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The Coming of War

'Then suddenly, like a chasm in a smooth road, the war came', wrote Virginia Woolf.[1] But in fact the Edwardian era was a period of considerable upheaval and unrest: the Boer War of 1899-1902; the intense controversies about the social services introduced by the Liberals from 1906; the trade union unrest of 1911-12; suffragette demonstrations; the bitter debates about education between Government, Church of England and Free Churchmen; the 1911 parliament Act; the renewed conflicts in Ireland which seemed to threaten civil war in 1914; the acceptance of a new type of commitment, however vague, towards France and Russia which was an important factor in the British participation in the war when it came. Back-bench Members of Parliament knew little more of the conduct of British foreign policy than the ordinary Edwardian citizen. Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary, had agreed to secret military conversations with France in 1906, but most members even of the Cabinet were ignorant of them until 1912. So many warnings of an impending catastrophe had been given by newspapers, novels, and plays that when it actually happened it seemed unexpected. In the first half of July 1914 the British government was still not expecting war; its main concern was the Irish crisis. On 24 July it held its first discussion on foreign affairs for a month. But on 4 August Britain declared war.[2]

For the first time for a century, a war had broken out which involved the whole nation. Many greeted it with relief and excitement. A crowd of 30,000 sang 'God save the King' outside Buckingham Palace; others smashed the windows of the German embassy. Though there was much talk of it all being over by Christmas, Kitchener's appeal on 7 August offered a service of 'three years, or until the war is concluded'. By 15 September, half a million men had volunteered. The length and the character of the war were largely unforeseen.

To the vast majority of Christians the outbreak of war was at first as unbelievable and unexpected as it was to almost everyone else. Hensley Henson, Dean of Durham, wrote:

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> There had been warnings and protests in plenty, yet when the stroke actually fell, it seemed to have the benumbing shock of an almost unimaginable disaster. The nation, conscious of its own devotion to peace, still smarting under the losses and humiliations of the South African War, and largely leavened with the perilous sophistries of pacifism, was reluctant to admit the possibility of war between nations so closely linked by ties of interest, culture, and tradition.[3]

The Principal of the Church of England training college at Culham wrote to his students: 'that the clash of arms should so suddenly and violently break in upon our harmony and comradeship never once entered into my calculations'.[4] But then on 9 July 1914, Lloyd George, Chancellor of the Exchequer, had remarked to a group of bankers at the Guildhall: 'In the matter of external affairs the sky has never been more perfectly blue.' On 23 July he had told Parliament that British relations with Germany were 'very much better than they were a few years ago'.[5] The *Church Family Newspaper* on 31 July 1914 stated its conviction that the Kaiser was using his great influence for peace.[6] In 1913, the Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland had passed a resolution supporting all efforts for international understanding especially between Britain and the 'great Protestant nation of Germany'. Rising to their feet, the delegates applauded an address of congratulation to the House of Hohenzollern on the recent marriage of the Kaiser's daughter.[7] In 1912 the leaders of the Student Christian Movement had been startled by the possibility of war with Germany, and had exchanged messages with the German student movement, but the danger passed. 'The war took us by surprise', wrote Tissington Tatlow, S.C.M. General Secretary; 'few of us had thought about the question of Christianity and war.' At the summer conference at Swanwick, which began on 23 July 1914, war seemed 'utterly remote'.[8] The August number of *Commonwealth,* the organ of the Christian Social Union founded by Scott Holland, contained no mention of the Sarajevo murders or of the approaching crisis. It did, however, include an announcement that the International Congress of Social Christianity would be held at Basle in September when papers would be read on 'Christianity and Universal Peace'. (The English Committee for the Conference included Percy Dearmer as Chairman, and the Bishops of Birmingham, Chelmsford, Lichfield, Lincoln, Winchester, and William Temple.) On 26 August, Scott Holland wrote in a letter, 'War is Hell':

> My one comfort now is to remember that I never insisted on War as

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inevitable, never shouted Armaments, never saw the Kaiser as the one unspeakable devil. It is just this which I denounce in the Germans. By talking like this, they have made the war inevitable. Our folk who did it are open to the same damning charge.

On 6 September, he was using to Neville Talbot language similar to that which he had criticized: 'every day reveals the black blind horror of Prussianism. It is the very devil. It has to be fought: and killed. It is the last word in iniquity. I could not have believed that man could be so diabolical.' A few days later he wrote to Frank Thorne:

> The paradox of Christianity and War falls *within* Christ Himself. He is dumb before his shearers: yet a sharp sword goes out of His mouth. He yields: yet he judges. . . . War is right when it is fought on behalf of Peace. . . .

