

# **“What can I say to them?”<sup>1</sup>: Messages about War and Peace in a Mennonite Children’s Periodical during World War II**

**David M. Csinos**, *Emmanuel College of Victoria  
University, University of Toronto*

“Seek Peace, and Pursue It”<sup>2</sup> was the theme of the summer 2012 Gather ’Round curriculum, produced in part by MennoMedia. For thirteen weeks, Mennonite congregations across North America taught children about the Anabaptist core tenet of peacemaking. This Mennonite curriculum explicitly educated children about war and peace, but it is worth asking whether this always has been the case. Have other Mennonite resources for children’s religious education throughout history attempted to educate children about war, violence, and peace?

This article is a preliminary study of how one Anabaptist denomination addressed issues of war and peace during a period of particular crisis through the publication of a children’s periodical. Beginning in 1939, the General Conference Mennonite Church produced a paper for children called *Junior Messenger*. This periodical, published during World War II, reflects ideas and practices common in Mennonite

communities at the time, including ambiguities about the war, and a traditional view that children were socialized into pacifism, rather than formally taught about pacifism. In general, the lack of material directly addressing war and peace in this periodical suggests it contributed to a larger silence about such issues in Mennonite communities during this period.

While *Junior Messenger* offers insight into many subjects, including missions, patriotism, and gender roles, my study remains limited to material that explicitly refers to issues of war and peace. Before moving into a discussion about *Junior Messenger*, however, it is important to offer some background information about pacifism, the Mennonite experience of World War II, Mennonite theology of childhood, and children during the war.

### War and Peace among Mennonites

Anabaptism arose in critical response to the Protestant Reformation of the early sixteenth century. The first Anabaptists were followers of Ulrich Zwingli and other Swiss reformers, but they believed that these reformers compromised the vision of the true church by failing to keep church and state separate from one another. As Zwingli, John Calvin, and others established state churches, early Anabaptists distanced themselves from these reformers and separated themselves from the state in a movement that became known as the Radical Reformation.

Pacifism was a teaching within Anabaptism from its earliest days when Conrad Grebel and George Blaurock baptized one another and several others in January 1525.<sup>3</sup> That same year, Blaurock clearly stated that the sword “has no place beside the cross.”<sup>4</sup> In 1527, Swiss Anabaptists gathered together to pen the Schleitheim Confession, a declaration of core articles of the Anabaptist faith. Article six states that as Christ refused to put to death the woman in adultery, so Christians are to refrain from “the death of the flesh.”<sup>5</sup> In the earliest extant writing of Menno Simons, the namesake of Mennonites, the priest-turned-Anabaptist-leader states that the sword is the weapon for the unfaithful, whereas those who are faithful to Christ use the Word of God as their weapon.<sup>6</sup> From the beginning of the movement, Anabaptists have denounced violence and war, even when their pacifist views resulted in martyrdom.

Despite the value that Mennonites have historically attributed to the peace position, explicit practices of peace education have not always been present in their communities. Rather, many Mennonites believed pacifism to be something that was naturally inherited or developed through socialization and demonstration, rather than explanation.<sup>7</sup>

This lack of explicit teaching about peace might explain, in part, the divergent responses that Mennonite communities have taken to the reality of war.<sup>8</sup>

At the outbreak of World War II, Mennonites in Canada and the United States responded in a number of different ways. Some held firm to Mennonite beliefs about pacifism, setting up and serving in Civilian Public Service (CPS) and Alternative Service camps for conscientious objectors (COs). Others enlisted in noncombatant duty with the armed forces. Surprisingly, thousands of Mennonites enlisted in the military and served in active duty during the war. Still others, however, felt that all of these options betrayed the core tenets of the Mennonite faith and the gospel of Jesus Christ; many who strongly believed in the separation of church and state faced prosecution for refusing to serve the government in any capacity when drafted.

Clearly, there was no uniformity in belief or practice among North American Mennonites when faced with the reality of World War II. In both Canada and the US, Mennonite communities and conferences disagreed on the nature of CPS and Alternative Service camps,<sup>9</sup> whether or not (and how) to work with governments in setting up service for COs,<sup>10</sup> the value of CPS camps,<sup>11</sup> whether or not noncombatant military service was appropriate,<sup>12</sup> how Mennonites should fraternize with other pacifist groups,<sup>13</sup> and whether or not (and how) support should be given to members of the flock who enlisted in active service. The war offered reasons for Mennonites to rejoice at an opportunity to be a "city on a hill" witnessing to peace,<sup>14</sup> and to demonstrate their faith,<sup>15</sup> as well as reasons to be proud of their work in CPS and Alternative Service camps.<sup>16</sup> Yet at the same time, the war provided reasons to be disillusioned and mournful about Mennonites who enlisted in active military service.

Other ambiguities in the Mennonites' position during World War II include disagreements and a sense of ambivalence regarding the separation of church and state. Many Mennonites understood their work in CPS and Alternative Service camps – particularly in the United States – to be a means of proving civic responsibility and carving out a place for themselves as part of society.<sup>17</sup> Despite their refusal to engage in military service, and notwithstanding the Mennonite tenet of separation of church and state, these men believed they were "proving" that they were good citizens, even as they dissented from the government's calls to military service. Similarly, some Mennonites were grateful to work with governments to establish alternative service options, even as they refused to submit to their countries' need for soldiers.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, some Mennonites who enlisted sought to demonstrate fidelity to their country, but were seen by other Mennonites as being unfaithful to their religious communities and traditions, as betraying

the community's beliefs in pacifism and church-state separation.<sup>19</sup> In fact, many of those who were committed to being peaceful and to refraining from physically wounding others through acts of war ended up emotionally and spiritually wounding enlisted Mennonites.<sup>20</sup> Many Mennonite communities shunned returning servicemen unless they repented of their involvement in the war. In the words of one Canadian Mennonite World War II veteran, the response of the larger community was "a cruel way to treat anybody."<sup>21</sup> Finally, the community's position during the war was further complicated by the views of those Mennonites who immigrated to North America from Germany, many of whom had mixed emotions about a war between the old country and their new homeland.<sup>22</sup>

