

## CHRISTIAN PACIFISM

Neither pacifism in general, nor Christian pacifism in particular, was a unitary, but rather a multi-faceted, phenomenon. There were those who approved the use of force by the police or by a world state, but disapproved of the use of force by individual nations. Some contended that the use of sanctions by the League was legitimate; others strongly disagreed. Some regarded pacifism as a dogma, an expression of faith: therefore its truth was independent of any actual consequences. Others preached pacifism primarily on pragmatic grounds: pacifism was a rational method of preventing war. Some contended that the aggressor would be shamed by world opinion into ceasing violent activity if confronted by a disarmed or pacifist population. Donald Soper, the Methodist pacifist, wrote in 1933: 'pacifism contains a spiritual force strong enough to repel any invader'. Throughout the inter-war years (as before and since) pacifists were pulled between two opposing strategies. Should they maintain absolute purity by becoming uncompromising sectarians and keep their hands clean by steering clear of politicians? Or should they risk compromising their purity by cooperating with non-pacifist but peace-loving politicians in order to be more politically effective? Many pacifists were socialists of one sort or another and so were committed (unless they were complete individualists) to working with non-pacifist socialists to change the social order, which in any case they contended was a prime cause of war. Some pacifists were anarchic individualists. In 1935 Bertrand Russell observed about first war COs: 'In some men the habit of standing out against the herd had become so ingrained that they could not cooperate with anybody about anything.' Pacifists were often involved in a variety of other dissenting movements and causes.<sup>1</sup> Orwell remarked on the prevalence of 'cranks' in left-wing movements. 'One sometimes gets the impression that the mere words "Socialism" and "Communism" draw towards them with magnetic force every fruit-juice

drinker, nudist, sandal-wearer, sex-maniac, Quaker, “Nature Cure” quack, pacifist and feminist in England.”<sup>2</sup>

Two of the tiny minority of Roman Catholic pacifists of the period, W. E. Orchard and Eric Gill, had crucially determinative Nonconformist backgrounds. W. E. Orchard (as we saw in Chapter 2) had exercised a highly individualist ministry at the Congregational King’s Weigh House, London before he became a Roman Catholic. Eric Gill’s grandfather and great-uncle had been Congregational missionaries. His father was ordained in the Congregational ministry but was forced to resign because he preached against hell; he then transferred to the Countess of Huntingdon’s Connexion. Later he was ordained as an Anglican priest. Eric Gill converted to Roman Catholicism in 1913 only to discover that his extremely individual amalgam of catholicism, eroticism, anarchistic communism and pacifism looked more like dissent than orthodoxy to his fellow-Catholics. His war memorial for Leeds University, unveiled in 1923, depicted Christ expelling well-to-do Leeds citizens from the Temple with a text (in Latin) from James 5.1 (‘Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl . . .’). Gill joyfully stirred the ensuing controversy.<sup>3</sup> Thus to imply that the war was caused by the rich was wholly characteristic of populist Nonconformist ideology. In 1931 when Gill was working on the sculpture above the entrance to Broadcasting House, London, his habit of wearing a crimson petticoat-bodice (without breeches) under his smock must have caused consternation among passers-by below. In 1939, just after the outbreak of war, he defended his pacifism by pointing out that British, Irish and American Roman Catholic prelates had taken opposing moral views about the war. ‘In any case, it is Catholic teaching that the individual conscience is the final Judge.’<sup>4</sup> When he died in 1940 he was buried with Roman Catholic rites but appropriately enough, the cemetery was situated next to a Baptist chapel.

The first scholarly book in England to investigate thoroughly the origins of Christian pacifism was *The Early Christian Attitude to War* (1919) by C. J. Cadoux, the Congregational academic and pacifist. He argued that though the Christian mind in the early church was in many ways immature, yet the church was pulsating with the vigorous life of its founder, as never since, and was constantly being purified by persecution. Its conscience was keen, and not yet compromised by worldliness. Cadoux granted that the evidence about early attitudes was complex. Slaves and Jews were exempt from military service so a large proportion of the early Christians were ineligible. All recruits needed could be obtained by voluntary methods. So for most early

