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The Church of England in the First World War

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A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of History

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in History

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by

Kevin Fielden

December 2005

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Stephen Fritz, Chair

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Keywords: Church of England, World War, 1914-1918, First World War, Church History, Anglican Church

## ABSTRACT

The Church of England in the First World War

by

Kevin Fielden

The Church of England was at a crossroads in 1914 as the First World War began. The war was seen as an opportunity to revitalize it and return it to its role of prominence in society. In comparison to other areas of study, the role of the Church of England during this time period is inadequately examined.

Primary sources including letters, diaries, contemporary newspaper accounts, and pastors' sermons were used. Also secondary sources provided background and analysis about the people, events, and movements of the time. A handful of papers and journal articles that specifically dealt with a particular aspect of the research provided some analysis.

This thesis examines the Anglican Church as the war began and during the war both domestically and at the front in order to judge the response it made to the war.

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my wife Jennifer and our two sons Henry and Luke. Without Jennifer's patience and understanding throughout this long process, I could not have succeeded.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The history of the Church of England during the Great War of 1914-1918 remains a largely underdeveloped area of study. One British social historian wrote in 1972, “the sociology and social history of religion in industrial Britain are still in the preliminary stage... where explanation is in part more or less informed guesswork.”<sup>1</sup> Fifteen years later another author makes a similar statement about a journal article writing, “this article is presented in the conviction that the religious dimension within the respective political cultures of Great Britain and Imperial Germany has yet to be exhaustively investigated”<sup>2</sup> This statement is still largely true with much more interest in the physical experiences of the soldiers at the front than in their spiritual life. An organization, like the church, in which millions of people had at least nominal participation on a fairly regular basis demands more attention.

Several explanations seem possible. Perhaps the stereotypical bias of academics as nonreligious and therefore uninterested or doubting the importance of religion has some merit. Another possibility is the post-war counter-culture belief that religion had been of little value during the war.<sup>3</sup> A lack of primary information could be to blame, though, that hardly appears to be the case.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty encountered in any discussion of religion is a search for meaning. What does the Church of England represent? What is the best way to

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<sup>1</sup> A.H. Halsey, ed. *Trends in British Society Since 1900: A Guide to the Changing Social Structure of Britain* (London: Macmillan St. Martin's Press, 1972), 407

<sup>2</sup> John A. Moses, “The British and German Churches and the Perception of War, 1908-1914,” *War and Society*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (May, 1987), 23

<sup>3</sup> Rich Schweitzer, “The Cross and the Trenches: Religious Faith and Doubt Among Some British Soldiers on the Western Front,” *War and Society*, Vol. 16, No. 2, (Oct, 1998), 34

define or measure adherence to religion? There seems to be little consensus among available works. Some possible measurements are by membership count, attendance figures, capacity of buildings and building programs (growth denoting an increase in attendance and willingness to finance them), or even the conformation of social behaviors to accepted Biblical interpretations.

Unfortunately, all of these measurements fall short of what is a very fluid phenomenon. Serious adherence to religious belief is fairly easy to observe and confirm. Individuals declare membership to a particular fellowship and support that choice with active attendance and giving. Measuring those who are not as seriously committed presents more difficulty and might require measuring social behaviors such as rates of infidelity and children born out of wedlock, increased attendance at pubs (a direct link exists between regular pub attendance and lack of church-going), or even crime rates.

Another difficulty when dealing with an institution like the Church of England is that at times it is intensely private but at others demands public demonstrations of adherence. How does one measure the comfort received from a religious rite or prayer? How is it possible to account for waxing and waning of belief but not participation or non-participation? It is possible, though at times difficult, to assess the quantity of activity within the Church of England by measuring such information as attendance and participation in religious activities and giving. However, the quality of religious experience both individually and corporately is, by its very nature, immeasurable.

One, perhaps all too common, mistake regarding these two concepts is an attempt to apply quantitative adjectives to a mainly qualitative phenomenon (i.e. How big is God? How much does that hurt? What color is four?) The social sciences often attempt to apply

quantitative measurements to qualitative issues. This confusion has a direct bearing on a study of this nature. The only real way to measure the usefulness and effectiveness (a largely qualitative function) of the Church of England during World War I is by using quantitative means. While this process may be necessary, it is doomed to ineffectiveness at best. Unfortunately, for the purposes of this paper the easiest (but least effective?) means to identify the role of the Church of England in the First World War is by just these means.

One of the difficulties faced by this paper is in identifying the role and the depth of aid and comfort given by the Church of England to its parishioners both civilian and military. While diaries and letters are becoming more available, a sampling of them displays only the smallest fraction of those who participated in the war. In addition, those who left written accounts might not be a typical sampling, more than likely being made up of an overly large number of the educated, the elite, and therefore more likely to be participants in the middle and upper class Church of England. What remains is largely an anecdotal sampling of a handful of personal histories.

However, anecdotal sources are not without merit, particularly within the historical framework, history within a sense being largely a series of anecdotes. So, for example, Rich Schweitzer's fine study of a handful of British soldiers as their beliefs evolved and changed throughout the war<sup>4</sup> might but be considered less than useful in a more quantitative realm such as sociology but potentially provides great insight into the mind of the British soldier when kept in perspective.

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<sup>4</sup> Rich Schweitzer, "The Cross and the Trenches: Religious Faith and Doubt Among Some British Soldiers on the Western Front," *War and Society*, Vol. 16, No. 2, (Oct, 1998), 33-57

What is accepted is that this time period was pivotal as the attendance and presumably influence of this state church hinged upon how the Church of England responded to the enormous crisis of World War I. It is also evident that the Anglicans went into a period of decline after the war. Obviously, questions arise as to the nature of this decline. What events led to the decrease in participation? Was the war to blame? Was the changing nature of British society responsible? Did the British government share any liability? Or did the Church itself bear the main responsibility?

## CHAPTER 2

### THE CHURCH BEFORE THE WAR

As Britain entered the twentieth century, the Church of England faced difficulties similar to the majority of Christian churches: a notable decline in attendance, a grappling with difficult societal and labor issues, the questions intruding from the scientific community, and the changing role of an established church. As things fell to pieces in Europe during the late summer of 1914, many turned to the Church of England as one of the traditional sources of comfort during this time of upheaval. What role did the British state church play in the Great War? At war's end could it hold its head high knowing it had done all it could do for the good of the English people?

The Church of England in the early 1900s was in the midst of a significant crisis. Attendance declined for reasons including class distinctions between pastors and parishioners, urbanization, an apparent lack of concern for the working poor, and questions of an intellectual or scientific nature concerning the truth presented by the Bible and the Church.

#### Demographics – Measuring the Church of England

Conventional wisdom presumes that attendance in the Church of England was down in 1914 and thus its influence was diminished. According to one author, “adherence to organized religion has in general decreased since 1901.”<sup>5</sup> Another saw a “notorious decline in the habit of church-going, especially among men, together with the

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<sup>5</sup> A.H. Halsey, ed., *Trends in British Society Since 1900: A Guide to the Changing Social Structure of Britain*, (London: Macmillan St. Martin's Press, 1972), 408

increasing difficulty of finding candidates for ordination, [which] told the same tale of belief on the wane.”<sup>6</sup> A more recent study of early twentieth-century Britain asserts that “England was overwhelming a Christian and Protestant nation.”<sup>7</sup> What was the truth of the matter? Some statistics show a decline in religion as a feature of life in pre-World War I Britain, others show just the opposite.

One of the most difficult features of a survey of this sort revolves around just this problem. What does it mean to be a member of the Church of England? There were certainly those who belonged to the Church for whom religion was a vital part of their lives. For others, membership meant nothing more than a claim and the name on the roll of the local parish as a social concession. Claiming religious affiliation does not demonstrate active religious commitment. To use an example, for Irish Presbyterians in 1961, three times as many people claimed to be Presbyterian as received communion from the Presbyterian Church there.<sup>8</sup> While this statistic may not be contemporaneous to the early 1900s it does demonstrate the difficulty in trying to measure something so amorphous.

Those on the extremes of commitment, or lack thereof, are relatively easy to track. The vast majority in the middle proves more problematic. And of course people sometimes change their level of commitment as time passes, particularly in stressful situations such as wartime. On one hand Christianity was at least passively accepted by a great majority of the British people, shaping their worldview, forming the basis for the society’s accepted moral principles, and giving the rites used by the vast majority of the

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<sup>6</sup> Esme Wingfield-Stratford, *The Victorian Aftermath*, Westport, (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1974), 126

<sup>7</sup> Hugh McLeod, *Religion and Society in England, 1850-1914*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 3

<sup>8</sup> Halsey, 409

population. However, involvement in the Church was often limited by class factors and what one author calls an “inability of English Protestantism to seize the imagination of the poor.”<sup>9</sup>

Most sources agree that while the Church of England had perhaps reached its zenith at the start of the war and then went into steady decline, it still exerted “a significant, if steadily diminishing, influence on the society it served.”<sup>10</sup> In fact, “as late as the 1960s, two-thirds of the population of England and Wales identified themselves as Anglicans.”<sup>11</sup> However, at the height of religious participation in 1850s Victorian England it seemed that only about one third who belonged to the Church of England actually attended services on any given Sunday (which amounted to about twenty per cent of the total population).<sup>12</sup> Still, better than any institution in Britain the Church of England functioned to inject all the social mores of English culture into its members.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps, more than any other institution, it could be called the ‘conscience of British society.’

So far as religious practice is concerned the United Kingdom displayed similarities with both the United States and Continental Europe. Like the U.S., Britain had a large number of Protestant denominations and a history of religious toleration. However, Britain more closely resembled Europe in that it possessed a “dominant, privileged established church, allied with the forces of political conservatism.”<sup>14</sup> This conservatism appears to be based more upon the bent of its local leaders and members

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<sup>9</sup> McLeod, 2

<sup>10</sup> Marrin, viii

<sup>11</sup> McLeod, 4

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 20

<sup>13</sup> Marrin, 7

<sup>14</sup> McLeod, 1

rather than as any official doctrine espoused by the Church of England. Also, Conservatives in Parliament tended to associate with the Church of England more than the Nonconformists.<sup>15</sup> The Church was a pillar of the government but in no sense monolithic ideologically.

### Divisions within the Church

The Church of England is a “conglomerate of several denominations” that roughly adhered to three grand divisions: High Churchmen, Low Churchmen, and Broad Churchmen. However, within these groups, various subdivisions and differences could be discerned.<sup>16</sup>

The High Church faction favored a more traditional, mild form of belief that stressed old-fashioned Tory conservatism. Within the High Church group an Anglo-Catholic faction became popular in the mid-nineteenth century and favored a return to more Roman Catholic practice and perhaps even a return to Catholicism.<sup>17</sup>

The Anglo-Catholic movement was very popular with the lower clergy during the latter part of the nineteenth century to such a degree that Parliament passed the Public Worship Act. This law, introduced into Parliament by the Archbishop of Canterbury, attempted to prevent Roman Catholic practices within the Anglican Church. Despite these efforts, including the imprisonment of several clergymen, Anglo-Catholic practice continued and even grew.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Anthony Wood, *Nineteenth Century Britain: 1815-1914* (London: Longmans, Green and Co Ltd, 1960), 400

<sup>16</sup> Marrin, 6 also see McLeod, 6

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Pool, *What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew: From Fox Hunting to Whist- the Facts of Daily Life in Nineteenth-Century England*, (New York; Simon & Schuster, 1993), 119-120

<sup>18</sup> Wood, 296

When in the 1890s Pope Leo XIII expressed interest in the idea of reconciliation with England he was snubbed by the English Cardinal Vaughn who “in the urbane style proper to theological controversy, characterized Anglicans who aped the practices of Catholicism as marionettes of Satan.”<sup>19</sup> So Anglo-Catholics, though rebuffed, continued to “Romanize to their hearts’ content within the elastic bonds of Anglican discipline.”<sup>20</sup>

The Low Churchmen or Evangelicals were both inspired by the Methodist movement of John Wesley in the eighteenth century and reacting to the Dissenter or Non-Conformist denominations. Some of the more overzealous members of this group actually resorted to brawling within as many Anglo-Catholic churches as possible.<sup>21</sup>

The traditional High Churchmen frowned upon both these factions and took steps to keep them from gaining power as much as possible. A final group emerged in hopes of reconciling the warring factions.