In November he wrote to Neville Talbot: 'We are eschatologists. God *must* win.'[9] It is significant that Scott Holland, the Regius Professor at Oxford, contributor to *Lux Mundi,* a leading member of the Christian Social Union, should have been surprised that man could be diabolical.

Fr J. N. Figgis, priest of the Community of the Resurrection, and a noted historian and preacher, was more prescient. He had written in the preface to his prophetic lectures, *Civilisation at the Cross Roads* (1912): 'Something is crumbling all around us.' In the second lecture he declared: '"There is death in the pot" of modern civilisation, and it is not like to heal itself.'[10] An ordinand at Mirfield remembers Figgis saying to him in 1913: 'You can hear something cracking every day.' About the same time he said in a sermon: '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.'[12] Temple Gairdner from Cairo in mid-July 1914 addressed forty or fifty laymen in business, politics and diplomacy, in Eastbourne. One of them recalled:

> He began by describing the trend of European philosophy during the last half-century, showing how Nietzsche's teaching had been woven in to make for Germany a new *Weltpolitik.* He talked also about the insurgent nationalities of Europe and especially of Ireland, and indeed he foretold the whole tremendous crash that was to come not much more than a fortnight afterwards. I shall never forget the impression it made on us, and our heavy hearts at the end.[13]

W. R. Inge, Dean of St Paul's, was deeply depressed: 'I never thought to

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have lived to see such a return to barbarism. Civilisation is in danger of dissolution. Neither religion nor philosophy gives me any comfort.'[14] A former curate of Canon Peter Green's remembers sitting up with friends in Salford to hear the clock strike twelve and enjoying the 'suppressed excitement of the moment, and with little if any realization of all that it portended. The Rector went to bed as usual. He knew what it meant more than most people.'[15] Peter Green wrote in his 'Artifex' column in the *Manchester Guardian* on 6 August: 'What has struck me most has been . . . the almost complete lack of appreciation, on the part of most people with whom I have spoken, of what war implies today.' Bishop E. S. Talbot of Winchester had foreseen some disaster, but nevertheless the war was a great shock. 'In one hour the judgement has come.' The crisis was shaking every stone in the national house. He was grateful for the new sense of unity, sacrifice and service in the nation, and was convinced that the cause was righteous, but he urged penitence for the English share of responsibility for the war. He asked people to pray for greater things than victory and peace alone, and to remember to love their enemies.[16] For Bishop Gore of Oxford, who had taken a sombre view of the movements of history, and had denounced the nationalistic spirit of vengefulness at the time of the Boer War, the coming of war broke upon him with 'a horror of great darkness'. 'Truly war is not a Christian weapon. It "cometh of the evil one"', he said, and hated it with all his heart. But he was convinced that British participation was right. It was as a judgement of God and it had to be endured to the bitter end. 'I feel as if we must be greatly chastised before we can be strengthened.'[17] Archbishop Lang of York reacted somewhat similarly: 'I hate War. I detest it. It is the bankruptcy of Christian principle', he said in York Minster on 9 August. But he believed the war to be 'righteous' and that 'we were bound in honour to enter it'. Both he and the Bishop of London in Pastoral Letters warned against hatred and stressed that the quarrel was not with the German people but with their rulers.[18] But, argued correspondents in the church weekly *Guardian* on 3 September, if the cause was morally right, surely was it not the duty of the clergy to enlist as well?

Fr P. N. Waggett, of the Society of St John the Evangelist, and a Chaplain from September 1914, wrote a powerful message in the September issue of 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

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a little later we faced the dread of peace which would have been purchased by the desertion of duty, and the fatal acknowledgement 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. . . . 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. . .[19]

The hope that out of the trials of war a more godly Church and a more just nation might arise was to become the theme of many sermons and speeches during the war.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson, a shrewd but cautious statesman, always in close touch with government circles, had been lulled into thinking that war between England and Germany was inconceivable, partly as a result of his contacts with German Christian leaders, though he was aware of the tensions. Dr Dryander, chief court chaplain to the Kaiser, had written on 17 July 1914 to inquire whether the Anglican Church would be likely to accept an invitation to take part in the celebrations to mark the 400th year of the Reformation in 1917. In his reply of 1 August, Davidson pointed out that because the Church of England had a relationship with 'the historic doctrine and system of the Western Church' as well as with the principles of the Reformation, there would be a 'very grave difficulty' in a public identification of the Church of England with a commemoration of Martin Luther. He had opened his letter by saying that he was sure that Dr Dryander was joining with English people in praying that 'the possibility of international conflict may be removed far from us. War between two great Christian nations of kindred race and sympathies is, or ought to be, unthinkable in the twentieth century of the Gospel of the Prince of Peace.' The Archbishop was watching the situation with grave anxiety. On 30 July, J. Allen Baker, a Quaker M.P., called on the Archbishop on

