

Catholic Neutrality: The Peace of Henri Bourassa

Geoff Keelan

Volume 22, Number 1, 2011

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1008959ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1008959ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The Canadian Historical Association / La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0847-4478 (print)

1712-6274 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Keelan, G. (2011). Catholic Neutrality: The Peace of Henri Bourassa. *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada*, 22(1), 99–132. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1008959ar>

Article abstract

One-time Liberal Member of Parliament, Henri Bourassa (1868-1952) was also a member of the Quebec provincial legislature, French Canadian nationalist and editor of *Le Devoir* from 1910 to 1932. His enduring career lasted over five decades, during which he discussed a wide range of domestic and political issues. During the First World War, historians have traditionally acknowledged his powerful domestic presence, such as over French language rights, the Conscription Crisis of 1917, or during the Easter riots of 1918. As a result, few scholars have commented on his broad-ranging and critical analyses of the international situation in Europe. This article uses Bourassa's discussion of the various peace proposals during the war to better understand his ability to engage and understand complex international events. It examines his reaction to the German peace proposal of December 1916, President Wilson's peace note of December 1916, Lord Lansdowne's letter of November 1917 and the Papal peace initiatives. It concludes that although Bourassa was greatly influenced by his Catholic religious beliefs, he ultimately displayed an intelligent understanding of the war that far exceeded many other contemporary Canadian observers.

Catholic Neutrality: The Peace of Henri Bourassa

GEOFF KEELAN

Abstract:

One-time Liberal Member of Parliament, Henri Bourassa (1868-1952) was also a member of the Quebec provincial legislature, French Canadian nationalist and editor of Le Devoir from 1910 to 1932. His enduring career lasted over five decades, during which he discussed a wide range of domestic and political issues. During the First World War, historians have traditionally acknowledged his powerful domestic presence, such as over French language rights, the Conscription Crisis of 1917, or during the Easter riots of 1918. As a result, few scholars have commented on his broad-ranging and critical analyses of the international situation in Europe. This article uses Bourassa's discussion of the various peace proposals during the war to better understand his ability to engage and understand complex international events. It examines his reaction to the German peace proposal of December 1916, President Wilson's peace note of December 1916, Lord Lansdowne's letter of November 1917 and the Papal peace initiatives. It concludes that although Bourassa was greatly influenced by his Catholic religious beliefs, he ultimately displayed an intelligent understanding of the war that far exceeded many other contemporary Canadian observers.

Résumé

Henri Bourassa (1868-1952) a été à la fois député libéral fédéral, député provincial au Québec, héraut du nationalisme canadien-français et éditeur du journal Le Devoir de 1910 à 1932. Au cours de sa longue carrière, qui s'est étendue sur plus de cinq décennies, Bourassa a commenté nombre de sujets. Les historiens ont généralement reconnu son importance en politique canadienne lors de la Première Guerre mondiale, alors qu'il a discuté des droits linguistiques des Canadiens français, de la Crise de la conscription de 1917 et des émeutes de Pâques de 1918.

Dans ce contexte, peu d'historiens se sont intéressés à ses analyses plus poussées de la situation en Europe. Cet article démontre la capacité de Bourassa à discuter et à commenter les événements internationaux complexes en analysant ses commentaires sur les différentes propositions de paix qui ont été faites durant le conflit. Il étudie ainsi sa réaction à la proposition de paix allemande de décembre 1916, à la note du président américain Woodrow Wilson également de décembre 1916, à la lettre de lord Lansdowne de novembre 1917 ainsi qu'aux initiatives de paix du pape Benoît XV. Bien qu'influencé par ses croyances religieuses, Bourassa a compris la guerre bien mieux que plusieurs de ses contemporains.

The popular memory and standard narrative of Canada's experience during World War I has long focused on the notion that English-speaking Canadians supported the war while French Canada was apathetic or opposed to participation. Historians have treated the French Canadian population as passive participants reacting to the unfolding events of wartime Canada. They are incorporated into the grander national experience, but often as disgruntled observers who suffer the consequences of events beyond their control or beyond their understanding. The themes of this meta-narrative, such as the level of support offered by French Canadians, their mistreatment during the war, and the long term consequences of conscription are debated; however, little attention has been paid to the questions French Canadians raised on the nature of Canadian involvement in the Great War and its legitimacy. Historians' reluctance to examine the details of their dissent is nowhere more apparent than in the scholarship on Henri Bourassa, the leading public opponent of Canadian participation in the war. Bourassa's analysis of the origins, purpose, and progress of the war has been ignored or marginalized. He has been characterized as an actor on the domestic stage of Canadian politics, as Sir Wilfrid Laurier's Québec opponent, or an advocate on French-language rights, but his writings on the Great War remain largely unexamined.

This absence is most striking when examining Bourassa's analysis of the peace initiatives of the war. Bourassa's insightful commentary reflected his detailed knowledge of international events and his discussion of the peace proposals of 1916 and 1917 offered

Canadians information and ideas minimized by other public figures and news sources. His willingness and ability to engage in a sophisticated and nuanced discourse about the war outside of the accepted, patriotic view of events was an important aspect of the home front experience. Bourassa's discussions of major initiatives, such as the German peace proposal, President Wilson's note of December 1916, the "Lansdowne Letter" of November 1917, and the Pope's calls for peace, present an articulate and significant deliberation on the war's purpose. Bourassa's combative character, religion, and nationality pushed him to be more critical of the war than his countrymen. While these traits coloured his perspective, they did not diminish the depth of his insight.

The breadth of historical literature on Bourassa is wide, but narrow in its focus. Two contrasting views characterized early historical scholarship of him. One is found in Elizabeth Armstrong's *Crisis of Quebec, 1914-18*, published in 1937, which was the first major historical work to deal with French Canada during the war.¹ Armstrong condemns Bourassa's challenge to the government and glosses over his wartime role. The rise of extreme nationalism in the 1930s heavily influenced Armstrong's conclusion that Bourassa was a dangerous domestic threat.² In her words, Bourassa dreamt of a "French Canada as a proselytizing force which ... [would] bring the American continent back to the arms of Rome and to the glories of French civilization."³ Though he never adopted the "active nationalism" that Armstrong so feared, she viewed Bourassa as a dangerous catalyst for French Canada. Another view was expressed by Robert Rumilly, best known for his voluminous history of Québec, who offers a more positive view of Henri Bourassa in a dedicated biography of the nationalist leader.⁴ Almost hagiographic, Rumilly essentially credited Bourassa with forming modern Québec nationalism. This contrast between Armstrong's and Rumilly's depictions of Henri Bourassa greatly affected historians who followed them. In one, he was a dangerous instigator and in the other a stalwart saviour of the *patrie*. His credentials as an informed student of international affairs were effectively ignored.

His death in 1952, and the centenary of his birth in 1968, produced brief flurries of academic interest in his historic importance.⁵ However, Joseph Levitt's *Henri Bourassa and the Golden Calf*, pub-

lished in 1969, represented the first serious monograph on the iconoclastic journalist, though still as a provincial or national figure.⁶ Levitt did not comment on the issue of war and peace, even though he specifically examined Bourassa as a “Catholic Critic.”⁷ By the 1970s, Bourassa had been reclaimed by English-speaking historians as an important predecessor to the bicultural and bilingual world of post-1967 Canada and the rise of Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau. General histories, such as Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook’s overview of early twentieth century Canadian history, have Bourassa figure prominently as an antagonist to English Canada and an important catalyst for the development of a modern Canadian identity.⁸ For English Canadians, Bourassa remains a simplified character cast in a predetermined role as either a contemporary dissenter or visionary forerunner.

French Canadian historians discuss Bourassa in more detail. René Durocher’s article on his relationship with the Catholic Church provides valuable insights on the man and the Church’s hierarchy, but he also ignores crucial issues raised by the war.⁹ Réal Bélanger’s entry in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* furnishes an in-depth study of Bourassa,¹⁰ but he limits the journalist’s concern with peace issues to the last months of the war. Few of these works pay serious attention to Bourassa’s extensive commentaries on the evolving international situation throughout the Great War. Sylvie Lacombe’s *La rencontre de deux peuples élus*, published in 2002, is a rare exception, critically examining the religious nationalism of French Canada and the imperial nationalism of English Canada. Bourassa is the dominant figure used to analyze French Canada’s “*ambition nationale*.”¹¹ Though her specific discussion of World War I is brief, her analysis of the “hierarchical relationship” between Bourassa’s liberal political beliefs and conservative religious ones, as well as her concluding summation of his religious nationalism, represents some of the most sophisticated scholarship on Bourassa.¹² Lacombe further examines Bourassa’s contradictory beliefs and their transformation during the war, which she argues had a radicalising effect upon him.¹³ Yet, even as Lacombe further deepens our understanding of Bourassa and French Canadian nationalism, her work underplays his role as a commentator on international issues. The focus by both French and English Canadians on

Bourassa's domestic role has hampered an all-encompassing historical study of him and diminished some of his most impressive writing of the period.

