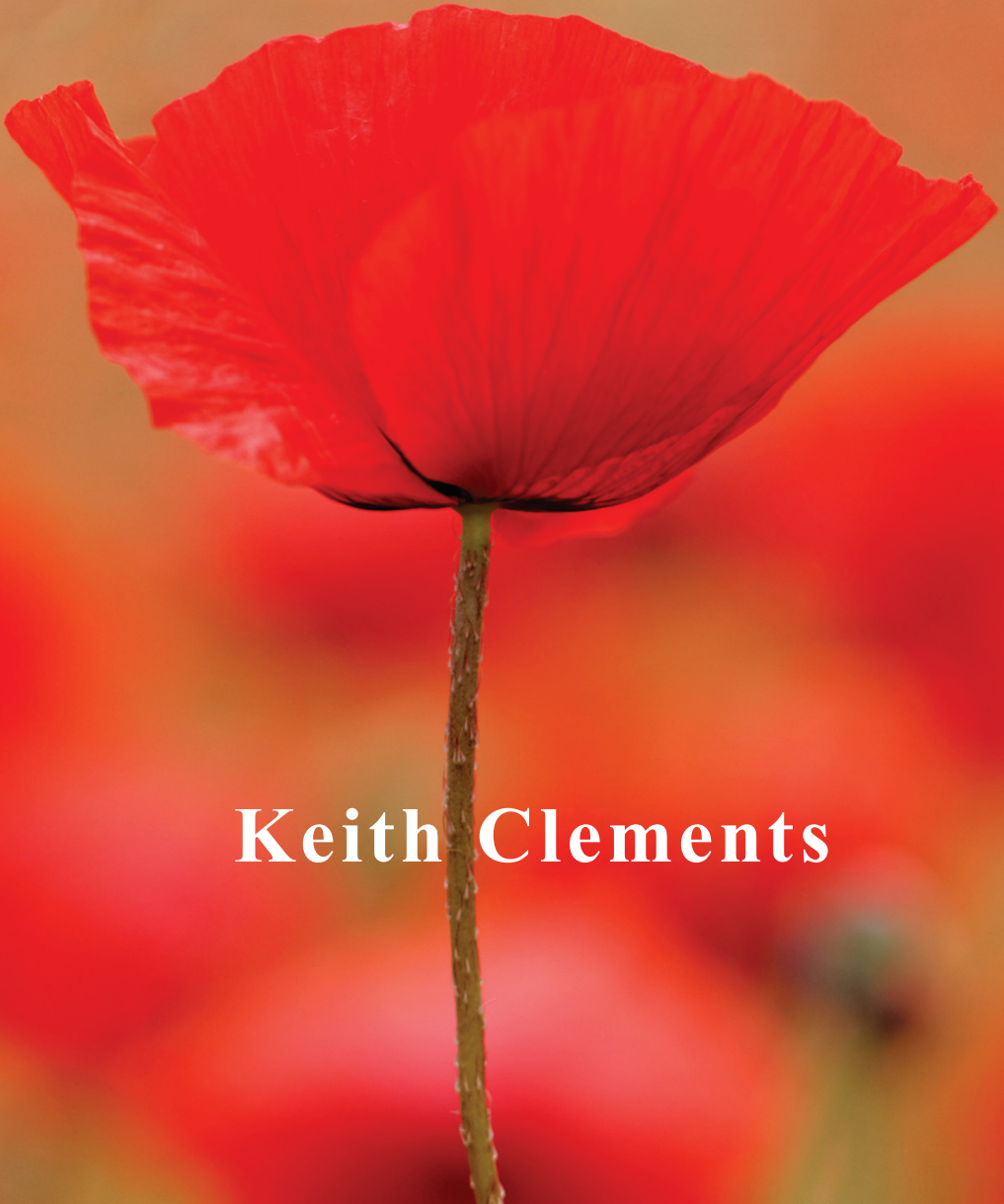


# WE WILL REMEMBER



Keith Clements

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## INTRODUCTION

### “WE WILL REMEMBER”

“We will remember them.” These words uttered at acts of remembrance will acquire a new poignancy in this and the next four years as we commemorate the centenary of the First World War. As that conflict slips over the edge of memory for almost everyone of this generation, to “remember” those who fought, suffered and died, and those whose lives were marked forever by loss and grief, means to enter into a special kind of devotion, a kindling of the heart, mind and imagination, in order to enter into a meaningful relationship with them. The pages that follow are offered as an aid to that devotion.

*“We will remember....”* For Christians “to remember” is a very special phrase. At the centre of their faith is the act of remembrance made every time the faithful meet to break bread and share the cup, remembering that Jesus Christ died for us and lives among us. Such “remembering” is more than just “calling to mind” a past event. It means entering into living relationship with the Lord and with one another. It is an act of *re-membering*. It is the enabling of the members of a broken humanity *to become members with one another again in Christ*.

*“We will remember....”* How then can we truly *re-member* with those who died long before most of us today were born, or lived into our time but whose experiences of the war were theirs and not ours? One way is simply to allow them to speak to us themselves, to hear their own voices from their own time. In these coming days an immense amount will be said and written, portrayed on stage and screen, about what happened in 1914-18, and why. Varying interpretations will be offered and disputed, judgments will be made and countered, particular political, philosophical and – yes – religious interests will become manifest as the past is reconstructed and reviewed. This anthology does not claim to do more than allow some of the voices from the past to speak and to make their

own impact upon us as today we still struggle with issues of conflict, peace and war, and of what belief in God means in it all.

*"We will remember...."* In Christian understanding none are to be privileged and none excluded from remembrance, for there is one God and Father of all. It goes without saying that we will remember those who were killed and maimed in such unimaginable numbers. But alongside them we remember those for whom each death was an inconceivable and irreplaceable loss. We will also remember those who came to our shores as strangers, whether as refugees or members of the armed services from far places in the British Empire. We will remember those who ministered to the needs of sick, wounded and distressed, professionally and voluntarily. We will also remember those whose conscience forbade them to take up arms, on account of which they were prepared to suffer with their own badge of courage and steadfastness. Further and not least, we will remember the varying ways in which churches, their leaders and their ablest minds sought to respond by discerning the will and purpose of God in the darkness and bore witness to their hope for justice, peace and reconciliation. So by listening to them we will *re-member* them, and they will become partners with us in our life and witness today.

*"We will remember...."* Whom else shall we remember? The body of Christ exists among and for all people and peoples, and the first and last allegiance of Christians is to Jesus Christ above all else. The church, while it exists among the nations, is a fellowship transcending all national boundaries and interests. When war prompts Christians to remember, even if they feel compelled to take sides their remembering will embrace all, as God's love embraces all. The First World War engulfed many countries, in Europe and beyond, as well as our own. The suffering and grief of our erstwhile enemies Germany and Austria-Hungary were as real as that of Britain and her allies. We will remember them too, as they will remember us, and give thanks for the relationships of peace that we now enjoy, and must strengthen still further, in Europe and beyond.

*"We will remember...."* Not just people, but the whole nature of the world in which they were set. If we, from today's perspective, can see

more clearly the things that were making for war long before the explosion of 1914 – the assumed ambitions and rights of empires, their competition for the earth's resources, the complacent belief in the cultural superiority of one's own national tradition and social structure – it is also the case that in remembering we shall also be judged by that generation for our own assumptions and our acquiescence in the sinful structures that operate against peace today. As will appear in the pages that follow, the war of a century ago brought to the best minds and most sensitive souls of the time a searching sense of penitence, the need for humility out of which a new beginning for humanity and the churches could be made.

The anthology comprises chapters of varying length on a range of aspects of the war, the particular experiences and differing stances of the people involved, and of Christian responses to the conflict. Some of the material may be relatively familiar. Other pieces appear in public for the first time and will be quite new to everyone. Towards the end of each chapter some Bible passages are suggested for reflection and meditation, questions are offered for discussion and in some cases there are suggestions for things to do. The material can be used in whatever way seems helpful: whether in study groups, in worship preparation, as resources for preaching or teaching, or for individual study and meditation.

However it is used, may we remember, and in our remembering be helped for service and witness by those who speak to us from their hour of crisis to our time of responsibility.

# 1

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## THE LAST SUMMER

But there was a strange temper in the air. Unsatisfied by material prosperity the nations turned restlessly towards strife internal or external. National passions, unduly exalted in the decline of religion, burned beneath the surface of nearly every land with fierce, if shrouded, fires. Almost one might think the world wished to suffer. Certainly men were everywhere eager to dare.

(Winston Churchill)<sup>1</sup>

The years immediately preceding the outbreak of war in 1914 were anything but tranquil, with increasing social unrest within Britain and the rising threat of actual conflict in Ireland, not to mention a steadily increasing tension and rivalry between Britain and Germany. But it was perhaps inevitable that, set against the horror of what was to come, the “last summer” of the pre-war world should be cast in an idyllic light.

Vera Brittain, 18 years old at the time, attended the end of school year celebrations and Speech Day at Uppingham School, from where her brother Edward and his friend Roland Leighton, with whom she was falling in love, were about to leave (seemingly) for university:

Some of the masters, perhaps, were more prescient, but I do not believe that any of the gaily clad visitors who watched the corps carrying out its manoeuvres and afterwards marching so impressively into the Chapel for the Speech Day service, in the least realised how close at hand was the fate for which it had prepared itself, or how many of those deep and thrilling boys’ voices were to be silent in death before another Speech Day. Looking back

upon those three radiant days of July 1914, it seems to me that an ominous stillness, an atmosphere of brooding expectation, must surely have hung about the sunlit flower gardens and the shining green fields. But actually I noticed nothing more serious than the deliberate solemnity of the headmaster's speech at the prize-giving after the service.<sup>2</sup>

I have written so much about Uppingham Speech Day because it was the one perfect summer idyll that I ever experienced, as well as my last care-free entertainment before the Flood. The lovely legacy of a vanished world, it is etched with minute precision on the tablets of my memory. Never again, for me and for my generation, was there to be any festival the joy of which no cloud would darken and no remembrance invalidate.<sup>3</sup>

Even before the storm broke, however, certain voices were warning that things were far from well beneath the surface. An Anglican theologian, Father J.N. Figgis of the Community of the Resurrection, in his book *Civilisation at the Cross Roads* (1912) wrote ominously: "Something is crumbling all around us" and "There is death in the pot of modern civilisation, and it is not like to heal itself." Still more darkly the following year he claimed: "We can almost hear the thunders of the avalanche of war – war on a scale unknown. Hardly does the world even look stable any longer."<sup>4</sup>

In fact, since the early 1900s there had been people in both the British and German churches, with the support of church leaders, actively campaigning for better relations between their two countries. During 1908-09 there had been two large-scale exchange visits involving senior figures of all denominations – Anglican, Roman Catholic, Protestant and Free Churches – and a joint council of the churches in both countries was set up to continue promoting better relations between the two peoples.<sup>5</sup> The British and German sections each published a journal, *The Peacemaker* and *Die Eiche* respectively, which published articles and exchanged information aimed at interpreting British and German atti-

tudes and political interests to each other. Out of this British-German initiative a still wider Christian peace movement was growing, and this culminated in an international conference at Constance on the German-Swiss border – which convened only on the fateful day 1 August 1914. As Europe was mobilising for war there was only just time to agree on the setting up of a body with potentially worldwide reach: the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches.

The chain of events following from the assassination in Sarajevo of the Austrian Crown Prince had taken almost everyone completely by surprise.

## ***FOR REFLECTION***

**Bible reading:** Luke 19:41-44

With hindsight, we are apt to say that well-meaning people in Britain and Germany, including Christians, failed to discern the factors that were endangering peace in Europe and thus leading to war. But Jesus speaks of a failure to recognize “the things that make *for peace*”.

- Does this imply that for Jesus Jerusalem was *already* in effect at war with the world around it and needed right away to seek the path of reconciliation with God and its neighbours?
- Some would argue that in the early 1900s the failure lay in not seeing that *empire* – any empire – was itself a creation and manifestation of war. Do you agree?
- Today, what are the inherently conflictual tendencies in our world that need to be exposed and addressed for the sake of peace?



## 2

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## SHOCK

Before we could realise what was happening, we found all the apparent solid ground beneath our feet breaking up, and ourselves standing in horror on the edge of the abyss. We would not be educated into seriousness, and now God has shocked us into it... It needs little foresight to see that as a result of this war ancient institutions will be shaken, much will be overthrown never to rise again, and a staggering blow will be dealt to our civilisation.

(From a sermon preached by Revd A.J. Nixon, Baptist minister, Burnham-on-Sea, Somerset, August 1914)<sup>6</sup>

Father P.N. Waggett, a member of the Society of St John the Evangelist (the “Cowley Fathers”) quickly became an army chaplain and wrote in September 1914 in the *Cowley Evangelist*:

Since we last read the *Evangelist* a great change has come over all our lives. In the interval we were forced to face the dread of war, and a little later we faced the dread of peace which would have been purchased by the desertion of duty, and the fatal acknowledgment that might is right... we recognise a great day of God, a time of reckoning with the Eternal Justice, a time of testing and inevitable transition. For the Day of God, when it comes and passes, leaves nothing as it was before... <sup>7</sup>

The sense of a “great day of God” was not confined to believers. The Cambridge poet Rupert Brooke, whose death in April 1915 was to become symbolic of patriotism at its most sublime, was a decided

atheist. Yet in expressing the liberating element in the shock even he could not refrain from religious rhetoric:

Now, God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour,  
And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping,

There was however deep pain for people like J.H. Rushbrooke, minister of Hampstead Garden Suburb Free Church, well-versed in German with a deep love of the country having studied in Berlin and being married to a German. A leading figure in the British-German churches' peace movement and editor of *The Peacemaker* (see chapter 1), he had been attending the peace conference at Constance and with his wife and daughter was still in Germany when war was declared. He had to remain there for several weeks before returning home. He wrote to his congregation:

Perhaps the shock of this war has fallen on few as heavily as upon me, who had toiled for years on behalf of friendly relations between two nearly-related peoples, and had believed that the Christian faith was strong enough to overcome the suspicions and jealousies that make for war. All seemed but a few weeks ago to promise so well – and now! My personal faith has almost reeled in the presence of the awful fact; and when I exhort you still to believe in the God of peace and love, I am exhorting no less my own heart. It is "out of the depths" that we must all cry to Him, whose ways are unsearchable, but who is nevertheless "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ".<sup>8</sup>

If in other ways still far from united, churches across the whole confessional spectrum shared a common sense of shock and distress. In Rome the newly elected Pope Benedict XV issued his first Encyclical *Ad Beatissimi Apostolorum* on 1 November (All Saints' Day):

....[W]hat could prevent the soul of the common father of all

being most deeply distressed by the spectacle presented by Europe, nay, by the whole world, perhaps the saddest and most mournful spectacle of which there is any record. Certainly those days would seem to have come upon us of which Christ our Lord foretold: "You shall hear of wars and rumours of wars – for nation shall rise against Nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (*Matt.* xxiv, 6, 7). On every side the dread phantom of war holds sway: there is scarce room for another thought in the minds of men. The combatants are the greatest and wealthiest nations of the earth; what wonder, then, if well provided with the most awful weapons modern military science has devised, they strive to destroy one another with refinements of horror. There is no limit to the measure of ruin and slaughter; day by day the earth is drenched with newly-shed blood, and is covered with the bodies of the wounded and of the slain. Who would imagine as we see them thus filled with hatred of one another, that they are all of one common stock, all of the same nature, all members of the same human society? Who would recognize brothers, whose Father is in heaven? Yet, while with numberless troops the furious battle is engaged the sad cohorts of war, sorrow and distress swoop down upon every city and every home; day by day the mighty number of widows and orphans increases, and with the interruption of communications, trade is at a standstill; agriculture is abandoned; the arts are reduced to inactivity; the wealthy are in difficulties; the poor are reduced to abject misery; all are in distress.

Moved by these great evils.....at the very outset of our Supreme Pontificate....we implored Kings and rulers to consider the floods of tears and of blood already poured out, and to hasten to restore to the nations the blessings of peace....We implore those in whose hands are placed the fortunes of nations to hearken to Our voice. Surely there are other ways and means whereby violated rights can be

rectified. Let them be tried honestly and with good will, and let arms meanwhile be laid aside. It is impelled with love of them and of all mankind, without any personal interest whatever, that We utter these words. Let them not allow these words of a friend and of a father to be uttered in vain.

## **FOR REFLECTION**

**Bible readings:** Jeremiah 4:23-30; Isaiah 54:10; Isaiah 24:18-20

*“Before we could realise what was happening, we found all the apparent solid ground beneath our feet breaking up, and ourselves standing in horror on the edge of the abyss.”* (Sermon by A.J. Nixon, quoted above).

- Can you recall a moment or situation in the life of the world in your own lifetime when you felt similarly?
- How does such an experience or sensation connect with a faith in God?
- Does faith act as a buffer against the shock? Or does the shock shake the faith? Or does the “shaking of the foundations” lead to a deeper realisation of what cannot be shaken?

The German-born theologian Paul Tillich (1886-1965) served as an army chaplain in the German army in the First World War. He found the experiences on the Western front shattering to his traditional Lutheran faith which he sought to rebuild in a new way. In the early 1930s, persecuted by the Nazis, he emigrated to the USA and became an outstanding theological teacher and writer. Not long after the Second World War his volume of sermons *The Shaking of the Foundations* (1949)<sup>9</sup> appeared. He describes “the shaking of the foundations” as the characteristic and ongoing experience of modern people, faced not only with upheavals brought by war and revolution but the discoveries of atomic science which appeared capable of bringing humankind and the whole world to chaos and utter destruction. “Man’s claim to be like God has been

rejected once more; not one foundation of the life of our civilization has remained unshaken.” His first sermon draws upon the above passages from Jeremiah and Isaiah, and he bids us learn from the prophets that it is precisely in the apparent doom that the unchangeable and unshakable divine reality can be encountered.