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his way to the founding conference of what became known as the 'World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches'. He wanted the Archbishop to sign a memorial to Asquith, the Prime Minister, in favour of non-intervention. The Archbishop refused on grounds which were very characteristic of his approach to complex political questions:

> I objected to much of its phraseology and also said that I could not possibly sign it without an assurance that it was on lines which the Government would find helpful and not harmful.

On 31 July he saw Asquith, who convinced him that Britain's influence on events depended upon keeping Europe in suspense. Asquith begged him to use his influence to prevent demonstrations or memorials in favour of non-intervention which could lead the European powers into thinking that Britain would be merely a spectator.[20] On 2 August Davidson preached in Westminster Abbey. He contrasted the present situation with the hopes for international brotherhood which had developed in the last half-century, and which had found expression in the growth of support for a system of international arbitration:

> What is happening is fearful beyond all words, both in actual fact and in the thought of what it may come to be. . . . This thing which is now astir in Europe is not the work of God but the work of the devil.[21]

H. G. Wells's novel *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* (1916) depicted vividly the careless enjoyment of the pre-war leisured classes, and the dawning horror that the more sensitive began to feel as the reality of war was revealed. Mr Britling (to some extent a portrait of Wells himself) mused: "On the very brink of war — on the brink of Armageddon", he whispered at last. "Do they understand? Do any of us understand?"[22] But for many in the nation the war came as a relief, cutting away all the complexity of national disputes, creating at last a clearly defined enemy, even a necessary turn in the evolutionary cycle. A letter of Wilfred Owen's to his mother on 28 August 1914 echoed the neo-Darwinians of the period who argued that civilization was produced only through conflict. Owen shows a studied but revealing ambivalence, even elitism; he was still a civilian:

> While it is true that the guns will effect a little useful weeding, I am furious with chagrin to think that the Minds which were to have excelled the civilization of ten thousand years, are being annihilated —

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> and bodies, the product of aeons of Natural Selection, melted down to pay for political statues.[23]

R. J. Campbell, Minister of the City Temple, worked for a few months for the Y.M.C.A. at the beginning of the war. He recorded how he met a young officer who considered that the political causes of the war were less important than the fact that 'human beings like fighting'. He believed that this was part of 'the struggle for existence', and that war was necessary when life became colourless in order to release heroic virtues. Though Campbell was uncomfortable with this view, he confessed:

> . . . as humanity has been constituted up to the present, war has been the means, more than any other agency, of bringing out on the grand scale that truth of sacrifice without which flesh can never be made to serve the ends of the spirit and the kingdom of the soul be won. This could be realised without war if only the race as a whole could be lifted up to the requisite level. It often has been realised without war in individual cases, but never for long on the wider basis of communal life. Please God, it will one day be universally realised without war. . . .[24]

Note that here Campbell, while rejecting the cruder aspects of neo-Darwinianism, accepts some elements from the tradition, but expresses them in language derived from St Paul and Romantic writers like Ruskin.[25] One also detects the way in which war could appeal to a Christian socialist like Campbell because it united the community in one grand co-operative enterprise. Though there was a section of English opinion, both within and outside the Churches, which believed that conflict and struggle were the appointed means of progress, this view was often severely criticized, when war came, as the essence of 'Prussianism' — that might is right, and that the weakest must go to the wall. Dr Chalmers Mitchell, who published *Evolution and the War*[26] in 1915, was one of several writers who repudiated the widespread belief that Darwinianism justified war. Like T. H. Huxley in his lecture 'Evolution and Ethics' (1893), he emphasized that man could influence evolution in a moral direction. If the theory of evolution posed problems for faith, it also enabled those who believed in progress to justify pain and suffering as the necessary price to be paid for it. So Archdeacon Basil Wilberforce, Chaplain to the Speaker, and a veteran Modernist,[27] said in a sermon in 1915:

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> God is travailing in pain in His creation . . . the law of progress is the law of evolution. The law of evolution necessitates, both on the physical and the moral plane, the fiery ordeal of war with the opposite of good, which is the only means of transition into higher, nobler life, and Infinite Immanent Mind must share every pang that ever racks any individual soul or any part of animated nature.[28]"

Julian Grenfell, brought up in a social group whose men found the regular killing of animals a ritual release of aggressive energies, 'adored' the war when it came. He wrote to his mother in October 1914:

> It is all the most *wonderful* fun; better fun than one could ever imagine. I hope it goes on a nice long time; but pigsticking will be the only tolerable pursuit after this or one will die of sheer ennui. . . . I *adore* war. It is like a big picnic. . . .