Bourassa's reputation as a fiery orator and a polarizing figure in provincial and national politics has drawn attention away from his wider interests. Few other Canadians approached the calibre of his reasoning or candour of his views. First inspired by the speeches of Wilfred Laurier and Honoré Mercier during the trial of Louis Riel, Bourassa entered politics as a young man determined to make a mark. At the age of twenty-one, in January of 1890, he was elected mayor of his childhood home of Montebello. By 1896, he was the successful Liberal candidate for the riding of Labelle in the federal election, which brought Laurier to power. Bourassa was held up as a promising potential candidate to replace Laurier as party leader, but this changed with the outbreak of the Boer War in 1899.

French and English Canadians fiercely contested their nation's involvement in the British war with the Boer republics in present day South Africa. While imperial-minded Canadians believed it was their duty to the empire to fight, others believed that Canada had no reason to send troops to far away Africa for British colonialism. Laurier compromised between the two groups and sent a volunteer battalion, the Royal Canadian Regiment, under Lieutenant Colonel W. D. Otter. Eventually, another contingent of mounted soldiers and artillery was sent and overall 8,300 Canadians enlisted to fight the Boers.¹⁴

Henri Bourassa believed that any Canadian involvement in empire affairs that were not its direct concern set a dangerous precedent. With his typical flair for sharp comment, Bourassa claimed that "M. Chamberlain [the colonial secretary] a voulu la guerre d'Afrique pour arracher des colonies, à l'heure où l'ivresse de l'orgueil et des passions sauvages fait taire la raison, ce premier tribut du sang qu'elles lui avaient refusé jusque-là."¹⁵ James Corcoran observes that Bourassa distinguished two key problems with Canadian participation: a question of fact and a question of law. Not only was the war immoral and unjust, but Canada also had no legal obligation to join it.¹⁶ The young MP's distinction between the moral act of committing Canadian troops and the legal requirement of the dominion revealed

a critical aspect of his burgeoning Canadian nationalism. Bourassa's disagreement with the Liberal policy and other English Canadians was not simply a dissimilar opinion; it signified a fundamentally different conception of the country and its place in the world. English Canadians believed that Canada's active participation in empire improved itself and the world. Bourassa could not accept such a worldview. In the age of Canadian imperialism, the separation of morality and legality from imperial responsibility was a significant one.

Bourassa so strongly opposed Laurier's Boer War policy that he left the Liberal Party and sat as an independent in the House of Commons. From this point on, he further defined his brand of Canadian nationalism through his own commentaries on political issues. Réal Bélanger writes that from the end of the Boer War in 1902, Bourassa was determined to communicate to Canadians "a clearer understanding of Canada's relations with the empire and the nature of the relationship between the country's English Canadian Protestant majority and its French Canadian Catholic minority."¹⁷ By 1904, the emergence of French Canada's *nationalistes* provided him a new outlet for arguments about Canada's place in the world. The new political movement sought to instill a "nationalist" sentiment in French Canadians that focused on a uniquely Canadian character, rather than its British or North American one. The group was composed of prominent young French Canadian intellectuals, such as Olivar Asselin, Jules Fournier, and Armand Lavergne, who expressed ideas on national and provincial matters through periodicals such as the aptly named weekly newspaper, *Le Nationaliste*.¹⁸

Bourassa's strong ideas and powerful rhetoric made him the most prominent member of this new group.¹⁹ At the heart of the *nationaliste* position laid Bourassa's own brand of nationalism that articulated a bicultural, autonomous Canada free of imperial responsibilities. "Les Canadiens-français du peuple n'ont d'autre patrie que le Canada," he wrote. "Ils sont prêts à lui rendre tout ce qu'ils lui doivent; mais n'estimant rien devoir à l'Angleterre ni à aucun autre pays, ils n'en attendent rien."²⁰ Bourassa believed that Canada's nationalism could be separate from its cultural and historical ties to England. Canada had become an entity in its own right with its own political

interests. Canadians possessed a culture that was a combination of French and English heritage and, because of their long history, French Canadians were best equipped to not just express these values, but defend them. Bourassa, unsurprisingly, often led the charge.

Bourassa's foremost vehicle for this articulation and defence came through his own newspaper, *Le Devoir*. As editor from its founding in 1910 to his resignation in 1932, he offered his opinion on provincial, national, and international topics to a small but influential audience.²¹ Bourassa's limited readership understates his influence. Bélanger notes that Bourassa was the mouthpiece of the "petty-bourgeois élite" who spoke for a generation of French Canadians.²² Bourassa did not represent the view of all French Canadians, but for many of the province's élite, who debated French Canada's place in confederation or Canada's place in the world he acted as a crucial spokesperson.²³

Le Devoir's first target was Laurier's Naval Bill, put forward in the House on 12 January 1910. His decade long opposition to Laurier only intensified over the decision to create a Canadian navy.²⁴ Britain, engaged in a naval arms race with Germany, had requested aid from its dominions. Laurier, seeking to again compromise between the enthusiastic imperialist supporters and his equally unimpressed French Canadian detractors, proposed a small fleet of ships that could only be committed to action by the Canadian Parliament. This "tin-pot" navy satisfied no one. The Conservatives, led by Halifax lawyer Robert Borden, decried it as an insufficient contribution to the defense of the empire, while the *nationalistes* believed it would inherently implicate Canada in imperial adventures. The resulting furor over the Naval Bill helped convince Bourassa and the Conservatives that together they could bring Laurier down and achieve their separate goals.

During the 1911 election, Bourassa, supported by Québec conservatives, attempted to bring a caucus of *nationaliste* MPs to Parliament. In English-speaking Canada, the main election issue was reciprocity with the United States. For Bourassa, however, it was a judgement on the naval issue and Laurier's decision to cooperate with Great Britain. He spoke fervently against Laurier alongside Conservative candidates, while at the same time insisting that Borden

would not be much better as prime minister.²⁵ His goal was not to bring Borden to power, but rather to ensure the election of *nationalistes* and create a bloc of federal MPs who would speak for French Canada alone. In the end, most of the Québec MPs elected as *nationalistes* joined the new Conservative government and followed the party line. Bourassa had merely helped to place Robert Borden and his imperialist allies in power with little to show for it.²⁶ The Conservative leader and his cabinet, notably the anti-French Minister of Militia Sam Hughes, led Canada even farther away from the nation envisioned by Bourassa and his compatriots.

By 1914, Bourassa was reaching the peak of his influence. Though he had failed to achieve his ambitious objectives for the 1911 election, the strengthening of Canada's conservative and imperialist elements enhanced Bourassa's appeal to his fellow French Canadians. In Ontario, the enactment of Regulation 17 in 1912 restricted French-language education in the province and reignited the simmering debate over language rights. Bourassa spent much of the years before the Great War campaigning for greater autonomy and linguistic parity. When war broke out in August 1914, Bourassa was in Alsace, where he fled the approaching German armies. On his journey home he witnessed German-ruled Alsatians gathering to pray for France, Frenchmen unite under the *union sacrée*, and Englishmen join their former continental enemy against a new one.²⁷

His escape from the continent and the powerful images he had seen were captured in his sole editorial that offered outright support for the war effort.²⁸ For Bourassa, this was the chance for Canadians to unite as well. Canada should present cautious and measured support of the war effort, he argued, equal to its ability to provide it. By the fall of 1914, however, his demands for a unity of purpose and a responsible Canadian contribution to Britain's war had earned the disdain and contempt of most English Canadians who believed that the war was a crusade against evil and required unqualified support. English Canada's extreme patriotism led Bourassa to re-evaluate his stance, and he began to actively oppose the war. In January 1915, he asked, in a provocative pamphlet, *Que devons-nous à l'Angleterre?*²⁹ The answer, he argued, was far less than what Canadians were providing. English Canada's intensified imperial nationalism provoked

Bourassa's, and French Canada's, defensive nationalism. The hostility between the two sides was exacerbated throughout the war and was contested in the newspapers. Famously, in August 1916, his cousin Talbot Mercer Papineau, an officer in the Canadian army, wrote a public letter to Bourassa denouncing his position on the war. Bourassa's vitriolic reply infuriated his opponents,³⁰ but both sides believed that their cause was the path to a better world and a responsible Canada.

Nearly all of the historians who have studied Bourassa discuss the origins and results of this discord through an inward looking lens that observes the impact in Canada. While the majority of his interventions focused on domestic issues, he discussed international events with similar coherence and intensity. From the first public overtures for peace by the Central Powers in December of 1916 until the end of the war almost two years later, there were hundreds of public notes and replies from the governments of belligerents and neutrals alike regarding the possibility of peace.³¹ Bourassa published a reaction to some of the most prominent, including Germany's proposal of 12 December 1916, the first serious suggestion of a negotiated peace. A few weeks later, American President Woodrow Wilson's demand for the publication of the war aims of the Central and Allied powers attracted Bourassa's attention. Bourassa's reaction to the Lansdowne peace letter published on 27 November 1917, which most Canadian journalists completely ignored, also deserves scrutiny. Finally, the deeply religious Bourassa found Pope Benedict XV's repeated calls for an end to hostilities particularly compelling and commented on them regularly.