The Broad Churchmen tried to provide a moderate common ground in order to maintain the cohesion of the church. More liberal in outlook and willing to widen what was acceptable practice, they managed to quiet differences within the church to a large degree. On the eve of war in 1914, the Church of England found itself largely united, particularly in comparison to previous decades.<sup>22</sup>

### Powers and Hierarchy of the Church

The powers and hierarchy of the church were what one would expect of an institution that was centuries old and not allowed to fully control itself. While the Church

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<sup>19</sup> Wingfield-Stratford, p. 127

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 128

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Pool, 119-120

had representation in the House of Lords by the two archbishops, the bishops of London, Durham, and Winchester, and 21 diocesan bishops in order of seniority, it lacked any legislative body of its own - the convocations, Houses of Laymen, Representatives Church Council, were all advisory bodies or forums and not the voice of the Church. The real control of the Church had once rested with the Crown but had been slowly transferred to Parliament between the mid-fifteenth century and the seventeenth century. The Prime Minister appointed bishops, though they had to be approved by a "cathedral chapter" or council of high church officials. By this time, members of Parliament, despite having power over the church, were no longer required to be Anglican. The Church was even controlled by the state in judicial matters. By the time of the war, appeals by churchmen went to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council whose members also did not have to be members of the Church of England.<sup>23</sup>

Both Parliament and the Church had changed with the time. Parliament no longer required its members to be Anglican and church jurisdiction over traditional areas dwindled.<sup>24</sup> What was worse, the church had entered the twentieth century "with a vast backlog of items in its organization, rules, and manuals of worship crying for modernization." In fact the Prayer Book had not been revised since the seventeenth century.<sup>25</sup>

The unfortunate truth of the matter was that the Church was caught between Parliament's unwillingness to give it any attention and its aversion to let the Church

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<sup>23</sup> Marrin, 9-10

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 10

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 11

handle its own affairs. These needed changes did not take place until the Enabling Act of 1919, perhaps too little too late.<sup>26</sup>

### Church Attendance

Church attendance is stereotypically thought to be in steady decline during this period. However, the numbers may somewhat belie this fact. In Great Britain, at the beginning of the war, “Religious observance had never been more flourishing, with an estimated 30 million nominal members of the Church of England.”<sup>27</sup>

Of course the key word is “nominal.” The idea of Europe as a continent joined by important bonds of belief of fellowship was flawed. “Many preachers pointed out that ‘Christendom’ was a giant abstraction and that most people in Europe were either pagans or only nominal Christians.”<sup>28</sup> What sort of influence belief and in particular the power of a state church could have on a people or a government is difficult to ascertain. As previously discussed, it is difficult to determine the impact of religion on both public and private life to any degree of certainty. However, there are numbers available that provide some insight.

The growth of all Protestant churches in Britain was up significantly from the 1890s to 1905-1910, but Anglican Church growth showed less dramatic gains than their Dissenter neighbors. During the war Church growth resumed and in some cases

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<sup>26</sup> Marrin, 11

<sup>27</sup> Moynihan, 14 - The population of Great Britain and Ireland a month before the outbreak of the War of 1914-18 was officially estimated at 46,089,249. (About 41,589,249 excluding Ireland) Marwick, 17

<sup>28</sup> Hoover, 7

accelerated, but after the war overall growth for all Protestant groups leveled out or went into decline.<sup>29</sup>

Those who claimed membership (nominal members) were far greater than those who actually attended and received communion. The total number of communicants in 1901 was 1,945,000 and by 1906 had grown to 1,988,000 and continued to grow until 1911 to 2,293,000. However, by 1916 the number had actually dropped to 2,097,000.<sup>30</sup>

Class difference was the greatest indicator of church attendance. “Among the middle class churchgoing was an accepted weekly ritual. Even upper-class house parties in country mansions took attendance at Sunday matins as part of the hospitality.”<sup>31</sup> These groups primarily attended the Church of England whereas among the “numerous agricultural workers” attendance at the local Protestant Dissenter chapel was still “the great community occasion, an oasis in lives of grinding labour and poverty.”<sup>32</sup> However, for the largest social group, the working class, “religion counted least.”<sup>33</sup> In fact the power and control exerted by the Church of England in “systems of authority and social control tended to alienate those at the lower end of the social hierarchy.”<sup>34</sup>

It was to this group to which the Anglican Sunday School presented the best hope for revival among the working classes. Attending Sunday School was an accepted behavior among the poor, long after church attendance had seriously waned. Therefore, the number of children attending Sunday School increased at a rate similar to the overall growth rate of the Protestant churches during this time.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Halsey, 410

<sup>30</sup> Halsey, 424

<sup>31</sup> Moynihan, 14

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 14-15

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 14

<sup>34</sup> McLeod, 1

<sup>35</sup> Halsey, 424 and McLeod, 78-80

These statistics seem to indicate that while the church-going trend within Britain was not without concern, the Church still seemed to exercise a fair degree of influence upon British society. And though the reliability of church membership statistics is sometimes questioned, the data are no less trustworthy than other types of social statistics.<sup>36</sup>

### The Clergy

The role and nature of the clergy is particularly important in the Anglican Church. Even by the early twentieth century the Church of England was the religious institution of the middle and upper middle classes. Though the trend was decreasing, Anglican pastors were largely from the upper classes. Even by 1914 the majority of pastors were graduates of either Cambridge or Oxford.<sup>37</sup> According to one author, “the function of the National Church was to place a civilizing influence in the form of an educated gentleman in every parish in the kingdom”<sup>38</sup> Considering that these men were supposed to be ministering to all classes of British society, the difficulties can be imagined.

Many pastors, particularly those in rural parishes, played an enormous part in the community both in religious and social roles. They were available to help with day to day affairs such as obtaining references for jobs but could also play a more paternal role of chastising errant members.<sup>39</sup> Even though some attempts had been made to remedy the situation, the Church of England (by 1914) had become an organization largely

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<sup>36</sup> Halsey, 407

<sup>37</sup> McLeod, 3, 20

<sup>38</sup> Marrin, 12

<sup>39</sup> McLeod, 15-20

dominated by the upper and upper middle classes both in terms of the ministers and the parishioners.

Though the academic quality and social standing of Anglican ministers remained relatively high, their numbers were decreasing. While some denominations were experiencing a slowdown in the percentage growth of their ministers, the Church of England was experiencing an outright decline. *The Times* reported a drop in clergyman from 25,235 in 1901 to 24,859 in 1911.<sup>40</sup> This trend was obviously of serious concern to Church leadership and was only to worsen as the war began with young ordination candidates volunteering for service in staggering numbers.<sup>41</sup>

These highly educated men acted as the disseminators of current theology more so than in any of the Dissenting institutions. In other words, the contemporary intellectual current had a more important and perhaps lasting impact on the leaders of the Church of England and the parishioners of that church had a profound impact on the Empire as a whole given their wealth and position.

In addition the Church also represented the dominant classes in society through control of its own school system of which the headmasters and professors were mostly Anglicans. The leadership of the church still had political influence if not power.<sup>42</sup> Further evidence of their traditional and therefore conservative bent is represented in their political affiliation.

Statistics before 1872, and the introduction of the secret ballot, show that Anglican ministers were more likely to vote Conservative than the members of any other

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<sup>40</sup> *The Times* (London), 7 July 1914, page 10, column d

<sup>41</sup> *The Times* (London), 23 September 1914, page 10, column d – The Bishop of St. Albans reported of a case in which every single ordination candidate had volunteered.

<sup>42</sup> Marrin, viii

secular profession.<sup>43</sup> By and large, it appears that the leaders and pastors of the Church of England saw themselves as pillar of proper English society. “According to a nineteenth century saying, the function of the National Church was to place a civilizing influence in the form of an educated gentleman in every parish in the kingdom... an accurate statement of a truth self-evident to the Englishmen of the governing classes.”<sup>44</sup>

In contrast to the upper-class churchmen, an increasing number of would-be parishioners within England were no longer of the conservative agrarian type, but in many cases socialist-minded industrial workers. To them involvement of the Church of England in “systems of authority and social control tended to alienate those at the lower end of the social hierarchy.”<sup>45</sup> These parishioners lack of education led to class differences and antagonisms that had an “enormous influence on patterns of religious affiliation and practice... whereas urban/rural differences were less important than in most other parts of Europe”<sup>46</sup>

The vast majority of Anglican churchmen were openly hostile to labor movements and the social unrest that they feared would accompany them. On the possible eve of the first general strike in England, William Randolph Inge, the dean of St. Paul’s, summed up the sentiments of his associates when he “denounced the unions as criminal combinations whose leaders deserved to be executed as rebels against society.”<sup>47</sup>

The greatest source of striving for worker benefits during this time period was among various socialist groups. Despite the popularity of socialist movements and the

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<sup>43</sup> McLeod, 91 quoted from John Vincent *Poll Books : How Victorians Voted* – (Cambridge, 1967)

<sup>44</sup> Marrin, 12

<sup>45</sup> McLeod, 1

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 2

<sup>47</sup> Marrin, 55 quoted from *Christian Times*, 11 July 1914

obvious need for change<sup>48</sup> there were only three Christian Socialist organizations. The Christian Social Union was the largest of the three and, though led by the likes of the Bishop of Oxford, Charles Gore, at its peak in 1910 it only boasted 6,000 members.<sup>49</sup> Oddly enough, none of these organizations made any real attempt to form a working-class arm of their association, preferring to work within the system and call for gradual change.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, though many of the early labor and political leaders claimed a religious foundation for their socialism, only one, George Lansbury, Labour M.P., remained a faithful Anglican.<sup>51</sup>

### Challenges to the Beliefs of the Church

With such a highly educated and elite clergy, the Church of England maintained unique role in British society. The local clergymen served as both religious leader and disseminator of current philosophical and scientific thought. Traditional religion appeared to be under siege at the turn of the twentieth century. The questions ranged from the position of the Church on Darwin and his theories to the very truth of Scripture itself. Though these were serious problems they were not especially widespread, secularism being called a “relatively marginal phenomenon” by one author.<sup>52</sup> So how did the church respond? And of course, what impact would their positions have regarding belief and adherence to faith when the lights went out all over Europe in August 1914?

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<sup>48</sup> For example, the army lowered the minimum height requirements at the turn of the century to 5 feet due to the malnutrition of the lower classes – Marrin, 33

<sup>49</sup> Marrin, 38

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 40

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 39

<sup>52</sup> McLeod, 2

Darwinism was first viewed as a problem with respect to inerrancy of Scripture but was eventually accepted by all but the Low Churchmen (who depended more on an inerrant and literal interpretation of the Bible as verbally inspired by God). Evolution was seen by many as simply a further insight into the way in which God worked in nature.<sup>53</sup>

However, Darwin's theory pertained to only part of the book of Genesis whereas biblical criticism, both higher and lower questioned the Scriptures as a whole, presenting a much greater challenge to the Church.