When one looks at the numbers, some of these troubling ambiguities plaguing North American Mennonites seem understandable. During the war, 3,876 American Mennonite draftees served in regular military service, 1,397 served in noncombatant service, and 4,536 served in CPS. Thus, almost 54 percent of all drafted Mennonite and Amish men in the United States chose to carry out their time of service in the military.<sup>23</sup> Of the nearly 17,000 Mennonite men of military age north of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel, 70 percent (about 12,000) served in active military service or alternative service during the war,<sup>24</sup> with approximately two-thirds (7,543) claiming status as COs. One in three (about 4,500) who served did so in the military.<sup>25</sup> With these numbers, it is no wonder that "in virtually every denomination, church leaders were troubled."<sup>26</sup>

## **Children, Mennonite Theology, and World War II**

According to T.D. Regehr, the peace tradition was not widely taught in Mennonite communities before World War II.<sup>27</sup> For children growing up in these communities, it was fairly rare to learn about the Mennonites' historic peace position. While this might be surprising, it can be explained, in part, by the ambiguous views of children and childhood that were (and still are) common in many Mennonite communities.

Holly Allen, in her recent essay on Anabaptist theological perspectives of children, suggests that the "Anabaptist view of children is tied directly to their practice of believer's baptism."<sup>28</sup> If children need not be baptized, it follows that they are not understood to be inherently tainted by original sin. However, many Anabaptists also argue that children are not inherently pure or innocent. The conventional Anabaptist view of childhood represents a third, middle way between the two extremes of total depravity and total innocence. It "upholds a strong view of sin's power and radical dependence upon God's grace for salvation while moving away from the concepts of original sin and

total depravity.”<sup>29</sup> In an essay on “the child” in the writing of Menno Simons, Keith Miller refers to this view as “complex innocence,” which he describes as “a recognition of the absence of both faithfulness and sinfulness in children, but an ‘innocence,’ as [Menno Simons] describes it, tempered with the acknowledgement of an inherited Adamic nature predisposed toward sinning.”<sup>30</sup> This is a more complex and nuanced notion of childhood. It lends itself to ambiguity and misunderstanding, which may have contributed to a relative silence and confusion about Mennonite theologies of childhood.

While it was clear in many traditional Mennonite communities that the primary responsibility of caring for children lay with their mothers, this larger confusion over the precise nature of childhood has caused controversies regarding children’s education.<sup>31</sup> For example, while many North American Mennonite communities accepted Sunday schools during the latter half of the nineteenth century, others opposed these new forms of childhood education because they “were convinced that religious instruction was primarily a family responsibility.”<sup>32</sup> Since children were not baptized and thus could not be church members, their place within churches, and communities’ responsibilities toward children, were not always clear.

Only months before the outbreak of World War II, a new resource for Mennonite children was launched. On January 1, 1939, the General Conference Mennonite Church began publishing *Junior Messenger*, an eight-page bi-monthly periodical for youngsters.<sup>33</sup> Although this paper was produced in the United States for readership primarily consisting of American children, it was also distributed in Canada and contained a few articles about and letters from Mennonites in Canada. *Junior Messenger* was meant to encourage young people (from children to readers in their early teens) to develop the character of good Mennonites. It included material about Christian living, strong morals, and the Bible; each edition contained a missions page, a Sunday school lesson, and Bible puzzles. Even though the peace position is central to the Mennonite faith – and caused many debates during World War II – issues of *Junior Messenger* during the war contain relatively little material about war and peace. Evidently, the periodical was not used as a primary vehicle for teaching children about pacifism. This absence might not be surprising, however, given that the peace position was traditionally seen as something to be “caught” through socialization and demonstration rather than taught through educational resources like *Junior Messenger*.

The lack of explicit teaching about war and peace in this children’s periodical contrasts sharply with propagandist materials and events for wider audiences of children in North America. In Canada, schools promoted allegiance to the British Empire and helped to mobilize

children for war efforts. They held assemblies in which students sang patriotic songs, discussed the war, and heard about “the heroic sacrifices and dauntless progress achieved by Allied forces.”<sup>34</sup> Such efforts were not restricted to public schools, as historians Tamara Myers and Mary Anne Poutanen make clear. “Exposed systematically to a Protestant view that emphasized loyalty to empire and nation, students [at Quebec’s Protestant schools] sang, read, drilled, and celebrated Empire Day, all of which reinforced patriotic feelings toward England,” they write. “Public schools across the country echoed similar allegiances.”<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Junior Red Cross programs encouraged girls to send clothing and food to servicemen and young war victims, and Children’s Brigade enrolled older boys to work on farms that lost labourers to the military.<sup>36</sup>

In the United States, when President Roosevelt declared war following the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the entire country found itself at war. Children were also considered to be involved in the war and were expected to make contributors to the nation’s war effort. A 1943 booklet for young people imparted the message to children that they were enlisted as “citizen soldiers.”<sup>37</sup> As Steven Mintz writes, “above all, [the war] politicized the lives of the young; it altered the rhymes they repeated, the cartoons and movies they watched, and the songs they heard, and instilled an intense nationalism that persisted into the postwar years.”<sup>38</sup> In Canada and the US, children were encouraged to become committed to their nations’ war efforts through everything from school lessons to propagandist Donald Duck cartoons and *Johnny Canuck* comics.<sup>39</sup>

It was a different story for Mennonite children. The main English-language publication for Mennonite youth, *Junior Messenger*, printed little material about war and peace. However, every so often some writing about these issues appeared, including the following poem by Nora Keen Duffy:

When we are grown-up people,  
We’ll run the country right;  
We do not think that neighbors  
Should bomb and shoot and fight.