How could the prophets speak as they did? It was because, beyond the sphere of destruction, they saw the sphere of salvation; because, in the doom of the temporal, they saw the manifestation of the Eternal. It was because they were certain that they belonged within the two spheres, the changeable *and* the unchangeable. For only he who is also beyond the changeable, not bound within it alone, can face the end. All others are compelled to escape, to turn away. How much of our lives consists in nothing but attempts to look away from the end! <sup>10</sup>

- In what ways do you think the churches today are more – or less – capable of enabling people to face the “shaking of the foundations” than they were in 1914?

**Further Bible reading: Mark 13:1-8**

### 3

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## THE CHURCHES RESPOND

On August 2, I believed that Great Britain could and should keep out of the European conflict, but the violation of Belgian neutrality made me waver, and the speeches in the House of Commons of Mr Asquith and Sir Edward Grey convinced me that duty and honour called to participation.<sup>11</sup>

So states the Congregational minister and theologian Alfred E. Garvie, principal of New College, London. His position of initial hesitancy or even opposition to war, followed by support in view of the German invasion of Belgium en route to attack France, is typical of most British church opinion at the time.

The veteran Baptist leader John Clifford, chief spokesperson of “militant nonconformity”, had a reputation as a vigorous campaigner for international peace and had braved much hostility during 1899-1901 for his outspoken opposition to the Boer War. He had attended the peace conference at Constance (see chapter 1) on 1 August and on his return drew up a statement calling for Baptists to abstain from the conflict. But the violation of Belgian neutrality decided the issue for him as he declared that Germany had:

deliberately and of express purpose... broken into Belgium, flung to the winds as veriest chaff her solemn treaty obligations, flouted public law, and trampled underfoot with inef-fable scorn the rights of small nationalities as not even the small dust of the balance.<sup>12</sup>

Expressed in variously dramatic language, this was indeed the standard viewpoint of church leaders in Britain. Charles Casartelli, Roman

Catholic Bishop of Salford, adds a certain confessional note:

It must be our consolation that, as far as we can judge, our Government has up to the last moment persistently and unwearingly done its very best to prevent this great War and to keep clear of it; and that only the genuine conviction, at last forced upon our rulers, that both our national existence and our sworn pledges in a cause of justice have rendered the momentous step inevitable, and has finally decided them to unsheathe the Sword. To us Catholics it is surely a further consolation that this unsheathing has been in chivalrous aid to a gallant little Catholic Nation, which for exactly 30 years has been governed by a purely Catholic Ministry and has given an example of enlightened social, economic, educational, cultural legislation, to all the world, of which we may well be proud... We as Catholics must ungrudgingly take up our full share in the stern work before our Country...<sup>13</sup>

### **Appeals from Germany<sup>14</sup>**

In September 1914 there arrived in Britain an “Appeal to Evangelical [i.e. Protestant] Christians Abroad”, signed by a large number of German Protestant church leaders, theologians and missionary representatives. It painfully responded to the widespread international condemnation of Germany’s part in starting hostilities – “a systematic network of lies, controlling the international telegraph service, is endeavouring in other lands to cast upon our people and its Government the guilt for the outbreak of this war, and has dared to dispute the inner right of us and our Empire to invoke the assistance of God”. Germany had gone to war only as a desperate measure to defend her frontiers and land “from being ravaged by Asiatic barbarism.” In a clear reference to Britain, the appeal lamented that Germany’s adversaries had been joined “by those whom by blood and history and faith are our brothers, with whom we felt ourselves in the common world-task more closely bound than with any other nation”, and especially that the mission fields where common

Christian enterprise was needed – as affirmed at the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference in 1910 – were now the scenes of hostility between Christian nations.

We know full well that through this sanguinary judgment God is also calling our nation to repentance, and we rejoice that she is hearing His holy voice and turning to Him. But in this we know that we are at one with all the Christians among our people, that we can and must repudiate on their behalf and on behalf of their Government the responsibility for the terrible crime of this war and all its consequences for the development of the Kingdom of God on earth. With the deepest conviction we must attribute it to those who have long secretly and cunningly been spinning a web of conspiracy against Germany, which now they have flung over us in order to strangle us therein.

In the Appeal no mention was made of the Belgian issue. The archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson, together with other Anglican bishops and Free Church leaders, responded at length and with astonishment...

that those who occupy the positions held by the signatories of this appeal should commit themselves to a statement of the political causes of the War, which departs so strangely from what seem to us to be the plain facts of this grave hour in European history.

§§

It has not been a light thing for us to give our assent to the action of the Government of our country in this matter. But the facts of the case as we know them have made it impossible for us to do otherwise.... It is upon these facts that we rest our assured conviction that, for men who desire to maintain the paramount obligation of fidelity to plighted word, and the duty of defending weaker nations against



violence and wrong, no possible course was open but that which our country has taken.

§§

God knows what it means to us to be separated for a time by this great War from many with whom it has been our privilege – with whom we hope it will be our privilege again – to work for the setting forward of the Christian message among men. We unite whole-heartedly with our German brethren in deploring the disastrous consequences of the War, and in particular its effect in diverting the energies and resources of the Christian nations from the great constructive tasks to which they were providentially called on behalf of the peoples of Asia and Africa.

But there must be no mistake about our own position. Eagerly desirous of peace, foremost to the best of our power in furthering it, keen especially to promote the close fellowship of Germany and England, we have nevertheless been driven to declare that, dear to us as peace is, the principles of truth and honour are yet more dear.

Also issued in Germany was the *Manifesto of the Ninety-Three* – a declaration by leading intellectuals in many fields, including writers, scientists and artists, which vehemently denied the accusations of German aggression and of violation of neutral Belgium (“It has been proved that France and England had resolved on such a trespass, and it has likewise been proved that Belgium had agreed to their so doing”) and ill-treatment of civilians there and in other countries: “It would have been suicide on our part not to have pre-empted this.” It affirmed the peace-loving intentions of Kaiser Wilhelm II and concluded:

*It is not true* that the combat against our so-called militarism is not a combat against our civilization, as our enemies hypocritically pretend it is. Were it not for German militarism, German civilization would long since have been extirpated. For its protection it arose in a land which for centuries

had been plagued by bands of robbers as no other land had been. The German army and the German people are one and today this consciousness fraternizes 70,000,000 Germans, all ranks, positions, and parties being one.

We cannot wrest the poisonous weapon – the lie – out of the hands of our enemies. All we can do is to proclaim to the world that our enemies are giving false witness against us. You, who know us, who with us have protected the most holy possession of man, we call to you:

Have faith in us! Believe, that we shall carry on this war to the end as a civilized nation, to whom the legacy of a Goethe, a Beethoven and a Kant is just as sacred as its own hearth and homes.

For this we pledge you our names and our honor.

Among the 93 signatories were the eminent theologians Adolf Deissmann, Adolf von Harnack, Wilhelm Herrmann, Friedrich Naumann, Adolf von Schlatter and Reinhold Seeberg. A young Swiss pastor, Karl Barth, was not impressed, as he later recalled:

...ninety-three German intellectuals issued a terrible manifesto, identifying themselves before all the world with the war policy of Kaiser Wilhelm II and Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg. For me it was almost worse than the violation of Belgian neutrality. And to my dismay, among the signatories I discovered the names of almost all my German teachers... It was like the twilight of the gods...<sup>15</sup>

This proved to be a defining moment for Barth, spurring him to initiate a radically new beginning for 20th century theology in which he was to become one of the most prophetic voices. It should be noted, however, that not all prominent German theologians signed the manifesto, and of those who did several during the later course of the war regretted their having done so in the heat of the moment.

## The pulpit a recruiting post?

The extent to which British pulpits were used to rally men to enlist is much debated. Certainly some preachers did affectively act as recruiting agents, or at any rate urged the righteousness of the cause upon their flocks, especially as stories (many unsubstantiated) of German atrocities in Belgium were given wide and often lurid publicity. Arthur Foley Winnington-Ingram, bishop of London 1901-39, reputedly often described the war as “The Nailed Hand against the Mailed Fist” and himself became chaplain of the London Rifle Brigade. In September 1914 he preached to soldiers at Bisley. After acknowledging that there were personal and national sins for British people to repent of he declares:

But when we have said all this, this is an *Holy War*. We are on the side of Christianity against anti-Christ. We are on the side of the New Testament which respects the weak, and honours treaties, and dies for its friends, and looks upon war as a regrettable necessity.... It is a Holy War, and to fight in a Holy war is an honour.... Already I have seen a light in men's eyes which I have never seen before.<sup>16</sup>

Father P.N. Waggett, of the Cowley Fathers (see chapter 2), wrote also in September of the morally energising effect of commitment to the struggle:

Already in our mood and feeling we have died the saving death. In mood and hope and feeling all littleness has passed away. It is burned in the furnace of affliction. It is evaporated in the *greatness* of the event. Where now are selfishness, and pretence, and animosity, and luxury, and sloth? Surely they are gone for ever. Where are they? They are hiding still at the bottom of the heart.... What is abandoned there must be abandoned in reality.... If each prays for this death and resurrection, if the Church with one heart thus prays, then the nation, now softened and ennobled by affliction, will not, when the great floods pass, climb again

to the old shores of worldly care and pleasure.<sup>17</sup>

### **Contrition, thoughtfulness and the wider view**

The Scottish layman J.H. Oldham had been secretary of the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, acknowledged to be a founding event in the modern ecumenical movement, and was now secretary of its Continuation Committee. At Edinburgh the close cooperation of the missionary bodies of Germany, Britain, the USA and other nations was affirmed as the great hope for the future of world Christianity. A world war obviously was the gravest threat to this. The day after Britain declared war on Germany, Oldham wrote to his American colleague John. R. Mott, the commanding presence at the Edinburgh Conference and acknowledged leader of the Western missionary enterprise. In important respects the tone of his letter is somewhat different from other voices:

It is impossible yet to take in the meaning of this terrible blow to all that we have been working for during the past few years. Our deepest need... is to continue to have faith in God, and to believe that not even human sin and madness can ultimately defeat His purpose of love for the world. So far as I have been able to think at all in the confusion of these terrible days, it seems to me that the service which the Continuation Committee may render at the present time is to seek to learn the purpose of God in what for the moment seems almost complete darkness, and to help the friends of missions throughout the world to lay to heart the lessons which he would teach.

I am sure that the first feeling in all our hearts must be one of penitence and contrition. We need not trouble about the distribution of responsibility. We need to get behind that to the fundamental fact that Christian Europe has departed so far from God and rejected so completely the rule of Christ that a catastrophe of this kind is possible. It may be that in God's sight the Christian nations were spiritually incapable

of the tasks awaiting them in the non-Christian world, and that they had to be purified by the discipline of suffering. Everything will be lost if we fail in deep humility to learn the lessons which God desires to teach the Church. Unless we see how utterly God has been forgotten and denied in national life, nothing lies before us but a calamity which will set back the progress of the world for generations. If that lesson can be learned, there may come to the Church a moral rebirth and a fresh accession of moral energy which will outweigh the diminution of material resources which will be inevitable. It is on this thought, I believe, that we must try to focus the attention of Christian people.

§§

We need to bow in deep humility before God, beseeching Him to show us things of which we had never dreamed, and to make us willing to be led along paths of which we at present have no conception. This surely is something which we must seek for ourselves, and endeavour to help others to seek.

Another thought that is much in our minds is that we must strive, even in this confusion of national interests, to maintain the international fellowship and love which we began to learn at Edinburgh. I have written personal letters of loving sympathy to our brethren on the continent, though I am doubtful whether those addressed to Germany will reach their destination.

§§

The universal feeling in our country is, I think, that our statesmen made every possible effort to maintain peace. Things have been so ordered that even the most ardent friends of peace are convinced that war has been inevitable in the defence of our vital interests and of international morality. The German treatment of Belgium has removed the last question that existed, and the nation is united as it has never been before. I am glad to say that, on the whole,

there is a remarkable absence of a jingo spirit and of feelings of bitterness and hatred. Many of us feel and pray as keenly for Germany as for our own land. Every nation in the world will suffer terribly from this catastrophe, but what the German people may have to bear in suffering is almost unthinkable.

May God cause light to arise in the darkness!<sup>18</sup>

## ***FOR REFLECTION***

**Bible readings:** Isaiah 28:14-21, Jeremiah 21:1-10

From the outbreak of war, Isaac Watts' paraphrase of Psalm 90 became one of the most popular hymns in Britain:

*O God, our help in ages past,  
Our hope for years to come,  
Our shelter from the stormy blast,  
And our eternal home.*

*Under the shadow of thy throne  
Thy saints have dwelt secure;  
Sufficient is thine arm alone,  
And our defence is sure.*

- What assumptions lay behind the use of “our” to mean “Britain”?
- The prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah (see the above readings) in their day radically questioned the idea that God would always be on the side of Jerusalem in a time of peril. How does this square with “patriotism”?

Both sides – Britain and Germany – appealed to justice, duty and honour. For the British churches in particular, the violation of Belgian neutrality provided a crucial moral imperative. It would therefore be wrong to accuse them of just being flag-waving patriots unthinkingly

bowing to the state.

- Yet how can we be sure that our appeal to morality is genuine and not just a hypocritical or self-righteous disguise for patriotic impulse?
- Both the British and the German churches fell in with the respective policies and justifications of their respective governments. Do you think this was inevitable?
- What do you think might have happened if British and German church representatives had been actually able to *meet* early in the war, and not just exchange appeals and messages?

### **An exercise**

As a piece of role play, if you are in a group divide yourselves equally into “British” and “German” church representatives, and imagine that you are at a meeting that has been called on neutral ground (Holland for example) early in the war, with someone from a neutral country in the chair. You are to present the cases of your respective countries and see if there is any possible basis for agreement or at least greater understanding. How does the discussion go – and what may be learnt from it?

*[Note: This exercise will benefit from some preparation, with at least one person in each group reading up beforehand on the respective stances and assumptions of “their” country and their views on the origins of the war. Useful online sources include: BBC-History- World War: The Origins of World War One, [www.bbc.co.uk/worldwars/wwone/origins](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldwars/wwone/origins); Causes of World War One – History Learning Site, [www.historylearningsite.co.uk](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk) Wikipedia, Causes of World War 1.]*

## 4

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### **“I WAS A STRANGER, AND YOU WELCOMED ME”**

Hardly, if ever, can it have happened before that a whole nation has been expatriated, and the way in which it has been brought about is enough to make the angels weep. What sorrow can be like theirs, who have seen the ruin of hearth and home and the spoiling of their Fatherland! We cannot even imagine it, and, perhaps, it is well for us that we are thus shielded from the unbearable shock of its horror; but we can do something to bring comfort and solace to those who need it so bitterly. None ought to be readier than the disciples of Christ for so worthy a service as this, and we as a church are trying to respond with all sympathy and generosity to so urgent a challenge. Already a committee has been formed...<sup>19</sup>

So wrote Revd Herbert Morgan, minister of Tyndale Baptist Church, Bristol, in November 1914. It is estimated that over 220,000 Belgians, many of them traumatised by their experiences of German invasion and occupation, came to Britain during 1914-18. Here is the story of just one city and one church which received them:

Within days of the start of the war, Belgian refugees began to arrive in Britain and were soon being dispersed to various parts of the country. Many arrived in Bristol and Tyndale Baptist church in that city was one of those which decided to provide assistance to them.

Already by early September 1914 thousands of Belgian



refugees had arrived in Britain – mostly coming into the port of Felixstowe. On 10 September Herbert Samuel, (President of the Local Government Board in Asquith's cabinet) told Parliament that the government had offered hospitality to Belgian refugees and that they were being brought to London. However he also expressed the hope that 'the country generally would co-operate in this work'. In Bristol the response was initially by the Voluntary Services Bureau which invited people to telephone with offers of accommodation and other help. Within a very few days the Bureau reported 'an abundance of offers' such that 'many homeless, destitute, bereaved Belgians will be looked after in Bristol and the neighbourhood'. Not surprisingly, the Roman Catholic community was at the forefront of these offers – most Belgians were of that persuasion. Indeed, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Clifton offered the use of a large mansion in Bath to accommodate the refugees. Unfortunately he was unable to fulfil his offer as the place was commandeered for military use! Meanwhile, the Belgian Consul in Bristol, Mark Whitwell, member of a well-known Bristol shipping and philanthropic family, became involved and opened a reception centre in Clifton.

Local councils were encouraged by the government to set up committees to deal with the refugee problem. Bristol responded immediately. In order that this committee might be widely representative of the City, it had 40 members.....A set of rules was agreed, and approved by Lord Lytton, the government minister responsible. Within days the trickle of refugees coming to Bristol had become a flood – a trainload was welcomed by a crowd of local people when they arrived at Bristol's Temple Meads railway station. Most of these arrangements were concerned with 'destitute persons' while it was hoped that 'persons of good families' would be offered homes and treated as guests. It was to these 'good families' that the Tyndale church offered

hospitality.

The church was offered the use of a house in nearby Pembroke Road – number 73. The house had belonged to Mr Richard Brinsley Hooper and his wife Annie. Richard had died in 1889, but his widow continued to live in the house until her own death on 20 November 1912, by which time their children had left home. Subsequently it came into the ownership of Messrs Daunton & Tyler. Neither the Hooper, Daunton nor Tyler families appear to have had any direct connection with the church – indeed the offer of the use of the house is referred to by the Minister in the church magazine as ‘by some generous friends outside our own church’. Work started immediately to prepare the house for the ‘guests’ – ‘zealous people have been setting besoms and scrubbing brushes in motion’. Meanwhile income was being raised both to purchase furniture and for the running costs, and an appeal was made both for money and for useful items of equipment. Once the first Belgians arrived, ‘Miss Turner and her maid went into residence ... and it is impossible to estimate how much they did not only for the physical comfort of the household, but more especially for their happiness’. Miss Turner was Dorothy Turner, a 23-year-old nurse and church member, who went on to serve as a nurse in India with the Baptist Missionary Society.