Christians, military service was not a live option. Jesus rejected violence for himself and for his disciples. It is incorrect to interpret some of Jesus' statements as legitimizing violence. Was his teaching inconsistent with the moral ordering of society? But Jesus was a far more effective reformer of morals than the police. The Christian community grows by the accession of reformed individuals and thus society would be transformed by decreasing the need of violence to restrain evil. (This, we note, was an individualistic view of Christianity congruent with the heroic individualism of the COs in the war rather than with any pacifist programme for political action.) Since Cadoux did not believe that Jesus was expecting an imminent end to history, his teaching could not be relegated to the status of an 'interim-ethic', which he described as 'the last fortress of militarism on Christian soil'.<sup>5</sup> The early Christians took Jesus at his word and normally refused to serve in the forces. But the early purity did not last; eschatological hope faded; standards were relaxed; biblical images of warfare became influential. But the decisive abandonment of the church's pacifism came with the Constantinian period, though the change was accepted only gradually and with an uneasy conscience. Though Cadoux did not attempt to present any detailed implications of pacifism for the modern world, he believed that nothing in modern life invalidated the teaching of Jesus or the witness of the early church. The Christian, now as then, has 'a method more radical and effectual than the use of arms and involving him in a full measure of suffering and self-sacrifice'.<sup>6</sup>

Cadoux's appeal to the authority of the early church was a shrewd move. By demonstrating with meticulous scholarship that Christ's teaching was interpreted as requiring pacifism by the early church, he attempted to reduce the authority of those New Testament passages which were less amenable to a pacifist construction. By treating Christianity as the call to the individual and by appealing to the authority of the pre-Constantinian church he ensured a hearing from fellow Nonconformists who believed that establishment led to worldliness. But by wholly deploring the Constantinian settlement he evaded the issue on which pacifists were (and still are) most vulnerable. Cadoux's position might have been wholly appropriate for first war objectors, but it was wholly inappropriate for the immediate post-war world where people were looking to international political action to bring peace. For Cadoux, pacifism remains the heroic stand by individuals, but it is politically null. We have here another version of the dilemmas of dissent which we examined in the first three chapters.<sup>7</sup>

If Cadoux's book informed the mind, *Conscription and Conscience*

(1922) by John Graham was designed to stir the heart and fire the imagination. It was prefixed by a poem composed by a Chartist leader in prison. Graham, Quaker Principal of Dalton Hall Manchester, chairman of the Friends' Peace Committee, had acted as a chaplain to imprisoned objectors during the war. The preface was written by the socialist pacifist Clifford Allen, chairman of the No-Conscription Fellowship 1914–18 who had served three terms of imprisonment in 1916–17. (Later he supported the National Government and was created a peer in 1932.) Allen's preface is wholly at variance with the main part of the book. Pacifists, he asserted, must be more concerned with the future than with the past. He urged the organization of a widely-based movement in which pacifists joined non-pacifists to oppose conscription. He was surprisingly critical of COs: their struggle was carried on 'far too often in a spirit of half-arrogant pride, not far removed from that militarism they sought to overthrow'. Yet 'we acted as we did because we loved our country'.<sup>8</sup> By contrast Graham wrote with fierce pride in the objectors and with deep revulsion against war: 'War means blind and wholesale death and maiming of innocent men. It means the torture of wounded men lying in the open, bleeding to death through hours of deadly thirst and moaning pain . . . it means desolate homes, poverty, and a fatherless generation growing to manhood . . . In war hatred becomes a duty, love ridiculous . . . The fellowship of mankind, the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God is earnestly denied in word and deed.'<sup>9</sup> By systematically collecting and vividly retelling the sufferings of the objectors, he provided an extensive martyrology which inspired the hearts of, and provided a model for, the outlook of the pacifists of the inter-war period comparable to the martyrologies of both the Free Churches and the Labour Party. The dichotomy between Allen and Graham in the book was prophetic of two different interpretations of pacifism which came to the surface in the 1930s when once again war became an imminent possibility. It was conscription which had created the sectarian rigour and heroism of the objectors. When with the end of the war, conscription ceased and optimism about achieving peace through international co-operation ran high, the specifically pacifist vocation was pushed into the background. As Ceadel points out, the leading pacifists of the inter-war era did not adopt their faith until some years after the war, roughly at the time the most famous of the war memoirs appeared. H. R. L. ('Dick') Sheppard became a pacifist in 1927 and Charles Raven in 1930.

The fact that Sheppard and Raven, two key figures in the Christian pacifist movement, were both Anglican priests is significant. Whereas

the large majority of the religious participants in pre-war peace movements and of the religiously motivated COs, were Nonconformist or Quakers, in the post-war period a significant number of Anglican clergy participated in groups of pacifiers or pacifists. Before 1914, the approach to war of the comparatively small number of Anglican pacifiers like John Percival (Bishop of Hereford) and Edward Hicks (Bishop of Lincoln) was one expression of their general liberal attitudes to social questions.<sup>10</sup> So the emergence of an Anglican contribution to societies like the LNU as well as to pacifist groups, was a further development and strengthening of the pre-war alliance between liberal Christianity and a progressivist ideology. Anglo-Catholicism with its dissenting attitude towards authority and its anti-erastianism had an influence way beyond its borders. It fitted well into the spirit of post-war rebelliousness against 'the old men' who had led the nation to war. H. D. A. Major, the modernist, observed about the Church of England in 1932: 'She who had been aptly described as the Conservative party at prayer, became, as the result of Gore's influence, at least in the persons of her Anglo-Catholic clergy, the Socialist party at Mass.'<sup>11</sup> Both Raven and Sheppard were inheritors of the pre-war alliance between political and theological liberalism. Sheppard's churchmanship owed a good deal to Anglo-Catholicism though he interpreted it in a very free-wheeling manner. Both were in the broad stream of the mild Christian socialist tradition, with which Anglo-Catholicism constantly interacted.