We love the little children  
Who live across the sea;  
When we get well acquainted,  
What happy friends we’ll be!

We’ll love and help each other,  
Instead of causing pain;

We'll work for peace and never  
Have any war again!<sup>40</sup>

Although writings that directly engage World War II are rare in the pages of *Junior Messenger*, they are worth considering closely. In a period when the larger Mennonite community was conflicted in its response to the war effort, such passages offer a glimpse into the messages about war and peace that this periodical conveyed to Mennonite children during World War II.<sup>41</sup>

### A Small but Distinct Presence

War, peace, and pacifism were not regular topics among the pages of *Junior Messenger*. In the more than 1800 pages printed throughout these years, I found only 57 overt references to war or the military. Yet a small amount of material on related topics reveals insight into pacifism and war. There were 19 references to peace in relation to everyday life of children (quarrelling with siblings, forgiving enemies at school, etc.). *Junior Messenger* included 23 pieces about the United States in which war or the military were mentioned. Peacemaking and pacifism in relation to war turned up in 23 pieces published during World War II. When one accounts for overlap between some of these broad categories, material about war and peace can be found in 93 pieces and on 110 pages. Of the 1864 pages that the General Conference published during the war, only 5.9 percent (1 in 17) contained writing that even remotely referred to issues of war and peace. And in many cases, this material was quite short and indirect.

Of these 93 stories, essays, poems, letters, and short sayings that mention war and peace, the great majority appeared during the latter years of the war. In the years before the attack on Pearl Harbor and the declaration of war by the United States, just eight pieces of writing spoke of war and peace. It may not be surprising that issues published before the attack on Pearl Harbor were fairly silent about war and peace, since the denomination published this periodical in the US and seemed to intend it primarily for American children. But the lack of material continued throughout 1942. During the first year of US involvement in the war, only five pieces about war and peace appeared. Things dramatically changed in 1943, when the General Conference began publishing *Junior Messenger* once a week instead of twice each month. During this year, the paper included 25 pieces (about one piece every two issues) that spoke of war and peace. Taking into account that twice as many issues were published in 1943 than in 1942, this is still an increase of 250 percent. There was an increase to 34 pieces in 1944,

and a decrease to 21 in 1945 (interestingly, 12 of these appeared after the war ended). The vast majority of material about war and peace in *Junior Messenger* was published in the latter years of the war: 86 percent was published during or after 1943, and almost 60 percent was published in 1944 and 1945.

The nature of these materials in wartime *Junior Messenger* is diverse, but it can be usefully placed into a number of distinct categories. These categories are general and there is a degree of overlap among them, but they offer a way of analyzing the broader message about war and peace offered by *Junior Messenger*.

TOPIC	#
<b>Everyday Peace</b>	<b>19</b>
• Peacemaking in relationships	9
• Loving/forgiving enemies	11
<b>Mention of War/Military in Pieces about the United States</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Peace in Relation to War</b>	<b>23</b>
• Peace during times of war	9
• Sinfulness/evils of war	14
♦ Sacredness of human life	2
<b>Courage/Strength to be a Pacifist</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Explicit Mention of War</b>	<b>57</b>
• War/military metaphors	10
• Mention of war in history or scripture	22
• Mention of or reference to World War II	27
♦ War relief	2
♦ Children mentioning family members involved in war in letters to editor	6
▪ Child's family member in Civilian Public Service camp	3
▪ Child's family member in military	3
♦ Life in Civilian Public Service camps	9

The first category, “everyday peacemaking,” refers to material about peace in personal relationships rather than situations of military conflict. A total of 19 pieces fit into this category, with eight focused on peacemaking in relationships, ten on how to love and forgive personal enemies, and one straddling these two subcategories. An example of an article on peacemaking in relationships is a brief story about two girls – one quarrelsome and one peaceful – with some words encouraging children to be peaceful.<sup>42</sup> The theme of forgiving those who wrong you can be seen in a short saying printed in November 1943: “If we become angry at those who wrong us, we are as wrong as they are. The Lord Jesus will make us sweet and forgiving if we ask Him.”<sup>43</sup> While articles and sayings in this category do not speak of peace specifically



during times of war, they encourage children to develop an attitude of peacefulness, peacemaking, and forgiveness in daily living.

A second category consists of articles, stories, and poems that mentioned war or the military in pieces about the United States, many of which seem aimed at instilling patriotic attitudes in children. A total of 23 pieces published during the war fall into this category. Several of them are stories about the good character and deeds of Abraham Lincoln and George Washington. Others include articles about American history and culture, like why the flag is called "Old Glory,"<sup>44</sup> how the term "Uncle Sam" developed,<sup>45</sup> and the "Origin and Meaning of Memorial Day."<sup>46</sup> Several of these articles appeared near American holidays (Independence Day, Thanksgiving, birthdays of Lincoln and Washington) and make passing references to war, like Lincoln's leadership during the American Civil War and Washington's adventures during the Revolutionary War. Yet the articles do not criticize war nor do they speak of the fact that the involvement of American heroes in war could be seen as compromising their Christian faith and character.

A third topic – and the first to be explicitly related to issues of war and conscientious objection – is that of peace in relation to war. This category includes two types of material. The first is made up of nine pieces of writing that clearly refer to peace and peacemaking during times of war. One example is an article that speaks of how Christians in the United States must "not become war-minded; we must love peace and do all we can to win our country completely to Christ."<sup>47</sup> The second subcategory includes fourteen writings with messages about the sinfulness and horrors of war, including two that teach about the sacredness of human life. One of these pieces is the poem from July 1941 (before the US entered the war) quoted above, a portion of which reads, "We do not think that neighbors / Should bomb and shoot and fight."<sup>48</sup> This material clearly aimed to instill the value of pacifism in children, teaching that peace is the way of Jesus, that Christians should not kill people, and that God has made each person sacred.