On 30 October sixteen Belgians arrived at 73 Pembroke Road – which rapidly increased to seventeen, when a baby was born on 10 November! There were two family groups. Madame van de Weghe had three daughters with her, one of whom was married to Henri Bertholet, who was also among the group with their four children. The other family group consisted of Georges Dereere and his wife, together with her two sisters and their maid. Gustav August Georges Dereere was the baby who was born soon after their arrival. The Dereere family came from Courtrai (later to

be the scene of a major battle in 1918). Mme Van de Wegh and her two unmarried daughters came from Ostkamp (near Bruges). Her other daughter, Mme Bertholet, and her family had been living in Hay (between Namur and Liege) but were originally from Denant-sur-Meuse. They had moved from their home town because of Henri Bertholet's work – he was an official of the Belgian Agriculture Ministry. Many of the Bertholet family had still been living in Denant at the outbreak of war, and were consequently caught up in the terrible events which took place there.<sup>20</sup>

### **Visitors from the Indian sub-continent**

In the autumn of 1914 large numbers of troops from the Indian Division arrived to fight on the Western Front and were soon put into some of the fiercest fighting. Many of the wounded were treated in hospitals in England. Often they professed deep personal loyalty to the King, but obviously for nearly all it was their first actual experience of the Western world. Equally, for many British people at home it was their first actual encounter with people from the Indian sub-continent. It is estimated that some 9,000 died in France and Belgium, and many more in the Middle East where their forces were later concentrated.

#### ***A Sikh to his father (Punjab)***<sup>21</sup>

*A hospital, England 20th February 1915*

My father and mother, brothers and sisters, you call those your sons and daughters who give you money. Those who do not, you refuse to look upon and you even drag them before the law courts. Here the ladies tend us, who have been wounded, as a mother tends her child. They pour milk into our mouths, and our own parents, brothers and sister, were we ill, would only give us water in a pot. There you see the brotherhood of religion, and here you see the brotherhood of the English, who are kind to us without any further motive. The ladies even carry off our *excreta*, so kind are they; and whatsoever we have a liking for, they put

it into our mouths. They wash our bed clothes every week and massage our backs when they ache from lying in bed.

They put us in motor cars and take us through the city. When, at four o'clock we go out from hospital, the ladies of the city give us fruit. They say, 'we have never seen such men. Only have we heard of them that they are the Sikhs of India who once fought against England. Now we see them with our own eyes as we see our sons.' They cheer us for routing the Germans. Their kings say, 'brothers, what manner of men are the Indians?' The government gives us envelopes every week.

This is a devils' war. When will it end? If I recover, I shall not remain a soldier, but serve my parents who have food enough and to spare. [Military] service is great weariness. I shall browse on the grass at home and keep myself alive. I am wounded. [Only] the man who has lost a leg or an arm returns to India. My ankle is broken. I was hit twice. My life is safe, but my leg is useless.

### ***FOR REFLECTION***

**Bible readings:** Matthew 25:31-46; Hebrews 13:1-3

"I was a stranger and you welcomed me." (v35)

Crisis often prompts people to act with outstanding generosity and sacrifice to others in need.

- Has this aspect of Britain in 1914-18 been sufficiently remembered and retold?
- Or for that matter has the substantial presence of troops from the Indian sub-continent been well enough known? If not, why not?
- How can the reception to "strangers" given then, no less than the accounts of the battlefields, become part of the national story? How might it impact on our attitude to "strangers" today?

### *A suggestion*

Look at the records of your church, and your local press, and see if there are accounts of the reception of Belgian refugees, and other “strangers”, during 1914-18 in your area. Perhaps you can:

- write an account for your church magazine or local paper;
- see if you can make contact any of the surviving relatives of those who came then, or at least the places where they came from;
- mount a small exhibition on the theme of refugees and strangers, then and now.

## 5

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### “YEARS OF SIN AND MISERY AND LOSS”

#### WASTE

Waste of Muscle, waste of Brain,  
Waste of Patience, waste of Pain,  
Waste of Manhood, waste of Wealth,  
Waste of Beauty, waste of Health,  
Waste of Blood, and waste of Tears,  
Waste of Youth's most precious Years,  
Waste of ways the Saints have Trod,  
Waste of Glory, waste of God,—  
War!<sup>22</sup>

So wrote Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy – “Woodbine Willie” – perhaps the most famous British chaplain of the First World War.

The colossal statistics of casualties and death on the Western Front and in all theatres of war during 1914-18, together with the even greater circle of bereavement and grief, are so daunting as to be almost meaningless. For us who live a century after it is only through the most personal testimonies of the participants, and the pained art of their poets, that we can begin to imagine the human reality.

In this chapter we offer a selection of such testimonies. Some are well-known; some will be quite new to most readers. Comment is kept to a minimum. We let them speak for themselves.

#### **Soldiers and chaplains**

Anglican priest John Michael Stanhope went straight from his Lincolnshire village parish to be a chaplain in France. In two months he buried

some 900 dead: “Tommy does not want religion. I don’t persuade him,” he said. But he continued to minister day after day. On the first day of the Battle of Somme, 1 July 1916 he records:

We have 1,500 in and still they come, 2-400 officers, it is a sight – chaps with fearful wounds, lying in agony, many so patient, some make a noise, one goes to a stretcher, lays one’s hand on the forehead, it is cold, strike a match, he is dead – here a Communion, there an absolution, there a drink, there a madman, there a hot water bottle and so on – one madman was swearing and kicking, I gave him a drink, he tried to bite my hand and squirted the water from his mouth into my face.....<sup>23</sup>

Capt John Crombie of the Gordon highlanders wrote to a friend:

As for the morals of the war, they are horrible. For instance, listen to this... When you come to a dug-out, you throw some smoke-bombs down, and then smoke the rest out with a smoke bomb, so that they must either choke or come out. Now when they come out they are half blinded and choked with poisonous smoke, and you station a man at the entrance to receive them, but as you have only got a party of nine, it would be difficult to spare men if you took them prisoners, so the instructions are that these poor half-blinded devils should be bayoneted as they come up. It may be expedient from a military point of view, but if it had been suggested before the war, who would not have held their hands up in horror?’<sup>24</sup>

John Crombie was killed in 1917, aged 20.

Another Scotsman, George Macleod, became a Captain in the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. In 1918 he was awarded the Military Cross for his part in the infamous battle of Passchendaele. This included an action in which he assumed command when his commanding officer

was killed, and in the words of the official citation he showed “conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty as adjutant, volunteering to go out and do duty in the hastily-organized line of defence when no company officers remained. He carried out his duties as adjutant as well, and was of the greatest assistance in keeping cohesion.” In that action 15 out of 20 officers were lost, and 330 out of 400 men failed to return. He was also awarded the French Croix de Guerre. After the war George Macleod became a minister in the Church of Scotland and came to prominence as founder of the Iona Community, and as a foremost pacifist and campaigner for social justice. In light of that later career the accounts of his time on the Western Front acquire a special significance.

To his sister from the front at Ypres in 1917 he writes:

When you think that next week will bring in the fourth year of the War – now and again one almost feels hopeless but that is usually just before breakfast, or some other such unprintable time – after dinner one realizes that there must be something that is going to turn up, somewhere, somehow, which will clear the clouds away. I have heard it said that a man comes out of this war with a very real religion or no religion at all. That is a very common saying here, nowadays – personally I think that any man who sees this war must come out with a very real religion or cut his throat!<sup>25</sup>

In a letter of March 1918:

Boche casualties were AWFUL. I will tell you all about it some day. You can imagine it was a great day for me.<sup>26</sup>

After another raid in which his men took 30 prisoners and gained 3 Military Crosses:

So we are all very bucked, and the men are cheery as sandboys, and all out for Boche blood, which is meet and



right, as the prayer book (Christian!) says.

When his commanding officer Colonel Mitchell died of pneumonia, Macleod was devastated. “It was in a time of despair after Mitchell’s death that George asked another senior officer, ‘What’s all this bloody business about?’ The response he got from his friend was a warning that another similar question would see him on his way home with a guard. He was horrified on one occasion to come across one of the quieter sergeants in the battalion lining up six German prisoners of war to shoot them. He asked him what he was doing, and found the man had a glazed look in his eyes; he too was a casualty of war.”<sup>27</sup>

***Havildar Abdul Rahman (Punjabi Muslim) to Naik Rajwali Khan (Punjabi soldier based in Baluchistan)***<sup>28</sup>

*France 20th May 1915*

For God’s sake don’t come, don’t come, and don’t come to this war in Europe. Write and tell me if your regiment or any part of it comes and whether you are coming with it or not. I am in a state of great anxiety; and tell my brother Muhammad Yakub Khan for God’s sake not to enlist. If you have any relatives, my advice is don’t let them enlist. It is unnecessary to write any more... Cannons, machine guns, rifles and bombs are going day and night, just like the rains in the month of Sawan. Those who have escaped so far are like the few grains left uncooked in a pot. That is the case with us. In my company there are only ten men [left]...

## **Welsh voices**

***GRAVES IN THE RAIN / Beddau a’u gwlych y glaw.***<sup>29</sup>

Beneath the rain of Flanders / Dan law digalon Fflandrys  
Whose are these saddened graves? / Pwy bia’r beddau hyn?  
Those marked with clean white crosses? / Rhyw hogia’ bach o  
Gymru

Some humble lads from Wales. / Beddau a'u gwlych y glaw

What drew them here to Flanders / Pa beth a'u tynnodd ymna  
A land so far away. / I wlad estroniaid pell  
Dreaming of Armagedon / Breuddwyd am Armagedon  
And Peace one distant day. / A Heddwch llawer gwel.

A factory of fire / Ond beth yw'r sŵn myrthwylion  
Send out the hammer's noise / Trwy ddrws y ffatri dân?  
That shatters dreams of glory, / Och! Dduw a helpo'r hogia,  
O! Lord, what of those boys. / Malurio breuddwyd wnân'.

But men are always human / Ond dynion ydyw dynion,  
Whose fault was the affray? / Felly ar bwy mae'r bai?  
Give thanks for human deafness / Diolch na chlywant hynny  
Beneath the doors of clay. / Tu hwnt i ddorau clai.

May God himself give succour / A Duw Ei Hun a ddiddano  
To those who homeward came, / Y rhai a ddaeth yn ôl  
And hear the hardened hammers / I wrando'r dur forthwylion  
Smash foolish dreams of fame / Yn dryllio'u breuddwyd ffôl!

Another Welsh voice is that of Lewis Valentine who went from the university at Bangor with many others to the fields of the First World War as a Medical Orderly (RAMC). He published his reflections of the war in a diary form, and they reveal his anguish at attending to the wounds of the soldiers and gradually realizing that in a war there are no winners, and that the war would only fuel another war.<sup>30</sup>

At the end of July 1917 Lewis Valentine had left the camp at Waratah, and travelled towards the front at Dikkebus, recalling that...

the fireballs roared and shattered all – the night of the great advance.

On the last day of the month, at four o'clock in the morning, the dam broke. The large insatiable guns barked

continuously, the bombs howled and the earth shook to the accompaniment of hundreds of planes. The dappled horses, prancing as though in a sea of fire.

He was called upon to serve as a runner, as the field telephone had failed, and knew that they were easy targets for the German snipers who rarely missed their prey. One of his closest friends passed him on such a journey, and within ten minutes the friend was killed.

On 4 August 1917 he writes...

Hell! Hell! Hell! O great and merciful God, what is man? Horror, blood, madness. The killing house of fiends, hundreds of corpses on the clay fields with 'the light in their eyes'. Fragmented flesh and limbs torn apart. Stop, O Lord, this maddening fever – stop the vomit of the mad-dogs. My friend Boden, my dear Fred Walker, and Bert Palmer, easy to love, in the midst of the mounds of bodies. I had to hurry by, with my prayer as a lump in my stomach.

On 8 August he writes that there was...

a respite of the fierce butchering and that they had a day to collect the boys who had been laying for days in no-man's-land and their flesh rotting. What if the country's mothers were to spend an hour with us, and see the havoc wrought unto these boys. Peace will never come to a world whilst waiting for politicians, for war was a profitable enterprise for many of them. O mothers, the keys of a war-free world are in your hands.

In an entry dated October 1917 he says...

There is no jingoistic spirit amongst these soldiers here, and the general belief is that it's impossible to conquer a nation as powerful, inventive and brilliant as the Germans.

As for myself, like Onias of old, I don't wish to see either side claim a victory, since victory will only sow the seeds of another war. If England wins the war, or if Germany claim the victory, farewell to any hope of peace in Europe.

What of the night, O watchman  
When will it go away,  
When will the news be broken  
The dawn of a new day  
The darkest clouds enclose us  
And add to all our fears  
O come the dawn of day to heal  
The spirit's stresses

What of the night, O watchman  
When hope moves on from strife,  
The joyful smile extending  
The boundaries of life.  
Instead of wails a song is heard  
The world will share a sea of cheer  
The breezes carry on its breath  
Delightful laughter

Dear Lord, Thy world remember  
Dissolve the peace-less night  
And from your loving presence  
Shine forth your radiant light  
For when your sun-like grace shines forth  
The hate-filled venom withers then  
And poppies turn the land of war  
A cheer-filled heaven.<sup>31</sup>

## **The whole world a ruin**

Just a little scrap of paper  
In a yellow envelope,

And the whole world is a ruin,  
Even Hope.

(Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy)<sup>32</sup>

In the summer of 1915 Vera Brittain, now aged 19, became engaged to her brother Edward's close friend, Roland Leighton, with whom she had been in love since the leaving ceremonies at Uppingham School the previous year (see chapter 1). After the outbreak of war Vera deferred completion of her studies at Oxford University and became a nurse in the Volunteer Aid Detachment (VAD), tending wounded soldiers at Camberwell, London. Both Edward and Roland Leighton had enlisted, and Roland was posted to France with the Worcester Regiment. At Christmas 1915 Roland was expected home on leave, and the couple planned a joyful reunion at Brighton where Vera's parents would be staying.

At eight o'clock [on Christmas Eve] as the passages were lengthy and many of the men were lame, I went along to help them to the communion service in the chapel of the college. It was two or three years since I had been to such a service, but it seemed appropriate that I should be there, for I felt, wrought up as I was to a high pitch of nervous exhaustion, that I ought to thank whatever God might exist for the supreme gift of Roland and the love that had arisen so swiftly between us. The music of the organ was so sweet, the sight of the wounded men who knelt and stood with such difficulty so moving, the conflict of joy and gratitude, pity and sorrow on my mind so poignant, that tears sprang to my eyes, dimming the chapel walls and the words that encircled them: "I am the Resurrection and the Life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die."

Directly after breakfast, sent on my way by exuberant good wishes from Betty and Marjorie and many of the others, I went down to Brighton. All day I waited there for a telephone message or a telegram, sitting drowsily in

the lounge of the Grand Hotel, or walking up and down the promenade, watching the grey sea tossing rough with white surf-crested waves, and wondering still what kind of crossing he had had or was having.

When, by ten o'clock at night, no news had come, I concluded that the complications of telegraph and telephone on a combined Sunday and Christmas Day had made communication impossible. So, unable to fight sleep any longer after a night and a day of wakefulness, I went to bed a little disappointed, but still unperturbed. Roland's family, at their Keymer cottage, kept an even longer vigil; they sat up till nearly midnight over their Christmas dinner in the hope that he would join them, and in their dramatic, impulsive fashion, they drank a toast to the Dead.

The next morning I had just finished dressing, and was putting the final touches to the pastel-blue crêpe-de-Chine blouse, when the expected message came to say that I was wanted on the telephone. Believing that I was at last to hear the voice for which I had waited for twenty-four hours, I dashed joyously into the corridor. But the message was not to say that he had arrived home that morning, but to tell me that he had died of wounds at a Casualty Clearing Station on December 23rd.<sup>33</sup>

To be added to this devastating blow were the deaths during the war of her brother Edward and close friends Victor Richardson and Geoffrey Thurlow, while others were severely wounded. Oppressed by a sense of the futility and waste of war, Vera Brittain continued to serve with the VAD both at home and in France.

## **In India too**

***Rahman Ali (Hindustani Muslim) to M. Pargan Singh  
(soldier in France)***<sup>34</sup>

*Peshawar 29th March 1915*

From this war lasting so long, great uneasiness is caused in the whole of India. There is no one who has not some friends or relatives engaged in this campaign. When the telegrams announcing the casualties arrive, in all the districts, near and far, great grief and trouble is caused, because each one is connected with the other by the chain of friendship or relationship, may God soon end this war! In the whole of India there is no fresh news worthy of mention, except the high price of grain, which is a needle in the hearts of high and low.....

## **A German family grieves**

Sabine Leibholz-Bonhoeffer (twin-sister of Dietrich Bonhoeffer) recalls her older brother Walter.

We little ones were full of admiration for his gymnastic feats on the horizontal and parallel bars. We loved the raft he made for us to sail on the mountain lakes. We also admired his collection of butterflies, his stones and birds' eggs, the squirrels he had caught himself, his doves and the animals he kept in aquaria and cages. He loved them all.

§§

When the war broke out in 1914 he was fourteen. He spent a short time in the Boy Scouts but then wanted to subject himself to harder training on his own, and on his expeditions he constantly increased the number of sand-bags he carried in his rucksack. He wanted to pass his *Notabitur* [short matriculation] and then enlist immediately as an officer cadet. In April 1918 Walter joined the fighting forces.<sup>35</sup>

§§

Dietrich, then twelve years old, had on his own initiative practised the song: 'Now at the last, we say God speed on your journey,' and in the evening before Walter left, he sang it for him with great seriousness, accompanying himself.