### Biblical Criticism

The majority of the churchmen in the Anglican Church, being accustomed to historical research and textual criticism, were suspicious of biblical criticism but most were tolerant of it to an extent. (Of course, the Low Churchmen were simply horrified by it because of their literal interpretation of Scripture, but they represent a small minority.)

Two forms of biblical criticism assaulted the foundations of Anglican faith. So-called "lower" criticism centered on linguistic analysis and comparison of texts of the type practiced by professional historians. The more theologically dangerous "higher" criticism questioned the substance and intent of the Bible.

Lower Criticism. The goal of the "lower" critics of the Bible was to establish a "correct" text for the Bible. In the 1840s, German universities, particularly Tübingen, began using standard historical practices such as comparing texts and using linguistic analysis to challenge the heretofore inerrant nature of the Scriptures.

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<sup>53</sup> Marrin, 41-42

High Churchmen (particularly of an Anglo-Catholic bent – which was to dominate the Church of England in the first half of the 1900s) were willing to allow “lower” textual criticism of the Bible. In fact Charles Gore edited *Lux Mundi*, the most influential work regarding the controversy. These essays virtually created a High Anglican orthodoxy with regards to what was acceptable when questioning the Bible. For example, Gore in his essay argued that Christ’s earthly knowledge was limited.<sup>54</sup> According to some scholars, Gore’s work was important in that it legitimized academic criticism of the Bible, allowing Anglicans to be both intellectually honest and maintain their basic beliefs.<sup>55</sup>

“Lower” criticism soon gave way to a “higher” form and Jesus was portrayed in seemingly whatever manner the scholar saw fit. German theologian Adolf von Harnack gave a series of lectures published in 1900 as *What is Christianity?* in which he interpreted Christ to be a social reformer calling for love and peace but certainly without any hint of exclusivity or dogma.<sup>56</sup> Anglican Bishop Winnington-Ingram went further “presenting Father and Son as superheroes of the sort portrayed in schoolboy adventure stories”.<sup>57</sup>

The more traditional Christians, both laymen and Churchmen, struck back at the higher critics. Renowned missionary Dr. Albert Schweitzer wrote *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* in 1906, which was translated into English in 1910. He argued against the possibility of Jesus as simply a great moral teacher as the liberals believed. To Schweitzer, Christ was either the Messiah as he claimed in Scripture or must be

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<sup>54</sup> McLeod, 190

<sup>55</sup> Marrin, 44

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

disregarded as a lunatic.<sup>58</sup> But the Church of England would only go so far. “Higher” criticism of the Bible, particularly Modernism, would be attacked viciously, some going so far as to imply in 1915 that a modernist bishop was pro-German.<sup>59</sup>

Higher Criticism. Perhaps the most worrying group to traditionalists with the Anglican Church were the “modernists.” These were scholars who sought to bring the basic beliefs of Christianity into “harmony” with modern thought. The basic modernist process was denial of anything not scientifically verifiable, which included miracles, the Virgin Birth, and even the resurrection.<sup>60</sup> While the Roman Catholics were able to handle this problem of orthodoxy by excommunicating two of its leaders, the Anglicans lacked so efficient a method. The system of authority simply did not exist in an institution built on so broad a base as to accept Anglo-Catholics, High and Low Churchmen.

However, it was the Anglo-Catholics who led the crusade under the leadership of Bishop Gore, of *Lux Mundi* fame. While Gore was willing to allow textual criticism, a challenge to the foundation of traditional belief and authority proved unacceptable. The Anglo-Catholic weekly newspaper, *The Church Times*, went as far in 1915 as to imply that the Modernists had pro-German sympathies, the harshest of insults at that jingoistic time.<sup>61</sup>

### Rationalism

A final challenge to the twentieth century Church was that of rationalism. By demanding verifiable proof of all knowledge, both the Bible and nearly all traditions and

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<sup>58</sup> Marrin, 44

<sup>59</sup> Marrin, 47

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 45-46

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 46

beliefs of the Church came under attack. By the beginning of twentieth century, rationalism had entered into “active competition with the older faiths, a competition in which it had more than Islamic simplicity.”<sup>62</sup> That the mob orators at Hyde Park would find interest in attacking Christianity in a loud boisterous fashion might have appeared humorous were it not for the fact that the Church of England took itself to be under siege from virtually all angles.<sup>63</sup> Interestingly, from time to time one of these spokesmen for free thought and verification through reason would find himself in jail for violating anti-blasphemy laws, more as they were “interpreted as only to be enforced against those who had not the education to be godless within the bounds of good taste.”<sup>64</sup>

Some authors disagree. One argues that the impact of rationalism and secularism in general was insignificant, describing it as a “relatively marginal phenomenon.” He argues that in Britain, liberalism, the social mover and shaker of the mid-nineteenth century, was “heavily shaped by religious dissent.” He further contends that secular liberalism was of “minor importance” compared to similar movements on the Continent. He thinks that the great majority of people in Britain at least passively accepted Christianity to the extent that it shaped their worldview, formed their moral principles, and gave them a system of common rites.<sup>65</sup>

As an organ of the government of the United Kingdom, the Church of England for obvious reasons tended towards social conservatism, regardless of the political climate. Many brought the Church to task for popular political issues of the day, including a lack of support for the women’s suffrage movement and an apparent lack of interest in the

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<sup>62</sup> Wingfield-Stratford, 120

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 122-23

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 123

<sup>65</sup> McLeod, 2

plight of the worker. The Church's stance on these issues and others requires study in and of themselves, but suffice it to say that radical women suffragists and leaders of socialist groups both blasted the Church for its positions.

If the trends continued from the late 1800s, on the eve of World War I most Anglican clergy voted Conservative whereas most Dissenter churchmen voted Liberal, with very few of either supporting the Labour Party.<sup>66</sup> Though there were the beginnings of a Christian Socialist movement, its impact was almost negligible at this time and would never realize the attraction it had on the continent.<sup>67</sup>

### The Peace Movement

Anglo-German relations in the early part of the century were becoming strained enough to alert concern among prominent Christian leaders in both countries to the point that a new organization was formed in order to bring the church leadership to encourage relations. The Associated Councils of the Churches of British and German Empires for the Fostering of Friendly Relations between the two Peoples was formed to this end. A group of 130 German ministers of all denominations visited Britain in May and June 1908, with financial support mainly from the Quakers who were at the core of the religious peace movement.<sup>68</sup> In fact, the Archbishop Davidson had to be virtually pushed into participation, saying "of course we must show them some civility...outwardly we must put a brave face upon it, vexatious as it is."<sup>69</sup> The inclinations of the Archbishop were more related to the divisions within his own church, worrying about alienating the

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<sup>66</sup> McLeod, 91 quoted from John Vincent *Poll Books: How Victorians Voted*, (Cambridge, 1967)

<sup>67</sup> Marrin, 38-40

<sup>68</sup> Moses, 28-29

<sup>69</sup> Moses, 29 from Papers of Randall Davidson in Lambeth Palace Library, see Vol. 336 (Germany 1907-13). Archbishop to Bishop of London, 10 December 1907, 336, ff 54-5, Davidson Papers.

Anglo-Catholic elements, rather than directed negatively against the peace movement. A reciprocal visit was planned for Germany the following year with Archbishop Davidson expressing more concern over being outdone by the Nonconformists than genuinely concerned for promoting peace. Two things became clear from this exchange; Anglican clergymen knew precious little about Germany, and they thought that a war between the two greatest Protestant nations of Europe was virtually unimaginable.<sup>70</sup> Despite these somewhat half-hearted attempts at unification with Germany in a peace movement, the Church did establish its own organization

The Church of England Peace League was established in 1911 in the belief that “war was the result of people’s failure to appropriate the Gospel, and that therefore, the Church’s task was to make the Gospel heard in the corridors of power as well as in the parishes.”<sup>71</sup> In fact the typical English Christian belief about war at this time would be that “it was an evil scourge against which rational people, armed with the ethics of New Testament, has to fight with the ‘sword of the spirit’”.<sup>72</sup> Naturally the interests of the British Empire would have been seen to coincide with these ethics. All the same, British agreement was that “rational Christian men could settle their differences through arbitration; war signified the triumph of unreason and evil in the world.”<sup>73</sup> Unfortunately it was to be just such a triumph that Europe experienced in the summer of 1914.

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<sup>70</sup> Moses, 30-31

<sup>71</sup> “Church of England Peace League” *Times* (London) 6 Feb 1911, 4

<sup>72</sup> Moses, 26

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER 3

### HOME FRONT DURING THE WAR

#### Beginning of the War

Three days before the war began Archbishop Davidson wrote to German theologian, Ernst Dryander: "War between the two great Christian nations of kindred race and sympathies is, or ought to be, unthinkable in the twentieth century of the Gospel of the Prince of Peace."<sup>74</sup> Needless to say as war began, most people in Britain and throughout the continent shared this sentiment and were caught completely by surprise. Few really expected war over something seemingly as minor as the assassination of an Austrian Archduke and a decades-old treaty obligation to Belgium.

On the whole British churchmen were supportive of peace and friendly towards Germany up until the outbreak of violence and then, with the violation of Belgian neutrality; they turned, almost to a man, into rabid war-supporters. Even those who had previously been the most liberal became much less critical in their questioning of the war effort and the government's role on the Continent. In fact, it was difficult to find hardly anyone throughout the European continent who was not only for the war but excited about it.<sup>75</sup>

This near-universal support of the British government and its policy by an institution whose responsibility was to act as the conscience of the English people made perfect sense when viewed within the light of the spiritual possibilities the war provided.

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<sup>74</sup> Hoover, 6 from G. K. A. Bell. *Randall Davidson: Archbishop of Canterbury* (Oxford, 1952), 733

<sup>75</sup> Roland N. Stromberg, *Redemption by War*, (Lawrence, Kansas: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1982), 1-4

Revitalization of both the Church and the people of Britain were surely the natural consequences of a conflict that would unite those who prior to the war had been at the point of civil war.<sup>76</sup>

### Initial Reaction

Apparently most of Britain was so stunned over the quick onset of the war that the first reaction was disbelief. One example of a fairly typical reaction by an atypical man was that of Reverend Dr. John Clifford. Though not an Anglican, Clifford, former president of the National Free Church Council, demonstrated as much restraint as nearly any Church or Chapel leader. Labeled as the “leader of the pacifist opposition to the Boer War” he at first opposed the war. However, as the first phases of the conflict progressed and tales of German atrocities surfaced, he felt it as much a religious duty to support this war as it had been to oppose the Boer War.<sup>77</sup>

It is interesting to note that those who held out long term against the war were small in number and drawn from “an important cluster of socialists, Liberals, philosophical pacifists, unflinchingly committed against the war” and virtually a total lack of public resistance to the war by any pastor of the Church of England.<sup>78</sup> In fact, aside from a few Christian Socialists, the vast majority of Anglican churchmen thought it both a duty and privilege to aid the country throughout the war.<sup>79</sup> However, the ubiquitous blame for the war and the vilification of Germany, long viewed as the most civilized of Christian nations, was slow in coming. Even a month into the war a British

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<sup>76</sup> Stromberg, 54.

<sup>77</sup> Marwick, 32-33

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 33

<sup>79</sup> Marrin, 186

editorialist did not fully put the blame on all of Germany or even the Kaiser, but rather the “military and ruling caste of Germany” who have “kept the world in turmoil during these long years.”<sup>80</sup> These sentiments would change as stories of German atrocities committed during the invasion of Belgium became more widespread and accepted.

The invasion and reported atrocities in Belgium probably did more than any other event to turn the initial shock and disbelief over the war into hardened resolve.