Yet *Junior Messenger* also included work noting that being a follower of Jesus' way of peace is difficult work and that Christians may be challenged and persecuted because of their beliefs. Accordingly, a fourth category of the periodical's writing on war consists of material related to the courage and strength needed to be a pacifist. Six articles can be found in this category, the first of which reminded children "It takes a great deal of courage to meet harshness with gentleness."<sup>49</sup> The other five pieces of writing appeared during the last ten months of the war, and they include Sunday school lessons that teach children that they must not obey the government if it tells them to do something that goes against God,<sup>50</sup> and a fictional letter from a CPS camper who told children that

several early Anabaptists were “put to death or had to leave their homes and go to a strange country because they could not fight.”<sup>51</sup>

The final category includes material that explicitly refers to war or the military. Fifty-seven pieces are found in this category, ten of which are writings that used war- and military-based metaphors for Christian faith and living. An article entitled “Three Good Soldiers” (printed in March of 1942 and reprinted in November of 1943) told of a boy who declared to his family that he wanted to be “a soldier in God’s army,” a metaphor referring to Christians who are obedient and faithful to God and God’s commands. Upon making this announcement, the boy’s father replied by telling him how God’s soldiers behave: they are to be courteous and obedient and serve God with gladness.<sup>52</sup> A second subcategory includes twenty-two pieces that mention war and the military – often in passing – in historical and biblical stories. Interestingly, many heroes in these tales (including Washington, Lincoln, Gideon, David, and Caleb) were directly involved in war – often in leadership – but are praised as examples of faithfulness to God rather than criticized for taking the lives of their fellow human beings.

The largest subsection of writings in this final category consists of twenty-six articles, stories, letters, and short sayings that explicitly mention or reference World War II (yet the material that directly mentions the war appears on just 1.7 percent of the 1864 pages printed during World War II – about one page in sixty!). Very few of these articles go into detail about the war; most simply mention it in passing. An article in June of 1943, for example, says, “Just as men the world over are fighting one another, so they are fighting against God’s laws in their hearts, and that is just why there is so much trouble in the world.” The article goes on to speak of peacefulness in friendships.<sup>53</sup> Another article begins by stating that “the Japanese American war had started, and all funds from abroad had stopped to come in,”<sup>54</sup> and moved on to tell of a missionary family who demonstrates their faith to a stranger.

Even within this subcategory, material can be broken down further. There are two pieces that speak of war relief work – one printed near the beginning of the US involvement in the war, urging children to send in clothing for war relief efforts,<sup>55</sup> and the other published a few months before the war ended, which offered seventeen ways that “Juniors” can help in relief work.<sup>56</sup> Another grouping in this category consists of six short letters to the editor in which children briefly mention having a family member involved in some form of service – three tell of family members in CPS camps, and three speak of family members in the military. It is interesting to note that while the editor’s responses to children with family members in CPS camps sometimes includes some words about how readers should encourage and pray for men in the camps,<sup>57</sup> any word about praying for those in the military is directed

only to the child who wrote the letter, and not to the paper's general readership. "I expect your daddy wishes he could see you all again. Don't forget to pray for him!" reads one response.<sup>58</sup> Finally, upon the surrender of Japan and Germany, *Junior Messenger* printed a series of nine front-page articles entitled "A Letter from Big Brother," educating readers about life in CPS camps. These fictitious letters were written by Mennonite Central Committee representatives and defended the important work of CPS campers. "[S]ome people say that we C.P.S. men are not serving our country because we are not fighting in the Army," one letter reads. "But we believe that we are serving in a better way than fighting: we are helping to make people well and happy instead of cold and hungry and homeless."<sup>59</sup>

### ***Junior Messenger: An Educational Tool?***

While *Junior Messenger* offered children intermittent messages about war, peace, and pacifism, the relative lack of discussion around these issues shows that the General Conference did not see the paper as a means of educating children about war and peace. Rather, it taught children about morals, the Bible, mission work, and even how to be a good American. The fact that most of its references to war and peace were buried within stories or letters with a larger message suggests that the paper is not to be understood as a primary vehicle for educating children about these issues.

*Junior Messenger* is evidence that, in keeping with Mennonite tradition, the General Conference Mennonite Church assumed that children would be socialized into the pacifist way of life rather than explicitly educated about it. Pacifism was to be "caught" from family and community rather than taught through educational materials.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, there is some evidence in this periodical that it was assumed that true Mennonite Christians were also pacifists. For example, a fictional letter from a CPS camper declares "Since I am a Christian, Jesus put love in my heart for every one; I just cannot fight."<sup>61</sup> Another article insists that the United States is not acting like a Christian nation because it is at war.<sup>62</sup> The underlying assumption of such passages is clear: being Mennonite (or Christian) and being a pacifist goes hand-in-hand. The fact that pacifism was left as an assumption in Mennonite communities, rather than foregrounded through a careful and clear argument, may have contributed to the phenomenon of Mennonite involvement in the military during World War II. That is, the assumption that Mennonite children and youth ought to have "caught" the community's pacifism might not have been sufficient to keep young Mennonites out of the military during the

war – particularly considering the dilemmas and ambiguities common among Mennonite communities around issues of war and peace, as outlined above.