The next day we saw Walter off at the station. When the train started moving, my mother ran alongside calling out to Walter: 'It's only space that separates us', and for a long time these words moved us deeply. A fortnight later Walter was killed on the Western front.

§§

I can well remember that bright May morning... and the terrible shadow that suddenly blotted it out for us. My father was just leaving the house to drive to his clinic, and I was about to go through the door on my way to school. But when a messenger brought two telegrams, I remained standing in the hall. I saw my father hastily open the envelopes, turn terribly white, go into his study, and sink into the chair at his desk, where he sat bowed over it with his head resting on both his arms, his face hidden in his hands. I had never seen my father like that. Then I knew what had happened, and I turned aside into the dining room which was empty. A few moments later I saw my father through the half-open door, holding onto the bannisters as he went up the broad easy stairway which at other times he mounted so lightly to go to the bedroom where my mother was. There he remained for many hours. It was not until late afternoon that I saw our mother.<sup>36</sup>

Their mother, Paula Bonhoeffer, lay ill for many months after Walter's death.

She only asked to keep one thing,  
The joy-light in his eyes:  
God has not even let her know  
Where his dead body lies.

O Grave, where is thy victory?  
O Death, where is thy sting?  
Thy victory is ev'rywhere,



Thy sting's in ev'rything.

(From G. Studdert Kennedy "MISSING BELIEVED  
KILLED – On Reading a Mother's Letter")<sup>37</sup>

### **Suffering to the point of no feeling**

For Vera Brittain, the sheer pain of loss and of devastated hopes became for a time transmuted into a deadening of spirit as the only means of survival in the atmosphere of war. One day while nursing in London she found herself declining an invitation to coffee from the senior church figure in whose house she and other nurses were living:

At that stage of the War, I decided indignantly, I did not propose to submit to pious dissertations on my duty to God, King and Country. That voracious trio had already deprived me of all that I valued most in life, and if the interminable process of attrition lasted much longer, the poor surviving remnants of the writer's career that I had once prepared for so fiercely would vanish into limbo with the men whom I had loved. My only hope now was to become the complete automaton, working mechanically and no longer even pretending to be animated by ideals. Thought was too dangerous: if once I began to think out exactly why my friends had died and I was working, quite dreadful things might suddenly happen. Without the discipline of faith and courage, disillusion and ferocious resentment would ravage unchecked; I might even murder my Ward-Sister, or assault the distinguished ecclesiastic. On the whole it seemed safer to go on being a machine, so, none too respectfully, I declined the invitation to coffee and took refuge in Kensington.<sup>38</sup>

### ***FOR REFLECTION***

**Bible readings:** 2 Samuel 1:17-27; 2 Samuel 18:31-33; John

## 15:12-13.

- Compared with 1914-18, how do our present-day reporting and media coverage of war enable us to appreciate the reality of war?
- David is capable of lamenting the deaths of both his dear friend Jonathan and his enemy Saul, and of his own son Absalom who has rebelled against him. What does this suggest to us about a truly human quality of grief?
- Jesus' words about the "greater love" have often been applied to those who have died for their country in war. How legitimate is this use of Jesus' words?
- Or, is the application of the term "sacrifice" to deaths in war always justified? Might it be used to divert attention from the way in which lives were wasted to no discernible gain? What might such as Vera Brittain have said to this?
- Or, is it that what is important is not simply a matter of their dying, but of what we consciously make of it and how we give significance to it?

## A prayer

A century now separates us from "The Great War", and other wars have intervened in our conscious past. As a means of trying to identify how far we still feel in continuity with that generation, and how far not, here are two prayers produced by the Student Christian Movement in 1920, in commemoration of students fallen in the war. See if you can pray using them, or adapt them as you think fit for today:

We give thee humble and hearty thanks, O merciful God, for the lives and examples of thy servants; for their high ideals and aspirations in college days; for their ready response to the call of their country; for their cheerfulness and courage in the midst of suffering and danger; for their steadfastness and self-sacrifice in the hour of death. Grant unto them, O Lord, joy and peace and greater opportunities of service in the new life to which thou hast called them; for the sake of

Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

And as we bless thy holy Name for those thy servants departed this life in thy faith and love, so we beseech thee to give us who remain grace to follow their good example, and to carry on the work which they began. Grant, O Lord, we pray thee, that the offering of their lives may not have been made in vain; that we and all thy people may hear the call to nobler living which sounds in our ears from the graves of those who have died that we might live; that we may dedicate our lives anew to the work of bringing in Thy kingdom upon earth: that so out of these years of sin and misery and loss, there may arise a better Britain and a better world; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*<sup>39</sup>

## 6

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### MODERATING VOICES

As the war proceeded feelings of bitterness towards Germany grew, unsurprisingly particularly in view of episodes like the sinking by a U-boat of the passenger ship *Lusitania* and the use of poison gas on the Western Front. In July 1915 the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Glasgow John Maguire declared:

You need weigh no arguments, you need to consult no clergymen or professors – the case is too clear. You are asked to fight for Europe's religion and civilization against the powers of darkness sitting in high places; against the prince of this world; against ambition, treachery, cruelty, lust and robbery. This is even more evident now than it was in the beginning of the war... Since then our adversaries have shown their contempt not merely for the laws of nations, for the laws of war, but, we might almost say, for all that distinguishes a reasoning man from a furious animal. They have passed from one almost incredible act of treachery and cruelty to another, reaching the climax so far by drowning in cold blood hundreds of non-fighting passengers on ships, and poisoning our soldiers with noxious vapours... And all this without provocation on our part or that of our Allies, but simply because it was hoped that by such ferocity we should be terrified into yielding up Europe to the tyranny of the Prussians and their King.<sup>40</sup>

While for many people there was no question that the war had to be fought, the major issue became *how* it was to be waged. Church leaders came under pressure, first of all, to make explicit pleas for victory in

prayers prepared for public use. The archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson, responded to one such demand from an earl in August 1914:

I thank you for your letter. Such criticisms are always useful, but I think I ought to tell you that, if there was one request which poured in more strenuously than others from all quarters when we were compiling these prayers, it was that we should abstain from identifying ourselves with the Divine Will to such an extent as to claim that God is simply on our side, and that this is a matter of course.<sup>41</sup>

An Oxford academic was even more specific in his recommendations on prayer:

My point is that one of the greatest powers of prayer is that of the mind of man over the mind of man: be it direct or goeth it round by heaven, it is spiritual and from mind to mind through whatever medium; -- it would be no use praying for a 16 inch gun to be an 18 inch gun -- but most efficacious would be a prayer to confound the gunner: and I suggest something like this: 'Strike the fear of God (at last) into the heart of the Kaiser (or our Enemy) so that he depart and go back whence he came: strike the fear of God into his hosts so that what is left of them may make haste to return with him' (even as Sennacherib, King of Assyria, and his remnant arose early in the morning and made haste to go back and dwell in Nineveh).'

To achieve this end concentration of force and numbers of those praying are likely to be most effective, and therefore there is need of brevity to meet human nature while the numbers swell the mass and volume of spiritual power sent forth.<sup>42</sup>

To the Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith, the archbishop wrote in May 1915:

I suppose that if anyone had suggested a few months ago that the British Army would use poisonous gases for creating fatal disease among its enemies, the notion would have been scouted as preposterous. What has happened to change our view? Nothing, so far as I know, except that our opponents have sunk to that level of misconduct in defiance of International Conventions and of the dictates of common humanity. Is the reason adequate? They have degraded the traditions of military honour and the good name of the German Army by adopting these vile practices. We can no doubt follow their example if we choose. If we adopt that line of reprisal (and this is a really important point) how far will the principle carry us? ... It seems to me that international agreements for securing the honourable conduct of war would then be obliterated in a brutal rivalry as to the horrors which can be perpetrated by both sides. The result would be such a tangle, that the world will soon be saying, and history will say hereafter, that there was nothing to choose between the nations who were at War, and it would become a matter of small importance, and probably of disputed fact, who it was who began the general course of adopting these vile usages.<sup>43</sup>

In 1916 raids on London by German Zeppelin airships brought demands for reprisals. Joyson Hicks MP (later Viscount Brentford) declared: "If our airmen dropped bombs upon the open towns of Germany, and insisted upon an eye for an eye, and a tooth for tooth, the Zeppelin raids would soon cease." The matter was discussed by clergy in the Convocation of Canterbury in February 1917, and the following motion proposed by the archbishop was approved:

That this house... desires to record its conviction that the principles of morality forbid a policy of reprisal which has, as a deliberate object, the killing and wounding of non-

combatants, and believes that the adoption of such a mode of retaliation, even for barbarous outrages, would permanently lower the standard of honourable conduct between nation and nation.<sup>44</sup>

### **A sentimental hatred?**

William Temple, at that time rector of St James's, Piccadilly, expressed impatience with some members of his congregation:

They are prepared to believe any evil of the Germans without a particle of evidence. They are very angry with the Navy for letting German cruisers shell Scarborough, and still more so with me for pointing out that the Navy's chief business is to keep the seas open, and not expose itself to destruction by submarines in order so to make sure that no English seaside resort is made uncomfortable.<sup>45</sup>

In July 1917 an advertisement appeared in the *Times*: "A Solemn Oath. To mark our horror and disgust of the methods of Germany since July, 1914, we swear that we will not (a) knowingly purchase anything made in Germany, (b) transact business with or through a German for ten years after peace is declared. So help us God." Temple's reaction was clear:

It is presumably vain to protest against this kind of thing because the kind of person who will respond to this appeal will certainly not heed our protest... We shall certainly want (after the war) to sell things to Germany, and we cannot sell to them unless we buy from them. The plain truth is that this 'solemn oath' is a piece of sentimental humbug, at once more dangerous and more contemptible because the sentiment is one of malignity and not of generosity. People sometimes think that it is only the generous who are sentimental; but hatred is a sentiment quite as much as love, and even more easily makes people blind and leads them

to ignore plain facts.<sup>46</sup>

The Congregationalist A.E. Garvie later recalled:

I had a.... contest to wage against the war spirit in the Executive of the National Free Church Council. Some of the Executive had no sympathy for the conscientious objectors and were unwilling to use the influences of the Council to protect them against the shameful treatment to which they were exposed, if refused exemption and forced into the Army. This was the mistake of the Conscription Act; the conscientious objectors, whatever penalty might have been imposed, should have remained under the control of the civil authority. In the effort to secure protection for them, I was brought once into contact with Lord Kitchener, just a few days before the tragic close of his career. Dr Meyer, Dr Shakespeare, Mr Nightingale and I saw him at the War office, and had a most courteous and considerate reception. He said that such outrages as we had evidence for were bad for the discipline of the Army, expressed his preference for a voluntary army, and assured us that he was opposed to any oppression of conscience. I am very glad that, contrary to many current representations, I can cherish so favourable an impression. One of the deepest sorrows of the time for me was the deterioration in sentiment and conduct of some Christian men and women who were possessed by the passions of war; and some pacifists, even in their opposition, cast off all restraints of tolerance and sympathy. I did not venture to pray as some did for the victory of our arms, as I recognised the fallibility of human judgment as to which issue would be in the interests of the Kingdom of God. I urged on my brother ministers, as I had opportunity, that, whatever conviction a man might hold, he should once state it candidly and considerately, and after that confession should in his preaching avoid any state-



ment which would provoke controversy, and endanger the unity of the Christian fellowship in the bond of peace. While there was much in speech and deed to be regretted, the unqualified condemnation of the churches for their part in the War is altogether unjustified. The Church did not deny Christ as did Peter, or betray Him as did Judas. It cherished hopes of the triumph of righteousness with peace, which have been disappointed; but to err is human.<sup>47</sup>

## **Papers in Wartime Group**

From 1915 significantly moderating views were expressed through the Papers in Wartime Group led by William Temple and including figures like essayist and journalist Arthur Clutton Brock, New Testament scholar B.H. Streeter, and missionary ecumenist J.H. Oldham. Its basic principles were:

- that Great Britain was in August morally bound to declare war and is no less bound to carry the war to a decisive issue;
- that the war is none the less an outcome and a revelation of the un-Christian principles which have dominated the life of Western Christendom and of which both the Church and the nations have need to repent;
- that followers of Christ, as members of the Church, are linked to one another in a fellowship which transcends all divisions of nationality or race;
- that the Christian duties of love and forgiveness are binding in time of war as in time of peace;
- that Christians are bound to recognize the insufficiency of mere compulsion for overcoming evil, and to place supreme reliance upon spiritual forces and in particular upon the power and method of the Cross;
- that only in proportion as Christian principles dictate the terms of settlement will a real and lasting peace be secured;
- that it is the duty of the Church to make an altogether new effort and apply to all the relations of life its own positive ideal of brotherhood

- and fellowship;
- that with God all things are possible.<sup>48</sup>

### ***FOR REFLECTION***

**Bible Readings:** 2 Samuel 2: 18-18; Ecclesiastes 3:1-8; Romans 12:14-21; James 3:13-18.

- During 1914-18 those who took a “moderating” position were accused by some of being “unpatriotic” because they opposed vengeance and reprisals, and by others of “joining the warmongers” because they believed their country nevertheless had to fight. Is it possible to be consistently “wise and understanding” (James 4:13) in such extreme situations?
- “It seems to me that international agreements for securing the honourable conduct of war would... be obliterated in a brutal rivalry as to the horrors which can be perpetrated by both sides.” How far have we come in 100 years in recognising the dangers against which Archbishop Davidson warned?
- Is it possible to fight an enemy without demonising them or (in William Temple’s words) “to believe any evil of them”?

## **ANOTHER COURAGE – PACIFISTS AND CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS**

The great majority of British people in 1914 felt that going to war against Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire was, if regrettable, wholly justified. Despite the ever-increasing losses they maintained that view throughout the next four years. Those who were pacifists, opposed to war in general or to this war in particular, were always a small minority. They did however attract a level of hostility and abuse out of all proportion to any material threat which they posed to the British war-effort. This was because to many they represented a set of values which appeared in total contradiction of the moral commitment, heroism and sacrifice being shown by those in uniform and risking life and limb in the trenches. Men of military age who were known to be, or suspected of being, pacifists were sometimes publicly arraigned by women who handed them white feathers in token of their “cowardice and “treachery”.

The first wave of recruits to the British army in response to Lord Kitchener’s famous appeal “Your King and Country Need You” was entirely voluntary. By late 1915 however the casualty rate in the British army was so high (over 520,000 killed, wounded or missing so far) that conscription was introduced in 1916 under the Defence of the Realm Act. Those of military age who refused military service on moral and/or religious grounds were known as conscientious objectors and had to appear before military tribunals to state their case. Most (but by no means all) objectors on religious grounds were Quakers. Some were exempted from actually bearing arms, being prepared to assist the army in the Non-Combatant Corps which could include acting as stretcher-bearers (often as exposed to danger as any others on the front--line).

Others refused to have any military ties or to do anything that might be considered part of the war effort. Such objectors usually were sent to prison, often in solitary confinement on the most meagre rations, or subject to hard labour.

In one notorious case 36 such “absolutists” were taken to France and put under military discipline without any accountability to civilian authority, tried by court-martial, found guilty of disobeying military orders and sentenced to be shot. News of the case attracted vigorous protests in Britain, including from a number of church leaders, and the commander-in-chief of the army, General Sir Douglas Haig, commuted the sentence to penal servitude.

Even before conscription was introduced, the No-Conscription Fellowship was formed by a consortium largely of Socialists and Quakers. Its manifesto following on the passing of Defence of the Realm Act ran:

### **REPEAL THE ACT**

Fellow citizens:

Conscription is now law in this country of free traditions. Our hard-won liberties have been violated. Conscription means the desecration of principles that we have long held dear; it involves the subordination of civil liberties to military dictation; it imperils the freedom of individual conscience and establishes in our midst that militarism which menaces all social graces and divides the peoples of all nations.

We re-affirm our determined resistance to all that is established by the Act.

We cannot assist in warfare. War, which to us is wrong. War, which the peoples do not seek, will only be made impossible when men, who so believe, remain steadfast to their convictions. Conscience, it is true, has been recognised in the Act, but it has been placed at the mercy of tribunals. We are prepared to answer for our faith before any tribunal, but we cannot accept any exemption that would compel those who hate war to kill by proxy or set them to

tasks which would help in the furtherance of war.

We strongly condemn the monstrous assumption by Parliament that a man is deemed to be bound by an oath that he has never taken and forced under an authority he will never acknowledge to perform acts which outrage his deepest convictions.

It is true that the present act applies only to a small section of the community, but a great tradition has been sacrificed. Already there is a clamour for an extension of the act. Admit the principle, and who can stay the march of militarism?

Repeal the Act. That is your only safeguard.

If this be not done, militarism will fasten its iron grip upon our national life and institutions. There will be imposed upon us the very system which statesmen affirm that they set out to overthrow.

What shall it profit the nation if it shall win the war and lose its own soul?

All opponents of conscription however were not necessarily themselves pacifist. The Baptist leader Dr John Clifford, for example, who vigorously supported the war, believed that to sacrifice the voluntary principle was to betray the moral basis of the war as a fight for *freedom*.

It is estimated that British conscientious objectors totalled approximately 16,000 during 1914-18.