Everyone who witnessed the first two years of warfare considered the possibility of peace in the winter of 1916. The Central Powers released a proposal to the Allies in December 1916, stating that they were spurred "by the desire to stem the flood of blood and to bring the horrors of war to an end" to enter peace negotiations.³² They did not outline the terms of the peace, but asked for a chance to discuss them. Bourassa did not unquestioningly support the German proposal. Despite his reputation in English Canada as being a rabid anti-imperialist, he approached the prospect of peace with reason and intellect. Two days after the announcement he commented on the timing of Germany's peace offer and the hidden motivation

behind it in an article in *Le Devoir* titled “La Démarche de l’Allemagne: Espoirs de paix — Obstacles probables.”³³ His careful deconstruction reminded his readers of the recent German victory in Romania and the acquisition of the oil fields there, which put them in a stronger position than the beleaguered Allies. The peace proposal did not reflect a new desire to end the war, he noted, but only a new belief that a negotiated peace would be beneficial at that time. It made sense that Germany would offer peace when they had the most to gain from it. It was clear to Bourassa that they sought to appear “devant l’opinion mondiale comme les protagonistes de la paix et à rejeter sur leurs ennemis la responsabilité d’une guerre à outrance.”³⁴

All of this could be construed as a reason to reject the German proposal, but for Bourassa it remained a crucial opportunity. Here lay the only hope for an honourable and immediate peace. The Allies could take Germany at its word and consider the terms, and if they were not acceptable, reject them. In response, the Allies could offer their own terms, and the neutral countries and the opinion of the world could form a reasonable middle ground between the two. Only then could the “droits de la conscience, de la justice et de la raison” prevail against the “passions sauvages.”³⁵ Bourassa did not simply react to the German offer and accept it as a means to end Canada’s involvement in a war he did not support. He honestly examined the proposal and accepted it as a *possible* means to end the war’s suffering. The German terms should be at least met openly, he argued, as any chance at peace was worth pursuing.

The article stands as an honest intellectual inquiry into both the German peace offer and the best response to it. He was not writing as a journalist agitating for a sensationalist headline to sell papers or a political figure seeking to weaken an opponent. Bourassa cut through the façade of the German peace offer as a means to end the war in their favour within the first few paragraphs of his article. Rather than condemning their deceit, he accepted it as inevitable and proposed a course of action that allowed for progress. He realized that, realistically, each side would only offer peace to serve their best interest. Accepting this truth was crucial in moving towards an end to the war. The patriotic press of English Canada did not easily recognize this important fact. Consider the headline from *The Globe* on 13

December 1916: “Foe Peace Proposals Accompanied by Threats: Allies will continue to fight for human liberty,” or its editorial, which declared that accepting the peace was “tantamount to an admission of defeat by the Allied nations [...] The Allies cannot sheathe the sword until their ends are accomplished.”³⁶ This perspective reflected English Canadians’ belief that the war had become a patriotic conflict requiring what Matthew Bray termed a “total Canadian war effort.”³⁷ The majority of English Canadian newspapers emphasized that Canadian triumph would be found in commitment to the war and the justifications for it. While the Canadian press was not monolithic in its coverage, it still clashed greatly with Bourassa, who articulated a very different understanding of the war.

Bourassa continued his analysis by outlining what he saw as the most significant obstacles to peace. He named the “*partisans de la guerre à outrance*”³⁸ as one of the greatest barriers, though they took different forms among the belligerent nations. First, he commented briefly on the *junkers* in Germany and their dwindling influence. As aristocratic power weakened, he argued, German socialists gained prominence. The German peace offer was, then, a consequence of the rising calls of German socialists for the end of the war.³⁹ Bourassa’s assertion stems from the socialist members of the Reichstag, who agitated for peace and publicized their views to Allied audiences through neutral media sources, such as the *New York Times*. Bourassa’s appraisal of the German situation spoke to the variety, and weakness, of his sources. Still, they led him to the reasonable belief that diminishing support of total war in Germany had opened a new opportunity for peace.

Bourassa concluded his analysis with what he believed to be the final, and most serious, obstacle to peace: Russia. He claimed that history would come to see this as a war for Turkish succession, the final struggle between “des Slaves et des Teutons pour recueillir les dépouilles du cadavre ottoman.”⁴⁰ The driving force behind the prolongation of the conflict was, in his view, the Russian determination to claim Constantinople and Balkan supremacy, which closely paralleled Papal fears regarding the Orthodox Church creating an “Orthodox St. Peter’s.”⁴¹ Bourassa’s claims may seem exaggerated given what historians now know about the fate of Russia’s imperial ambitions, but explaining the war as a titanic struggle between

German and Slavic peoples must be understood in the context of the previous decades of European history. Since the Russo-Turkish war of 1877–1878, the Balkans had been the centre of conflict between Russia, Austria, the Ottomans, and the smaller Balkan nations. Indeed, the First and Second Balkan Wars had been fought in 1912 and 1913. To a contemporary and informed observer of European affairs, such as Bourassa, solving the “Balkans problem” would have to be one of the final results of the bloodshed on European battlefields. The entire conflict had begun there and Bourassa argued that it would end there as well. He wrote:

Si la guerre se prolonge, si toute chance de paix est écartée, si des millions d’Anglais, de Français, de Canadiens continuent à périr dans les tranchées ou survivent mutilés, ce sera principalement parce que la Russie n’a pas encore atteint son objectif suprême: la prise de Constantinople.⁴²

The seizure of Constantinople would finish the war in the East and bring about a Russian victory, an outcome Bourassa found problematic. Russia, the least democratic of the great powers whose autocratic ruler would be gone a few short months later, was to Bourassa the lynchpin of Allied victory. He mocked Britain and France for supporting an ally so obviously not interested in liberty, civilization, or progress. To him, the alliance with tsarist Russia was difficult to reconcile with Allied claims of fighting for democracy against the German Kaiser. As long as Russian success remained an important part of Allied objectives, their war effort would be tainted and peace would depend on victory in the East as much as the West. For Canadians, such a victory had little value.

Above all, Bourassa remained a Canadian trying to understand the Great War. The inability of the belligerent nations to end the war would have a terrible cost for Canada, whoever was to blame for its origins. Fighting the Great War meant the death of tens of thousands of Canadians; ending the war would mean tens of thousands saved. His simplest observation was perhaps the most valid. If the war was solely about saving lives, then it would be over within a day. Clearly this was not the case. He wrote in his final line, that, “les peuples

sanglants, mutilés, épuisés, finiront par l'entendre."⁴³ His words were an ominous prediction reminding his readers that the obstacles to peace may prove too great for the moment. In time, he hoped, Canadians would understand that the prolongation of the conflict carried with it far more disastrous consequences than a compromised peace.

The article struck at the centre of the myth of the Allied war effort, and the hearts of many patriotic Canadians. Portraying the war as a political and economic manoeuvre was especially challenging to the most zealous of patriots who claimed moral superiority over their enemies. If Britain fought for wealth and power, and not for civilization and liberty, then it was perhaps not worth the increasing cost. This view of the international system differed from that described in the rest of the Canadian press. Drawing on earlier articles he had written,⁴⁴ Bourassa depicted the war for a scrap of paper and Belgian security as a means to an end, a solution to the problem of rising German dominance that had threatened the British Empire for the last two decades. Belgium, Poland, Serbia, Romania, and Greece were all victims of "l'ambition et [les] infâmes calculs de leurs grands voisins, manipulateurs sans scrupules de 'l'équilibre européen'."⁴⁵ The primary tenet of the international system that had maintained relative peace across the continent since the Vienna Congress of 1815 had been the preservation of this "balance of power." The corruption of that balance by great powers in the twentieth century resulted in more than just the outbreak of World War I. Bourassa inferred the system which had once assured the continuance of European peace now assured the continuance of war. The small powers of Europe were to be pushed to one side as the Germans were intent on seeing the scales tip in their favour, while the British were determined to see the opposite. Neither of the powers wanted to see the other benefit from the war's end. Germany's proposal, a gauntlet thrown when the balance was so tenuously in its favour, could not and would not be accepted.

Closely following the German peace proposal was a "peace note" released by President Wilson on 18 December, 1916. Though the United States was still nominally neutral, the German U-boat campaign had claimed American lives. Equally, the issue of the war had domi-

nated the recent American election between Wilson and Republican Charles Hughes, with Wilson maintaining his policy of neutrality. The president's refusal to enter the war hinged on a continuing belief that he could mediate a peace between the belligerents, as well as having a "manifest duty" to maintain a detachment from European affairs.⁴⁶ Wilson, who ran as the man who had "kept America out of the war," wanted nothing more than to mediate the conflict. His "peace note" was not a peace proposal. It suggested that the powers involved in the conflict declare their war aims. He proposed that this would allow neutral nations to understand better when and how the war would end.⁴⁷ Arriving on the heels of the German offer, Wilson made it clear that his note was neither a response to it nor connected to it in any way.⁴⁸ It represented the call of a neutral nation to the warring ones: a call not for peace, but for clarity.