Another possible reason for the relative silence on war, peace, and pacifism in the periodical is that these subjects were considered unpleasant for children<sup>63</sup> – and it was unnecessary for young people to know about them because they were too young to join the military. This may have been why so much of the periodical's material about forgiving one's enemies and being a "peacemaker,"<sup>64</sup> to use the language of an early *Junior Messenger* article, was related to refraining from quarrelling with friends and family members. Perhaps this is also a reason that only one piece of writing in the periodical explicitly addressed the realities of being a pacifist during times of war.<sup>65</sup>

Throughout the hundreds of issues of *Junior Messenger* published during World War II, ample evidence suggests that the periodical was not well-utilized to educate children about war and peace. Even though, as one article stated, it is "better to build up a Christian philosophy in [children's] minds at an early age,"<sup>66</sup> pacifism was one aspect of the Mennonite philosophy that was clearly left to families and communities to impart to young people.

### A Few (Mixed) Messages About War and Peace

Even though *Junior Messenger* does not seem to have been intentionally used to teach children about war and peace, it did include some material that offered messages about these issues. Even these messages, however, were often ambiguous and even contradictory, and it seems that some of the moral ambivalence regarding such issues common among Mennonite communities made their way into this children's paper.

First, the ambiguous relationship between Mennonites and the state is reflected throughout *Junior Messenger*. In particular, a number of articles, poems, and stories taught children to become good American citizens (as mentioned, although some Mennonite children in Canada read *Junior Messenger*, the General Conference produced it in the United States and seems to have primarily intended it for American children). Youngsters learned about great figures in US history, and were taught about American literature and common American sayings. And, as mentioned previously, many of these stories were about times of war, particularly the Revolutionary and Civil wars. Yet *Junior Messenger* never called these wars from history, or the military involvement of many historical American heroes, into question. In fact, not only were stories about the military leadership of Lincoln and

Washington included in *Junior Messenger*, the stories portrayed these men as good “Christian gentlemen” that young Americans – including the paper’s readers – should emulate. For example, one article about Washington as “a Christian gentleman” spoke of the fact that “he trusted in God and made no secret of it,” and that he prayed for his country and his soldiers and brought victory to his army.<sup>67</sup> While there was an implicit assumption in other places of this periodical that true Christians are pacifists, it appears as though some involvement in war, particularly if it occurred in key instances in American history, was deemed appropriate. In another article, Washington’s life was held up as “an exemplary life for men of his day to follow, and is still a worthy pattern after which to fashion our lives.”<sup>68</sup> Given the material in the periodical that spoke of the horrors and sinfulness of war, one might assume there to be an implicit caveat – “except for the fact that he was in the military” – in the encouragement to live like Washington, but no such message is clear.

Even though some issues of *Junior Messenger* reminded children that war, fighting, and killing is wrong and that human life is sacred, others included words of gratitude for soldiers who “suffered and died for us that we might enjoy the privileges and freedom of this glorious country.”<sup>69</sup> The paper encouraged children to decorate the graves of fallen soldiers and offer words and acts of appreciation for veterans. Some pieces also included words of gratitude for the government. In the final “letter from big brother,” for example, the author states “our government has been very good in letting us do C.P.S. work instead of helping the Army.”<sup>70</sup> Clearly, *Junior Messenger* imparted the message that its readers should be grateful for the government and people in the military.

But not all messages about the government were positive. In some instances, the paper taught children that the government was wrong in going to war and it discouraged its readers from participating in anything to do with war – including buying war stamps and playing war games,<sup>71</sup> activities common among children in North America during World War II.<sup>72</sup> One piece of writing noted “there are many things [in the US] which are not as they should be in a Christian nation,”<sup>73</sup> specifically naming the fact that the nation was at war. Furthermore, even though *Junior Messenger* instructed readers to decorate graves of fallen American soldiers, it discouraged them from having victory gardens that were used to raise funds for war bonds, like those made by non-pacifist children.<sup>74</sup> All this conflicting and confusing material is evidence that the ambiguous relationship of Mennonites to governments – one filled with gratitude and criticism, patriotism and dissent – surfaced throughout the issues of *Junior Messenger* published during the war.

The paper portrayed similarly mixed messages and a sense of ambivalence towards enemy nations. As mentioned, a number of Mennonites had immigrated to North America directly from Germany and had mixed emotions about a war between their new home and their former home. Some material printed in *Junior Messenger* spoke of how God loves all children and how all children ought to be respected – including those in Japan and Germany. A poem entitled “Little Folks” read: “Little folks in China land, / Little folks in far Japan, / Little folks in every land, / Are our brothers too.”<sup>75</sup> Yet even though this periodical attempted to foster brotherhood/sisterhood among their North American readers and children in enemy countries, one of its Sunday school lessons began with these words: “We hear a great deal about our enemies, the Germans and the Japanese, how cruel they are, how they make children suffer and how they destroy homes and schools and churches.”<sup>76</sup> It went on to teach children about how Jesus said people should treat their enemies. Thus, ambiguous notions of people in Axis countries – brothers and sisters yet cruel destroyers – can be found in *Junior Messenger*. Readers were taught about children in these nations and were told to pray for them, even as they were told that the Germans and Japanese were cruel.