### **“A very easy ride”: one young conscientious objector’s experience**

Here we can read just one account, previously unpublished, of a young Christian pacifist’s experience, told in his own words. Eric Fenn (1899-1995) was the son of devout Presbyterian parents in Birkenhead.<sup>49</sup>

Gradually from 1914 to 1916 family opinion changed from reluctant support for the war to a pacifist position. The change was most rapid, as might be expected, in my oldest

brother, now deep in Marxism and quick to interpret the war as an irrelevant dynastic-imperialist quarrel. For the rest of us the drive lay in religious and moral revulsion from the sheer brutal stupidity of the increasing slaughter, together with the study of writers such as E. D. Morell and their exposition of the international politics which preceded the final break-down. For myself, I take no particular credit or blame for what happened. I was incredibly ignorant and very young. It just happened that I was caught up in the pacifist movement instead of the much more common patriotic fervour. But with the introduction of conscription in 1916, it was clear that we had to make up our minds on the matter. Louis had married a fellow student, Lilian Anderson, knowing that he would very soon be in prison. Both were leading members of the Kensington/Liverpool Independent Labour Party and I attended some of the meetings – and a very odd bunch they were! However, we persuaded them to form a carol party around Christmas 1916 asking not for money but for signatures to a Peace Petition which had been launched by a strange alliance of left-wing political movements and various religious elements. We carried a portable harmonium which Reg played and whenever we ran into trouble a little man would call out “Let’s give them ‘England Arise!’ in unison”! An entirely fatuous but exciting episode. Very few of those involved had any regard for the Christian content of the carols, but as one of them said, “I don’t believe in Jesus but I don’t mind singing about him.”

Louis by that time had been called up, court martialled for refusing to obey orders, and sentenced to three months’ imprisonment in Wormwood Scrubs. The next to follow, early in 1917, was Reg. Robert was an acute asthmatic and allowed to go on teaching at Wallasey grammar School.

My own turn came in the autumn of 1917. I had left school a year before [but continued studying in evening classes then went back to teach for a while at my school].

I received my calling up papers soon after my 18th birthday in June 1917. By then a routine procedure had been established in dealing with Conscientious Objectors. You applied for exemption on conscientious grounds. In due course you were summoned before a local Tribunal which had power to grant exemption on condition that you were willing to do work of national importance, or to turn the application down and thus leave you to the mercy of the Military authorities. In that event you were liable to arrest and trial before the local Magistrate. The tribunal turned my application down and I was left awaiting arrest.

In the meantime, I had been awarded a scholarship to Liverpool University, conditional upon my accepting military service. When I replied that I could not do this, the scholarship was withdrawn.

So in due course a nice detective arrived at the house and saw my mother. "I'm sorry, Mrs Fenn, but I've come for another of your sons." I was out but he agreed that it would be alright if I presented myself at the police station next morning – which I duly did. The charge was that I had refused a summons to join up and I was handed over to the military authorities. A most objectionable young subaltern put me in charge of a sergeant, with the words, "Take this down to the station and to Chester barracks – drop it in the river if you get the chance". And in due course I arrived at Chester Castle and was put in the guardroom. My chief recollections of the week I spent there are of trying to eat the porridge with a one-pronged fork, the stench of the latrines, and the succession of drunks who passed through the room on various charges – and of a nice youngster who had lied his way into the army at the age of fifteen and began to go to the dogs.

Next morning a nice, elderly sergeant took me across for medical inspection. On the way he said, "I suppose you are not going to do anything? Well, when we get there I

shall order you to strip. If you disobey, you must give me a reason." In due course he said, "This is a military order – Strip". To which I replied that I had a conscientious objection to military service and must refuse. He said, "You realise what you are doing? This means a court martial." I assured him I fully realised this, and we retraced our steps to the guardhouse.

Nothing much happened for a few days. I wrote out a statement for the Court Martial. My mother, accompanied by her youngest sister... came to see me, and they were very brave. Within a week the Court Martial was held and I was charged with refusing to obey orders, to which I pleaded guilty and read out my statement. So far as I can recall, what I tried to say was that I recognised that the law required me to accept service in the armed forces but that as a Christian I could not admit the right of the State to require a course of action which conflicted fundamentally with my religious convictions. I could not see that what was then happening in France was other than a complete denial of those values which I had accepted as final. What I did not go on to say (though I might have done so) was that I had come to reject the commonly accepted view of the origins and nature of the war itself because of a different understanding of the international crises which had led up to it. This did not seem to me to allow for a clear white or black judgment in regard to the conflict between Germany and Great Britain. Next day, on parade, I was duly sentenced to three months imprisonment and sent off under escort to London and to Wormwood Scrubs...

It is clear that by this time the first ill-treatment of C.Os was over. The whole process had become a routine and no attempt was made to coerce me. Some of the early objectors were brutally treated, for the whole idea of conscientious objection was new and very irritating to men in the services, especially those who had been in France. This



one can easily understand and, indeed, sympathise with, but I had a very easy ride.

When I had been handed over to the warder at Reception and my escort had gone, the first thing that happened was emptying my pockets and being issued with prison clothes. Then a bath, a medical examination, putting on the grey serge clothing, my own clothes being parcelled up to await the end of my sentence – and then off we went to Ward C. And there came my first major shock. Apparently I had contracted a skin disease in the guardroom at Chester – the blankets were pretty grubby so I was put into the “Itch” cell, leaving me with only a very smelly night-shirt, a plank bed and thin mattress, and (on a shelf) the Bible and a combination of the Prayer Book and Hymns Ancient and Modern. I had no watch and therefore no idea of the time... Eventually a warder arrived, accompanied by a prisoner bearing the evening meal, thin porridge, about 2 oz. of bread, a small pot of margarine and an even smaller scrap of cheese, plus a mug of weak tea. The food generally was meagre and we were always hungry. But that was to be expected, the U-boat warfare was at its height and food short for everybody. We were, on the whole, treated well within the limits set by the prison discipline and the national emergency. Then silence... Finally the light went out (it was controlled from outside) and the night proper began. I can't say I enjoyed my first night in prison but I did get some sleep.

Next day [after unpleasant treatment for the skin disease]... I was put in a cell on one of the higher landings, which was to be my “home” for the next three months. Immediately, as with all prisoners sentenced to hard labour that meant a period of solitary confinement lasting about a fortnight. Once a day we were allowed out for exercise, watched by warders to make sure you didn't talk to each other. For the rest of the day – and night – we were alone

in our cells. A few days after getting installed, a gnome-like warder appeared with a few old mail-bags, showed me how to mend them, and left me the means to do so. Unfortunately, they were running out of bags at the moment, so I only had three to last me about ten days; and there was no reading matter in the cell apart from the Bible and Hymns Ancient and Modern. I decided that, as I had never read the Bible straight through, this was an opportunity to do so, and I had got as far as Joshua when the prison librarian arrived with a trolley load of books... In any case I learned the meaning of “solitary confinement” and was glad it did not go on longer than the fortnight. Thereafter I was marched out each day for “Associated Labour” which involved sitting on a stool in a large room with a hundred or so others, either sewing mailbags or making ships’ fenders. And of course not speaking to anybody!

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We had of course no access to newspapers, so we were dependent for news of the outside world and of the war on the brief summary given by the Chaplain after the morning service. But all kinds of rumours spread around the place. One means of communication was a code of tappings on your neighbour’s wall and another was hurried whisperings with stiff lips either on exercise or when food was being delivered at your cell door. But the great excitement was an air-raid. Germany was still using Zeppelins over London and when this happened we were all shoved into the cells on the ground floor, three or four in a cell, till the raid was over – and we could talk! I remember standing on a stool and looking out of a cell window to see the silver monster, brilliantly lit by search-lights, moving slowly across my line of vision. It was an awesome sight – but what we most enjoyed was the chance to *talk*.

After about a month I was taken before yet another tribunal and asked whether I was willing to do “work of

national importance". This was the question which separated the "absolutists" (i.e. people who refused any part in the war effort) and those who felt that work not directly connected with the war were legitimate. I had agonised about this matter of conscience, and come down on the side of accepting "work of national importance" if offered. So I agreed, and when my time was up I was sent off on parole with a number of other C.Os to Knutsford.

The change from Wormwood Scrubs to Knutsford was something like the change of status from criminal to political prisoner. The prisons at Knutsford, Wakefield and Dartmoor had been taken over as "Work Centres" for conscientious objectors. There was a Governor in charge with a small staff of warders, but we were allowed to elect our own officers, with a committee to organise our own work and recreation. We fed at long tables on the ground floor and occupied unlocked cells where we could do as we liked in spare time. The "work of national importance" comprised the inevitable mail-bags etc but there were also internally useful jobs to be done – in the kitchen or the laundry... In the evenings we could attend any classes or entertainments available inside the prison or go out provided we signed the book at the door and got back by 9.30 p.m. After the restrictions of Wormwood Scrubs it was a marvellous change. I attempted to run a class in German, but I was too theoretical for the members and it was not a success. I was there for about six months until I was tempted by the offer of a job in in a sand quarry near Aylesbury, since my parents had moved to London and I thought I might get to see them if I were nearer.

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In the spring of 1918 I moved to the sand quarry. There we were housed in an old shed, filled with bunks, and our job was to dig out the top layer of clay and earth so that the two or three expert workmen could get at the white sand

which was carted away and finally transported in barges for glass-making and so on. It was hard open air work, not without a mild degree of danger, for you had to run the top-soil in barrows across a deep valley on 9-inch planks and dump it on the rubbish heap, and if you missed your step you might fall a matter of eighteen feet. Which was precisely what I did one day that autumn, with the result that I got a badly bruised and cracked arm and was sent off, as useless, to Dartmoor.

We were a very odd collection of men at that quarry. The cook was a man called Willmott, a devotee of the IBSA (International Bible Students Association). Then there was Tom Cochrane, a Marxist Trades Unionist who tried to convert us to Marxism; George Archibald, a young and fiery Scot, an Essex postman; a very earnest Quaker of terrifying integrity; a man who suffered from epilepsy and was apt to throw fits in bed, and a young Cockney with a great repertoire of lewd jokes. The boss of the outfit was an old man called Barber, and the chief technician, who dug out the sand, was called Dick. Our one recreation was listening to Wilmot's gramophone playing Gilbert and Sullivan.

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Dartmoor prison held the most extraordinary collection of humanity... I was allocated to "light duties" in view of my injured arm, and found myself one of a party of three charged with cleaning out the unused cells and clearing the ventilation shafts of dust. The boss of this little group was an extraordinary chap called Golding, an artist and a singer... Perhaps this is the place to say something about the "Pacifist Movement" as I experienced it. It consisted of a very wide spectrum of "objectors"; some were politically motivated. They were Marxists, or extreme Socialists who regarded the war as a capitalist affair which had no relevance to the working man except in providing an opportunity for social disruption. Then there were the extreme

religious sects – the predecessor of Jehovah's Witnesses, some pietistic Brethren who denied the right of the State in various fields, including war; a small group of genuine Quakers; people like my friend the singer who simply had a horror of firearms and violence; a few Jews belonging to obscure Jewish sects. There was even one man who refused to join the army because the Liverpool Corporation had cut off his gas supply! There was very little coherence, but there were some able men... On the whole most of them were sincere, most of them working or middle class, some who regarded the whole affair as a kind of unofficial university experience. And, indeed, there was much in it to be learned if you had a mind to it. But it was not much of an environment for a young, ignorant youngster like myself. There was much discussion of the progress of the war, and particularly after 1917, of the Russian Revolution and its implications for other countries. Not much open religion – and a great deal of worry about wives and children and parents and the effect on them of the stand these men had taken.

This last point was very serious. It was all right for us – we were segregated from society. At times a few of us might be set upon if we went any distance from the prison – one man in Knutsford was badly beaten up and another who went to Tavistock from Dartmoor had a bad time – but wives and parents had to live with a great deal of social ostracism, and found few people, even among close friends, who understood, let alone sympathised with the pacifist position. I think this was one cogent reason for my parents' move to London, though not the most important motive. Birkenhead was not a comfortable place for the parents of three conscientious objectors! This was a fact which only began to dawn on me after the vital decision had been taken.

After his release at the end of the war, Eric Fenn went through a deep spiritual and intellectual crisis. His earlier faith, drained by his harsh experiences, had to be rebuilt. After theological study at Cambridge he worked for the Student Christian Movement, was a collaborator with J.H. Oldham for the 1937 Oxford Conference “Church, Community and State” and other ecumenical projects; then worked successively for BBC Religious Programmes, the British and Foreign Bible Society and finally as President of the Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham. In 1960 he was elected Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of England, and later took a major part in the uniting of the Presbyterian Church and Congregational Church to form the United Reformed Church.

### ***FOR REFLECTION***

**Bible readings:** Matthew 5:1-16; Matthew 10:34-39; Matthew 21:12-13; Matthew 26:47-54.

- Is it possible to gain a consistent picture of Jesus’ attitude to violence from these gospel passages?
- How do you imagine that pacifists and non-pacifists would have argued over these passages during the 1914-18 war?
- What contribution to our country’s understanding and valuation of human rights and freedoms do you think was made by the pacifists’ witness in 1914-18?

## “WHO MAKES WAR?” – PROPHECY AND NATIONAL SELF-CRITICISM

Let us have the courage to face the truth. It is not particular nations or classes or statesmen which are the makers of war; it is not Kings or Emperors, it is not militarists, it is not the scare-makers and the Press: it is you and I. They are the puppets of destiny; we are the creators of destiny.<sup>50</sup>

(Eglantyne Jebb, Quaker, pacifist and social activist in her late 1915 paper “Who Makes War?”)

“I see *John Bull* says you’re all saints; well, all I can say is, ‘eyes right’ and look at your neighbour.”<sup>51</sup>

(Chaplain G. Studdert Kennedy, addressing troops in France, 1917, during the “National Mission of Repentance and Hope” initiated by the Church of England in 1916. Horatio Bottomley MP, owner and editor of the patriotic periodical *John Bull* had ridiculed the church for calling fighting men to repentance, since they were “saints and heroes”, not sinners.)

The combined shock of war and sense of national peril was apt to prompt very varied moral reactions. On the one hand, as Eglantyne Jebb points out, it could lead to easy scapegoating of particular groups leading to a failure to see one’s own responsibility and complicity in the human condition. Or it could lead to an idealizing (indeed idolizing) of all things British and by the same token the demonizing of all things German. The idealizing attitude was, as seen here, given short shrift by that most

compassionate yet down-to-earth chaplain and poet Studdert Kennedy

### **A matter of judgment**

Another reaction was to identify certain “sins”, individual or national, as having incurred the divine wrath and for which the war was sent as punishment. William Temple in his preaching on St John’s Gospel severely castigated this attitude:

[O]ne has heard people during this war speak about it as if God had deliberately caused the war in order to punish mankind for certain sins – there are some who have even suggested to us that they know what sins it is that we are being punished for – that God has deliberately brought into the world all the agony of war to punish men, at any rate in this country, for certain conspicuous vices or failings, such as drunkenness or impurity or Sabbath-breaking. I venture to say that is sheer superstition. We can trace the actual causes of the war, and we know quite well that its causes were in human wills, and we are not at liberty to say that God intervened in the history of the world to inflict anguish and pain by means of the war as punishment for certain sins that have no relation to it. How could the war grow out of drunkenness? All the way through this Gospel of St John we are taught that a judgment of God is not a deliberate act of His intervening in the world to make guilty people suffer, but an automatic product of His Presence and Revelation.

So we shall think of this war. It is, indeed, a judgment upon the world of sin, and judgment of the sin from which it arises – the sin of selfishness, individual and national, of which in various degrees all men and nations throughout the world are guilty. The sin which led immediately to the outbreak of war we may believe to be mainly in one nation, but the root is to be found among all peoples, and not only among those who are fighting, but neutral peoples just as much. The punishment for that sin comes through the moral



order which God has set up in the world, an order which reacts upon those who break it. So that if a man persists in doing what is contrary to the will of God, in doing evil which he himself recognized as such, the consequences of his sin will at last overtake him. God has no pleasure in the infliction of that penalty, the penalty is rather a warning against indulging in the evil course at all. The pleasure of God is in men's salvation; men's salvation is His purpose. The repudiation of the will of God finds its climax in men's repudiation of Christ Himself. That is their condemnation. What more can be done?<sup>52</sup>

For his part, the Congregational theologian P.T. Forsyth had no doubt that the war represented a divine judgment, but on a much wider and far more profound level than would attach the blame wholly on any one nation, or vice. Furthermore, something much more radical than a "revival of religion" (which patriotic fervour was often mistaken for) was needed:

Patriotism is not religion. God does not love one nation at the cost of the rest. In His free grace he is for nations only as they are for Him.<sup>53</sup>

§§

An event like war at least aids God's purpose in this, that it shocks and rouses us into some due sense of what evil is, and what a Saviour's task with it is. We need not speak of "total corruption", but it is the malign and organised evil of a whole intricate and infected world that has got hold of us in various degrees, an evil from which no culture can free us, to which the apparatus of civilisation itself, when captured, may but give the more power and scope. The state of civilisation is a revelation (such as never came home to the genial pieties of peace) of this superhuman wickedness of the world, which prophets from time to time declared and doomed, only to be called the Jeremiahs of the hour... and

the maligners of human nature in the interest of a dead and dismal theology.<sup>54</sup>

§§

Such considerations [of superficial religious life and thought] help to explain why the Gospel of God's Kingdom (which, by right, is the one International) does not come home to the nations, why it does not take charge of the public conscience on a universal scale either to inspire courage or to sustain fortitude. They explain also how it is possible socially for evangelical sentiment to co-exist with commercial rapacity without a deadly jar; for the methods of the Standard Oil Company to share the enthusiasm of the same soul with Church life and Sunday-school work; and generally, how men can lead a double life, and divide the one soul between the keen egoism of civilisation and the self-sacrifice of the Gospel, without feeling miserable or dishonest – till one day. One day the moral anomaly explodes, and the latent ethical outrage takes its natural and inevitable effect in a world war which but makes overt what was implicit in competition, besting, and tariffs. So the one Judge of all the earth does right... War, with a national competition for God as ally, instead of a national obedience to Him as Sovereign, war with its eagerness to have Him on our side instead of having His side for ours, such war is but the debacle of a religion which is but sequentially, instead of essentially, moral, whose ethic is but a by-product. It is the fruit of the union of a civilisation which is fundamentally egoist, and a religion also egoist and propositional, sentimental, or what you will, only not holy. An egoist civilisation, an individualist salvation, and a non-moral theology in a world which belongs by right to the kingdom of conscience and God... such things do not make debacle strange or judgement wonderful. The shock would be if the combination did not so explode.<sup>55</sup>

## **And churches, what of yourselves?**

The more perceptive Christian thinkers therefore felt that the crisis was one which demanded searching self-examination by British society, and no less by the churches themselves. The missionary statesman and ecumenical leader J.H. Oldham felt that the disaster had exposed the superficiality of so much of the churches' talk about "mission", at national and international level, at and since the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference of 1910:

The Christian protest against the unchristian forces in social and national life must be clearer, sharper and more potent than it has been in the past. It may be that the Church as it was before the war could never have evangelized the world: that its witness had not the penetrating force necessary for so gigantic an undertaking that before God could answer the prayers of His people some deep-seated evil had to be removed, however terrible the cost.<sup>56</sup>

Still more specifically, in relation to the recently reported and appalling statistics of child poverty in Britain, he comments:

It may be doubted... whether a Church that was willing to tolerate a state of things that denied to a large section of our population the elementary conditions of health and happiness possessed the moral passion which would enable it to evangelize the world.