### *Charles Raven*

Charles Raven (1885–1964) was Dean of Emmanuel College Cambridge when war broke out. Four times he attempted to enlist as a combatant but each time he was turned down on medical grounds. In 1917 he was accepted as a chaplain. In later years he often vividly described how radically his time at the front changed him as a human being and as a priest.<sup>12</sup> During the spiritual agony of his first night in France, and during the nine months that followed, he had a profound experience of the companionship of Christ. He marvelled at the brotherhood and the spirit of self-sacrifice which surrounded and sustained him. Life 'has tested us to the full. Only those who go down into the valley of death will ever know the glory of life's summits.' Those who stayed at home and profited and those who watched from afar, consumed with hate, were the true victims rather than the maimed or widowed. 'Those who can live in it may be purified: those who look on are usually defiled.' Just as before the war he had glimpsed the glory of God in a couple in love or in a dingy fish-and-chip shop,

so now he saw a dead soldier and the natural world of plants and insects surrounding him, 'ablaze with the Shechinah of God'. Seeing the whole evolutionary struggle as illuminated by the sacrifice of Calvary, and drawing (as so often) on Romans 8, or as here on Ephesians 6, he believed that the war was 'not a conflict between opposing armies but of flesh and blood against the tyranny of blind and impersonal forces . . . Bitterness and enmity are purged away.'<sup>13</sup> Theologically the war confirmed him in his liberal modernism. He looked backwards to the mediaeval church as apostate, but forwards to the post-war period as a new Pentecost after Calvary, a fresh unfolding of the dynamic and unifying activity of the Spirit. War (he wrote) had stripped away sacerdotalism (chaplains had to be friends before they could be priests) and was pressing the church towards a liberal view of the Bible, a rejection of hell and much else which was impossible for the average man to accept.<sup>14</sup>

Towards the end of his life he repeated with approval the view that there are two unique sacraments – the physical universe and the person of Christ. Both disclose the nature of God if they are allowed to illuminate each other.<sup>15</sup> As a boy he had first learnt the meaning of the worship of God in the mountains of the Lake District. He comprehended that God dwells in darkness and that the Son of Man is revealed in darkness, when he spent whole nights alone in the open observing natural life.<sup>16</sup> Though he knew the 'terror of nature'<sup>17</sup> it was all held within (and distanced by?) his Christocentric view of God and history. Many of his decisive religious experiences were expressed in markedly Christocentric forms. As a young man he grew to love the church because it mediated the knowledge of Jesus and could on occasion offer deep experiences of fellowship, but he was always critical of its institutionalism, credalism and legalism. He was convinced that the development of modern science (which he found such an exhilarating story) only became possible when the control of the mediaeval church was broken. Despite his sympathy for Christian socialism and his work for COPEC, ultimately his Christianity was centred upon the personal relationship between Christ and the individual. This view of Christianity gave him strength to stand against the official church. All forms and structures were for him potentially oppressive and restrictive of life. But repeatedly he was torn by the dissenter's dilemma. His great gifts were as an electrifying and prophetic preacher, but he longed for recognition by the official church that (say) a bishopric would have given him. Yet after all he was Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge 1932–50, Master of Christ's College 1939–50 and Vice-Chancellor 1947–49. But a bishopric would

have cramped the freedom he needed and his wounded, hypersensitive personality would have been tortured by the incessant routine of attending to the structures. Though he felt excluded from the ecclesiastical high table, in 1942, he was nevertheless still able to write to Archbishop Temple as 'My dear William'.

From 1924 onwards, he became convinced that the abolition of war was the supreme issue for mankind. Temperamentally he was ambivalent about conflict. He could not debate in a hostile environment and his natural *metier* was proclamation, synthesis not dialectic, cooperation not competition. Yet his growing isolation in the 1930s created by his pacifism and liberal theology led him to become increasingly polemical and denunciatory. Yet he could react paranoiacally when critics and reviewers were equally forthright. His distrust of psychoanalysis revealed an unwillingness to face the complexity of human motivation.