He listed the Germans he had killed in his game book together with the 105 partridges he had killed at home. 'The fighting excitement revitalises everything. . . . One loves one's fellow man so much more when one is bent on killing him.' To those brought up on Greek drama, Keats, and Shelley, it was glorious to die young, especially in battle. 'He whom the gods favour dies young' — the lines of Plautus were often quoted. Many of the messages of sympathy received by Julian's mother after his death in 1915 spoke of the wonderful privilege of motherhood to be able to give sons to the death in war.[29] When, in April 1915, Michael MacDonagh called on another mother to express his condolences, she told him that she had no grief, only pride that her son should have died for his country.[30] On 4 April, Easter Day, 1915, Dean Inge preached to a large congregation in St Paul's Cathedral. He preached on Isaiah 26.19: 'Thy dead men shall live. . . . Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust.' He spoke of the thousands of parents, widows, and orphans who were thinking of 'hastily made graves in a foreign land'. When peace dawned, were the dead to be excluded from it? He then read Rupert Brooke's 'The Soldier' ('If I should die, think only this of me: . . .') by 'a young writer who would . . . take rank with our great poets'. He commented: 'The enthusiasm of a pure and elevated patriotism, free from hate, bitterness, and fear, had never found a nobler expression. And yet it fell somewhat short of Isaiah's vision, and still more of the Christian hope.'[31] Edward Marsh wrote at once to Brooke to tell him that he had become famous overnight.[32] On 23 April Brooke died of septicaemia in a hospital ship in the Aegean.

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By contrast, for the working-class recruit, enlistment offered not only a way of serving his country but also an alternative to a humdrum job or unemployment. George Coppard describes how he was stirred by the military bands and the tramping feet of the Territorials. He enlisted at the age of sixteen years, seven months, by declaring that he was nineteen.[33]

The question of war and peace had been discussed by Lambeth Conferences in 1897 and 1908[34] and by several Church Congresses. Christians had often followed the lines laid down by the Lambeth Conferences in urging arbitration and other peaceful methods of settling disputes.[35] The Church of England Peace League formed in 1910, though never a large body (it had only about 100 members in 1913), numbered among its members Bishop Gore, Bishop Percival of Hereford, Bishop Hicks of Lincoln, William Temple, Hastings Rashdall, and George Lansbury. Of the main Christian groups, only the Quakers maintained a corporate witness to peace, though in fact 33 per cent of Quakers of military age enlisted. The first British National Peace Congress in 1904 included many Quaker and secular participants, but very few other Christians. Asquith was one of several speakers at a Christian Conference for Peace in 1908 who criticized the Churches for their lack of support.

Ecumenically, contacts between European Christians were very limited, and were only just beginning before the war. J. Allen Baker, a participant in the second Hague Conference of 1907, in consultation with a German delegate, conceived the idea of exchange visits of German and British churchmen to follow up the visit of the Kaiser to Britain in 1907 and exchange visits between newspaper editors and civic leaders. Accordingly, a German delegation of about 130 Roman Catholic and Protestant churchmen visited Britain in 1908. A writer in the souvenir volume declared:

> Two nations closely allied by common blood and spiritual history have yet in recent years failed to understand each other aright. . . . What was needed was that some ray of Divine light should pierce through the misunderstandings, and reveal to men the ties that bound them to each other.[36]

In the sermons and speeches, as Dr John Clifford, the Free Church leader, commented, Germans and British tried to 'outrival' each other in their proclamations of 'mutual indebtedness'.[37] In General

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Superintendent Faber's opinion they were 'one race — connected by blood and by language'.[38] Bishop Winnington-Ingram, in a speech laced with German phrases, spoke of his love for Germans, and the kindly feelings of Germans towards England. The two delegations passed a resolution which recognized 'how greatly the world's peace depends upon the amicable relations between our two countries' and appealed to all classes to promote friendship and goodwill. 'Our nations are closely allied by the stock from which both peoples spring, by the kinship of our Sovereigns, by our history, our long friendship, our mutual indebtedness in Art, Literature, and Science, and above all by our common Christianity.'[39] Fulsome tributes were paid to the Kaiser. The Archbishop of Canterbury wrote of the 'eloquent expressions of the great Sovereign of the German Empire in favour of peace'.[40] Allen Baker said that it was largely due to 'the peace-loving character of the German Emperor' that Germany had not been engaged in a great war in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.[41] Archdeacon Basil Wilberforce in a sermon linked the visit to the evolutionary theology popular among liberal churchmen like himself:

> I believe in my soul that the direction in which the immanent Spirit of God, the spirit of evolution which is in all, above all, and through all, is mainly working in the present day is towards unity: friendship, brotherhood, mutual understanding, international amenities are in the air, . . . is there a single department of human energy in which we have not learnt much from you? Your nation — ruled by a sovereign unique in European history for the loftiness of his ideals, the variety of his accomplishments, the earnestness of his religion, the intensity of his patriotism . . .[42]

In 1909 a similarly-sized interdenominational British delegation, including Anglican diocesan bishops, visited Germany. Once again the souvenir volume was prefixed with photographs of the two sovereigns whose healths were proposed with cheers on a number of occasions. The delegates were warmly received at Potsdam by the Kaiser. The speeches and sermons again celebrated Anglo-German brotherhood founded on a common culture and faith. Professor Harnack and Dean Armitage Robinson particularly stressed the mutual indebtedness of German and English theology. The Chaplain-General, Bishop Taylor Smith, declared: 'English and Germans are brothers, both for time and eternity.'[43] At the end of the visit the two groups sang together 'Now thank we all our God'. As the boat prepared to sail the British delegates

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sang 'Should auld acquaintance be forgot' from the bridge of the steamer. A Baptist summed up the general impression of the British delegates: 'We return home absolutely convinced that the great majority of the German people honestly and earnestly desires peace.'[44] But to judge from the extensive contents of the two souvenir volumes, the visits took place in an atmosphere of such euphoria and hyperbole that the hard political, military, and economic realities of Anglo-German relations were simply ignored. As one German remarked, 'We see in the air, not airships, with spies, soldiers, bombs, but we see the angels of God. . . .'[45] The two groups resolved to establish permanent means of communication between the Christians of the two nations. 'The Associated Councils of Churches in the British and German Empires for Fostering Friendly Relations between the Two Peoples', formed in 1910, was launched in Britain at a meeting in the Queen's Hall, London, in February 1911. The Archbishop of Canterbury presided, and leading German Christians present included Professor Harnack, who spoke. The first annual meeting in March 1912 was told that already 7,000 people in Britain and the colonies had joined the movement. At the annual meeting in May 1914, Davidson felt optimistic enough to believe that the two Councils in Germany and England had practically secured the mutual friendship for which they stood.

In 1914, as a result of a Swiss initiative, what was called after 1915 'The World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches' was created at a conference in Constance. But, meeting on 2 August, the delegates (depleted in number by closure of frontiers and troop movements) had to disperse quickly before war broke out. They passed, however, four resolutions urging united Christian action for peace and proposing means by which the work of the Alliance could be furthered. National committees of the World Alliance were formed even in the belligerent countries, including Germany and England, and managed to achieve a limited amount of work, though in Germany its literature appeared with blanks due to censorship. It is clear that some within the Churches were beginning to realize the international implications of Christianity; but too little was done too late and with insufficient support from the official leadership of the Churches; and what was accomplished did not impinge on the Church at the local level.

When war actually came, most neutralists changed their minds. Bishop Hicks of Lincoln and Bishop Percival of Hereford had been deeply involved in various peace movements in the pre-war period.

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They joined the Neutrality Committee which had been quickly formed, and which included Gilbert Murray and Ramsay MacDonald among its leaders. But both bishops after a brief wrestle with their consciences gave their support to the war. Liberal and radical journals which had advocated non-intervention soon transferred their allegiance. Gilbert Murray in late July 1914 had signed a declaration (supporting some Cambridge Fellows and the Bishops of Hereford and Lincoln) in favour of neutrality which was published on 3 August. But after the invasion of Belgium and having studied the various documents from the respective governments, Murray concluded sorrowfully: 'the Power whose good faith I had always championed . . . in part meant murder from the beginning.'[46] A private organization (but with the Prime Minister as Honorary President), 'The Central Committee for National Patriotic Organizations', secured the writing of pamphlets supporting the war. Contributors included six members of the Oxford Faculty of Modern History. Those leaders of the nation who had been educated at either Oxford or Cambridge — and they included nearly all the bishops — naturally treated such opinions with considerable respect. Even Wilfred Owen wrote a patriotic jingle:

> O meet it is and passing sweet
> To live in peace with others,
> But sweeter still and far more meet
> To die in war for brothers.[47]

John Percival was Bishop of Hereford from 1895 to 1917; before that he had been successively the first Headmaster of Clifton, President of Trinity College, Oxford, and Headmaster of Rugby. He was a man of independent thought and action. On occasion he made himself unpopular in the diocese — by his fierce criticism of the Boer War and the protectionists, by his appointment of the noted Modernists Streeter and Rashdall to canonries, and by his invitation to Free Churchmen to receive Communion in the Cathedral at the time of the Coronation in June 1911. (Kingsley Martin's father was a Congregationalist minister in Hereford and took part. 'In thanking the Cathedral authorities for taking this step towards Christian unity, Father astounded his hosts by suggesting that they should pay a return visit to a chapel service. They thought him mad.)[48] In 1904 he attended a Peace Congress in Boston, U.S.A. He strongly attacked 'Christian nations' for 'squandering their wealth and their manhood on armies and navies':

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> We have to learn to feel that the jingo spirit which swaggers in its pride and delights in warfare and aggression is in the main a survival of those brutal instincts that should be eliminated from every civilised and Christian life.

Christians were put to shame, he said, by those outside the Christian allegiance who were spending their lives in the cause of peace. Greed and militarism had spread like an epidemic. Whereas American poets had celebrated peace, Kipling 'is the exponent of strife and violence, we might even say of brutality'. A 'High Court of the Nations' was needed to substitute law for force.[49] He had long had the cause of peace at heart, addressing the Church Congress in 1896 on the subject, preaching at The Hague in 1899 while the Hague Conference was sitting, presiding over the annual meeting of the International Arbitration and Peace Association in 1900, the National Peace Congress at Bristol in 1905, and the annual meeting of the Christian Conference on Peace in London in 1908. However, he was never a pacifist; he had indeed urged the use of force on behalf of Armenia and Macedonia because he believed in the use of arms to help oppressed peoples. (He had for many years advocated Welsh disestablishment.)

In late July 1914 he watched the international scene with growing alarm. He joined in a committee of protest 'against the mischievous utterances of our jingo Press'. On 1 August he urged priests to hold prayers in church, and to call meetings of parishioners to send to the Prime Minister resolutions urging neutrality and efforts for peace. In a letter of 2 August he suggested that the Mayor of Hereford should be asked to call a meeting for the same purpose. But when Germany invaded Belgium he changed his view completely, instinctively supporting the small nation. In a letter in *The Times* of 12 August he sought to clarify his position. He said that he had believed assurances from the Prime Minister and Sir Edward Grey that England was free from all treaty obligations, and had therefore been at liberty to remain neutral; now he realized that 'there had been commitments by way of understandings which, though entered into without authority of Parliament, made it difficult for us as a nation to stand aside with honour'.

> Under these circumstances I am brought to the conclusion that, in obedience to our treaty obligations, and in support of Belgium's just claim, our country had no choice but to take up the sword if

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> honourable dealing was to have any chance of surviving in international affairs. . . .

The war, he hoped, would surely bring us nearer the day when the people would rise up and sweep military governments away.[50] (This is the voice of the traditional English Christian gentleman, who keeps his word, tries to care for the weak and to do his duty, and speaks in chivalric language about 'taking up the sword'. He had not only established Clifton as a school in which games were regarded as an important part of education; he had also inaugurated a separate House in which Jews could corporately follow their own observances.)

In September he kept his 80th birthday; the following month his son was killed in the war. Persuaded of the justice of the nation's cause he gave it his support, believing, as he said in 1915, that 'along with our Allies we are the predestined instruments to save the Christian civilisation of Europe from being overcome by a brutal and ruthless military paganism'; therefore the war must be fought 'till the victory is won and the law of Christ is firmly established as the paramount authority in all national and international affairs'.[51]

Edward Lee Hicks (Bishop of Lincoln 1910-19) had long felt that the maintenance of peace was one of the most urgent needs of the period. When residentiary Canon of Manchester and Rector of St Philip's, Salford, he had preached a controversial and much criticized sermon against the Boer War, later published by the Manchester Transvaal Peace Committee. He was labelled pro-Boer. From 1910 he was President of the Church of England Peace League. This aimed to combat the `war-spirit' by arbitration and international friendship; he remained President until his death in 1919. Canon W. L. Grane, in a sermon for the League in April 1913, had imagined Christ saying to the Church:

> How can you say you love Me if you twist my teaching? How is it you believe the opposite of what I taught? Even the Press and Pulpits of your Church now proclaim that they who take the sword shall *flourish* by the sword.[52]

In May 1914, Canon J. H. B. Masterman (Bishop of Plymouth 1922-33 and brother to the Liberal politician C. F. G. Masterman) in a sermon published by the League pointed out that the Church of England had never spoken with a united voice for peace. But there was strong reason to hope that if the need arose, at least some contemporary

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church leaders would 'dare to withstand the sudden madness that drowns the voice of reason and turns a sober people into a wild beast howling for blood'.[53]

In 1913, Bishop Hicks hesitated about blessing regimental colours. War to him, wrote his biographer, was 'the sport of a corrupt gang of financiers, armament-makers and imperial filibusters, made popular through an equally corrupt Press'. Hicks rejoiced that Norman Angell was a Lincolnshire man. (Angell in *The Great Illusion,* 1910, had argued that a major war would be as economically disastrous for victor as for vanquished; this book, popular among pacifists and neutralists, was also widely read throughout the world, and translated into many languages.) On 2 August 1914, Hicks preached in Cleethorpes, pleading for British neutrality. When war came he felt his hopes shattered and his lifetime's ideals brought to nothing. But events dispelled his doubts. On 6 August he wrote to his daughter: 'England did not want this war: I hate it. But it seems as if the Kaiser and his friends were bent on it.'[54] In *The Church and the War* (1915) Hicks restated his beliefs. Prussian militarism must be overthrown; a 'balance of power' policy was not the way to preserve peace; the independence and neutrality of small states must be protected; there must be no more secret treaties — foreign policy must be democratized; the manufacture of arms should be nationalized.

By contrast with both Bishops Percival and Hicks, Handley Moule, the veteran evangelical Bishop of Durham, sent a letter to every parish two days before the English declaration of war to say that it was our 'plain duty' to defend Belgium, even though such a policy would mean declaring war on Germany.[55]

In 1908 Ben Tillett told a Labour demonstration for peace that the 'churches were strong enough to prevent war if they chose, but they were supported by capitalists, war-mongers, scare-mongers and people of that kind'.[56] But Hyndman and Blatchford warned of the military power of Germany, which they did not believe the German socialists could control. In 1909 Blatchford wrote a series of articles for the *Daily Mail* recommending national service and preparation for war as the only hope of preserving peace. The 1907 International Socialist Conference passed a resolution calling on the working classes to prevent war by appropriate action, and to intervene to bring it to an end if it started. Keir Hardie nevertheless failed in attempts in 1910, 1912, and in late July 1914, to gain a pledge of an international strike of the working classes in the event of war. Immediately before war broke out, both German and French socialists indicated their readiness to support

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their respective governments. The ideal of international socialism collapsed before the more powerful forces of nationalism.[57] In 1916 Lord French was able to pay a warm tribute to Ben Tillett's tireless work for the war effort,[58] for when war arrived all the working classes of the various countries obediently (with a few exceptions) supported their respective governments. The Kaiser was delighted when German socialists voted for war. 'I see no parties any more, only Germans', he said.

Individuals like Ramsay MacDonald and Keir Hardie continued their opposition but the 'rape of little Belgium' swept aside dissent; the trade unions were almost unanimously in favour of fighting. Though English socialists were, like Christians, in theory internationalist, they also longed for their country to be united in a common cause. They hoped that the war would promote state intervention and a breaking down of social barriers. Members of the Church Socialist League (founded in 1906) were divided. George Lansbury, an Anglican, and some others continued to oppose the war. Lansbury and Dick Sheppard wanted men and women to stand unarmed between the opposing armies. Conrad Noel, socialist Vicar of Thaxted, and his friends supported the war as a way of helping small nations against Prussianism.[59] Some Christians expressed their horror at the spectacle of Christian nations in conflict, remembering the exchange visits of churchmen between England and Germany. Keir Hardie, a socialist of Christian inspiration, was shattered by the failure of international socialism to live up to its ideals:

> Ten million Socialist and Labour voters in Europe, without a trace or vestige of power to prevent war! . . . Our demonstrations and speeches and resolutions are all alike futile. We have no means of hitting the warmongers. We simply do not count.[60]

After a stroke and a mental breakdown, he died in September 1915. His constituency elected in his place a fervent supporter of the war.