## ***FOR REFLECTION***

**Bible readings:** Jeremiah 26; Matthew 23:29-58

- What is the difference between the declaration by the prophets, and Jesus, of God's judgment on the nation, and sheer moral disapproval of people's behaviour?

- If Eglantyne Jebb, Studdert Kennedy, William Temple, P.T. Forsyth and J.H. Oldham were alive today what do you think they would be saying to our society and churches?

## WHERE IS GOD?

The First World War raised the question of Providence, of the relation of God to History and of His character and very existence, in perhaps the most acute way that has ever happened, and certainly in the most public way. Not merely with religious men and serious thinkers, but quite literally with every Tom, Dick and Harry. Questions were wrung out of people that only a prophetic Christianity at close grips with the secular problems of the age had the slightest chance of meeting. And the word was not forthcoming.<sup>57</sup>

There are many unschooled thinkers who say that an awful catastrophe like modern war is enough to unsettle any belief in a God, a Father, a kingdom of heaven. Nay, but it is the other way. With such a Europe, with its negligence of God and His righteousness, with the levity even of the religious mind, the unsettling thing would be if there was no judgement on materialist civilisations, poor pieties, and shallow politics, and gorgeous getting on, were there no rectification of things by a tremendous surgery, no dreadful excision of the deadly growth that gathers within the nations that forget God. It is all the judgement action of that kingdom of grace for which we pray. By terrible things in righteousness dost Thou answer us, O God of our salvation. When we pray for the kingdom to come, we know not what we ask.<sup>58</sup>

(P.T. Forsyth, 1917)

One day I wandered into the charred and crumbling ruins

of the cathedral. The great stone-vaulted roof had been smashed in pieces. Walls were falling and strong pillars were bent and misshapen like giants in agony. The painted windows and priceless mural frescoes had wholly disappeared. The flagged floors of the nave and aisles were full of gaping holes and littered with debris. A shapeless mass of stones, plaster and lumber represented what had been the altar of God. The great organ in its gallery, mute and silent, stood rent and wounded. Then I saw a wonderful thing. I saw a little girl come in and kneel down to pray among the rubbish that littered the chancel steps. I was suddenly moved by an indescribable emotion. That child was the answer to all this madness. The rainbow was still in the cloud. Something was left in the world that shells could never destroy.<sup>59</sup>

(Charles Warr at Ypres, 1915)

### ***Le Christianisme***

So the church Christ was hit and buried  
Under its rubbish and its rubble.  
In cellars, packed-up saints lie serried,  
Well out of hearing of our trouble.

One Virgin still immaculate  
Smiles on for war to flatter her.  
She's halo'd with an old tin hat,  
But a piece of hell will batter her.<sup>60</sup>

(Wilfred Owen)

...when death looked me in the face, my manhood withered and collapsed. For what seemed hours I was in an agony of fear... and suddenly as if spoken in the very room, His words "For their sakes I consecrate, myself" and the fragrant splendour of His presence... for the next nine months

He was never absent, and I never alone, and never save  
for an instant or two broken by fear. If He who was with me  
when I was blown up by a shell, and gassed, and sniped  
at, with me in hours of bombardment and the daily walk of  
death, was an illusion, then all that makes life worth living  
for me is illusion too...<sup>61</sup>

(Chaplain Charles Raven, on his first night in France in  
1917, on his way to Vimy Ridge)

*At a Calvary near the Ancre*

One ever hangs where shelled roads part.  
In this war He too lost a limb,  
But His disciples hide apart;  
And now the Soldiers bear with Him.

Near Golgotha strolls many a priest,  
And in their faces there is pride  
That they were flesh-marked by the Beast  
By whom the gentle Christ's denied.

The scribes on all the people shove,  
And bawl allegiance to the state,  
But they who love the greater love  
Lay down their lives; they do not hate.<sup>62</sup>

(Wilfred Owen)

*Azad Khan (Pathan) to Jemadar Khan (Peshawar)* <sup>63</sup>  
17th September 1917

Alas for our condition! It is a great pity that we cannot write  
you an account of the fighting, for if we did, you would  
weep over our fate...All of you must pray to God to deliver  
us from the vicinity of unbelievers, for we are no longer  
Muslims – our faith is gone. It really is the Last Day! No one  
here can help his neighbour, and death would be prefer-

able to such a life.

### ***THE SUFFERING GOD***

If He could speak, that victim torn and bleeding,  
Caught in His pain and nailed upon the Cross,  
Has He to give the comfort souls are needing?  
Could He destroy the bitterness of loss?

Once and for all men say He came and bore it,  
Once and for all set up His throne on high,  
Conquered the world and set His standard o'er it,  
Dying that once, that men might never die.

Yet men are dying, dying soul and body,  
Cursing the God who gave to them their birth,  
Sick of the world with all its sham and shoddy,  
Sick of the lies that darken all the earth.

Peace we were pledged, yet blood is ever flowing,  
Where on the earth has Peace been ever found?  
Men do but reap the harvest of their sowing,  
Sadly the songs of human reapers sound.

Sad as the winds that sweep across the ocean,  
Telling to earth the sorrow of the sea.  
Vain is my strife, just empty idle motion,  
All that has been is all there is to be.

So on the earth the time waves beat in thunder,  
Bearing wrecked hopes upon their heaving breasts,  
Bits of dead dreams, and true hearts torn asunder,  
Flecked with red foam upon their crimson crests.

How can it be that God can reign in glory,



Calmly content with what His Love has done,  
Reading unmoved the piteous shameful story,  
All the vile deeds men do beneath the sun?

Are there no tears in the heart of the Eternal?  
Is there no pain to piece the soul of God?  
Then must He be a fiend of Hell infernal,  
Beating the earth to pieces with His rod.

Or is it just that there is nought behind it,  
Nothing but forces purposeless and blind?  
Is the last thing, if mortal man could find it,  
Only a powder wandering as the wind?

Father, if He, the Christ, were Thy Revealer,  
Truly the First Begotten of the Lord,  
Then must Thou be a Suff'rer and a Healer,  
Pierced to the heart by the sorrow of the sword.

Then must it mean, not only that Thy sorrow  
Smote Thee that once upon the lonely tree,  
But that to-day, to-night, and on the morrow,  
Still it will come, O Gallant God, to Thee.

Swift to its birth in spite of human scorning  
Hastens the day, the storm-clouds roll apart;  
Rings o'er the earth the message of the morning,  
Still on the Cross the Saviour bares His heart.

Passionately fierce the voice of God is pleading,  
Pleading with men to arm them for the fight;  
See how those hands, majestically bleeding,  
Call us to rout the armies of the night.

Not to the work of sordid selfish saving

Of our own souls to dwell with Him on high,  
But to the soldier's splendid selfless braving  
Eager to fight for righteousness and die.

Peace does not mean the end of all our striving,  
Joy does not mean the drying of our tears;  
Peace is the power that comes to souls arriving  
Up to the light where God Himself appears.

Joy is the wine that God is ever pouring  
Into the hearts of those who strive with Him,  
Light'ning their eyes to vision and adoring,  
Strength'ning their arms to warfare glad and grim.

So would I live and not in idle resting,  
Stupid as swine that wallow in the mire;  
Fain would I fight, and be for ever breasting  
Danger and death for ever under fire.

Bread of Thy Body give me for my fighting,  
Give me to drink Thy Sacred Blood for wine,  
While there are wrongs that need me for the righting,  
While there is warfare splendid and divine.

Give me, for light, the sunshine of Thy sorrow,  
Give me, for shelter, shadow of Thy Cross;  
Give me to share the glory of Thy morrow,  
Gone from my heart the bitterness of Loss.<sup>64</sup>

(G. Studdert Kennedy)

## ***FOR REFLECTION***

**Bible readings:** Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Colossians 1:15-20, 23.

- The citations in this chapter are witnesses to how, in the inhuman agony, death and destruction of the battlefields and amid the

desolating sorrow at home, people struggled and searched for God. How far did the war demand a change in people's understanding of God and God's relationship to human beings?

- In their different ways both Studdert Kennedy and Wilfred Owen were caught by the thought of a suffering God – as were in later years theologians such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Jürgen Moltmann. Is the thought of a “suffering God” merely a cry of despair, or is it a breakthrough to a new kind of hope for the world?
- What do you imagine was discovered by the chaplains at the front, on the way the faith could be communicated in the modern world?

## **“EVEN IF HE IS A HUN” – HUMANITY AND FAITH IN MIDST OF IT ALL**

The “Christmas truce” of 1914, when British and German soldiers met in no-man’s land, fraternizing and playing football together, is the best-known instance when in the midst of war enemies saw each other as fellow human beings. There were however other ways in which people, both on the front-line and at home, sought to counteract blind prejudice and hatred.

A.E. Garvie recalled:

I tried in all my teaching and preaching to preserve the Christian attitude. In one of the religious weeklies, a quite young man indulged in a sneer at the hypocrisy of an old man, of whom he had heard, who, approving of the war, tried to preserve his Christian Spirit towards the German people by reading his daily portion in the German New Testament. That is what I did with absolute sincerity, and as a means of grace which God used to save me from hatred. An intimate German friend, a great New Testament scholar, the late Dr Adolf Deissmann, told me he had read the English translation, so that he might realize the fellowship of Christians in their common faith, despite all national differences. Now that I can with calmness look back upon my experience, it seems to me that my own intense and enduring sorrow was purified as it was merged in the sorrow of a stricken world. I was saved from self-absorption, as my interest went out to others in their grief, and I realized a world’s woe.<sup>65</sup>

Sgt-Major Frederic Hillersdon Keeling serving in France wrote in a letter home:

I believe a large proportion of the men here who think at all share my sentiments about it. I have no sympathy with people who want to execrate the whole German nation as much as possible... I will not hate Germans to the order of any bloody politician and the first thing I shall do after I am free will be to go to Germany and create all the ties I can with German life.

...When you are lying at rest and hear a bombardment going on you can't help thinking of the poor devils of infantry in the trenches on both sides with sympathy. You are none the worse soldier or fighter for that... how one dreams of the end! Of course I don't want peace to be made as things are. The job must be finished off... Only let it be a definite well-established peace when it does come. The Prussian monarchy must be smashed but the German people must be given a chance to live an honourable life if they will dissociate themselves from the bloody system of militarism...

When I dream of *après la guerre* I just think of the world – this good old cheery ball of earth – as a place of exquisite beauty, adventure, joy, love and experience... By God! I can see the scene, before the peace, even during the armistice. The infantry men will swarm over the parapets of the trenches on both sides and exchange every damned thing they can spare off their persons – down to their buttons and bits of equipment as 'souvenirs'.<sup>66</sup>

Lieutenant Horace Fletcher wrote to his mother, 1916:

Do you think that the experience of the War has made the general public realise that there must be other ways of ending points of dispute which are as satisfactory as the way of bloodshed? If man were to make venture of

faith, and believe that there *is* a way (if demanding more patience) such a way would be found.<sup>67</sup>

### **“Patriotism is not enough” – Edith Cavell<sup>68</sup>**

No figure in the war came to symbolise courage and noble patriotism more than did Edith Cavell (1865-1915). Daughter of an Anglican priest in Norfolk, she trained as a nurse and in 1897 become matron of a nurses' training school in Brussels where she remained for the rest of her life. On the outbreak of war in 1914 she and her staff treated Belgian, British and German troops alike. She hoped to continue working in this non-discriminatory way under the Red Cross, but that organisation's work was moved away. Under the German occupation her hospital continued to treat civilians, but more and more Belgian, French and British troops caught behind the lines found their way there. As well as treating them she assisted them in making contact with the resistance network which enabled them to escape across the border into neutral Holland. By 1915 she and her colleagues were increasingly under suspicion from the German authorities, and in August that year she and others in the network were arrested. After weeks in solitary confinement, in a legal mockery of a trial by court-martial she was found guilty of “treason” (and afterwards also accused of “spying”), and sentenced to death. Throughout her life she had remained a deeply devout Christian, and during her time in solitary meditated upon Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*. She and seven others were executed by firing squad on the morning of 12 October 1915. Her biographer recounts of her last days, when she was visited by the English priest in Brussels Stirling Gahan:

She did not complain about her trial. She did not know that the others who stood trial with her and whose involvement in resistance work had been greater would be reprieved. She said she willingly gave her life for her country. She perhaps did not know that the aid she had given to Allied soldiers was not sufficient, even under the maverick laws by which she was indicted, to justify the sentence passed on her. She told Gahan that the German pastor, Le Seur,

had been kind, and she accepted that he be with her at the end. She was thankful for the imposed silence of her ten weeks' imprisonment. It had been, she said, 'like a solemn fast from earthly distractions and diversions'. She told him:

I have no fear or shrinking. I have seen death so often that it is not strange or fearful to me. Life has always been hurried and full of difficulty. This time of rest has been a great mercy. Everyone here has been very kind.

But this I would say, standing as I do in view of God and Eternity: I realise that patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness towards anyone

Her death sparked outrage in the English-speaking world (and even eventually troubled the German Kaiser) and was hugely exploited for recruiting purposes with slogans like "Remember Edith Cavell" and "Who will Avenge Nurse Cavell?" It is estimated that following her death recruitment doubled from 5,000 to 10,000 a week for eight weeks. In death she became the embodiment of female patriotic heroism. The statue of her which was erected and unveiled in Trafalgar Square in 1920 bore the words: "FOR KING AND COUNTRY", "HUMANITY", "DEVOTION", "FORTITUDE", "SACRIFICE" and "FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH". But her own words spoken to Stirling Gahan on the eve of her death – "Patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness for anyone" – were at first not included. They were added only after a campaign in 1923 by the National Council of Women of Great Britain and Ireland.

## **Other nurses**

Vera Brittain (see chapters 1 and 5) nursed for a time in France, and on a ward for German prisoners.

In the German ward we knew only too certainly when "the next show" began. With September the "Fall In" resumed its embarrassing habit of repetition, and when we had no more beds available for prisoners, stretchers holding angry-

eyed men in filthy brown blankets occupied an inconvenient proportion of the floor. Many of our patients arrived within twenty-four hours of being wounded; it seemed strange to be talking amicably to a German officer about the “*Putsch*” he had been in the previous morning on the opposite side to our own.

Nearly all the prisoners bore their dreadful dressings with stoical fortitude, and one or two waited phlegmatically for death. A doomed twenty-year-old boy, beautiful as the young Hyacinth in spite of the flush on his concave cheeks and restless, agonised biting of his lips, asked one evening in a courteous whisper how long he had to wait before he died. It was not very long; the screens were round his bed by the next afternoon.<sup>69</sup>

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[After dealing with a very difficult, demanding German] But I felt quite melancholy when I came on duty one morning to find that he had died in the night.

There was no time, however, for regrets, since I had to spend half that day sitting beside a small, middle-aged Bavarian who was slowly bleeding to death from the sub-clavian artery. The haemorrhage was too deep-seated to be checked, and Hope Milroy went vehemently through the dressings with her petrified cavalcade of orderlies while I gave the dying man water, and wiped the perspiration from his face. On the other side of the bed a German-speaking Nonconformist padre murmured the Lord's Prayer; the sombre resonance of its conclusion sounded like the rolling of some distant organ:

*“Und vergib uns unsere Schulden, wie wir unsern Schuldigern vergeben. Und führe uns nicht in Versuchung, sondern erlöse uns von dem Übel. Denn Dein ist das Reich und die Kraft und die Herrlichkeit in Ewigkeit, Amen.”* [“And forgive us our...”]

But the dying man was not much interested in the



forgiveness of his sins; the evil from which neither friends nor enemies could deliver him prevailed all too obviously.

“*Schwester, liebe Schwester!*” [“Sister, dear Sister!”] he whispered clutching at my hand. “*Ich bin schwach – so schwach!*” [“I am weak, so weak!”].

When I came back from luncheon he too had died, and Hope Milroy was sitting exhausted at the table.

“I’ve just laid that man out,” she said; “and now I want some tea. I don’t care about watching a man bleed to death under my very eyes, even if he is a Hun.”

Before making the tea, I went behind the screens to take a last look at the wax doll on the bed. Now that the lids had closed over the anxious, pleading eyes, the small bearded face was devoid of expression. The window above the body happened to be closed, and Hope called to me to open it.