Bourassa deconstructed Wilson's note in the same manner as the German proposal. In an article entitled "Espoirs de Paix," in the 27 December 1916 issue of *Le Devoir*, he discussed the significance of the note while echoing many similar themes from the previous weeks.⁴⁹ He outlined three important facts: "la valeur intrinsèque de la note du président; l'accueil favorable qu'elle reçoit dans les milieux favorables à la paix, neutres ou belligérents [et] l'opposition violente que lui suscitent les démagogues, les jingos, et les profiteurs du massacre."⁵⁰ Each of these points explored the reaction to Wilson's peace note and reinforced Bourassa's personal appraisal of the situation. The American president did not compromise his neutrality, rather he asked both the Allies and Central Powers to present their goals for the war and let the world judge them impartially. Wilson was "la voix du chef de la plus grande des nations neutres" who had "la plus haute autorité morale du monde."⁵¹ Bourassa saw that the best possibility for peace lay not with the belligerent nations, but with neutral intermediaries, such as Switzerland, Holland, and the Scandinavian countries — those best positioned to understand the true horrors of war inflicted upon their neighbours. He believed that this proximity granted them both the moral influence and opportunity to mediate the conflict. Bourassa assumed that Wilson's call for a statement of war aims meant the mobilization of these neutral powers and the prospect of ending the war. Bourassa had previously set out the logic behind the self-interest

of governments and their reasons for wanting the war to continue. Now, he argued, it was in the best interests of the neutral nations that it ended. It was up to them to represent the “*intérêt général de l’humanité*.”⁵² Bourassa split the political scene into its logical power blocs; separating the interests of the Allies, the Central Powers, and the rest of the world. While those at war sought an end through victory, the neutral powers alone sought an end through negotiation.

In Bourassa’s eyes, the attack by the ardent supporters of the war on those who wished for peace exposed their duplicity as they further abandoned the pretence of a just war. After first insisting that the American government give a material advantage to the Allies in the name of democracy and liberty, “*les vampires d’outre-mer lui font maintenant un crime de vouloir mettre fin au conflit, source de profits inouïs pour son propre pays*.”⁵³ Bourassa argued again that the war was about profit and that peace seemed unattainable when corporate and political interests suffered little but gained much. Discussing a possible peace was more responsive to the general needs of the world, alone offering “*aux nations en guerre une chance de sortir honorablement du conflit avant leur total épuisement*.”⁵⁴ He reiterated the notion that the war would destroy its participants if not stopped immediately. With so much at stake, Bourassa wondered how the Allies could think of continuing to fight; as even a major defeat was better than total annihilation. Quoting at length from Manchester’s liberal newspaper, *The Guardian*, he stated that many were against the war in Britain, but their opinion was “*malheureusement peu exprimée*” and when it was expressed, “*ses interprètes sont isolés, impuissants, traqués et dénoncés comme traîtres*.”⁵⁵ As a result, the dominant view became the only view. Bourassa’s arguments spiral close to ridiculous as he accused the “vampires” of each nation of paying others to support it and terrorizing any who did not agree.⁵⁶ The response to Wilson’s note only further convinced Bourassa of the need for careful and neutral deliberations.

Bourassa ended his article on a religious note that belied his aggressive tone. He invoked the words of Pope Benedict XV: the war would not conclude until the aggressors accepted “*les obligatoires et nécessaires sacrifices d’amour-propre et d’intérêts particuliers*,” and that the peace must not benefit “*à une seule des parties, mais à toutes*.”

“Plus que jamais,” he continued, “[nous avons] le devoir de prier pour que la paix rétablisse.”⁵⁷ His religiosity infused his political analysis with a moral attitude and supreme confidence. René Durocher argued that Bourassa “[a] accepté] sans réserve l’autorité de l’Église,” and felt obligated to “informer [les autres] des opinions.”⁵⁸ That approach represented a key aspect of Bourassa’s belief system and his stance towards the war. The views Bourassa defended were reflections of those coming from the Vatican, or at least his own take on them. This moral superiority translated into a ferocious writing style, with evocative imagery and unshakeable conviction that he spoke the truth.

Yet, at times, Bourassa’s prose appeared out of touch with the reality of a nation at war. His deeply held beliefs left little room for compromise. Just as with the “jingoists,” his was a world of black and white; you agreed with Bourassa or you were his enemy. It is little wonder that English Canada vilified him. After all, he called the most devoted of war supporters hate mongers possessing short-sighted minds who, if they could, would have God himself in their armies.⁵⁹ Yet these are the men and women of Toronto, or Ottawa, or Victoria. These are his fellow Canadians. Bourassa’s anger may have been justified to him, so fiercely did he believe his own opinions, but he did not earn himself many friends with it. Neither side was willing to admit the other could be correct. The legitimacy of his analyses of these peace proposals, as insightful as they may have been, often suffered from the anger they revealed. For a man supposedly trying to bring about peace, his tone was decidedly belligerent.

Almost a year after the German peace proposal and Wilson’s note, Henry Petty-Fitzmaurice, 5th Marquess of Lansdowne, released a letter to the press in November 1917. Lansdowne, former Governor-General of Canada, as well as the former leader of the Conservative Party in the House of Lords, had an illustrious career in the service of Britain.⁶⁰ The “Lansdowne Letter,” which he had originally circulated among the British Cabinet a year before, called for a negotiated peace that would have preserved Germany as a Great Power while ensuring economic trade and European stability. For Lansdowne, continuing the war would simply cause more bloodshed and destroy Europe: “its prolongation will spell ruin for the civilized world and an infinite addition to the load of human suffering.”⁶¹ The

letter was originally circulated as a memorandum after Prime Minister Herbert Asquith asked his Cabinet to express their views on potential peace terms in early November 1916. Even before the letter had been released, it had an impact on British politics. Lansdowne's biographer, Lord Newton, suggests that Lansdowne's memorandum split the Cabinet and helped break up Britain's Coalition Government, allowing David Lloyd George to come to power.⁶² When it was published in *The Daily Telegraph*, his plea for peace was widely denounced in the British Parliament, though the press reaction among Allied powers varied from ignoring it to praise.⁶³ Lansdowne specifically chose to respect Cabinet tradition and did not disclose that it had already been discussed by the upper echelons of British government. For the most part, the letter and Lansdowne himself were widely condemned, though it did influence those already deliberating over peace negotiations.⁶⁴ The venerable politician would later publish two letters in the press analyzing various Allied diplomatic efforts as the end of the war drew closer.⁶⁵ These were better received; however, they were published in much better circumstances for the Allies than the first.

Bourassa's comments on it were brief but significant.⁶⁶ Whereas Lansdowne was more concerned with winning the war in a way that was still beneficial to Great Britain, Bourassa saw the proposal as another initiative to end the war before greater evils were committed. The first portion of his article reminded his readers of this intention and linked it to arguments the Pope had already expressed. The letter was merely "la traduction, dans le langage politique et humain, des diverses manifestations de la pensée du Souverain Pontife."⁶⁷ The words of the Pope were the standard that Bourassa used to evaluate other peace plans. He saw Lansdowne's letter as mirroring the papal peace, which aimed at stopping the terrible slaughter of the war as soon as possible; not as a political or economic analysis of the disastrous cost of the war for England. In this case, Bourassa's own Catholic values clouded his personal reaction to Lansdowne's words. He saw what he wanted to see in the aristocrat's writing. He compared it to Wilson's grand claims of a peace that would "make the world safe for democracy." Lansdowne proposed a peace that was not "uniquement la seule paix *juste et durable*, c'[était] aussi la seule paix

possible.”⁶⁸ The United States had entered the war despite Wilson’s high ideals of the previous year. For Bourassa, the president’s willingness to participate in the butchery in France had corrupted the American vision of peace. Peace to Bourassa meant the immediate cessation of hostilities and killing by both sides and did not include any other considerations.

Bourassa’s comments on the letter again targeted Canadians who continued to support fighting the war. The war’s quick end was the best possible solution for humanity. Lansdowne presented five points that would encourage Germany to accept a peace. He believed that reassuring Germany that defeat did not mean destruction, politically or economically, would make them more amenable to negotiations. Bourassa agreed with this assessment, noting the irony of the belligerents’ positions. The situation in late 1917 was a reversal from the previous year, and Bourassa asked if “les exploiters de chair humaine gagneront [...] la partie cette année, en Allemagne, comme ils l’ont gagnée l’an dernier, en pays alliés?”⁶⁹ The greatest impediment was not, he suggested, that one side feared a peace without victory; rather both the Allies and the Central Powers feared a peace with defeat. Just as the Allies had rejected losing the war through the peace terms of 1916, Germany now refused to consider a peace that amounted to an Allied victory. He repeated Lansdowne’s belief that the great powers fought for security foremost above other concerns and a longer war meant a greater chance of revolution and disorder. Bourassa warned that to ignore the cause of peace, which echoed “dans l’âme des millions d’êtres humains,” would lead to a war against the state that denied it and cause a universal civil war.⁷⁰ Ultimately, Bourassa wanted to put an end to the bloodbath, which he saw as the war’s great tragedy, and he understood the growing social fractures caused by the conflict. Nevertheless, whether he was a knowing prophet or an unwilling instigator, his words did not endear him to English Canadians.