George Bell (Bishop of Chichester 1929-57) was asked by the Archbishop of Canterbury to be one of his chaplains just before war broke out. He arrived for consultations at Lambeth on the night war was declared. Next day he assisted the Dean of Wells and others in drawing up official forms of service and prayers for wartime. Some

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complained that the prayers did not contain direct petitions for victory. To a protesting peer Davidson replied:

> . . . if there was one request which poured in more strenuously upon me 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.

A senior fellow of Trinity College, Oxford, suggested a prayer '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).[61]

The *Guardian* praised the restrained language of the official prayers.[62] But Canon Peter Green wrote of their 'almost incredible absence of power, relevance and dignity'.[63]

Very soon, some were looking back at the days of peace with distaste. Neville Talbot, one of the sons of Bishop Talbot, wrote from an O.T.C. camp on the last Sunday of peace: 'I feel that a great deal of our long peace has been a false peace, oblivious of God and His Righteousness. My thoughts turn towards a chaplaincy to the troops.'[64] Lloyd George had exploited this theme in a speech in September 1914; his sentiments were often echoed by churchmen in the years that followed. Indeed the speech used many of the 'props' of popular pulpit rhetoric. The images have just enough biblical echoes[65] to give them a sonorous and hallowed authority, but they remain vague enough to prevent any precise and embarrassing identification of their contexts:

> We have been living in a sheltered valley for generations. We have been too comfortable and too indulgent — many, perhaps, too selfish — and the stern hand of Fate has scourged us to an elevation where we can see the everlasting things that matter for a nation — the high peaks we had forgotten, of Honour, Duty, Patriotism, and, clad in glittering white, the great pinnacle of Sacrifice, pointing like a rugged finger to Heaven. We shall descend into the valleys again; but as long

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> as the men and women of this generation last, they will carry in their hearts the image of those great mountain peaks whose foundations are not shaken, though Europe rock and sway in the convulsions of a great war.[66]

Both Lloyd George in the state, and, as we shall see, A. F. Winnington-Ingram, Bishop of London, in the church, had the ambiguous gift of being able to articulate what most Englishmen wanted to hear. E. A. Burroughs, Fellow of Hertford (Bishop of Ripon 1926-34) praised this speech in a celebrated letter to *The Times* of 4 March 1915.[67]

So, many gave thanks for the new sense of national unity, self-sacrifice and purpose as Labour leaders, Ulstermen, and suffragettes dropped their antagonisms in the face of the common enemy. (Members of the Labour Party were to hold office for the first time in the coalition of 1915.) Whereas a respected minority, both inside and outside the Churches, had opposed the Boer War, few voiced any opposition to the Great War once it had broken out. H. G. Woods, Master of the Temple, was able to say early in the war: 'God be thanked, there has been no division of Christian opinion among us as to the righteousness of our cause.'[68] In the autumn of 1914, Welsh Baptists were annoyed by Anglican claims that most of the recruits were coming from the established Church. The Baptists refuted such claims, and pointed proudly to the numbers of Nonconformists who were enlisting. Yet until August 1914 Baptists had been opposed alike to militarism and the social establishment.[69] Roman Catholics were equally eager to demonstrate their patriotism.[70] A Free Church commentator ascribed the remarkable 'revolution' in Nonconformist attitudes which before the war had been so internationalist and pro-German, to the 'sense of horror and fear at the moral madness of Germany'.[71] The invasion of Belgium had particularly shocked and united Christian opinion in England. It seemed a flagrant violation of the principles of international law, the gradual building up of which Christians had been at pains to support as the best hope for future peace and international order. The Bible with its story of the small state of Israel always at the mercy of conquering world powers; the stories of Christ's care for the downtrodden and weak; the stories of the early Christian communities persecuted by the might of the Roman Empire; the public school ideal which encouraged the well-off to go to the aid of the less fortunate: all seemed to support the moral necessity of Britain's intervention on behalf of Belgium. Furthermore, Christian socialists had often

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celebrated the Magnificat as the revelation of God's purpose for social and political relationships: 'He hath put down the mighty from their seat: and hath exalted the humble and meek.'[72] Preachers compared the invasion of Belgium with Ahab's seizure of Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21).[73] Free Churchmen's self-understanding was inextricably bound up with their own bitter experience of oppression by the power of the social and religious establishment. So they too were especially ready to identify with the cause of Belgium.[74] The English Christians who were so ready to spring to the defence of Belgium only rarely recalled with penitence examples from British imperial history when Britain too had used its power to conquer small defenceless nations.

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