“I always open the windows when they die – so as to let their souls go out,” she explained.<sup>70</sup>

## **The church across frontiers**

Despite the mutual suspicions, hostility and recriminations of British and German church leaders in the early days of the war there was not a complete breakdown of communication. The international meeting at Constance at the beginning of August 1914 had, before it was hastily abandoned, agreed on the setting up of the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches. The British and German sections of the World Alliance continued not only to publish but to exchange (via neutral countries) their respective journals launched after the exchange visits of 1908-09: the British *Peacemaker* now rebranded as *Goodwill* edited by J.H. Rushbrooke, and the German *Die Eiche* (see chapter 1) edited by the courageous pastor Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze. *Die Eiche* often appeared with blank sections of pages thanks to the German censorship. This at least enabled readers to know more of what was being said and thought in “enemy” territory. In August 1915 the World Alliance was even able to hold a conference in Bern, Switzer-

land attended by, among others, representatives from three belligerent countries – Britain, Germany and Italy. Also now in the field was the largely pacifist Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), of which a leading organizer in Britain was the Quaker Henry Hodgkin. He had been at the Constance conference in August 1914, and in bidding a farewell to Frederic Siegmund-Schultze at the railway station in Cologne, he and his German friend pledged to each other “We are one in Christ and can never be at war.” The FOR was constituted at a conference in Cambridge in 1915, and among its basic principles was the belief: “That... as Christians we are forbidden to wage war, and that our loyalty to our country, to humanity, to the Church Universal, and to Jesus Christ our Lord and Master, calls us instead to a life-service for the enthronement of Love in personal, commercial and national life.”

Meanwhile on the world missions front J.H. Oldham was desperately anxious to remain in contact with his German colleagues on the Edinburgh Conference Continuation Committee. The Germans were increasingly bitter towards what they saw as British church connivance at the confiscation of German missions property in lands that were in British overseas territories, or in countries in Africa that were now under British occupation. They could not know that Oldham in fact was quietly and steadfastly working to prevent just such developments in his approaches to the British Foreign Office and Colonial Office. He made more than one unsuccessful attempt to meet with his German counterparts in neutral Switzerland, and in the end had to rely on correspondence to assure them of his sympathy and goodwill in their predicament. But it was proving increasingly hard to surmount the negative political propaganda on both sides. To Friedrich Würz, the director of the (German) Basel Mission, Oldham wrote:

If the German case were as were as wholly evil as the bulk of people in Great Britain think it is, men like you... would not be able to give it your wholehearted support... Similarly if the British case were only what most Germans conceive it to be, many whom you know personally in England would certainly not be among its supporters.... Love is a

surer guide to truth than hate. Many of us in this country are trying to think of the Germany that Germans love. Let Germans also try to think of the England which Englishmen love... The suffering through which German missionaries are passing, and the whole German people, touches me profoundly. One is able to know what it means because our own people are passing through similar sufferings.<sup>71</sup>

It was to Karl Axenfeld, secretary of the German missions coordinating committee, that Oldham – as early as 1915 – made a remarkably prescient comment when communicating to him the principles of the Papers in Wartime Group: <sup>72</sup>

It will be clear to you that these principles determine our view with regard to the treatment of Germany in the event of a victory for the Allies. *It is quite clear to us that any attempt to humiliate Germany or to impose on her unjust and crushing conditions of peace or to restrict her natural and legitimate aspirations is simply to sow the seeds of another war.*<sup>73</sup> (Emphasis Clements')

## News from the other side

Immediately on the outbreak of war under the Defence of the Realm Act strict press censorship was imposed, especially of any material that might conceivably undermine morale of either the military or the civilian population, and which might create sympathy for the enemy. This included of course material coming from the enemy side. Nevertheless in the course of time it was possible to read in England such statements as “It ought to go without saying that the German people long for an end to this monstrous slaughter “(*Berliner Tageblatt*, November 1915); and in November 1917, a report which despite strict German censorship had appeared in the *Kölnischer Zeitung* on the appalling levels of child mortality in Germany as mothers no longer had the milk to breast- or bottle-feed their babies.<sup>74</sup>

That such reports could be made known in Britain was due to the efforts of the Quaker Dorothy Buxton assisted by her sister Eglantyne Jebb and others. Concerned that censorship was preventing people from getting a fuller (and therefore more true) picture of the war, and that vilification of all things German was growing relentlessly, Buxton in 1915 approached the new Prime Minister David Lloyd George and secured permission to import foreign newspapers including German ones. From these she and her helpers created a uniquely independent news service, translating and distilling many of the overseas reports and publishing them in the *Cambridge Magazine*. The periodical was read by many, including MPs some of whom (like the established press) were fiercely opposed to the project. But others appreciated it highly, including MPs Philip Snowden and Charles Trevelyan who were encouraged to advocate a negotiated peace. The writer Jerome K. Jerome (author of the humorous *Three Men in a Boat*), who was serving as an ambulance driver with the French army, was highly impressed:

The *Cambridge Magazine* is the only paper that for the last two years I have read with any interest. It is the only paper that any man who cares to think for himself can read with any satisfaction in the present time. It is the only paper from which one obtains the undoctored truth and undistorted facts. There are only two methods that occur to me, of teaching the actual position of affairs. One is to compel every adult civilian in England to spend three or four months in the fighting line, the other to compel them to read '*The Cambridge Magazine*'.<sup>75</sup>

## **FOR REFLECTION**

**Bible readings:** Psalm 87; Acts 17:22-28; Ephesians 2:11-22

- What is it, in your view, that enables some people even in time of war to keep a sense of common humanity and respect for human dignity without distinction, while others succumb to “us-and-them”

impulses?

- Compared with 1914-18, wars today receive much more immediate and full press and media coverage. Does this make us view armed conflict differently? Did the lack of first-hand and detailed reporting have a role in prolonging the conflict?
- For Christians do loyalty to Christ and his body the transnational church override all national loyalties in all circumstances?

## PEACE – OF A KIND

The Armistice of November 1918 brought an end to war but not to suffering. The Treaty of Versailles laid down the conditions of peace but also sowed seeds of a future conflict.

Those in the churches who had hoped and prayed for a day when reconciliation might be possible were not slow to act. The World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches held the first post-war international, ecumenical conference at Oud Wassenaar in the Netherlands in October 1919. Relations between the British and German missionary leaders, so severely strained during the war, were patiently if painfully rebuilt, helped by the fact that J.H. Oldham was instrumental in even getting inserted into the Versailles Treaty a clause exempting German missions property from expropriation as part of the reparations imposed on Germany; and furthermore, a guarantee of freedom of access and action of all missionary societies (including German) in Africa. The International Missionary Council, the long-awaited permanent fruit of the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910, was finally constituted in 1921, with German participation. Writing in 1920 Oldham expressed the spirit and motivation underlying such actions:

For the Christian nationality is not the ultimate loyalty. His highest allegiance is to the Christian fellowship. He cannot be indifferent to the claims of nationality, for the genius and tradition and spirit of the nation have made him what he is. He cannot divest himself of the duties of citizenship. The nation is a fact in the life of the world and we cannot set the fact aside as if it did not exist. There are many points at which the claims of national loyalty and of loyalty to humanity as a whole are difficult to reconcile and create

perplexity for the Christian conscience. But there can be no doubt that our great need to day in a world fevered and torn by national antagonisms is to be recalled to the simple and universal things, and to realize how much more fundamental are the things that unite men than those that divide them...<sup>76</sup>

In the later stages of the war the diplomat Cecil Spring-Rice, recalled from his post as British ambassador in Washington after the entry of the USA into the war, had penned lines which were soon to become famous but which are of rather different sentiment to Oldham's:

I vow to thee, my country – all earthly things above –  
Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love,  
The love that asks no question, the love that stands the test,  
That lays upon the altar the dearest and the best:  
The love that never falters, the love that pays the price,  
The love that makes undaunted the final sacrifice.

## **The German pain**

On the German side, the imputation to Germany by the Versailles Treaty of sole and whole guilt for initiating the war was the most deeply embittering wound. It was precisely against such humiliating vindictiveness, and their likely dangerous consequences that Christians like Oldham and William Temple had earlier warned (see chapter 10). But there was a far more immediate and material cause of German bitterness, namely, the misery caused by the British blockade. From the outset of the war Britain imposed a naval blockade in the North Sea and English Channel, preventing raw materials and foodstuffs being imported into Germany (a French blockade was also imposed on Austrian ports in the Adriatic). Germany tried to counter this by its submarine warfare, but the blockade effectively strangled Germany's supply of food and basic raw materials essential for industry and agriculture. By the winter of 1916 many Germans were subsisting only on a diet of "ersatz" products. Disorder

and rioting ensued in Germany, Austria and Hungary. There was also resentment in neutral countries which greatly depended on trade with Germany. Disease became rife by 1917 (scurvy, dysentery and tuberculosis). An estimated 763,500 deaths during the war were caused by starvation due to the blockade (excluding a further 150,000 in the influenza pandemic of 1918, a figure probably including many already weakened by malnutrition and related diseases).

### **A child's cry – the only international language**

The bitterness was particularly acute *after* the Armistice, however, because the blockade was continued as a means of enforcing German acceptance of the terms of the Versailles Treaty in 1919. In Britain it was the Quaker sisters Dorothy Buxton and Eglantyne Jebb who did most to arouse the public conscience on the issue.

Now, over our afternoon tea, dear friend,  
Let's consult together why  
We're starving sixty million people, between us,  
You and I...  
Is it to make them accept terms of peace  
which they otherwise wouldn't?  
Or is it that we may get hold of some markets  
we otherwise couldn't?  
Do we want the food – though it's more than  
We could eat – for our own poor nations?  
Or do we simply want to reduce  
The enemy's population?  
Perhaps it is to punish sin? The fact is I  
Want to know what to say  
When asked what my motives exactly  
Were, by God, at the Judgement Day.  
For I've an increasing suspicion,  
Although hitherto I've hid it.  
God will not let us off scot free  
When we say that the Government did it.<sup>77</sup>



(Eglantyne Jebb, 1918)

Buxton and Jebb formed the Fight the Famine Council, launched at a rally in the Albert Hall, which sought to highlight conditions, especially as they affected children, in Germany and Austria. For them the way hunger was being used as a tool of policy was an issue of morality:

It [Paris/Versailles] believes it is making a new Europe that it is writing history with a large and firm hand, but history is being made elsewhere. It is being made in 1,000 hospitals, in innumerable humble homes all over Europe. The cry of the child for bread is hushed in a nameless grave, but surely his voice will waken again. It will resound down our century. All shall hear it. It will become a voice of thunder which shall send statesmen and politicians, parliaments and Churches, to their doom.

Our spurious patriotism, our moral indolence, all that tissue of pretences which we call 'civilisation' has destroyed the child, but the child in its feebleness and its pain may perhaps have destroyed this 'civilisation'.<sup>78</sup>

"The only international language in the world is a child's cry." (Eglantyne Jebb)<sup>79</sup>

As late as 1920 Buxton wrote in a pamphlet:<sup>80</sup>

Much is written today of the privation and misery of the children in many countries of Europe. But there is one country where the misery is still hidden from general recognition by the veil of scepticism, if not actual misrepresentation, carefully woven by a press which fears a dangerous political repercussion if the ugly facts were known. This press, moreover, finds ready material in the superficial observations of careless travellers. The sword of the pen is not yet sheathed, and its unseen victims to-day are the bodies of

countless children.

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The favourable reports on German conditions which are produced from time to time in *The Times* and other newspapers are the work of observers who stay in the most expensive hotels and never give themselves the opportunity to share the life of the people; who avoid all the statistics of death and disease and appear to base their judgments on the most superficial appearances of the towns, and on the more favourable conditions of the country districts.

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[A brigadier of the Salvation Army] wrote in March, 1920, that the Army's investigations among children "fully authenticate the appalling stories we had received." "All were stunted in growth and backward in development. The children of three in some cases look little more than 12 months – skeleton bodies, little hands and faces, the expression of which is that of old people... The majority of children appear at least two years below the normal in physical development. Mr Scattergard, head of the American Friends Mission, has given a very similar description, as has also Mr Gardiner, late Editor of the *Daily Mirror*, who visited Germany under the relatively favourable conditions of the summer. "As you go through the schools," he says, "you have the sense of a whole generation stricken by a blight."

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[A Report of the Women's Societies of Saxony in *The Friend* for 26 March 1920 stated] "We have no swaddling clothes for new-born children, no coal for the first bath, no wadding to stop bleeding, no soap for the washing, no linen for the changing." This description is unfortunately typical.

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The suffering and ruin of these children may indeed be matched, and in individual cases surpassed, in Poland or in Austria, but it is the enormously larger numbers affected in

Germany which constitutes the special gravity and urgency of the problem. Nor must one forget the height of prosperity from which Germany has fallen into the depths of misery and despair. But the reaction on body, mind and soul of a protracted privation must be proportionately shattering to a people accustomed for generations to a high level of diet, cleanliness, order and comfort. The conclusion of the matter as it presented itself already last winter to the correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* is as follows: "The abject condition of the German people today contains the seed of a future and terrible war. But it will excite the best interest of the British people. The children and sickly women... deserve their sympathy and support."

It was out of the Fight the Famine Council that the charity we know today as *Save the Children* was formed.

### ***FOR REFLECTION***

**Bible readings:** Isaiah 40:1-2; Zechariah 8:9-23; Matthew 5:38-48; Matthew 18:1-14.

- The hymn "I vow to thee, my country" still arouses strong passions, for and against, today. Does it have a place in Christian worship?
- How realistic is it to expect a people who have suffered so much in war to sympathise with the sufferings of another people, especially "on the other side"?
- How significant do you think it is that the British people who were most concerned about famine in Germany were women?
- "The only international language in the world is a child's cry" (Eglantyne Jebb). How might that serve as a motto for today?

## AFTERMATH – WHAT CHURCH? WHAT UNITY? WHAT PEACE?

Two things are brought home to me through this war. Firstly, that an ordinary Anglican religion won't do; it doesn't save souls in any volume. That is sufficient condemnation, therefore it must be scrapped. Secondly, that the only forms of religion in the Anglican Communion which have any life in them are the Evangelical and the Sacramental.<sup>81</sup>

(Walter Carey, Naval chaplain)

The war prompted many in the churches to searching reflection on their own failures in witness, their lack of impact upon the lives of people at large and indeed their own complicity in the wrongs that had led to war. It also opened the eyes of leaders to the need for Christian unity at every level, from the local to international.

### **Unity: a new quest**

In 1918, even before the war had ended, J. H. Shakespeare, secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, declared:

It is as certain as anything can be in this world that, unless the churches are prepared to unite upon the most vital issues, they may finally abandon the hope of winning the intellect and soul of the modern world.

The reason is not far to seek. The thinking part of the nation outside the churches has an entirely different conception of that matter. They see that the real issue of our time is not in the things that divide the churches, but in

the war they wage together against the forces of evil. They see that the real conflict is to retain the Cross, the Gospel, the personal God Himself, any of the priceless and sacred treasures which Christianity has brought to the human race. How well I remember walking up and down on a calm Sunday evening by the sea-shore with one who had lost two gallant boys, one in France and another beneath the burning Eastern sun. As he told me of the awful struggle raging in his soul, how he had prayed and prayed that they might be spared, and then of the wreckage and midnight of faith when both fell, I saw that in this coming time which will have suffered and lost so much and in which so many lights have gone out, the sects as such can do nothing at all. The things they stand for in their divisions may be true and good as far as they go, but they do not matter. They simply and finally do not matter in this tragic hour. If the churches can together keep one steady light burning to guide the tempest-tost to the haven, then in the name of God let them do it.<sup>82</sup>

In 1920 at international level two highly significant calls were issued for a new unity among the churches.

From the Ecumenical Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church,  
Constantinople  
UNTO ALL THE CHURCHES OF CHRISTENDOM  
WHERESOEVER THEY BE  
(January 1920)

‘See that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently’  
(1 Pet. i.22)

Our Church is of opinion that a closer intercourse with each other and a mutual understanding between the several Christian Churches is not prevented by the doctrinal dif-

ferences existing between them, and that such an understanding is highly desirable and necessary, and in many ways useful in the well-conceived interest of each one of the Churches taken apart and as a whole Christian body, as also for preparing and facilitating the complete and blessed union which may some day be attained with God's help. Our Church, therefore, deems the present time most opportune for bringing forth and considering this important question in common.....

We therefore, on the establishment of the League of Nations, which has now been effected with good omen, consider the matter to be both feasible and more than ever timely, and we beg, full of hope, herein to state summarily our thoughts and opinions as to the way in which we conceive this intercourse and understanding, and we earnestly seek and invite the judgment and opinion thereon both of the other brothers in the East and of the venerable Christians of the Churches in the West, wheresoever they be.....

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Such a frank and vivid intercourse between the Churches will be all the more beneficial to the whole body of the Church, as many dangers threaten no longer any particular Church, but all of them generally, because these dangers attack the very foundation of the Christian faith and the very composition of Christian life and Society. For the terrible World War which has just come to an end, as it has brought to light many unhealthy things in the life of Christian Nations, and revealed in many cases a great absence of respect for the very principle of justice and humanity, so, too, it has not only made old wounds worse, but, so to speak, opened new ones of a more practical character, and with regard to which great attention and care is naturally needed on the part of all Churches.....

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Finally, it is the duty of the Churches which adorn themselves with the sacred name of Christ not to forget and neglect any longer His new and great commandment of love, and still to fall piteously behind the political authorities, who, truly applying the spirit of the Gospel and of the Justice of Christ, have under happy auspices already instituted the League of Nations, for the defence of right and for the cultivation of love and harmony among the nations.....