### Later Stages of the War

After the first few weeks, the initial shock of war wore off and reaction to the war went through a series of well-defined stages. The initial phase was a period of intense patriotism and high morale that gave way to a more restrained and realistic attitude of grim resolve. During this first phase the pastors tended to identify the Christian community with the nation at war. The goal among ministers was to use the war as an opportunity to draw people back into the religious fold after a period of secularization of British society.<sup>81</sup>

To many Church leaders one of the most pressing social and spiritual issues of the day was that of drink. The coming of war allowed these men to draw special attention to the temperance movement. During the first few months of war, church leaders warned of the dangers of alcohol during this stressful time. For example, the Archbishop of Canterbury warned of the dangers of ‘treating’ friends to drinks during the enthusiasm of wartime.<sup>82</sup> He continued on his campaign, warning of the danger caused by the

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<sup>80</sup> Sir W. Robertson Nicol, “British Christian Opinion of the War” *Christian Century*. Vol. XXXI, 3 Sept 1914, #36, p 8 quoted from the *British Weekly*.

<sup>81</sup> Stuart Mews, “Spiritual Mobilization in the First World War” *Theology*, Vol. 74 1971, 259-260

<sup>82</sup> *The Times* (London), 27 October 1914, page 4, column e

understandable intemperance among soldiers and their wives and called for shorter hours for the sale of liquor (to cheers from the crowd he addressed).<sup>83</sup>

The temperance movement, so far as the Church of England's leadership was concerned, seemed to take a significant back seat in the coming months as the focus on the war effort intensified. While there were undoubtedly those within the Church who still preached against drink, the horror and loss of the war effort caused intemperance to pale in importance.

### Theology and Sermons

The mood in England towards war was at first that of a just war but gradually shifted to the crusade mentality as atrocity stories, both real and fabricated, became prevalent.<sup>84</sup> Any further doubt over the moral blame for the war, at least in Anglican minds, was erased when in September 1914 eighty German theologians published the *Appeal to Evangelical Churches Abroad* which showed Germany as “defending Christian civilization against Russian barbarism.”<sup>85</sup> The Church of England replied with *To the Christian Scholars of Europe and America* written by the Archbishop of Canterbury and other Anglican theologians. Their evidence of German barbarism included the intentional destruction of the university library at Louvain, along with burning much of the city, and the intentional killing of many civilians.<sup>86</sup> The Fundamentalists, who took the Bible as the inerrant word of God, were also swift to point out that the higher criticism of the

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<sup>83</sup> *The Times* (London), 14 November 1914, page 11, column d

<sup>84</sup> Ronald Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), 207

<sup>85</sup> Stromberg, 54

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

Bible had its start in Germany, further evidence of that country's infidelity to true Christian principles.<sup>87</sup>

A common theme among Anglican leaders is exemplified in a sermon delivered by the Archbishop of York in October 1914. Archbishop Lang alluded to the German philosopher Nietzsche and the common British interpretation of his writings to conclude that 'might makes right.' He insisted "there could be no peace until this German spirit had been crushed" and thus paradoxically appealed to "friends of peace... to be supporters of our war."<sup>88</sup> The idea he promoted was that force when coupled with moral authority is changed to become "a little like love."<sup>89</sup>

The Archbishop of Canterbury, in addressing the leaders of the Church in early 1915, stated that he did not "entertain any doubt that our nation could not, without sacrificing principles of honour and justice, more dear than life itself, have stood aside and looked idly on the present world conflict."<sup>90</sup> This concept of a Christian duty to fight was nearly universal among the Anglican clergy. Those expressing pacifism as a possible alternative were virtually nonexistent during the war. In fact, Marrin was unable to find a single man who had taken Anglican Orders who denounced the war for the reasons traditionally put forth by Christian pacifists.<sup>91</sup> With this virtually monolithic support of the war by even the most liberal of Anglicans, it is not surprising these pastors would enthusiastically support the war from their pulpits.

Some respect for Germans consistency was at least grudgingly granted by Henry Scott Holland, a professor of divinity at Oxford and canon of Christ Church. He argued

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<sup>87</sup> Stromberg, 55

<sup>88</sup> *The Times* (London), 12 October 1914, page 5, column c

<sup>89</sup> Stromberg, 54

<sup>90</sup> *The Times* (London), 10 February 1915, page 5, column a

<sup>91</sup> Marrin, 147

there was nothing odd or contradictory about the fact that both the Germans and British prayed to the same God for victory. “We would think less of the Germans if they did not believe in their cause. Herein lies our only hope-that both sides believe in a simple law of righteousness; a universal conscience. Praying to the same God proves that we are not relativists. We British pray that God will help Britain, not because she is Britain, but because she is righteous.”<sup>92</sup> It was seemingly appropriate to allow that Germans were in fact praying to God, their problem being that He was only listening to the British.

Many pastors were quick to point to the good that could come from the evil of war. While this approach may have been popular even through the first two years of the war, it became less and less meaningful or even appropriate as the war dragged on. In order to explain the horrible loss of life and destruction that would seem to lay at least some blame at the feet of an all-powerful God, the idea became prominent that God was “not the author of the evil but he uses the evil once it starts.”<sup>93</sup> A further corollary of this idea in the first months of the war was the hope that many clergymen had for the spiritual revival of a Britain that had become deluded by materialism and progress. Paul Bull, a minister and former chaplain during the Boer War, pointed out the paradox that “The Age of Progress ends in a barbarism such as shocks a savage. The Age of Reason ends in a delirium of madness.”<sup>94</sup> As war continued and the losses mounted, these attitudes and explanations became less and less satisfying and the resulting decline should have taken no one by surprise.

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<sup>92</sup> Hoover, 6 quoted from *So as by Fire*, 107-9

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 8

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10 quoted from Paul Bull, *Christianity and War* (London, 1918), 63

### Arthur Winnington-Ingram and Charles Gore

Two prominent leaders within the Church of England that serve as good examples of the differences that could peacefully exist among the Anglicans particularly when united for a common cause. The Bishop of London, Arthur Winnington-Ingram, and Charles Gore, Bishop of Oxford, were two dissimilar men with very different styles who both worked for the good of the nation and the Church as they saw it.

#### Bishop of London – Arthur Winnington-Ingram

One of the most outspoken and patriotic proponents of the war was the head of its most prominent diocese. Arthur Winnington-Ingram was the Bishop of London. His biographer described him as a man who was intensely patriotic saying that “there was for him a sacredness about England which was beyond argument... His instinctive judgment was that the national cause must be right.”<sup>95</sup> Winnington-Ingram was a popular, extroverted man who claimed to have added ten thousand men to the armed services with his sermons and other recruiting. He was in fact awarded for his efforts by the king with the Knight Commander of the Victorian Order, the second highest award of chivalry.<sup>96</sup>

The Bishop of London never seemed to shirk enthusiastic endorsement of the righteousness of the war and the British cause and the important role the Church of England must play in the whole affair. His favorite sermon text was the same wherever he went; better to die than see England a German province.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Spencer Cecil Carpenter, *Winnington-Ingram: the Biography of Arthur Foley Winnington-Ingram, Bishop of London, 1901-1939*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1949), 279

<sup>96</sup> Marrin, 181

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

In a more bizarre, but perhaps practical, turn the Bishop of London speaking in early 1915 said that the Church had “to foster and increase the fortitude of the nation; to comfort the mourners and *inculcate a happier and brighter view of death* [italics added]; to see that the survivors were adequately relieved; to lead the nation in its intercessions; and to foster the spirit of charity towards our foes.”<sup>98</sup>

In an oft-repeated (and damning?) quote, the Bishop of London, after a year of war, called for the men of England to “band in a great crusade -we cannot deny it- to kill Germans. To kill them, not for the sake of killing, but to save the world; to kill the good as well as the bad; to kill the young men as well as the old, to kill those who have showed kindness to our wounded as well as those fiends who crucified the Canadian sergeant, who superintended the Armenian massacres, who sank the *Lusitania*... and to kill them lest the civilisation of the world should itself be killed.”<sup>99</sup> The Bishop went further, giving the war a further crusading touch by adding, “As I have said a thousand times, I look upon it as a war for purity, I look upon everyone who dies in it as a martyr.”<sup>100</sup>

The most generous interpretation of his words is a defense of religion and an indictment of the Christian church for lack of zeal in preaching the Gospel principles of peace prior to the war rather than a call for bloodthirsty crusade against the Germans. In fact in the same sermon he expressed no desire “to stir up unchristian hatred of the German race.” However, he pointed out that, “only one nation wanted war...only one nation has set at nought the Christian principles which have slowly gained ground in the

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<sup>98</sup> *The Times* (London), 10 February 1915, page 5, column a

<sup>99</sup> Moynihan, 15-16

<sup>100</sup> Ronald Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), 207 quote from Winnington-Ingram, *The Potter and the Clay* (London, 1917), 42

conduct of the war; and only one spirit has produced the war, and that a spirit avowedly and in so many ways passionately opposed to the Spirit of the New Testament”<sup>101</sup>

So what would Winnington-Ingram say was the role of the Church in war? He answered in a sermon that was published in 1915 saying, “It exists to inspire the nation to take a noble and high-minded line of policy, to fill the sailors and soldiers with fortitude and courage, and give them in abundance the spiritual and sacramental help they need; to set an example of self-sacrifice; to visit the sick and wounded; to comfort the mourners; and to lead day and night the intercessions of the people.”<sup>102</sup>

Winnington-Ingram was not without critics. One author believed that those pastors who went along with the Bishop of London discredited their religion while “the more sensitive became quickly aware that the hysteria and jingoism of the home front had no place on the battlefield.”<sup>103</sup> Winnington-Ingram was obviously a man of the Church but more precisely an Englishman of the Church of England.

#### Bishop of Oxford – Charles Gore

In contrast to the Bishop of London, Charles Gore was the academic Anglo-Catholic Bishop of Oxford. Though not nearly so easy to categorize, or perhaps demonize, Gore was a man who in a later age might have been expected to use his position to protest against his government. However, during a time when both the academic and religious communities were equally conservative and patriotically inspired, Gore’s positions supporting King and country are hardly surprising.

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<sup>101</sup> Mews, 259 quoting Winnington-Ingram, *The Potter and the Clay*, no page

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 260 quoting Winnington-Ingram, *The Church in Time of War*, 1915, vi

<sup>103</sup> Moynihan, 16

According to a review of his sermons through December 1914, published as *The War and the Church, and other Addresses*, he used his pulpit for “sermons upon the war and the whole war and nothing but the war” but made sure that the sermons did not become “an obsession of the preacher’s mind”<sup>104</sup> In fact, the reviewer believed that “Dr. Gore has no misgivings as to the righteousness of the national cause.”<sup>105</sup>

As further evidence of a common theme during the first stages of the war, Gore reasoned that the conflict actually saved Britain from a “tremendous class war, a war of capital and labour” thus proposing one of the arguments for God’s power using the bad (the war) to work for the good (no class war).<sup>106</sup> In the end the reviewer admits, “We could hope that the war may somehow shake the English Church up as well as the English nation... Who knows if the Church has been placed in this position for such a time as this?”<sup>107</sup> As the war progressed, these sentiments were expressed with less and less frequency.

