2	65	6	9.2	23y 11m
St. Paul Par.	ONT-Cen	55	2	3.6	42	2	4.8	20y 6m
160th Battalion	ONT-Wst	73	12	16.4	64	11	17.2	24y 1m
Bruce-Grey Par.	ONT-Wst	15	2	13.3	15	2	13.3	26y 5m
100th Battalion	MAN	21	5	23.8	11	4	36.4	23y 8m
184th Battalion	MAN	15	1	6.7	8	1	12.5	21y 0m
68th Battalion	SASK	21	5	23.8	12	3	25.0	21y 10m
46th Battalion	SASK	20	5	25.0	6	3	50.0	20y 9m
Calgary Diocese	ALTA	67	10	14.9	26	2	7.7	28y 3m
Cathedral Parish		24	2	8.3*				
Military Referral		43	8	19.0**				
121st Battalion	BC	31	6	19.4	13	4	30.8	30y 8m
Etchinghill VD Hospital (October 1917)		34	34		25y	11m		
Total		1073	170	15.8	843	139	16.5	

* From St. Mary's Cathedral Parish List, Calgary

** Sample from Military demobilization papers for southern Alberta – attempts to relocate men in RC parishes

Source: National Personnel Records Centre, Ottawa, Confidential Personnel Files of Canadian Expeditionary Force Personnel.