A third and final ambiguity in *Junior Messenger* further reflects the confusing and uncertain notions of childhood within Mennonite communities. As mentioned earlier, Mennonites inherited (from their namesake) a notion of the “complex innocence” of children, a view that places children somewhere between complete innocence and total depravity. This theological understanding of childhood is somewhat ambiguous and can easily be misunderstood, which was certainly evident in the writings about war and peace published in *Junior Messenger* during World War II. In some instances, the periodical conveyed the message that children are in need of protection and must be shielded from the horrors of war. In fact, this may be one reason why there was so little writing about war in the paper, and even less material that explicitly mentioned the war that was raging on at the time. Instances in which World War II (and pacifism in relation to the war) were addressed in detail are even rarer. Yet despite being part of a pacifist tradition, Mennonite children in North America had their daily lives directly affected by World War II. Brothers, fathers, and other family members served in the military or CPS and Alternative Service camps. Mothers and sisters moved to the city to find employment or took on the loads of responsibilities that remained at their farms. Even the children themselves had to deal with issues of patriotism and war games at school; in 1940, twenty-seven Mennonite children were suspended from schools in Kitchener, Ontario for refusing to engage in patriotic behaviour like declaring allegiance to the Crown.<sup>77</sup> The lack of

material about an issue that surely affected the lives and communities of *Junior Messenger* readers might have been the partial result of a wish to shelter Mennonite children from learning about the horrors of war. It is no wonder that the paper encouraged readers in one short article to think only of pleasant things.<sup>78</sup>

While the relative lack of writing about the war in *Junior Messenger* suggests a theological understanding of children as sinless and somewhat innocent (and a concurrent wish to protect children from hearing about the evils of war), several pieces published during the war do seem to signal a belief that it is impossible to completely shelter children from learning about war. World War II may have been horrible, they seem to suggest, but children were going to hear about it anyway and, as just mentioned, it affected their daily lives. One article already quoted, for example, began with the assumption that children had already heard much about the Japanese and Germans that their countries were fighting against.<sup>79</sup> But the clearest example of the journal's complex theology regarding children – as neither completely innocent nor totally depraved – and the resulting lack of material about war and peace, can be found tucked away in a Thanksgiving story from 1944. After a child asks his mother “is it right to have a good time and a big feast when there is so much war and suffering in the world,” his mother wonders how to respond:

(Bless your heart, child! Why do people tell children about all these horrors? But to avoid their finding out, one would have to keep the radio out of the home, and the newspaper. But we really cannot keep them in a cocoon of ignorance, after all, and then see them disillusioned some bitter day. It is better to build up a Christian philosophy in their minds at an early age. Surely children are keen, we could never conceal the condition of the world from them unless we'd imprison them away from all associates. They must needs find out. What can I say to him?)<sup>80</sup>

In light of the periodical's complex negotiation of childhood, even the few pieces of writing about war and peace published during World War II can be understood as being meant to help children learn about the Mennonite peace position, even if the paper as a whole did not have this purpose. Some articles taught children about the sacredness of human life, that Jesus preached peace and forgiveness, and that even though good Mennonites ought to be patriotic citizens, “our first duty is to God, and if our government asks us to do something which is contrary to the commands of God, we must not do them even if it means punishment to us.”<sup>81</sup> While these messages were fairly rare, there is

evidence that at least some articles and stories in *Junior Messenger* taught children about the Mennonite values of pacifism and primary obedience to Jesus' teachings about peace.

Additionally, the paper offered children glimpses into the important work undertaken by men in CPS camps during the war. The nine fictional "letters from big brother" speak of contributions of CPS workers to tree-planting initiatives,<sup>82</sup> medical testing and advancement,<sup>83</sup> mental hospitals,<sup>84</sup> and forest fire fighting.<sup>85</sup> And in some of these letters, the fictitious writers inform readers about why they are engaged in alternative service rather than serving in the military. One letter reads, "I believe Jesus taught that I should love every one. If I love every one, I can't help to kill some people."<sup>86</sup> Another stated that "some people say that we should serve our country by joining the Army. . . . We are sure we are obeying God's commands to love every one, and it is much more important to obey Him than to do what men tell us to do."<sup>87</sup> The author of another letter writes "I am glad that I can serve my country by protecting the lumber sources here instead of by helping with the war and in that way making millions of people cold and homeless."<sup>88</sup> It is evident that, even if it was scarce and if much of it appeared after the war, at least some material in *Junior Messenger* did attempt to teach children about the Mennonite view of pacifism. Whether this was the intention of the authors, editors, and the General Conference Mennonite Church begs further research.

### Conclusion

The 1864 pages of *Junior Messenger* published during World War II offer a wealth of information waiting to be mined. In this essay I engaged in a preliminary study – the only research about this periodical of which I am aware – exploring how the periodical was used to educate children about pacifism, and surveyed the rather ambiguous messages about war and peace that it offered to its young readers. Three conclusions surface in light of this research. First, the lack of material about war and peace and the even greater lack of content that directly mentioned World War II demonstrate that *Junior Messenger* maintained the traditional view that pacifism was something children were socialized into rather than formally taught. Second, in those rare instances where the periodical did offer messages about war and peace, it reflected the ambiguous, complex, and even contradictory views about World War II, relationships to governments and homelands in Europe, and theological views of children that were common among North American Mennonite communities. Third, rather than intentionally educating children about Mennonite views of war and peace,



*Junior Messenger* as a whole contributed to a pre-existing silence and a relative lack of teaching about these issues in North American Mennonite communities.