A few weeks later Gore preached from the text, “Be not wise in your own conceits” and took shots at a “certain German philosopher” (Nietzsche) for whom humility was a “servile virtue” to be discarded. Gore argued that humility was in fact the “only virtue which could really make men free.” Ironically he went on to use the British Empire, which “conjoined Irishmen, Englishmen and Indians” as a prime example of the proper use of “humility as applied to nations.” He further argued that the British allowed

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<sup>104</sup> *The Times Literary Supplement* (London), 3 December 1914 , 535, column a

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> *The Times Literary Supplement* (London), 3 December 1914 , 535, column b

“a separate people ... a really free opportunity to make the best of its soil, its own gifts, in its own manner, so that its own native powers should have their fullest expression.”<sup>108</sup>

Like the soldiers at the front, it is difficult, and inappropriate, to assign a single stereotype to all Anglican ministers. Some were unabashedly jingoistic like Bishop Winnington-Ingram while others in much smaller numbers supported the peace movement throughout the war. Shocked by the war’s sudden outbreak, the vast majority of Anglican ministers were at least sympathetic to peace in the beginning only to turn against Germany with emotions raging from sadness to a vigorous disgust.

#### “Official” position of the Church to the War

Both clergy and laity took it for granted that the Church of England should aid the war effort by whatever means possible. The responsibilities included explaining the causes for the war, the meaning of the war, maintaining morale on the home front, and reminding the public that the primary obligation of young men was to enlist.<sup>109</sup> The Archbishop of Canterbury did express concern that perhaps the consequences of righteous anger devolving into a “poisonous hatred” would turn “what was a righteous – yes, a wholesome- wrath against wrong into a sour and envenomed hatred of whole sections of our fellow men.”<sup>110</sup>

The official position with regards to clergy was that they should not take up arms in the military. Ordained ministers should not enlist and fight in the trenches, a position held throughout the history of the Church of England. However they could, and were

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<sup>108</sup> *The Times* (London), 25 January 1915, 13, column c

<sup>109</sup> Marrin, 179

<sup>110</sup> George K. A. Bell, *Randall Davidson, Archbishop Canterbury*. 2 vols, (Oxford, 1935), II, 903

encouraged, to serve as chaplains and in other non-combatant roles so long as their absence could be covered by others in their diocese.<sup>111</sup>

The main argument (and the only one ever used by the bishops) against the churchmen serving in the military was their need at such a difficult time in their parish.<sup>112</sup> While many young curates chomped at the bit to enlist and ‘do their part’ for God and country, they were simply not allowed. When a thousand junior clergymen petitioned the Bishop of London, the most bellicose of church leaders and perhaps one of Britain’s greatest recruiters, to be allowed to enlist, he refused. He argued that London diocese could not do without them whereas the army could find a similar number of young men to take their place.<sup>113</sup> Although the varying beliefs within the umbrella of the Anglican Church were united in their service to the people of Britain, the church hierarchy aimed to keep the clergy at home to meet the increasing needs of loss and depravation there, a stance that may have undermined the image of the church in the long run.

### Charity Work

The Church of England sought to aid the soldiers and civilians in both spiritual and material ways. Organizations abounded around training centers. One such group, the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K.), distributed “over 40 million Bibles, hymn books, prayer books, and tracts” during the first two years of the war. The S.P.C.K. also translated tracts for German prisoners and devotional books for the soldiers

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<sup>111</sup> Marrin, 189

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 190

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 193

from the far flung reaches of the Empire.<sup>114</sup> The material goods provided by the Church were staggering as well.

The basic needs of people both around the world and at home were met by the generosity of the Church of England. The Anglicans contributed to organizations as varied as the Belgian relief fund and the Russian Jews' Relief Fund. Domestically, they helped the wives of servicemen receive proper benefits due them, ran temperance canteens for both men in training and women working in munitions factories, and cared for the soldiers' orphans with the Waifs and Strays Society.<sup>115</sup>

In addition to the work performed by the charitable organizations, individual pastors worked outside of their normal duties. The main venue for these activities was through the program called National Service. The army having been decimated in 1916 by the Somme Offensive, more and more men were needed and the army demanded the conscription of all nonessential workers. Coupled with hard feelings directed against the clergymen for being exempt from the Military Service Act of 1916, pastors did all they could to free up men for the front, a task that did not lessen the resentment against them. Clergymen served in either "special service" as chaplains to the armed forces and hospital workers or in "general service" working in the munitions industry or as farmers. Some worked as policemen, auto mechanics, coal miners, postmen, and tax collectors. One pastor with a background in experimental chemistry even became a researcher at the leading poisonous gas factory, so though not technically taking up arms; he certainly

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<sup>114</sup> Marrin, 78

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 178-79

contributed to the horrible death and injury of perhaps thousands of his German brethren.<sup>116</sup>

### Propaganda

Propaganda became an important tool during the war and one in which the Church was a willing participant. The pastors and their leaders became both participants in and “victims” of propaganda. Most Anglican ministers found it hard to believe that the civilized Germans could be responsible for the atrocities claimed in the initial stories. However, the burning of Louvain and especially the university library there, the publication of the Bryce report,<sup>117</sup> and finally the sinking of the *Lusitania* all were decisive in changing their minds. Once their faith in German civilization had been breached, nearly every atrocity story in circulation was believed and transmitted by the pastors to their flocks.<sup>118</sup> In fact, the religious press spent the entire conflict extolling the virtues of giving “without stint, and without flinching, the blood of his sons to the national cause.”<sup>119</sup>

### Recruiting

One of the most controversial roles of pastors during the war was that of recruiter. Many clergymen were convinced of the righteousness of the British cause and the civic responsibilities they saw as an integral part of the Christian life.<sup>120</sup> In fact, Marrin claims

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<sup>116</sup> Marrin, 196-97

<sup>117</sup> *The Bryce Report* was a heavily researched look into the atrocity stories allegedly committed by the Germans in Belgium using eye-witness accounts from British soldiers, Belgian civilians as well as diaries from captured German soldiers. <<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/brycere.htm>>

<sup>118</sup> Marrin, 184

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 186-87

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 177-78

that “there was hardly a bishop or church dignitary who did not participate in some way in the recruiting drives.”<sup>121</sup>

As the leader of the Anglican Church, the Archbishop of Canterbury quickly took a stand on recruiting. Lord Derby, the head of the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee had requested that the Church encourage recruitment from the pulpit. Archbishop Davidson rejected such a request not, as his biographer suggests, because he was opposed to the idea but rather because he felt that such action would actually have a detrimental effect on recruiting.<sup>122</sup> In fact, the Archbishop had written in a pastoral letter published in the *Church Times* that “The well-being, nay the very life of our Empire may depend upon the response which is given to the call for men, and I think I can say deliberately that no household or home will be acting worthily if in timidity or self-love, it keeps back any of those who can loyally bear a man’s part in the great enterprise on the part of the land we love.”<sup>123</sup> Archbishop Davidson was not the only Church leader to support recruiting. The Archbishop of York, Cosmo Gordon Lang, apparently enjoyed presiding at recruiting rallies.<sup>124</sup>

Not only church leadership but ordinary Anglican pastors were quick to encourage recruitment. An Anglican minister writing a letter to the editor in the *Times* assumes that Nonconformist ministers who have not joined have “strained every nerve to assist recruiting, because I know how many [Church of England] vicars and curates have done the like.”<sup>125</sup> He obviously felt that recruiting was nothing of which to be ashamed

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<sup>121</sup> Marrin, 180

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 180 referencing letters between Derby and Davidson; Derby to Davidson, 16 Nov. 1915; Davidson to Derby, 18 Nov. 1915

<sup>123</sup> Marrin, 180 quoting from *The Church Times* 1 Jan. 1915

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 180-181

<sup>125</sup> *The Times* (London), 20 February 1915, page 9, column d

and seemed far more concerned that his Nonconformist rivals were not doing their part to recruit in their own chapels.

Pastors and church leaders used several different approaches to recruit. Pastors trying to encourage parishioners to recruit would often stress duty or equate fighting for England with fighting for Christ. Others railed against cowardice. The master of St. Catherine's College, Cambridge said of those who were able to volunteer but would not, "It is a pity that we cannot brand that sort of man 'Made in fear of Germany.' Would to God we had known when they were born that they would eat our bread and grow and live amongst us, trusted and approved, and yet cowards. We need not have prayed and worked for them."<sup>126</sup> Perhaps the most disconcerting early practice of church recruiters was to appeal to the female relatives of potential recruits. At times they informed their parents that it was better for their sons to die an honorable death in battle than to live in dishonor. Even Anglican women's groups aided in this process as at times they tried to taunt and humiliate the men to join up. Needless to say as the war progressed and casualties increased this particular practice fell out of favor.<sup>127</sup>

In fact the more pressing issue in the first years of the war was not whether or not the Church ought to recruit but rather whether those who had taken Anglican orders should be allowed to volunteer themselves, as chaplains if possible and soldiers if not.

### Serving as Chaplains or Combatants?

One of the early pressing needs of the Church was to supply the troops at the front with sufficient numbers of chaplains. The problem appears to be not one of lack of

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<sup>126</sup> Marrin, 182-83 quoted from C.H.W. Johns, "Who is on the Lord's Side?" *Sermons for the Times* #9 (1914), 14

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 183

chaplains but the difficulty of the military situation.<sup>128</sup> Apparently the British Army was more concerned with shipping fighting men to the Western Front than supplying the spiritual needs to the satisfaction of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Another difficulty faced by the Church was the role of its clergy and their desire to fight against the Germans. While the official position was eventually hammered out, a debate raged over the course of several weeks in the *Times* editorial pages.

The controversy arose when a writer signing himself as “Churchman” sent a letter to the *Times* in February 1915 that criticized the “very feeble attitude of the Church of England in regard to the war.” He claimed that Nonconformist ministers were constantly signing up to join the ranks of the enlisted while “our vicars and curates should be comfortably at home while the whole manhood of the nation is endeavouring to defeat the Germans.”<sup>129</sup> Needless to say, with such broad statements the fireworks followed.

Writers to *The Times* in response to “Churchman’s” letter were generally critical of his views. The strongest argument that one writer gave was the order of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the head of the Church of England, that they ought to remain at their post and pointed out that the work of the clergy “had always been adverse to the bearing of arms.”<sup>130</sup> Another churchman pointed out much the same thing, emphasizing that the superiors of many young ministers had persuaded them to stay at their jobs by arguing that there “never had been a time when each man of them was more needed at the post of pastoral duty than during a period of sorrow and stress such as this was has involved.”<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> *The Times* (London), 10 February 1915, page 5, column a

<sup>129</sup> *The Times* (London), 19 February 1915, page 9, column d

<sup>130</sup> *The Times* (London), 19 February 1915, page 9, column d

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

One Anglican minister assented that there were in fact ministers at the front and furthermore that the theological colleges were “practically empty,” as the young men normally there had already enlisted and were serving in the military.<sup>132</sup> In February 1915 Luke Paget, the Bishop of Stepney used the evidence of the small number of young men available for taking holy orders at that time as evidence not of the decline of the Church but rather proof of these men’s true service to both God and England saying, “this too was a religious act...patriotism had ceased to be a sentimentalist thing it once was, and now was felt as a deep and burning religion.”<sup>133</sup>

Another very personal aspect of this dispute arose from the most obvious source, young churchmen who desired to enlist. One young pastor responded in a letter in *The Times* that were he to enlist, as he desired and as his congregation urged him to do, he faced serious consequences. His superiors told him he would be “unfrocked, his wife turned out into the street and have to live on 12s. 6d. a week with no prospects whatever when the war is over.”<sup>134</sup> Perhaps it would be best to remember that this young churchman must have had some idea that he would also face horrible conditions and a very real chance of a frightful wounding or death at the front.