As a devout Catholic thinker, Bourassa continued to rely heavily on Papal discourse regarding the war. His religion was a crucial component of all his ideas and judgements on the peace proposals. While some Canadians gauged the war’s moral purpose through concepts of imperialism or democracy, Bourassa and other Christians saw

it as a moral or religious issue. Whether the Ontario Protestants⁷¹ or French Canadian Catholics of Québec,⁷² most Canadians had to reconcile the war's atrocities with their religious convictions. For a dedicated Roman Catholic such as Bourassa, Pope Benedict XV was not only the inspiration for his ideas, but the spiritual and intellectual leader who shepherded his religious beliefs.

Pope Benedict XV, born Giacomo Giambattista Della Chiesa, replaced Pope Pius X, who died on 24 August 1914 — apocryphally from a broken heart over the outbreak of a general European war. Della Chiesa had only been a cardinal for six months, after serving as Bishop of Bologna for seven years, though he had had a long career of diplomatic posts within the Vatican. He worked closely with Cardinal Mariano Rampolla, Pope Leo XIII's secretary of state, where he performed admirably and was heralded as the “new Consalvi” (referring to the worldly cardinal who after the Vienna Congress of 1815 had positioned the papacy as a neutral power, restored the Papal States and preserved its international relevance).⁷³ Despite his commendable credentials, his election to the papacy came as a surprise for contemporary observers. Few outside of Rome had heard of him, but as his biographer writes, of all the papal candidates in the 1914 Conclave, it was Della Chiesa who was the most *papabile*. He fulfilled the description of the ideal Pope who possessed “superior intelligence, holiness of life, and Christian charity.”⁷⁴ As Sovereign Pontiff, Benedict XV immediately set out to resolve the terrible conflict that split his flock. Although he ultimately failed, his long years of diplomatic intervention earned him the name the “Pope of Peace.” Often unjustly characterized by contemporaries as having done nothing during the Great War besides meddle, recent historians have demonstrated the immense commitment he made towards ending the war and aiding its victims.⁷⁵ The Allies and the Central Powers were suspicious of Benedict, and the Treaty of London that brought Italy into the war specifically forbade any papal presence at future peace negotiations. Members of the Roman Curia hoped for a Central Powers victory precisely because it could resolve the “Rome Question” and perhaps restore the Papal States, which had only been annexed in 1860. The publication of the Treaty of London by the Russians after the fall of the tsar in 1917 certainly encouraged this view.⁷⁶ Though

some of the Curia may have been sympathetic to the German and Austrian war effort,⁷⁷ Pope Benedict XV was committed to his policy of strict neutrality. His failure to bring about a resolution to World War I was not through lack of trying. From September 1914 onwards, the Vatican commented on and engaged with each of the belligerent powers in its efforts to stop the war. Bourassa would mention many of them in his own writings as he attempted to persuade his countrymen of the validity of the Pope's words.

Pope Benedict XV argued that the war would only end when just and fair arbitration took precedence over the force of arms. His underlying philosophy was that participation or support for the war was a sin for his followers (or believers in any moral code). Bourassa agreed wholeheartedly. He condemned those who fought and proclaimed the superiority of their civilization and morality. In August 1916, his article "L'Effort pour la Paix," wondered how English Canada could reconcile its trumpeted loyalty and religion while fighting the war and attacking those who proposed a peace. He wrote that "le vrai loyalisme" would allow the sincere expression of support for "une paix honorable et durable," and asked if "la vraie religion ne nous commande-t-elle pas de tout faire pour hâter la paix?"⁷⁸ The issue at hand was not simply the resolution of the conflict. He raged at the insincerity of his opponents, who would claim one thing and do another.

Papal notes throughout the war lamented the lack of progress towards peace. The most significant, issued by the Holy See on 1 August 1917, and addressed to the "rulers of the belligerent peoples," declared the Pontificate's impartiality and commitment to the ending of the conflict.⁷⁹ Bourassa wrote an editorial reply to it on 18 August, "L'Appel du Pape." He responded to the accusation that the Pope was a German sympathizer. The claim stemmed from detractors in Canada and Great Britain who attacked Benedict XV after he began to appeal for peace early on in the war. Again, after this latest proposal, the "presse vampire" had painted the Pope as a "docile et hypocrite instrument du Kaiser."⁸⁰ Bourassa reiterated in detail the Pope's plan to combat the false representation he had received in other newspapers. Outlining each point, he defended the spiritual leader against those who tried to make his ideas seem both "trop absolues et

trop favorables à l'Allemagne" and "trop vagues et insuffisantes."⁸¹ War supporters constantly attacked and tried to discredit the Pope at every turn. Nonetheless, Bourassa remained optimistic that a true peace was possible by paying heed to the reasoned and moral voice of the Pope. He hoped that the people of the world would force their leaders into action as they saw more of "les hideux vampires qui se gorgent du sang des nations,"⁸² the people of the world would force their leaders to action. Whether the war ended in victory or defeat, the cost of thousands of lives every day was outrageous to the religious man. Thus, Bourassa's unconditionally supported the Pope's message — not simply because of his religious beliefs, but because the Pope alone called for a peace for the sake of peace.

The chance to end the war was a profoundly ethical issue for Bourassa. It was not about attacking English Canadians, or British imperialism, or championing his province's rights. His visceral reaction was always one rooted in his analysis of events, his Catholic faith, and his confidence in Pope Benedict XV. He compared others' peace proposals with that of the Holy See. If Bourassa found them wanting, and he often did, he did not hesitate to attack them. It was more than a matter of political importance. Though his religious nationalism certainly formed the core of his moral values and political beliefs, the devout French Canadian seemed ethically obliged to question why the war could not be ended. To evade such questions would be morally dishonest. Despite his moral indignation that the war was allowed to continue, Bourassa did not allow himself to forget the real political implications of war and peace on the international stage.

In early 1918, Bourassa published a series of articles critically interrogating the diplomacy behind the Great War. He introduced the series with an editorial that stemmed from his new book, *Le pape arbitre de la paix*. In it, Bourassa examined one of the chief justifications for the war: the protection of Belgium. The protection of the neutral country arose from "un droit et un principe infiniment supérieurs" to French, English, or German domination of Europe.⁸³ God's will was to protect the weak, which superseded the will of nations. It was ludicrous he argued, that heads of state could purport that the only resolution to the conflict was through their force of arms. The Pope offered an alternative: why could the belligerents not

accept the word of “le représentant de Dieu sur la terre”?⁸⁴ Bourassa answered the question in subsequent articles. “Vers la Paix” examined the Central Powers’ reluctance to agree to a peace. First, he delved into Germany’s war aims and outlined what they still hoped to achieve from the war. Quoting German Chancellor Georg von Hertling, Bourassa concluded that Hertling agreed with President Wilson and Prime Minister Lloyd George on almost every point of Europe’s territorial readjustment, except one. On the subject of Alsace-Lorraine, where “le tort fait à la France [devrait être] réparé,” the Germans had no response but silence.⁸⁵ This single issue blocked peace negotiations and it was the biggest challenge the two sides had to overcome. The Allies also faced difficult circumstances at home and on the battlefield. The terms of a peace aside, two greater threats endangered the world of 1918: famine and revolution. Bourassa warned that if the forces of a starving, ravaged people met “la panse monstrueuse et la bourse débordante” of the plutocracy before the ruined nations of the world could regain normalcy, then “malheur aux chefs d’État, malheur aux riches, malheur aux peuples, malheur au monde!”⁸⁶ The terrible consequences of the war were deeper than a simple moral transgression. Continuing to fight the war to achieve security and power was at best idealistic and at worst suicidal. By 1918, the war was stretching the morale and cohesion of the nations involved. The spectre of Russian civil war loomed, and the belligerent countries risked devastation that might prevent them from fighting any war, let alone the Great War.