These conclusions are based on research that is admittedly preliminary. There is still much insight in *Junior Messenger* that is waiting to be uncovered. It can be studied not only for messages about war and peace, but also to better understand how children were taught about many related subjects, including patriotism, Christian morality and behaviour, missions work, and gender roles. Future research might also take up some of the many questions that have arisen from my preliminary study: Why was material about CPS work omitted until after World War II had ended? Why were the letters from CPS camps fictional, when many campers surely sent letters to their families and communities? Does the material printed in *Junior Messenger* reflect issues and dilemmas facing the General Conference Mennonite Church throughout the war? What are we to make of the fact that so much writing was aimed at encouraging children to become patriotic US citizens, when Mennonites have traditionally valued the separation of church and state? What can the material printed in this periodical tell us about Mennonite theologies of childhood? What effect did *Junior Messenger* have on the young people who read it? Did Canadian children respond to the paper differently than their neighbours to the south? Clearly, this essay has simply scratched the surface in the wealth of insight that *Junior Messenger* can offer about a topic that has been undervalued and overlooked in many Mennonite communities: children.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The title of this essay is adapted from a line in Ada Cassell Sell, "The Brown Turkey," *Junior Messenger*, November 19, 1944, 7-8. I am grateful for a number of people who offered feedback to early drafts of this article: Phyllis Airhart, Chris Hrynkow, Jonathan Knight, Jin Woo Lee, Carmen Celestini, Susanne Guenther Loewen, Andrew Martin, and Sarah Freeman.
- <sup>2</sup> Gather 'Round: Hearing and Sharing God's Good News. *Seek Peace and Pursue It*, ed. Anna Speicher (Brethren Press/MennoMedia: Elgin, IL/Harrisonburg, PA/Waterloo, ON, 2012).
- <sup>3</sup> Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity, Volume 2: The Reformation to the Present Day* (New York: Harper Collins, 1985), 54-5.
- <sup>4</sup> George Blaurock, "Reminiscences of George Blaurock: An Excerpt from the Hutterite Chronicle, 1525," in *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*, ed. George H. Williams and Angel M. Mergal (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 42.
- <sup>5</sup> *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. "Schleitheim Confession (Anabaptist, 1527)," <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/S345.html#ART6> (April 10, 2011).
- <sup>6</sup> Menno Simons, "The Blasphemy of John of Leiden," in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons, c. 1496-1561*, translated by Leonard Verduin and edited by J. C.

Wenger (Scottsdale, PA/Waterloo, ON: Herald, 1984), 34, 43. It is ironic that at times throughout the history of Anabaptism, including the ways in which Mennonite soldiers were dealt with after World War II, the Bible was often used in hurtful ways.

- <sup>7</sup> Paul Toews, *Mennonites in American Society, 1930-1970: Modernity and the Persistence of Religious Community* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1996), 107.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 156, 174.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 150. See also T. D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970: A People Transformed* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 38.
- <sup>10</sup> Albert N. Keim, "Mennonites and Selective Service in World War II: An Ambiguous Relationship," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 66, no. 4 (1992): 522.
- <sup>11</sup> Toews, *Mennonites in American Society*, 158. Keim, "Mennonites and Selective Service," 514-5. E. Morris Sider, "Life and Labor in the Alternative Work Service Camps in Canada during World War II," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 66, no. 4 (1992): 582.
- <sup>12</sup> Toews, *Mennonites in American Society*, 150.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 139, 141. Paul Toews, "The Impact of Alternative Service on the American Mennonite World: A Critical Evaluation," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 66, no. 4 (1992): 619.
- <sup>15</sup> Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 65.
- <sup>16</sup> Sider, "Life and Labor," 586.
- <sup>17</sup> Toews, *Mennonites in American Society*, 141. Keim, "Mennonites and Selective Service," 517.
- <sup>18</sup> Keim, "Mennonites and Selective Service."
- <sup>19</sup> Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 136.
- <sup>20</sup> Keith L. Sprunger and John D. Thiesen, "Mennonite Military Service in World War II: An Oral History Approach," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 66, no. 4 (1992): 483-4.
- <sup>21</sup> *The Pacifist Who Went to War*, online, directed by David Neufeld (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada/Office national du film du Canada, 2002).
- <sup>22</sup> Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 41.
- <sup>23</sup> Sprunger and Thiesen, "Mennonite Military Service," 483. Toews, *Mennonites in American Society*, 173.
- <sup>24</sup> Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 31.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.
- <sup>26</sup> Toews, *Mennonites in American Society*, 174.
- <sup>27</sup> Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 45.
- <sup>28</sup> Holly Catterton Allen, "Theological Perspectives on Children in the Church: Anabaptist/Believers Churches," in *Nurturing Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives and Best Practices*, ed. Holly Catterton Allen (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2008), 111.
- <sup>29</sup> Allen, "Theological Perspectives," 118.
- <sup>30</sup> Keith Graber Miller, "Complex Innocence, Obligatory Nurturance, and Parental Vigilance: 'The Child' in the Work of Menno Simons," in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 194.
- <sup>31</sup> Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 30.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.
- <sup>33</sup> *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. "Junior Messenger (Periodical)," <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/S345.html#ART6> (April 10, 2011). On January 1, 1943, the publication of *Junior Messenger* changed to a weekly schedule.
- <sup>34</sup> Jeffrey A. Keshen, "The Children's War: 'Youth Run Wild,'" in *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers: Canada's Second World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004), 202.