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Issued over the name of Locum Tenens of Patriarchal Ecumenical throne, Metropolitan of Brussa, Dorotheus.<sup>83</sup>

### **THE LAMBETH CONFERENCE 1920**

From the Bishops Assembled in the Lambeth Conference of 1920 (August)

An Appeal to All Christian People

IV, The times call us to a new outlook and new measures. The Faith cannot be adequately apprehended and the battle of the Kingdom cannot be worthily fought while the body is divided, and is thus unable to grow up into the fullness of the life of Christ. The time has come, we believe, for all the separated groups of Christians to agree in forgetting the things which are behind and reaching out towards the goal of a reunited Catholic Church. The removal of the barriers which have arisen between them will only be brought about by a new comradeship of those whose faces are definitely set this way.<sup>84</sup>

### **Remembering – whom, and what?**

In Britain the innumerable memorials to the dead became and still are the most obvious visible legacy of the war, from the Cenotaph in London to the engraved lists in every city, town and village, and in so many churches, colleges, schools, factories, railway stations and all kinds of institutions. In some instances there is a special poignancy. In the memorial side-chapel of King's College, Cambridge, the list of the

174 members of the college who died in 1914-18 includes the name of Rupert Brooke who had immortalised patriotic sentiment in his lines:

If I should die, think only this of me:  
That there's some corner of a foreign field  
That is for ever England.

But also remembered there is Ferenc Békássy, a Hungarian who had been a popular student at King's from 1911-14, was conscripted into the army of the Hapsburg Empire and was killed on the Carpathian front in 1915. His name is not included in the main list but placed on a wall close by. John Maynard Keynes, leading economist and a fellow of the college (who was warning against the negative economic consequences of the Versailles Treaty), advocated Békássy's name being included among all the others. Some other fellows strongly objected to the name of an "enemy" being so included. The result was a compromise, a poignant reminder equally of a generosity of spirit and of the pain of the journey towards reconciliation. Other colleges in Britain likewise ensured that names of Germans and Austro-Hungarians were not forgotten as being equally members of the fraternity regardless of which uniform they had died in.

## **A measure of responsibility**

"We have to ask not only who dropped the match but who strewed the ground with gunpowder."

In 1932 the furious press reaction to this remark by William Temple, now archbishop of York, showed for just how long sensitivities persisted. Temple was preaching in Geneva just before the start of the League of Nations Disarmament Conference, and was criticising the effect of the "whole guilt" clause imposed on Germany in the Versailles Treaty. But equally Temple himself was demonstrating how more thoughtful minds had come to an awareness that the conflict which exploded in 1914,



whatever its immediate causes, could not have come about except in a world of deeply entrenched imperial systems and economic competitiveness. A radical critique of Western “civilisation” was needed.

### **War, pacifism, remembrance and heroes: a German reflection in the 1930s**

Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933. As part of his remilitarisation programme, in 1935 he reintroduced conscription but there was also a psychological exploitation of the German experience of 1914-18. As well as capitalising on the humiliating terms of the Versailles Treaty, he changed the name of the annual commemoration of the war dead from “Memorial Day” to “Heroes’ Remembrance Day”. This presented a particular challenge to pastors. None recognised this more than Dietrich Bonhoeffer. From 1935 he was director of one of the illegal seminars of the Confessing Church (that section of Protestantism which was resisting the Nazification of the Christian faith). Bonhoeffer had himself lost a brother in 1918 (see chapter 5). Since 1931 he had been deeply involved in the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches, and in other ecumenical peace activities. He was also calling for a new obedience to Jesus’ commands in the Sermon on the Mount as part of “costly discipleship”, and was advocating non-violence to be taken with real seriousness. The following are extracts from drafts of lectures to his students, on the keeping of “Memorial Day” and related matters.<sup>85</sup>

The Christian pacifist ceases to be specifically a *Christian* pacifist and becomes an idealist pacifist when he sits in judgment of other, past wars and develops his own programs.

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It is our task to speak God’s word concerning the events of 1914-18, something that has become all the more urgent in today’s world with its new shouts for war. “Memorial Day” is what one called it at the beginning. At the time, two things were to be proclaimed through a sermon about the

cross of Christ: First, one was to provide the consolation of the gospel for those who were grieving, for the people that were still sick unto death from the wounds of war. Second, one was to provide an answer to the question: How could God allow such a thing to happen? Ever since one began saying “Heroes’ Remembrance Day” instead of Memorial Day, our internal attitude toward the Great War has changed. Grief made way for pride in the accomplishment, sacrifice, and service of our soldiers during 1914-18 for their people and for their fatherland. Who did not want to cherish this thought? Who did not want to fall completely silent in reverence and humility in view of the men and youth who met death at that time? Two million died, and even today there remains among us the host of those who were among them, still marked by death, still abiding in mute community with each other and with those who were killed. May we ever forget that the very ground on which we live was preserved and fought for with the blood of our brothers? May we ever cease being grateful? All the sacrifice and service of 1914-18 puts us Christians to shame. What a commitment of life for the cause of the people! How prepared are we to die for the cause of faith? [Those who mock or even moralize about or sneer at 1914-18 forfeit their credibility; what is past is now in the hand of God’s judgment.]

We cannot stop with the focus on the human beings and their actions. Beyond all these things, we must seek God. In France one can still see a photograph from the war depicting a crucifix in the midst of the barbed wire of a bombed-out trench. Christ in a battlefield trench – what does it mean? It prompts us to repent. Whether in victory, in struggle, or in defeat – the question is whether we are able to perceive the proclamation of Christ in all this and whether we come to repentance. Only then has God “blessed” an event for us. From pride and grief one moves

through Christ to repentance.

Repentance – because God is still compassionate enough to preserve us despite and through 1914-18. Repentance – because in the events of the world war we recognize that our world is a lost world, because according to the word of the Lord war itself is the premonitory sign of the final collapse of the world under God's judgment. Repentance – because war tempts our faith in God and robs many of that faith. Repentance – because war is a sin against God's gospel of peace. Repentance – because to a large extent Christendom and the churches bear part of the blame for having thoughtlessly blessed that war and for having tried to justify it before God. Repentance – because Christians fought against Christians, because the world war was in fact a war that "Christian" nations fought against one another. "Christ in the trenches" – judgment on a godless world. But also the infinite love of God, who enters into this godlessness and bears all its sins. Forgiveness, however, was and is to be found only in faith in precisely this divine compassion on the cross of Christ.

Whoever God leads to proper repentance is also engaged anew in God's service. And precisely that is the question facing us now: What is a Christian's proper service to the people, especially in face of war? Intercession for the authorities – daily prayer for peace! Christendom requests and proclaims only peace. Service to the gospel through proclamation and action, commitment and willingness to sacrifice. In every war and every cry of war, we see that we are aliens and citizens of a new world that will soon commence, a world in which God will break the bow and shatter the spear, in which there will be eternal peace with God and among human beings. Our greatest service to our people is to testify to this world today through Jesus Christ with our words and deeds.

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*[On the War Sermon]*

War bears *within itself* the justification of sin. For it contradicts God's commandment. A final answer to the question of whether a Christian should or should not participate must be rejected. Both answers are possible. One person shows solidarity and goes along. The other one says: "Even the authorities are demanding sin; I will not participate." On the one hand, we are threatened by militarism. And on the other, by doctrinaire pacifism.

This is not a matter of assessing people morally. Here people did die the heroic or miserably cowardly deaths. One can be even more grateful to the cowardly than to the person who died heroically. Just think what it meant for a poor, cowardly person to offer up life itself! The heroes at least had an ideal. The others died without such an ideal, miserably, but perhaps with all the more difficulty. But both *suffered* death, stood together in a single line like a wall. Gratitude! But God *amid* all this! It is not our place to award retroactive medals for bravery. Nor the opposite either. They died. How? Who knows? Enough simply that they died. As a result, we live. That prompts us to offer thanksgiving and to repent before God!

Pray for the victory of one's own cause? No. It, the church, prays only for peace for soldiers on *both* sides. War sermons? They were equally bad in both Germany and England.

### **Pacifism and modern warfare: A British former conscientious objector reflects**

Eric Fenn, whose story as a conscientious objector in 1917-18 was heard in chapter 7, many years later (after the Second World War) reflected on "Pacifism and Modern Warfare".<sup>86</sup>

It is easy to see the issue between pacifist and non-pacifist

in simple terms. For the pacifist it may appear as the choice between “joining the army and not doing so”; while, for the non-pacifist it can appear as a straight issue of patriotic duty, a duty which the pacifist avoids either out of cowardice or stupidity. Again, pacifists may think that anyone who is not a pacifist must necessarily be a war-monger. Yet both may well have the same sense of obligation to the society which has nourished them and which, in time of war, is in dire peril. These, however, are gross oversimplifications which merit little consideration. The real issues lie much deeper.

The first jolt my own naïve pacifism received came from the sergeant who took me from the police court to Chester barracks. He was a nice man, and as we walked down to the railway station in Birkenhead he said: “I don’t understand how you people can go on eating food.” The German U-boat campaign was at its height: food reached us stained with the sacrifice of men who risked all for our sakes. His remark was a crude expression of something which has become more and more starkly apparent as modern war has developed. There is no escape from its implications. The 1914-18 war became a struggle between whole populations as well as being an apparently endless horror in Flanders and on the high seas. The second war of 1939-45 made the point even more clear, for in that war the total resources of Britain and its Empire had to be thrown into the struggle, and mass bombing took civilians into the front line. Whatever you elected to do, you could not avoid being part of it. Further, the situation in 1939 was entirely different from that in 1914, at least for anyone like me who had some personal knowledge of Nazi Germany and who was immersed in and committed to the Ecumenical Movement. It was true, of course, that Nazism was, in large measure, the creation of the Versailles Treaty and therefore to that extent our fault; true, also, that the murder of six million

Jews lay in the future; but it was clear to any who were not wilfully blind that the genie we had conjured up was bent on world hegemony and that nothing could save European freedom except war. On the other hand, the Churches of the world had grown together over the past two decades in such a remarkable way that bonds of trust and friendship had been forged, at least among Church leaders, which could stand even the ultimate strains of international war. We knew that there were those in Germany who were as much opposed to National Socialism as anybody on the Allied side, and we could only imagine the desperate nature of their plight, torn between genuine love of country and the desire to see the end of Nazi tyranny.

### **Former soldier, later pacifist**

If some former pacifists felt led by later events to reconsider their stance, for other people involved in the First World War the journey was in the other direction. George MacLeod (see chapter 5), decorated warrior of the Western Front, was moved towards pacifism not simply by what he had experienced in the trenches but at least as much by disillusionment with the world that followed the war. Above all, as his later writings reveal, it was not so much a horror of the past as a vision of the future which now captivated him: a vision of wholeness which embraces all creation and in the seeking of which human beings find their fulfilment. It is therefore appropriate that as we conclude this whole series of “We Will Remember” we note George MacLeod’s words from nearly 40 years after the First World War finished – and thus already nearly 60 years ago from today. In some ways they are dated. In other ways, we may feel, their time is yet to come.

The prophets, looking to the final peace, saw the wolf lying down with the lamb and in place of the briar saw coming up the fir tree. So Paul was holden of this thought when he foresaw that the creation itself would be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of

the children of God. Both St John and St Peter took up the vision of a new heaven *and a new earth* where right relations would triumph and all would cry glory. It is the earnest of this that is already in our bodies, and in the Body of the Church on earth. Already we are, in prophecy, part of the restoration of all things. It is this that he constantly held before us by the vision of Christ the High Priest in the midst of all things: the present renewer of spirits, of bodies and of the earth.<sup>87</sup>

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One day there will be a new heaven and a new earth. We are they who know it and who also know the holiness of the very dust, through the action of the great High Priest. Thus we are they who must be exercised about the holiness of earth in the present dispensation. If hospitals are full by reason of our irresponsibility, there are fields all over the world... that are becoming desert because we do not reverence the earth. There are increasing millions (our brothers in Christ) going to die of starvation because deserts grow where once the roses blossomed. There is soil-erosion through ignorance, and soil-erosion forced on men because of our colonial seizure of the better land, leaving insufficient land for native cultivation. Nor need we blame the settler, for when did he ever hear the Church assert that to exploit the land is to dishonour the garment of God, nay to do despite to the body that God deigned to take upon Himself?... The issue is more minute than a handful of soil. It is the very atom itself, ultimate constituent of earth and of the bodies of men, that Christ has redeemed in the death and resurrection of His Body. Yet how do we intend to use this manifestation of the Body of God as it is found in the atom? Forty thousand million pounds *each year*, it has been calculated, is cumulatively being spent by the nations of the world in preparation for a war which scientists, atheists and Christians are agreed will settle nothing should it

actually be provoked. There is no halting of this universally admitted madness till men recover their awareness of what it is that we manipulate for our mutual and conceivably common destruction. It is the garment of God.<sup>88</sup>

Or, from chapter 10 we may recall again Sergeant Major Keeling's 1916 dream of "after the war":

.... I just think of the world – this good old cheery ball of earth – as a place of exquisite beauty, adventure, joy, love and experience... By God! I can see the scene, before the peace, even during the armistice. The infantry men will swarm over the parapets of the trenches on both sides and exchange every damned thing they can spare off their persons – down to their buttons and bits of equipment as "souvenirs".

### ***FOR REFLECTION***

**Bible Reading:** Isaiah 2:1-4; Isaiah 11:1-9; Romans 8:1-28; Revelation 21:1-8, 22-5

- If a new search for Christian unity was a legacy of the First World War, how well has that legacy been used?
- Is it time that a properly inclusive, international act of remembrance for all the dead of 1914-18 should be enacted together by all the nations that took part?
- Both Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Eric Fenn suggest that pacifists and non-pacifists do not just differ on the rightness or wrongness of violence, but have a different understanding of the individual's relation and obligation to society. Do you agree with this? (If you are in a group that includes both pacifist and non-pacifists, you might see how far you can go in identifying what is ultimately important for the holders of each view.)
- What would you like to see happening as a sign that the earth is being



recognised as, in George MacLeod's words, "the garment of God"?

## EPILOGUE

### Some questions

Having pondered these pages and reflected upon what you have read:

- Has your understanding changed at all of who and what is to be remembered, and how?
- What has come to you as new?
- What has surprised you?
- What has disturbed you?
- What new *questions* have arisen in your mind, about the past and present?
- Of all the people who have been brought to you in these pages, are there any in particular with whom you'd like to imagine yourself in conversation?
- As a result of all this “remembering”, is there a specific action you now feel prompted to undertake, either by yourself, or with friends, or church or other community?
- Could you write your own prayer, or poem, or meditation?

### A final poem: if he would but dare

John Oxenham (1852-1941) was a Congregational layman, writer and poet. He is best known today for his hymn *In Christ there is no east or west* which has been translated into many languages and is often sung at international and ecumenical occasions. His poems became especially popular during the First World War. One of them, however, “Police-man X – If He Would But Dare”,<sup>89</sup> had been written years before, in 1898, when the Tsar of Russia had suggested a Peace Conference “with a view to the lightening of the evergrowing burden of arms.” The poem concludes:

.... I saw,—  
A chamber hung with black and heaped with flowers,  
Where candles tall flashed white on watchers' swords.  
High on a high-raised bier lay one at rest—  
Crosses and orders on his quiet breast,  
Head proudly cushioned on his country's flag,  
Hands calmly folded on his helmet's crest,  
His back to earth, his mute face turned to heaven,—  
Answering the summons of his Over-Lord.  
I strained my eyes upon his face to learn  
Thereon his answer. But the dark vail dropped,  
And left me wondering what his word had been.  
Had I but read his face I should have known  
Who lay there — Man, like other men? Or one  
Who grasped the greater things, and by his will  
Brought peace on Earth and drew Earth nearer Heaven.  
The bells beat softly on the midnight air  
Proclaiming the New Time. Shall it be Peace?  
A voice within me cried and would not cease,  
*“One man could do it if he would but dare.”*

## Endnotes

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- 14 Information on and citations from these exchanges may be found in: G.K.A.Bell, *Randall Davidson. Archbishop of Canterbury* Vol. II (Oxford University Press 1935); Wilkinson, *The Church of England ...* (see note 7); Keith Clements, *Faith on the Frontier. A Life of J.H. Oldham* (WCC and T. & T. Clark 1999).
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- 23 Wilkinson, *The Church of England and...*, p141.
- 24 Cited in Diana Souhami, *Edith Cavell* (Quercus 2010), p187.
- 25 Ronald Ferguson, *George Macleod. Founder of the Iona Community*  
(Collins 1990), p39.
- 26 Ferguson, *George Macleod*, p43.
- 27 Ferguson, p44.
- 28 Cited in *Indian Voices* (see note 21), p61.
- 29 Poem by "Cynan". Translation by Denzil John and used with permission.
- 30 Material on and citations from Lewis Valentine kindly supplied by Denzil  
John.
- 31 Welsh hymn possibly by Albert Cynan Evans and translated by Denzil  
John. Sung to the hymn tune Talfryn composed by David de Lloyd.  
Original words and tune to be found in Llawlyfr Moliant (1930). But they  
appear in an earlier version of the Welsh Baptist hymn-book.
- 32 "A Scrap of Paper", *The Unutterable Beauty*, p89.
- 33 Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, p235f.
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- 35 Sabine Leibholz-Bonhoeffer, *Portrait of a Family* (Covenant Publications  
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- 54 Forsyth, p31.
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- 66 Cited in Souhami, *Edith Cavell* (see note 24), p346. Keeling died in France in August 1916, aged 30.
- 67 Cited in Souhami, p189. Fletcher had wanted to be a priest but was killed in March 1917 aged 28
- 68 All citations in this section are taken from Souhami, *Edith Cavell* (see note 24).
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- 77 See Mulley, p226.
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