Considering the declining role that organized religion was supposed to have played in society the success of the Church in recruiting is even more interesting. There are several explanations for this phenomenon. One was the power of persuasion of the pastors who were able successfully to call upon their countrymen’s religious feelings, his love of country and his emotions. The position of the clergymen within the community, especially the rural districts, was still powerful. He was seen as both religious leader and

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<sup>132</sup> *The Times* (London), 19 February 1915, page 9, column d

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> *The Times* (London), 22 February 1915, page 9, column e

an authority figure that had the education and standing that commanded a great deal of respect.<sup>135</sup>

Unfortunately, the stand the bishops took of not allowing their clergymen to join in combatant roles had unintended consequences. Many pastors became overzealous in their recruiting and propaganda efforts, exhorting and chastising from the pulpit. One commentator claimed that “its peculiar obligations were, with far too few exceptions, more deeply betrayed than they would have been by bearing arms.”<sup>136</sup> Many among the more zealous young pastors would later regret some of the remarks they had made in the heat of religious fervor.

#### Public View of the Church

During the first two years or so of the war public opinion was very positive towards the Church as with nearly all British social and political institutions. However, as the war progressed and especially as the clergy were excused from enrolling under the Derby scheme and excluded from conscription under the Military Service Act in 1916 public sentiment began to turn against the Church.<sup>137</sup>

Surprisingly the most vehement critics of keeping clergy out of the ranks were not the servicemen themselves but both religious and lay leaders who found the most faults. British soldiers serving in the trenches realized the incompatibility of service as a frontline soldier with the calling of the parson serving the Prince of Peace. Many on the

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<sup>135</sup> Marrin, 181-82

<sup>136</sup> Mews, 262 quoted from R. H. Gretton, *A Modern History of the English People 1910-22*, (1929), 173

<sup>137</sup> Marrin, 190

home front did not so understand and had very negative opinions towards the ‘shirkers’ who were not serving.<sup>138</sup>

### Problems Faced by the Church

Though no Church attendance records were kept during the war, conventional wisdom asserts that while there was initially a sharp increase in religious attendance and interest, it did not last. In fact, not only was there no willingness to assert that attendance had increased as the war continued through the years, many devout church attendees were actually driven away by the shrill German-hating sermons. Evidence of this decline can be seen in the loss of confirmations for those between the age of twelve and twenty. In 1914 there were 229,000 confirmations compared to 183,000 in 1919. In fact the 1914 figure has never again been equaled.<sup>139</sup>

What became alarmingly clear was that the war revealed and exacerbated the problems faced by the Church and society. Apparently “religious observance had no deeper roots than social convention or escapism. At home such factors as the break-up of the family, the introduction of Sunday labour and the abandonment of accepted standards of behavior depleted the church congregations.”<sup>140</sup> The Church would never recover.

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<sup>138</sup> Marrin, 190-91

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 210-11

<sup>140</sup> Moynihan, 15

CHAPTER 4  
AT THE FRONT

When the British entered the fighting in August 1914 it did so with a small professional army whose members were traditionally held in the lowest of esteem. The Great War was to change all that, to make soldiering respectable and create a truly national army.<sup>141</sup> The opportunities for the Church were seemingly limitless. If millions of newly minted British soldiers could be drawn closer to the Church in the initial emotional mood of patriotism and enlistment then a great revival could be achieved. If the Church used this opportunity properly then it could win England back to God and his Church.<sup>142</sup> Could the Church succeed in reversing the decline, particularly among the working class, using the common experiences of the war as the motivation?

Initially there was some room for hope for revival at the front. There seemed to be some evidence that those troops who served early in the war were more inclined to religion than the mass conscripted armies of the latter half.<sup>143</sup> However, the problems facing the Church in endeavoring to win back the young men of England were significant.

Some of the difficulties were obvious and unavoidable. For example, the number of chaplains initially serving with the British Expeditionary Force was tiny (only sixty-five) and the British government was much more inclined to send fighting men and

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<sup>141</sup> Albert Marrin, *The Last Crusade: The Church of England in the First World War*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1974, 184-85

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 202

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 203

material to the front than more chaplains.<sup>144</sup> While this figure would grow to a total of 3,480 by the end of the war, it was soon discovered that it was no easy matter to put pastors in the field.<sup>145</sup> One reason for this difficulty was that virtually all of those young men studying to become ministers volunteered for the infantry, 400 of the 1274 of those at theological colleges having done so in 1914 alone.<sup>146</sup>

### Chaplains

One of the greatest difficulties faced by the Church of England was the lack of qualified men to send along with the vast new armies being quickly formed. There were 5,397,000 British soldiers mobilized<sup>147</sup> during the four years of the war (a total of 8,905,000 from the whole British Empire during the period<sup>148</sup>) and only 3,030 Anglican chaplains having ever received commissions.<sup>149</sup> The number of men to be served per chaplain was high, making their jobs extremely difficult.

In addition, the job of the chaplain was further complicated by the expectations put upon that position and the limitations imposed by outside interference from both Church officials and superior officers. At the war's outset, the original sixty-five chaplains were assigned primarily to the hospitals, Field Ambulance, and brigade staffs. Their principal role was to minister to the wounded and there was little ability for them to meet frontline needs.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Jonathan Iremonger, "British Army Chaplains of World War I - Reactions to Service at the Front," Royal College of Defence Studies, 2000, 9

<sup>145</sup> Marrin, 206

<sup>146</sup> Iremonger, 6

<sup>147</sup> Colin Nicholson, *The Longman Companion to the First World War*, Longman, 2001, 248

<sup>148</sup> <<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/FWWarmies1914.htm>> Accessed 9 September 2005

<sup>149</sup> Marrin, 206

<sup>150</sup> Iremonger, 9

The harsh judgment of some contemporaries that the chaplains were a bumbling and incapable group is unfair. According to Marrin, these men were neither all exceptionally good nor bad, but rather as to be expected with any group, ranged in quality from the extraordinary to the criminal. Some became well-known for their exploits among the troops.<sup>151</sup> One explanation for this persistent negative belief was perhaps the savage attacks launched against Anglican chaplains, in particular by some writers after the war. For example, Robert Graves, in his famous book *Goodbye to All That: An Autobiography*, penned a scathing denunciation of Anglican chaplains: “If Anglican regimental chaplains had shown one tenth the courage, endurance and other human qualities that the regimental doctors showed, we agreed the British Expeditionary Force might well have started a religious revival.” Rather, Graves found them to be to be “remarkably out of touch with their troops.”<sup>152</sup> While Graves’ accusations might be one sided and a bit unfair, his basic criticisms were not founded upon thin air.<sup>153</sup> However, the role that chaplains played was more complicated than many troops might realize.

The list of jobs and responsibilities that chaplains had was staggering, making them among the “most overworked men in the army.”<sup>154</sup> In addition to his pastoral duties he helped in Church Army<sup>155</sup> recreation canteens, censored the mail, and served as social director by keeping the troops entertained. Sometimes he would be put in charge of helping with the stretcher bearers or drive an ambulance.<sup>156</sup> The chaplain was also in

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<sup>151</sup> Marrin, 207

<sup>152</sup> Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That: An Autobiography*, Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1995, 242.

<sup>153</sup> Iremonger, 11 note 33 – Graves’ wife was a staunch atheist and he had been deeply affected by the experiences of trench life, especially the loss of his close friend, David Thomas.

<sup>154</sup> Marrin, 207-8

<sup>155</sup> The Church Army was an Anglican organization designed along the lines of the Salvation Army.

<sup>156</sup> Marrin, 208

charge of burial services, registration of graves, writing letters of condolence, and even writing personal letters home for soldiers who were illiterate.<sup>157</sup> To meet these needs he had little formal preparation and had to learn essentially by doing.

Early in the war a distinct lack of training was a significant problem among the chaplains. It was assumed that with a minimum of military training, such as how to use a gas mask, a pastor could be converted straight from his parish into the job of chaplain. This deficit was not addressed until 1916 when a school was set up at Woolwich. The problem continued, however, and in 1917 an interdenominational school was created in France that offered periodic six day courses to share experiences, discuss problems, and improve morale.<sup>158</sup> Needless to say, these provisions were imperfect at best.

One of the most difficult aspects faced by the chaplain was to try to make sense of the chaos and seeming randomness of death at the front. In an army in which only an estimated ten to twenty percent of the men were acknowledged to be committed church members, the challenges of explaining the horror all around them was difficult at best.<sup>159</sup> Though the chaplains did not participate directly in killing, they did witness all the horror of combat and often lived in regular fear for their lives. In a few cases the chaplains themselves lost their faith, succumbing to the inexplicable dreadfulness of their experiences.<sup>160</sup>

When facing the problem of evil as presented by the war, many Anglicans discovered that the tools of the Church were not up to the task. In an army in which a great majority of the soldiers hardly understood the basic Christian doctrines of God,

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<sup>157</sup> Iremonger, 13

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 12

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 14 quoted *The Army and Religion* and the Bishop of Kensington's Report which agree on the broad consensus of the chaplains surveyed.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 14

grace, sin, forgiveness, and repentance, the chaplains were forced to lay the basic foundations of their faith before trying to explain how a loving God could allow such suffering. The lack of knowledge about the basic teachings of Christianity was not limited to enlisted men or found only in government schools but seemed to cut across all ranks and educational levels.<sup>161</sup>

Many Anglican ministers saw the opportunities for getting to the really important issues of life being incubated in the trenches. Phrases such as “the beautiful brotherhood of the trenches” and “the comradeship of the trenches” were thought to express a sentiment that the trenches represented a place where many a Tommy, as British soldiers were called, experienced genuine spiritual rebirth.<sup>162</sup> However, these concepts, while genuine and sincere, were in no way able to match the dreadfulness of the conditions at the front. As one writer puts it, “At the front something far more cataclysmic undermined the consolations of religion. With death in its most hideous forms all around, it needed a faith founded on rock to sustain any belief in a ‘merciful Father’.”<sup>163</sup>

The comparison of the suffering Christ and the sacrifice of the men at the Front is made no where more forcefully than in a letter by the poet Wilfred Owen. With obvious bitterness he writes:

For 14 hours yesterday I was at work – teaching Christ to lift his cross by numbers, and how to adjust his crown; and not to imagine the thirst till after the last halt. I attended his Supper to see that there were not complaints; and inspected his feet that they should be worthy of nails. I see to it that he is dumb, and stands at attention before his accusers. With a piece of silver I buy him every day, and with maps I make him familiar with the topography of Golgotha.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Iremonger, 16

<sup>162</sup> Marrin, 186

<sup>163</sup> Moynihan, 15

<sup>164</sup> Harold Owen and John Bell ed. *Wilfred Owen: Collected Letters*. London: Oxford University Press, 1967, letter to Osbert Sitwell – July 3, 1918, letter # 634, 562

Of course, the idea of the young being led to slaughter is not original or solely Owen's and some used it for other purposes.

Obviously more jingoistic-minded pastors and chaplains used the sacrifices as an opportunity to point out the necessity of suffering in order to achieve spiritual growth. Of course this revivalist approach was impractical if the chaplains did not handle themselves properly among the men.

In researching the minutes of the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, Schweitzer suggests that their padre, M. S. Evers, was "an ideal chaplain" who lived with his regiment, went over the top with them in order to bring in wounded troops, and was rewarded by drawing roughly two-hundred soldiers to Holy Communion.<sup>165</sup> The consensus of effective chaplains, Anglican, Roman Catholic, or Nonconformist, agreed with Evers in that "the Army Authority was completely stupid. They said that the proper place for chaplains was behind the line...I lived with the Regiment."<sup>166</sup> Even someone as seemingly opposed to religion as Robert Graves admitted that "the Roman Catholic chaplains were not only permitted to visit posts of danger, but definitely enjoined to be wherever fighting was, so that they could give extreme unction to the dying. And we never have heard of one who failed to do all that was expected of him and more."<sup>167</sup>

Anglican Chaplain G. A. Studdert Kennedy admitted in his poem, *Woodbine Willie*, that often he would go to the front and only hand out cigarettes to the troops rather than address their real needs (and thus earning the sobriquet "Woodbine Willie" for the brand of cigarette popular at the time). The poem concludes with the line:

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<sup>165</sup> Schweitzer, 41-42

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 41 quoted from Evers interview with Peter Liddle, September 1979, Evers Papers, Liddle Collection

<sup>167</sup> Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, 243

Their name! Let me hear it--the symbol  
Of unpaid--unpayable debt,  
For the men to whom I owed God's Peace,  
I put off with a cigarette.<sup>168</sup>

Successful chaplains learned what worked, but Church officials were either unaware of what was effective or hesitated to listen to their own men.