Bourassa’s position on the war evolved towards what has been termed “Christian Pacifism,”⁸⁷ but a more proper description may have been “Catholic Neutrality.” This term, rooted in the context of 1914–1918, deserves a thorough explanation. “Catholic” refers to Bourassa’s personal faith and the integral role it played in shaping his wartime views. His ultramontanist belief in the infallibility of the Pope and his supremacy over civil authorities or national church hierarchies created a definitive understanding of the war’s events. While Bourassa may not have been absolutely certain of the Pope’s judgment in temporal affairs, he was certain that the Pope was the least fallible.⁸⁸ Bourassa’s thoughts on the war were undoubtedly Catholic in nature; however, they significantly diverged from the positions taken

by other Catholics in Canada. For instance, English-speaking Catholics used the war as a tool to further emphasize their difference from French Canadian Catholics. The result was a careful balance between wishing to prove their loyalty to Britain and maintaining sympathy with their fellow Catholics.⁸⁹ A few English Canadian Catholic commentators echoed Bourassa's arguments. For example, Toronto Archbishop Neil McNeil's 24-page pamphlet in February 1918, entitled *The Pope and the War*, sold over 5,000 copies and refuted accusations levied against the Holy Father. McNeil reminded his followers, like Bourassa, that "the Catholic Church is the only international power remaining unbroken by the conflict of nations and empires."⁹⁰ Still, for most Anglophone Catholics, the years-long battle over language education in Ontario had created so much tension between English and French speakers that Bourassa was equally vilified by them as he was by Protestants.⁹¹ Meanwhile, the French Canadian Catholic Church hierarchy was consistently committed to the war effort, but rejected conscription. French Canada, led by Bourassa and Laurier, was a vocal opponent against conscription during the "Khaki Election" of 1917. The decision to support the war remained a source of strain for French Canadian Catholics, since many parish priests sided with Bourassa's wider view of the war.⁹² Thus, Bourassa was not unique among Canadian Catholics for contesting conscription or advocating the papal position; but, Bourassa alone publicly rejected the war itself based on a combination of Catholic devotion and critical inquiry.

It is worthwhile to compare Bourassa to the Archbishop of Melbourne, Daniel Mannix. Australia's Catholics were also opposed to conscription against their government's wishes. Similar to Canada's English-speaking Catholics, they were largely Irish immigrants and had supported the war effort. Unlike their North American brethren though, they rejected conscription under Mannix's leadership. The outspoken Archbishop campaigned fiercely against conscription and it was rejected three times by Australians during the war. Yet, historians argue that Mannix's position emerged out of sympathy with Irish Catholics' place in Australian society rather than strictly a result of religious doctrine.⁹³ While both Bourassa and Mannix represented a religious and cultural minority within their nations, the context and

reasoning behind them was vastly different.

Just as important was the concept of “neutrality.” Bourassa did not espouse a “pacifist” view (a moral opposition to any violence), rather he contested the justification and consequences of World War I itself. Here he departed slightly from Pope Benedict XV’s official position of “absolute impartiality,” which denoted a subtle but often misunderstood difference from neutrality. “Absolute impartiality was more than simply a tightened concept of neutrality,” Charles R. Gallagher clarifies. “Absolute impartiality distinctly forbade public moral determinations by non-belligerent states.”⁹⁴ The Holy See refused to draw moral judgments on warring states, with Benedict XV trying to position the Vatican as both politically *and* morally neutral in the conflict.

Bourassa’s sententious writing did not follow this dictate closely. Rather, he argued for a peaceful resolution to the European war while denouncing those who refused to consider peace even as a viable option. He effectively situated himself as neutral within an older context of neutrality, stemming from the nineteenth century. There, neutrality was a key element in maintaining the European balance of power and restraining larger nations’ aggressive tendencies. Neutral status was not simply refusing to engage in warfare. M.M. Abbenhuis observes that this position was a “legitimate foreign policy option” and a nation’s intent against war was just as valid as those who threatened to wage it.⁹⁵ Bourassa did not oppose the war for the sake of opposing it. He expressed, through a definitively religious lens, his belief that moderation, restraint, and limited war (not total war) were the only ways to assure European stability and maintain the virtues of civilization for which both sides claimed to fight. Bourassa’s neutrality was not a passive abdication of war for religious reasons, as the term “Christian pacifist” might suggest. It was an aggressive stance against war’s excessive incarnation, rooted in Benedict XV’s wartime policy. Above all, the French Canadian Catholic commentator trusted Papal infallibility and the righteousness of the Sovereign Pontiff to guide humanity.

Historians and contemporaries alike have traditionally portrayed Bourassa as a man who attacked anyone who disagreed with him. A careful analysis of his articles on the possibility of peace during World

War I shows this characterization to be only partially true. Bourassa denounced hypocrisy and immorality. Of course, he found those qualities among many of his critics and those who disagreed with him. He did not restrain himself for fear of backlash. Equally, his criticisms of the peace proposals frequently touched on other problems within the international system as well. When he commented on the various discussions surrounding the proposals of peace from the Germans, Wilson, the Pope, or others, he did not only discuss the war *per se*, but also the failure of the international system itself. The Great War was, for Bourassa, the terrible result of a system that had cracked under the weight of misplaced ambitions and duplicity. The longer the leaders of the war persisted in abusing their power, the greater the damage to the international system, until finally it would crumble. Although that world had once brought stability and progress, it now promised only destruction. It was a world of imperial ambition, unrelenting greed, and the lust for power collapsing under its own weight. Bourassa realized the gravity of this outcome for Europe and the world and he proffered a solution. Only the holy words of Rome, which proposed a system based on trust, goodwill, and the word of God, could provide order. He did not necessarily imagine a Catholic world, but simply one that realized the truth of the Pontiff's message. Faced with a continent torn apart by warfare, he searched for a solution; he found it in his own unshakeable faith. The repetition of the sanctity of Rome and the virtue of the Pope's verdict in his editorials is significant. Only the Pope held the moral power capable of surpassing human interests and defending the common good of all people. Yet its flaws are not examined and the feasibility left unquestioned. Perhaps Bourassa's faith did not allow him to question it. He needed something unchangeable in the face of a world that had changed so much in such a short time.

Bourassa was one of the most significant Canadian intellectuals during World War I. As a commentator in an international debate on the meaning and reasoning behind the war, he stood alone in Canada. Unfortunately, the influence Bourassa had in Canadian domestic politics has overshadowed any serious attempt to analyze his important thoughts on the diplomatic game played by the nations of Europe. Bourassa was not an objective observer: his articles equally

contain inaccuracies, skewed perspectives, and occasionally repetitive rhetoric. Prominence and passion do not encourage detachment, but Bourassa's zealous words are still worthy of study, especially when compared to his contemporaries. One of the most outspoken English Canadian nationalists before the war, J.S. Ewart, silenced himself rather than risk the patriotic backlash.⁹⁶ J.S. Woodsworth, the best-known opponent of the war in English-speaking Canada, expressed a pacifist position but offered no systematic analysis of the war or the various peace proposals.⁹⁷ By contrast, Bourassa explicitly confronted the powerful supporters of the war in Canada. He scrutinized the basis of the Allies' war effort and bared the hypocrisy of the patriotic rhetoric found in each nation's cause. French Canadians, the leaders of the only French and Catholic bastion in North America, understood the war and its prolongation in a unique way. Bourassa, with eloquence, intellect, and Catholic determination, gave a voice to their efforts to comprehend their place in a Canada, and a world, at war.

GEOFF KEELAN is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Waterloo.

GEOFF KEELAN est candidat au doctorat à la University of Waterloo.

Endnotes:

- 1 Elizabeth Armstrong, *Crisis of Quebec 1914–1918* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1937).
- 2 See the Carleton Library Edition of Armstrong's work (1974), and the introduction by Joseph Levitt, viii.
- 3 Armstrong, 53.
- 4 Robert Rumilly, *Histoire de la province de Québec* (Montréal: Valiquette, 1940); Robert Rumilly, *Henri Bourassa: La vie publique d'un grand Canadien* (Montréal: Éditions Chantecler, 1953).
- 5 For example, see Martin P. O'Connell, "Ideas of Henri Bourassa," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 19 (August 1953):

- 361–76; Martin P. O’Connell, “Henri Bourassa and Canadian Nationalism,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1954); Patrick Allen, ed., *La pensée de Henri Bourassa* (Montréal: L’Action nationale, 1954). This book is a published version of an issue of *L’Action nationale* that appeared in January, 1954. See André Laurendeau, “Henri Bourassa,” in *Our Living Tradition*, ed. R.L. McDougall (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962); James I.W. Corcoran, “Henri Bourassa et la guerre sud-africaine (suite),” *Revue d’histoire de l’Amérique française* 19, 1 (1965): 84–105; V.C. Smith, “Moral Crusader: Henri Bourassa and the Empire, 1900–1916,” *Queen’s Quarterly* 76, 4 (Winter 1969): 635–47. An important non-academic contribution is Casey Murrow, *Henri Bourassa and French-Canadian Nationalism: Opposition to Empire* (Montréal: Harvest House, 1968).
- 6 Joseph Levitt, *Henri Bourassa and the Golden Calf: The Social Program of the Nationalists of Quebec 1900–1914* (Ottawa: Les Éditions de l’Université d’Ottawa, 1969).
- 7 Joseph Levitt, “La perspective nationaliste d’Henri Bourassa, 1896–1914,” *Revue d’histoire de l’Amérique française* 22, 4 (1969): 567–82. It is worthwhile to read Richard Jones’ reply to Levitt’s article. See Richard Jones, “La perspective nationaliste d’Henri Bourassa, 1896–1914: commentaire,” *Revue d’histoire de l’Amérique française* 22, 4 (1969): 582–6. Joseph Levitt, *Henri Bourassa on Imperialism and Bi-culturalism, 1900–1918* (Toronto: Copp Clark Publishing Company, 1970); Joseph Levitt, *Henri Bourassa — Catholic Critic* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1976). Levitt’s chapter “Henri Bourassa: The Catholic Social Order and Canada’s Mission,” in *Idéologies au Canada français 1900–1929*, eds. Fernand Dumont, Jean Hamelin, Fernand Harvey, and Jean-Paul Montminy (Québec City: Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 1974), 192–222, ably demonstrates how easily the war can remain absent from otherwise comprehensive works, notably on 217. Jean Drolet’s succeeding chapter is similarly revealing, “Henri Bourassa: Une analyse de sa pensée,” in *Idéologies au Canada français*, 223–50.
- 8 Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, *Canada 1896–1921: A Nation Transformed* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), 274 *passim*. Michael Oliver, *The Passionate Debate: The Social and Political Ideas of Quebec Nationalism, 1920–1945*, (Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1991) also includes an excellent discussion of Bourassa’s role, though again purely within the realm of Québec-Canadian politics.
- 9 René Durocher, “Henri Bourassa, les évêques et la guerre de 1914–1918,” *Canadian Historical Association Historical Papers* 6 (1971): 248–75. There exist many general French language studies, such as Paul André Linteau, René Durocher, and Jean-Claude Robert, *Histoire du Québec contemporain, de la Confédération à la Crise (1867–1929)* (Montréal: Boréal Express,