- <sup>35</sup> Tamara Myers and Mary Anne Poutanen, "Cadets, Curfews, and Compulsory Schooling: Mobilizing Anglophone Children in WW II Montreal," *Histoire sociale / Social History* 38, no. 76 (2005): 383.
- <sup>36</sup> Keshen, "The Children's War," 203.
- <sup>37</sup> In Steven Mintz, "Mobilizing Children for World War II," in *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 258.
- <sup>38</sup> Mintz, "Mobilizing Children for World War II," 255.
- <sup>39</sup> Keshen, "The Children's War," 202. *Der Fuehrer's Face*, DVD, directed by Jack Kinney, 1943 (Los Angeles: Walt Disney, 2004).
- <sup>40</sup> Nona Keen Duffy, "When We are Grown-Up People," *Junior Messenger*, July 15, 1941, 3.
- <sup>41</sup> During the months following the war, a number of articles and letters about peace, war, and pacifism were published, some of which include the most explicit references to war, peacemaking, and contentious objection to appear in *Junior Messenger* from 1939-1945. Even though these articles were published *after* World War II, they are important documents and I include them in my counts of material about war and peace published *during* the war.
- <sup>42</sup> T. A. van der Smissen, "Peace," *Junior Messenger*, September 23, 1945, 5.
- <sup>43</sup> *Junior Messenger*, November 14, 1943, 8.
- <sup>44</sup> Sel, "He Named the Flag 'Old Glory,'" *Junior Messenger*, July 1, 1945, 6.
- <sup>45</sup> M. Gardner, "Origin of Uncle Sam," *Junior Messenger*, February 27, 1944, 6.
- <sup>46</sup> *Junior Life*, "Origin and Meaning of Memorial Day," *Junior Messenger*, May 30, 1943, 7.
- <sup>47</sup> "What Makes a Nation Great?," *Junior Messenger*, July 2, 1944, 7.
- <sup>48</sup> Duffy, 3.
- <sup>49</sup> "Meet Evil With Good," *Junior Messenger*, May 23, 1943, 5.
- <sup>50</sup> "Found on a Penny," *Junior Messenger*, November 19, 1944, 3, 5.
- <sup>51</sup> "A Letter from Big Brother," *Junior Messenger*, December 2, 1945, 8. It is interesting to note that this passage says that early Anabaptists "could" not fight and not that they "would" not fight, implying that Christians (particularly those in the Mennonite Church) are not able to fight in a war and continue being Christian. This is an important assertion, especially considering that over half of the Mennonites involved in service during World War II served in the military, either in active or non-combative duty.
- <sup>52</sup> Margot L. Ridge, "Three Good Soldiers," *Junior Messenger*, March 1, 1942, 6.
- <sup>53</sup> June Norton, "God's Secret of Peace," *Junior Messenger*, June 13, 1943, 5.
- <sup>54</sup> H. J. Brown, "Lost and Found," *Junior Messenger*, April 30, 1944, 4.
- <sup>55</sup> "Needs and Projects," *Junior Messenger*, September 1, 1942, 4.
- <sup>56</sup> "How Juniors May Help in Relief Work," *Junior Messenger*, April 29, 1945, 4.
- <sup>57</sup> *Junior Messenger*, July 16, 1944, 8.
- <sup>58</sup> *Junior Messenger*, December 3, 1944, 8.
- <sup>59</sup> Lois Johns, "A Letter from Big Brother," *Junior Messenger*, November 25, 1945, 8.
- <sup>60</sup> Toews, *Mennonites in American Society*, 107. A more comprehensive study of Mennonite educational material for children might reveal that pacifism was explicitly taught to children, perhaps through Sunday school curricula, for instance. Yet the scope of this essay remains within the pages of *Junior Messenger* and a study of this periodical offers evidence that supports a "caught, not taught" view of children's education about pacifism.
- <sup>61</sup> Mennonite Central Committee, "A Letter from Big Brother," *Junior Messenger*, October 7, 1945, 2.
- <sup>62</sup> "What Makes a Nation Great?," *Junior Messenger*, July 2, 1944, 3, 7.
- <sup>63</sup> In a short untitled piece, children are told about "a certain lady who has made it the rule of her life to remember only the happy or lovely things," and children are implicitly encouraged to be like her. *Junior Messenger*, October 1, 1944, 8.
- <sup>64</sup> "Peacemakers," *Junior Messenger*, September 15, 1939, 7.

- <sup>65</sup> “The Invincible Leader,” *Junior Messenger*, November 21, 1943, 3, 7.
- <sup>66</sup> Ada Cassell Sell, “The Brown Turkey,” *Junior Messenger*, November 19, 1944, 8.
- <sup>67</sup> “Washington,” *Junior Messenger*, February 15, 1942, 6.
- <sup>68</sup> Ellen Mary Stewart, “Honored Madam,” *Junior Messenger*, February 18, 1945, 7.
- <sup>69</sup> “Origin and Meaning of Memorial Day,” *Junior Messenger*, May 30, 1943, 7.
- <sup>70</sup> “A Letter from Big Brother,” *Junior Messenger*, December 2, 1945, 8.
- <sup>71</sup> Untitled Letter, *Junior Messenger*, December 26, 1943, 4. “What Makes a Nation Great?” *Junior Messenger*, July 2, 1944, 7.
- <sup>72</sup> Keshen, “The Children’s War,” 201.
- <sup>73</sup> “What Makes a Nation Great?,” *Junior Messenger*, July 2, 1944, 7.
- <sup>74</sup> Leah Kauffman, “God’s Victory Garden,” *Junior Messenger*, September 16, 1945, 2, 6-7.
- <sup>75</sup> “Little Folks,” *Junior Messenger*, October 17, 1943, 5.
- <sup>76</sup> “Jesus’ Way of Winning,” *Junior Messenger*, November 12, 1944, 3.
- <sup>77</sup> Keshen, “The Children’s War,” 202.
- <sup>78</sup> *Junior Messenger*, October 1, 1944, 8.
- <sup>79</sup> “Jesus’ Way of Winning,” 3.
- <sup>80</sup> Sell, “The Brown Turkey,” 7-8.
- <sup>81</sup> “Found on a Penny,” *Junior Messenger*, November 19, 1944, 3, 5.
- <sup>82</sup> “A Letter from Big Brother,” *Junior Messenger*, October 14, 1945, 1.
- <sup>83</sup> “A Letter from Big Brother,” *Junior Messenger*, October 21, 1945, 1.
- <sup>84</sup> “A Letter from Big Brother,” *Junior Messenger*, October 28, 1945, 1.
- <sup>85</sup> “A Letter from Big Brother,” *Junior Messenger*, November 4, 1945, 1.
- <sup>86</sup> “A Letter from Big Brother,” *Junior Messenger*, October 7, 1945, 2.
- <sup>87</sup> “A Letter from Big Brother,” *Junior Messenger*, October 14, 1945, 2.
- <sup>88</sup> “A Letter from Big Brother,” *Junior Messenger*, November 4, 1945, 1.