The Church also made dedicated service to the soldiers at the Front difficult by giving chaplains an enviable choice; they were able to return to their parishes at the end of one year of service.<sup>169</sup> While the needs of their parishes at home had increased, this practice seriously undermined the continuity of chaplains meeting the troops' needs. More importantly, the effect of this policy obviously left the Church open to criticism from front line troops who did not have the same "go home" clause.<sup>170</sup>

Another difficulty chaplains faced in trying to reach the men was in their choice of sermon topics. There were instances reported of chaplains being given their topics directly from their commanding officers who were more interested in inspiring the troops than teaching about the gentler aspects of the Prince of Peace. In fact, Major-General Sir William Thwaites, speaking at a soldiers' dinner after the war, recalled, "I told them on one occasion that I wanted a bloodthirsty sermon next Sunday, and would not have any texts from the New Testament."<sup>171</sup> Some chaplains needed little encouragement in their bellicosity. A journalist, C. E. Montague, recalled hearing two chaplains complaining as

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<sup>168</sup> Studdert Kennedy, *The Unalterable Beauty*, 1

<sup>169</sup> Moynihan, 58

<sup>170</sup> Iremonger, 12

<sup>171</sup> Marrin, 209 quoted from C. E. Payne, *Society at War* (Boston, 1931), 31

the war was drawing to a close that a few more German towns had not been destroyed nor had the latest poison gas been given enough use.<sup>172</sup>

A similar sentiment was voiced in November 1917. Former Secretary of State, Lord Lansdowne, tried to ensure that the war was not prolonged unnecessarily and published his views that the Allies ought to make their peace terms known.<sup>173</sup> The main church newspapers denounced him for undermining the war effort. Even though the Archbishop of Canterbury privately supported Lansdowne's position, he did not make his views known to the public, and only a few ex-chaplains openly supported Lansdowne.<sup>174</sup>

One of the most common complaints against the Church of England was that it was a cold, aloof, and unapproachable institution. The landmark book *The Army and Religion: An Enquiry and its Bearing upon the Religious Life of the Nation*, published in 1919, points to the arguments given for decades to explain the membership losses suffered by the Anglicans. The soldiers' list included a lack of fellowship, a party spirit within the Church, pew rents, a class restricted and socially exclusive clergy, and a Church that was an enemy of labor and in the pocket of the wealthy and nobles.<sup>175</sup> It seems that this distinction among classes placed a significant chasm between the chaplains and their would-be parishioners. One of the main obstacles to overcome was the class distinction between the wealthy and poor exemplified by the officers and men. The fact that all chaplains were officers and Anglican chaplains in particular were

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<sup>172</sup> Marrin, 209 quoted from C. E. Montague, *Disenchantment* (1922), 70

<sup>173</sup> Wikipedia: Henry Charles Keith Petty-FitzMaurice, 5th Marquess of Lansdowne. <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry\\_Petty-FitzMaurice%2C\\_5th\\_Marquess\\_of\\_Lansdowne](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Petty-FitzMaurice%2C_5th_Marquess_of_Lansdowne)> Accessed 20 September 2005.

<sup>174</sup> Iremonger, 30

<sup>175</sup> *The Army and Religion: An Enquiry ad its Bearing upon the Religious Life of the Nation*, 1919, 447-49 quoted in Marrin, 205

educated at the most exclusive universities in Britain created a vast gulf. They tended to be so different intellectually from the bulk of the enlisted men that it seems ludicrous to imagine that any sort of meaningful spiritual communication could have existed.<sup>176</sup>

Many chaplains responded to these charges of distance by using a language and a message the men could understand. Some tried more simple services and focused on the basics of Christian faith. Among the more successful were G. A. Studdert Kennedy and “Tubby” Clayton both of whom had experience before the war in working with the poor and disadvantaged. Both Clayton and Studdert Kennedy were atypical and both pursued different methods in order to reach the troops.<sup>177</sup>

Philip Thomas Byard “Tubby” Clayton became one of the more famous Army chaplains of the war. After having graduating from Oxford with a degree in theology he was ordained in 1910. He joined the army in early 1915 as a chaplain. By the end of 1915 he had opened a rest house in Flanders near the Ypres battlefield for soldiers returning from the front. The house was named Talbot House or more commonly Toc H (after the army signalers’ jargon for TH) and quickly became a favorite among the troops. Notices were placed throughout the house that rank did not apply within and Clayton treated all men equally.<sup>178</sup> Famed British military historian John Keegan notes that even today the chapel at the original Toc H “remains a deeply moving way-station to any pilgrim to the Western Front.”<sup>179</sup> In fact, at war’s end Clayton returned to England and opened another

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<sup>176</sup> Marrin, 205

<sup>177</sup> Iremonger, 20-22

<sup>178</sup> First World War. Com. Who’s Who: Tubby Clayton.

<<http://www.firstworldwar.com/bio/clayton.htm>> Updated - Wednesday, 26 December, 2001, Accessed 7 September 2005. and Toc H: History < <http://www.toch.org.uk/history.htm>> Accessed 7 September 2005.

<sup>179</sup> John Keegan, *The First World War*, New York: Knopf, 1999, 183-84

Talbot House and Theological School where hundreds of men from the original Toc H kept their promises to become ordained ministers should they survive the war.<sup>180</sup>

Other Anglican chaplains also distinguished themselves with their self-sacrifice and bravery. Four chaplains were awarded the Victoria Cross, the highest honor for military service. Of those four, three were chaplains from the Church of England. These men had a couple of things in common. They ignored or received dispensation to ignore the order forbidding chaplains to go into the front lines and their courageous acts all involved bringing several wounded out of harms way while under heavy enemy fire. Two of the three survived the war, while the third died of wounds and received his Victoria Cross posthumously.<sup>181</sup>

In addition to the three Anglican chaplains who were awarded the Victoria Cross, a number of clergymen's sons were also recipients. The most notable of these was Captain Noel Godfrey Chavasse, son of Francis James Chavasse, Bishop of Liverpool and founder of St. Peter's College, Oxford. In fact Captain Chavasse was one of only three men to ever be awarded the Victoria's Cross twice and the only one to do so during the First World War. As a doctor in the Royal Army Medical Corps, his desire to aid the wounded sent him into no man's land several times to retrieve soldiers for treatment. These awards were unusual in two respects; firstly, it was rare for a doctor to retrieve the wounded from no man's land and secondly, few members of the RAMC received

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<sup>180</sup> Toc H: History < <http://www.toch.org.uk/history.htm>> Accessed 7 September 2005.

<sup>181</sup> Bob Coulson, *The Chaplain VCs of the Great War*. <<http://www.hellfire-corner.demon.co.uk/coulson.htm>> Accessed 24 September 2004

distinction for their activities as they were considered to be only doing their jobs. The second award was granted posthumously.<sup>182</sup>

In fact, the sons of Anglican clergy made up an astonishing number of officers. It is estimated that the lay sons of clergymen provided thirty percent of Army officers and that by February 1916, thirteen bishops' sons had died in combat. The interest of pastors and church leadership was personally involved in the execution of the war and it is not hard to imagine that the attitude of those pastors who lost sons in the war must have been affected by their sacrifice.<sup>183</sup>

### The Men and the Church

The evidence of a lack of popular interest in the Church of England is demonstrated by statistics that point to attendance at voluntary communion services. During the war about seventy percent of the troops were registered as members of the Church of England, but it was common to find perhaps only twenty men in a camp of five thousand attending communion.<sup>184</sup>

It was strictly forbidden for British troops to keep personal diaries. The reasoning behind this rule was that the risk of them falling into enemy hands far outweighed any benefit their owner might later receive. One diarist writes of being charged with “disobeying Army Orders, writing a Field Postcard.” The charges against him were dropped due to lack of evidence, but his diary immediately afterwards switches to simply

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<sup>182</sup> Wikipedia: Noel Godfrey Chavasse <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/N.G.\\_Chavasse](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/N.G._Chavasse)> Accessed 6 September 2005.

<sup>183</sup> Marrin, 187-8

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 203

listing names and addresses of friends, one may assume out of concern for further reprimand.<sup>185</sup>

However, diaries were kept by men of all ranks and branches of service. Diaries of British soldiers would seem to serve as a fair place to look for introspective thoughts about God and the Church. However, the main things on the minds of the men at the front were artillery shells, snipers, weather, food, lice, and bathing (or lack thereof). Little space was reserved for discussion of their church attendance or reflection on the hereafter, or at least the Anglican version of it.<sup>186</sup> It is remarkable to see how little religion is found in the diaries and letters home of both officers and men, particularly when compared to their German counterparts.<sup>187</sup> The most common reference to church attendance is the Sunday Church Parade which was as much a kit inspection as anything else. In his autobiography years later, the Christian convert C.S. Lewis referred to them as “wicked institutions.”<sup>188</sup> Of course, the men had to spend free time cleaning their kit, further discouraging cheerful attendance to voluntary services.<sup>189</sup>

As an example of the lack of discussion of spiritual matters, the diary of George Culpitt is useful. Despite being called a “very religious man” and member of the Plymouth Brethren – a somewhat secretive Dissenter group – there was only brief mention of any belief in his diary. Upon being wounded and returning to England he writes, “Well I was now back in England after nearly thirteen months spent amongst the

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<sup>185</sup> William Bernard Whitmore, *England and the Somme*,

<<http://www.firstworldwar.com/diaries/whitmore.htm>> Accessed 6 September 2005

<sup>186</sup> The WWW is an excellent place to start for viewing diaries, letters and personal biographies. A listing of some of the more comprehensive sites is included in the bibliography.

<sup>187</sup> See Michael Moynihan *On Our Side: The British Padre in World War I*. London: Leo Cooper, 1983 – Chapter 7 for German students’ war letters

<sup>188</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1955), 107

<sup>189</sup> Iremonger, 28.

dangers and hardships of modern war and it was indeed good to feel that for a time at least one was safe, and I thank God that He has seen fit to preserve my life and send me home. He is indeed good for to Him I owe my life.”<sup>190</sup> As far as seeming to participate in any religious services or being influenced by any religious leader, chaplain or otherwise, there is no mention. One can only assume that he became religious only upon return from the war, or his belief was too private to write about in his diary, or he was too occupied with war to be concerned with religion. Regardless of the explanation, the lack of remarks regarding any religious activity or thought in his diary seems surprising.