- 1989).
- 10 Réal Bélanger, "Bourassa, Henri," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online* (www.biographi.ca). Bélanger's article has many additional titles dealing with Bourassa than listed here, particularly French language sources.
 - 11 Sylvie Lacombe, *La rencontre de deux peuples élus : comparaison des ambitions nationale et impériale au Canada entre 1896 et 1920* (Sainte-Foy, PQ: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2002), 10. As a Québec academic, Lacombe is unique in that she also discusses English Canadian imperialists through a nationalist lens, rather than simply a colonial one, a thesis Carl Berger argued three decades previously. Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism 1867–1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 277. Ramsay Cook makes this point in his review of Lacombe's book in *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 56, 4 (2003): 557–60.
 - 12 Lacombe, 19–26, 37–124. For her discussion of Bourassa and World War I, including his reaction to American neutrality and subsequent entry into the war, see 107–24. Her conclusion to the section of the book on Bourassa is both concise and informative, 122–4.
 - 13 Sylvie Lacombe, "Entre l'autorité pontificale et la liberté nationale: l'anti-impérialisme britannique d'Henri Bourassa," in *Le Devoir: Un journal indépendant (1910–1995)*, eds. Robert Comeau and Luc Desrochers (Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1996), 273–81. She refers to his points of radicalization in n.3, 273.
 - 14 For more information on the Boer War, see Desmond Morton, *A Military History of Canada*, 5th ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2005), 115–18.
 - 15 Henri Bourassa, *Grande-Bretagne et Canada: Questions actuelles* (Montréal: Imprimerie du Pionnier, 1901), 32.
 - 16 Corcoran, 84.
 - 17 Bélanger.
 - 18 These periodicals were the inspiration for Bourassa's own paper, *Le Devoir*, founded in 1910. See Hélène Pelletier-Baillargeon, "Les Débats et Le Nationaliste, de bien curieux ancêtres pour *Le Devoir*," in Comeau and Desrochers, eds., 191–7.
 - 19 For a more in-depth examination of the goals and development of the *nationalistes*, see Levitt, *Henri Bourassa and the Golden Calf*. For a collection of commentary on Canadian nationalism and imperialism, see Carl Berger, ed., *Imperialism and Nationalism, 1884–1914: A Conflict in Canadian Thought* (Toronto: Copp Clark Publishing Company, 1969). The *nationaliste* movement was a complex one formed from different people and opinions, though for the sake of simplicity, I conflate here Bourassa's and the larger movement's ideas, as they are similar in attitude

- if not in detail. For more detail on the founding years of the *nationalistes*, see also H  l  ne Pelletier-Baillargeon, *Olivar Asselin et son temps: Le militant* (Qu  bec:   dition Fides, 1996).
- 20 Henri Bourassa, *Les Canadiens-fran  ais et l'Empire britannique* (Qu  bec: Imprimerie S.A. Demers, 1903), 40.
 - 21 *McKim's Directory of Canadian Publications* lists *Le Devoir* as having 18,894 subscribers in 1915, a number which dropped to an estimated 14,000 by 1917. See *McKim's Directory of Canadian Publications*, 1915, 1917. *McKim's* estimated that Montr  al, where *Le Devoir* was published, had a population of 550 000. It is estimated that the city was 25.8 percent English and 63.5 percent French in 1915. See, Andrew Sancton, *Governing the Island of Montreal: Language differences and metropolitan politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 27.
 - 22 B  langer.
 - 23 Conservatives seeking to unseat the Liberals in Qu  bec who were attracted to Bourassa's ability to defy Laurier and Qu  bec's Liberal Premier, Lomer Gouin, helped to fund its publication. Bourassa controlled the majority of the company's shares and secured complete creative freedom to publish his thoughts. See B  langer.
 - 24 For more on Bourassa's thoughts on the naval issue, see Henri Bourassa, *Le projet de loi navale: sa nature, ses consequences* (Montr  al: Le Devoir, 1910). Also, many articles from *Le Devoir* in 1910 focus on the subject.
 - 25 Bourassa, "La Vrai Terrain de la Lutte," *Le Devoir* (2 August 1911).
 - 26 The extent to which Borden ignored Qu  bec would not be fully realized until 1913 when the Conservatives introduced their own Naval Aid Bill, though it was defeated in the Liberal-dominated Senate. Patrice Dutil and David Mackenzie's recent work, *Canada 1911: The Decisive Election that Shaped the Country* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2011), reviews this pivotal electoral campaign thoroughly, and concludes that the Conservatives could easily afford to not bow to Qu  bec demands for more representation given the seats they had gained outside the province, see 294. Another useful work is R  al B  langer, *Paul   mile-Lamarche: Le pays avant le parti (1904–1918)* (Qu  bec: Presses de l'Universit   Laval, 1984), and its exploration of Lamarche's career as a "conservative-nationalist" MP.
 - 27 Rumilly, *Henri Bourassa*, 503.
 - 28 Bourassa, "En France et en Alsace au Debut de la Guerre," *Le Devoir* (22 August 1914), 1.
 - 29 *Ibid.*, *Que devons-nous    l'Angleterre? La d  fense nationale, la r  volution imp  rialiste, le tribut    l'Empire* (Montr  al, 1915).
 - 30 For more information on the Bourassa-Papineau exchange, see Sandra Gwyn, "Papineau, Talbot Mercer," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*; Sandra Gwyn, *Tapstry of War: A Private View of Canadians in the Great War* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1992); Geoff Keelan, "Talbot Mercer

- Papineau: Memory, Myth and the Search for Meaning,” (M.A. diss., University of Waterloo, 2010).
- 31 For an extensive listing of these notes, see James Brown Scott, *Official Statements of War Aims and Peace Proposals, December 1916 to November 1918* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Division of International Law, 1921).
- 32 Scott, “Proposals for Peace Negotiations made by Germany,” *Official Statements*, 3.
- 33 Bourassa, “La Démarche de L’Allemagne: Espoirs de paix — Obstacles probables,” *Le Devoir* (14 December 1916), 1.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 *The Globe* (13 December 1916), 1, 6.
- 37 R. Matthew Bray, “‘Fighting as an Ally’: The English-Canadian Patriotic Response to the Great War,” *Canadian Historical Review* 51, 2 (1980): 154. See also Robert Matthew Bray, “The Canadian Patriotic Response to the Great War,” (Ph.D. diss., Laurentian University, 1977).
- 38 Bourassa, “La Démarche,” 1.
- 39 Historical study has demonstrated that this claim was false, and that as the *junkers* lost their influence, it was army officers, such as Generals Erich Ludendorff and Paul von Hindenburg, who gained it, not the Reichstag’s socialist members. For an excellent overview of the state of German politics throughout the war, see Roger Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- 40 Bourassa, “La Démarche,” 1.
- 41 John F. Pollard, *The Unknown Pope: Benedict XV (1914–1922) and the Pursuit of Peace* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1999), 90–1.
- 42 Bourassa, “La Démarche,” 1.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 For Bourassa’s review of the role of Belgium and Britain at the beginning of the war, see his articles in *Le Devoir* from 28 August to 14 September, 1914.
- 45 Bourassa, “La Démarche,” 1.
- 46 “Manifest duty” was Wilson’s term in his Annual Message to Congress on 7 December, 1915. See Edgar E. Robinson, *The Foreign Policy of Woodrow Wilson, 1913–1917* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1917), 294.
- 47 Scott, *Official Statements*, 15.
- 48 Ibid. 13.
- 49 Bourassa, “Espoirs de Paix,” *Le Devoir* (27 December 1916), 1.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Ibid.

- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 Having barely avoided an attack by a mob of war supporters in Ottawa in December 1914, Bourassa knew that patriots were willing to go to extreme lengths to condemn dissenters. Though an extreme situation, it characterized the severe backlash Bourassa experienced for his critical opinions.
- 57 Bourassa, "Espoirs de Paix," 1.
- 58 Durocher, "Henri Bourassa," 272.
- 59 Bourassa, "Espoirs de Paix," 1.
- 60 P.B. Waite, "Petty-Fitzmaurice, Henry Charles Keith, 5th Marquess of Lansdowne," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online* (www.biographi.ca).
- 61 As quoted from the copy of the letter, published here: *New York Times* (30 November 1917), 2.
- 62 Thomas Wodehouse Legh Newton, Lord, *Lord Lansdowne, A Biography* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1929), 449–50.
- 63 Ibid., 469–73.
- 64 Newton notes the influence it had on President Wilson and quotes his advisor Edward M. "Colonel" House, who credited it in encouraging them to create Wilson's Fourteen Points, which would shape the peace conference of 1919. Ibid., 481.
- 65 One was published 5 March, 1918, in response to a speech by the German Chancellor Count Hertling, who in turn had been replying to Wilson's Fourteen Points, and another on 31 July, 1918, in response to a parliamentary motion to suppress pacifism. See Newton, 475–6. Overall, there is a scant historical work done on the Lansdowne letters, and much more research is required.
- 66 While many papers reported on the letter, few offered any editorial commentary as Bourassa. A notable exception was *The Globe's* editorial condemning the peace proposal and suggesting Lansdowne's argument and attitude was a reaction to the economic impact on Britain's aristocratic upper class society. See, *The Globe* (1 December 1917), 6.
- 67 Bourassa, "Le Manifeste Lansdowne," *Le Devoir* (1 December 1917), 1.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 Ibid.
- 70 Ibid.
- 71 The influence of Protestant faith on the war effort has been explored by numerous historians, notably in Jonathan Vance, *Death So Noble* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997), chaps. 2 and 3. See also Ian Miller, *Our Glory and our Grief: Torontonians and the Great War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), chaps. 2 and 3; Michael Bliss, "The Methodist Church and World War I," *Canadian Historical Review* 49, 3 (1968): 212–33; Michelle Fowler, "'Death is not the Worst Thing': The Presbyterian Press in Canada, 1913–1919," *War & Society* 25,

- 2 (2006): 23–38.
- 72 Some French Canadians fought the war for religious reasons just as Protestants did. This is most evident among the soldiers of the French Canadian 22nd Battalion. See Geoff Keelan, “Il a bien mérité de la Patrie’: The 22nd Battalion and the Memory of Courcellette,” *Canadian Military History* 19 (Summer 2010): 28–40.
- 73 Henry E.G. Rope, *Benedict XV The Pope of Peace* (London: The Catholic Book Club, 1940), 33.
- 74 Pollard, 64.
- 75 This is concisely reviewed in Charles R. Gallagher, “The perils of perception: British Catholics and papal neutrality, 1914–1923,” in *The Papacy Since 1500: From Italian Prince to Universal Pastor*, eds. James Corkery and Thomas Worcester (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 180–1. Pollard’s work reviews Benedict’s accomplishments, which included 82 million lire donated to war’s victims, helping 26,000 POWs and 3,000 civilian detainees to convalesce in Switzerland, and even formally protesting the ongoing Armenian genocide in Turkey. See Pollard, 112–39.
- 76 Oliver P. Rafferty, “The Catholic Church, Ireland and the British Empire, 1800–1921,” *Historical Research* 84, 224 (May 2011): 305–7. Pollard has an excellent chapter on Pope Benedict XV and Italy’s relationship during the war. See Pollard, 85–111.
- 77 One such example is Rudolph Gerlach, the papal secret chamberlain, who was accused of being the lead spy in an Italian espionage ring and allegedly linked to German and Austrian intelligence. He was discovered following an investigation into the destruction of the Italian battleship, the *Leonardo Da Vinci*, in August 1916. Benedict was convinced of Gerlach’s innocence and there is little evidence of his guilt in the historical record. Gerlach was quietly sent to Switzerland, but eventually had several public and embarrassing meetings with the King of Bavaria, the German and Austrian Emperors, and General Hindenburg. See David Alvarez, “Vatican Communications Security, 1914–1918,” *Intelligence and National Security* 7, 4 (1992): 443–53; David Alvarez, “A German Agent at the Vatican: the Gerlach Affair,” *Intelligence and National Security* 2, 2 (April 1996): 345–56; Pollard, 103–7.
- 78 Bourassa, “L’Effort pour la Paix,” *Le Devoir* (12 August 1916), 1.
- 79 See Scott, “Peace Proposal of Pope Benedict XV,” *Official Statements*, 129–31, for a summary of the Pope’s views.
- 80 Bourassa, “L’Appel du Pape,” *Le Devoir* (18 August 1917), 1. Bourassa’s first footnote also remarks on some of the offending papers, which included Montréal’s *La Patrie* and New York’s *Evening Post*.
- 81 Ibid.
- 82 Ibid.

- 83 Ibid., “Le Pape Arbitre de la Paix,” *Le Devoir* (26 January 1918), 1.
- 84 Ibid.
- 85 Ibid., “Vers la Paix, Partie 1,” *Le Devoir* (29 January 1918), 1.
- 86 Ibid., “Vers la Paix, Partie 2,” *Le Devoir* (30 January 1918), 1.
- 87 François-Albert Angers, “Le problème de la paix selon Bourassa,” in Allen, ed., 83.
- 88 Lacombe, *La rencontre de deux peuples élus*, 276. For a succinct yet detailed examination of Bourassa’s combination of political and religious ideology, see Lacombe, “Entre l’autorité pontificale et la liberté nationale,” 274–7.
- 89 Mark G. McGowan, “‘To Share in the Burdens of Empire’: Toronto’s Catholics and the Great War, 1914–1918,” in *Catholics at the “Gathering Place,”* eds. Mark McGowan and Brian Clarke (Toronto: Canadian Catholic Historical Association, 1993), 188. Equally, Duff W. Crerar argues that “English-speaking Roman Catholic churchmen fought to establish a public identity as both Catholics and Canadian nationalists.” See Duff W. Crerar, “Bellicose Priests: The Wars of the Catholic Chaplains, 1914–1919,” *Canadian Catholic Historical Association, Historical Studies* 58 (1991): 21–39. See also Mark G. McGowan, “Harvesting the ‘Red Vineyard’: Catholic Religious Culture in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914–1919,” *Canadian Catholic Historical Association Historical Studies* 64 (1998): 47–70.
- 90 Neil McNeil, *The Pope and the War* (Toronto: W.E. Blake, 1918), 1. See also McNeil’s biography, *George Boyle, Pioneer in Purple* (Montréal: Palm Publishers, 1951).
- 91 For a concise overview of the Anglophone Catholic (predominantly Irish) wartime experience and the continuing hostility towards French Canadians, see Adrian Ciani, “An Imperialist Irishman: Bishop Michael Fallon, the Diocese of London and the Great War,” *Canadian Catholic Historical Association, Historical Studies* 74 (2008): 73–94. One of the most stringent opponents of Bourassa was Father Alfred Edward Burke, who frequently and venomously denounced Bourassa and French Canadians. See Mark G. McGowan, “Burke, Alfred Edward,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online* (www.biographi.ca).
- 92 Durocher, “Henri Bourassa.” More work remains to be done on the role of the Catholic Church hierarchy during the war. Durocher’s article hints at complex reasons behind the Catholic Church’s support of the Borden government, but offers little explanation for it.
- 93 Several historians discuss Mannix in detail, such as B.A. Santamaria, *Daniel Mannix — The Quality of Leadership* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1984), though one of the most recent works, James Griffin, *Daniel Mannix: Ambiguity and Ambition in World War One* (Armidale, New South Wales: University of New England Armidale, 2001), is also useful. See also James Griffin, “Mannix, Daniel (1864–1963),” *Australian Dictionary of*

Biography Online (<http://adb.anu.edu.au/>).

- 94 Gallagher, 169.
- 95 M.M. Abbenhuis, “‘Too Good to be True?’ European Hopes for Neutrality Before 1914,” in *Small Powers in the Age of Total War, 1900–1940*, eds. Herman Amersfoort and Wim Klinkert (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 28.
- 96 Before the war, Ewart published *The Kingdom Papers* (1914), which attacked Canada’s relationship with Britain, but stopped publishing during the war; only in 1925 did he publish *The Independence Papers*. Ewart, who was a regular correspondent with Bourassa before the war, stated that he would not speak out against it and admitted that he feared the potential backlash and did not wish to be unpatriotic. Their letters stop until late in the war and after conscription. See Bourassa’s correspondence with him at Library and Archives Canada, Bourassa Fonds, R8069-0-5, reel M-722.
- 97 See Kenneth McNaught, *A Prophet in Politics: A Biography of J.S. Woodsworth* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959).