Some diaries report religious activity in a very mundane manner. An Irish soldier in the British army at Gallipoli reports celebrating Mass with “our Priest” at 7 a.m. one Tuesday morning but makes no other comment. He later reports having Mass every morning and service on Sunday while at base camp. He reported these spiritual activities in literally the same breath in which he rejoices in receiving a new shirt, making it difficult to tell which of the two was more significant and brought more comfort.<sup>191</sup>

A fairly typical diary is the one kept by Private William Kelly. He was a married father serving with the ANZACS at Gallipoli. He mentioned going to church parade fairly regularly but made no other mention of his faith, the impact belief had on his life, or his thoughts on God and religion. Obviously, mandatory attendance at church parade (little short of another inspection in the eyes of most troops) being merely one of many activities expected of soldiers, had little impact on him. Or perhaps he was a private

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<sup>190</sup> George Culpitt, *The War Diary of George Culpitt, Royal Welch Fusiliers*, <<http://www.culpitt-war-diary.org.uk/index.htm>> Accessed 6 September 2005

<sup>191</sup> Denis Joseph Moriarty, Compiled by Alan Osborne, *A Gallipoli Diary* <<http://ww1.osborn.ws/>> Copyright 1999. Accessed 6 September 2005

religious man who did not express his feelings in his diary but rather in his letters home.<sup>192</sup>

Travis Hampson, an officer in a Field Ambulance unit with the Royal Army Medical Corps, has a couple of interesting stories involving the chaplains with whom he served. One of them he calls “an awful souvenir hunter” after the padre tried to figure a way to get an Iron Cross away from a wounded German officer. This type of behavior was not exactly what his superiors would want remembered. In the same entry the diarist recounts that the previous chaplain had “left us to join a cavalry regiment as a combatant”. The same chaplain who had been accused of souvenir hunting managed to “capture” a German cavalryman two days later when the German gave himself up.<sup>193</sup>

While many soldiers responded to the horrors of the war by virtually shutting down any attempts to reconcile what they experienced with anything outside of themselves, some educated young men turned to atheism and agnosticism. One of the most notable of these was C.S. Lewis, who reasoned that if God existed that he must have been somewhere else quite unaware of what was going on in the hellishness of the trenches. Of course, after the war Lewis returned to Christianity to the extent that he was considered one of the greatest Christian writers of the twentieth century. However, most of the college educated soldiers were more likely to lean towards Darwinian agnosticism rather than the more extreme atheism that Lewis espoused.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> William Kelly, *Personal Diary – Broadmeadows to Gallipoli – 1915*  
<[http://www.minerva.com.au/austwardiary/warriors/ARMY/WW1/Gallipoli/w\\_kelly.htm](http://www.minerva.com.au/austwardiary/warriors/ARMY/WW1/Gallipoli/w_kelly.htm)> Accessed 6 September 2005

<sup>193</sup> Travis Hampson, Travis Philip Davies, ed., *1914 to 1919: A Medical Officer's diary and narrative of the First World War*, <<http://web.ukonline.co.uk/xenophon/contents.htm>> Accessed 6 September 2005

<sup>194</sup> Stromberg, 78

Perhaps one of the most interesting and significant feature of the war was the seeming lack of involvement of the Church of England in the lives of many of the troops. For example, the soldiers produced trench newspapers using equipment found along rear areas when they were in reserve or preparing to rotate into the front trenches. One of the most famous of these produced by British soldiers was called *The Wipers Times* named for the British mispronunciation of the Belgian town of Ypres. The newspapers display a marvelous sense of humor and wit and deal with nearly all aspects of trench life. A study of the complete collection, covering four years, reveals no direct reference to the Church of England, its chaplains, or members.<sup>195</sup> The fact that the enlisted men produced dozens of different editions of this paper from various locations in and around the Ypres Salient during the course of the war, and yet still no such references to the Church of England appeared, is very telling. If the Church were having a meaningful and lasting impact on the men it seems at least some mention would have occasionally been made.

Though the experience of the war poets was not any different from other men who served, their ability to communicate makes them noteworthy. Some of the most poignant words of the period come from those who served at the front. The war created a generation of poets, some who lived to see war's end, some who did not. Two of the most well-known British poets were Wilfred Owen and his mentor Siegfried Sassoon.

It seems that in the poetry and letters of these two men there is to be found an assault on the established church (or more correctly churches) and the Establishment they represented. Whereas the Church and in particular the pastors at home in England seemed patriotic past the point of good sense, Sassoon and Owen turned away from those beliefs

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<sup>195</sup> Patrick Beaver, ed. *The Wipers Times: A Complete facsimile of the Famous World War One Trench Newspaper, Incorporating The 'New Church' Times, The Kemmel Times, The Somme Times, The B. E. F. Times, and The 'Better Times'*, London: Peter Davies, 1973

after spending a relatively short time at the front. These poets asserted that their rejection was based on the fact that pastors supported the government and thus the war, whereas they supported the soldiers and therefore humanity. Owen writes in a letter to his mother, that he would like to send a Bible to the Archbishop of Canterbury with only one verse “Ye have heard that it hath been said: An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say that ye resist not evil but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”<sup>196</sup> Owen continues, “And if his reply be ‘Most unsuitable for the present distressing moment... then there is only one possible conclusion, that there are no more Christians at the present moment than there were at the end of the first century.’”<sup>197</sup> Owen felt that the duty of the Christian church lay with the swift ending of the carnage and his poetry reflected these themes more and more as the war progressed.

One of the interesting aspects of the poetry of both Sassoon and Owen is the obvious Christian overtones. Both men grew up with Christian influences; Owen even considered ordination at one point.<sup>198</sup> Despite their backgrounds, the poetry of Owen and Sassoon, while being spiritual, was more humanistic than Christian. For example, in Owen’s poem, *Soldier’s Dream*, he writes:

I dreamed kind Jesus fouled the big-gun gears;  
And caused a permanent stoppage in all bolts;  
And buckled with a smile Mausers and Colts;  
And rusted every bayonet with His tears.

And there were no more bombs, of ours or Theirs,  
Not even an old flint-lock, not even a pikel.

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<sup>196</sup> Harold Owen and John Bell ed., *Wilfred Owen: Collected Letters*, London: Oxford University Press, 1967, 483

<sup>197</sup> Owen, 483

<sup>198</sup> Arthur Orrmont, *Requiem for War: The Life of Wilfred Owen*, New York: Four Winds Press, 1972, chapter 3

But God was vexed, and gave all power to Michael;  
And when I woke he'd seen to our repairs.<sup>199</sup>

Clearly, the poem is not particularly orthodox. It shows two Gods; one a suffering Christ who wants the carnage to end and the other a vengeful God who wants the war to continue.

There were lesser known English writers like Gerard Manley Hopkins, W. N. Hodgson, or the famous chaplain G. A. Studdert Kennedy whose poetry was much more overtly Christian.<sup>200</sup> For example, the contrast with the earlier poem *Woodbine Willie* by Studdert Kennedy is explicitly Christian and questioning of self rather than God.

The poetry of Sassoon and Owen is best at powerfully demonstrating the suffering and senselessness of the war. While their poetry contains many spiritual references that their readers would likely understand because of the cultural imprint of the church, it is much more intent on questioning the establishment, including the church, than it is in calling for men to turn to Christ. So while the poetry of Sassoon and Owen might have been popular and poignant, it demonstrated less of the power of the Church of England to inspire and influence these writers spiritually than it does in giving them a common cultural background from which to address their countrymen.

A group of Evangelical (Nonconformist) soldiers offered the three following suggestions for reforms of Anglican services; “in the first place the services had to be bright and cheery, in the second the preaching had to be short, real and practical and in the third there had to be less starch and more brotherhood.”<sup>201</sup> Though these suggestions

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<sup>199</sup> Wilfred Owen, *War Poems and Manuscripts of Wilfred Owen*,  
<<http://www.hcu.ox.ac.uk/jtap/warpoems.htm#29>> Accessed 3 October 2005

<sup>200</sup> Iremonger, 6 note 19

<sup>201</sup> Schweitzer, 45 quoted from Minutes of 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion Christian Union Meeting, 27 February 1918

might be helpful were the Church of England to consider them at the time, what stands out is the attitude and perception of common non-Anglican Christians towards the established church. It seems obvious that they had some knowledge of their subject, if through nothing more than hearsay. Considering the fact that these were minutes recorded from a Christian gathering from an area of England that was estimated to be composed of seventy-one percent Anglican<sup>202</sup> it seems safe to assume that at least some of these men had first-hand knowledge of Anglican services. The opinions of these men were very similar to Anglican chaplains who tried to assert those views at war's end to senior church officials. While changes took place within the Church of England after the war, it is unclear to what degree the Army chaplains had on them.<sup>203</sup> What is clear is that many of the same issues, including whether chaplains should be allowed in the front lines and the short service of chaplains, returned with World War II.<sup>204</sup> In short, it appears that little that was learned in the First World War was applied to the Second.

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<sup>202</sup> Schweitzer, 39

<sup>203</sup> Iremonger, 24

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 33-34

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

An attempt to judge any organization as vast, ancient, or important as the Church of England in such a limited manner verges on impertinence. The role of the Christian church in any Western society in the Twentieth century is a difficult and at times controversial one. Add to that the difficult position of a state church in an empire as vast and powerful as the British Empire in 1914 and the job becomes exceedingly more complicated. There is no yardstick by which to properly measure it.

Addressing the question of the effectiveness of the Anglican Church on England during this period is difficult at best. The actual amount of aid and comfort given by the Established Church (or any church for that matter) is difficult to gauge in any satisfactory way. After the war, attendance initially rose through the 1920s but fell through the 1930s. The Church and its leaders continued to have an impact upon the peace treaties, Bishop Gore being an ardent supporter of the League of Nations.<sup>205</sup> Furthermore, the concept of preventing war at all costs, an idea championed by many veterans of the Great War and supported by men like Chaplain G. A. Studdert Kennedy, would have a tremendous impact upon the next generation. Sadly, what they desired for good was turned to evil when Adolf Hitler used the fear of war against the well-intentioned men who fostered it.

By almost all quantitative means it would appear the Church failed in its goals to use the great tragedy of the war to revitalize itself and re-evangelize England. While the number of people positively aided by the Church of England during the war is without question, most Anglican leaders would find little upon which to point with pride.

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<sup>205</sup> Marrin, 242

Individual efforts by men like “Tubby” Clayton and Christian Socialists like Bishop Charles Gore and Rev. Studdert Kennedy changed the opinion of some about the relevancy of the Church and its interest in the common Briton.

However, given that the vast percentage of the population of Britain was a member of the urban laboring classes, the Church of England had to rise to meet the challenge of this situation. To fail to do so would have been calamitous. Considering the eventual precipitous drop in adherence and attendance after the Great War, it appears that the Church indeed missed its chance. It is interesting to speculate that if the events of the summer of 1914 had not occurred as they did and the Great War had not happened, how would the Church have dealt with these same working classes?

Certainly, the Church of England made many mistakes during the war. Many pastors in later years regretted urging recruitment from their pulpits or preaching messages of hate against Germany. The hyper-patriotism of the early stages of the war perhaps could also be regretted but the pastors were no more or less jingoistic than any other sector of society. Church leaders at all levels could always imagine that more could have been done with regards to evangelism or charity work, but countless numbers were aided by dozens of church agencies and associations throughout Europe.

The Church of England could take pride in several areas as well. As a state church, it had been loyal to the government and thus to the people it represented. With dissent virtually nonexistent, the Church certainly seemed to be mirroring the will of the people with this patriotic support. It would be hard to imagine the impact that Anglican opposition to this initially popular war would have been. Without doubt it would have made the Suffragette movement seem mild in comparison. The Church did maintain to a

significant degree its moral compass throughout the conflict. While many of the decisions appear hard to understand today, the loyalty of the members of the Church of England to their country is admirable. In fact the sacrifice of such a high percentage of its bright young theology students definitely had a negative impact on the health of the Church after the war. These men could not be easily replaced.

Through no fault of its own the Church of England found itself in an impossible situation in August 1914. Second-guessing the decisions made during that time, even with the benefit of hindsight, is difficult at best. While the hoped-for revival of the Western Front never materialized, the Church of England was not forced into irrelevancy by the events of the war. During such a cataclysmic time that left empires crumbled and millions dead perhaps maintaining relevancy is all that can be expected.

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