Charles believed that the true and indeed the only possible way of interpretation was to see the universe as a single evolutionary process . . . What he seemed never able to entertain was the possibility that the universe could be interpreted in *two* ways . . . Continuity *and* discontinuity, unity *and* duality, the organic *and* the dialectical, progress through evolution *and* progress through resistance to evolution, steady growth *and* radical change, man cooperating with nature *and* man controlling nature; to attempt to hold dualities such as these together through the use of complementary models seemed to Charles . . . a policy of despair. He hardly seemed to realise that a single scheme was always in danger of being identified as ultimate in itself – an idol, even though a moving, expanding idol.<sup>18</sup>

His cosmic vision anticipated that of Teilhard de Chardin, but was open to some of the same criticisms, not least that it minimized the reality and complexity of evil and the inherent capacity of human beings for self-defeat (a characteristic of Raven himself). Raven was the first English pacifist to give a coherent theological basis to pacifism. His individualism, mystical idealism and suspicion of structures made it difficult for him both to tolerate the institutional nature of the church and to translate his ardent pacifism into the inevitable compromises and half-tones of political action. However, in his earlier books, at any rate, his evolutionary approach to history made it more possible for him than for some pacifists, to give a blessing to intermediate steps towards peace which fell short of the pacifist ideal. He became a pacifist in 1930, joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation and in 1932

became its chairman; he was president from 1945 until his death. He was one of the Sponsors of the Peace Pledge Union founded by Dick Sheppard.

Raven's first major study of pacifism, *Is War Obsolete?*, was published in 1935. The title implied the evolutionary view of history which undergirded the whole book. He grants that the evolutionary process, in which there is incessant war between the species, presents the pacifist with agonizing moral perplexities. But each new struggle is a move upwards and onwards. He had experienced war as a speeded-up example of the whole evolutionary process: the bovine rather than the intelligent and sensitive succumbed to shell shock. But war is now an anachronism. Our struggle today should be to sublimate and harness aggressive forces for peace. Raven read church history in evolutionary terms as well. The emancipation of slaves led to a new concept of brotherhood. The emancipation of women opens the way for their ordination. The ecumenical and peace movements move onwards together. One nation after another has renounced the papacy because it stands in the way of progress. So we cannot indulge in easy condemnations of earlier generations for not realizing the incompatibility of Christianity with war. To criticize the church for the Constantinian settlement is to criticize the method of evolution. (Here Raven parts company with Cadoux and others.) So Christians should be able to 'acquiesce in the internationalizing of armed force', even if this falls short of the ideal, because it would be a step in the right direction, 'while advocating and developing another way of reconciliation'.<sup>19</sup>

Raven defines pacifism as a response to the new way of defeating evil opened up by Christ on the cross. 'Martyrdom is the Christian's ultimate obligation.'<sup>20</sup> Pacifism must not be grounded in a revulsion from pain nor be promoted by painting a totally black picture of war. The last war failed to achieve its aims. Another war would plunge civilization into ruin. Nevertheless he felt impelled to justify the support which he and others had given to the war: they had felt a protective compassion towards Belgium; they were seized by a zest for adventure; how could they seek to preserve their own lives when so many of their fellows were going to their deaths?

If I may be frank, when I listen to some of my peace-loving friends, their arguments arouse an instinctive antagonism: their horror of death, the falsity of their picture of war, their failure to recognize the existence of human beings whose religion glorifies fighting, their inability to resist the appeal to fear and to disgust, as if Satan could ever cast out Satan – these things merely fill me with a vast



admiration for the simple heroism of the lads whom I buried somewhere in France.<sup>21</sup>

Raven here was torn between his interpretation of the cross as the supreme example of pacifist non-resistance and his belief that the evolutionary process disclosed the principle of self-sacrifice and creative struggle which was focussed on Calvary. He now repudiated war morally and theologically. But his pastoral imagination had been unforgettably stirred by the heroism and self-sacrifice which the conflict had drawn from others and from himself, however much the acknowledgment of this might seem to undermine traditional pacifist arguments. Christian pacifists like Raven pointed to the cross as the condemnation of war. Conversely non-pacifist Christians interpreted the cross as the sanction and the inspiration for the self-sacrifice that war involved.

This book contains early examples of his life-long polemic against Karl Barth and Reinhold Niebuhr. German theologians have failed (Raven asserted) to develop the social implications of the gospel – they are a generation or more behind us. Raven presented an immanentist version of Christianity -- the universe manifests deity *within* it. But to him Barth's God was external and transcendent and Barth's Christ an intruder; the Holy Spirit becomes meaningless; man is unable to cooperate with God. He attacked Niebuhr for believing that human collectives are less moral than the individuals which compose them. Raven's experience of the richness of Christian fellowship contradicted this. He criticized American society for its separation of church from state (here again he revealed the Anglican slant of his pacifism). Raven could not accept Niebuhr's distinction between personal and corporate ethics. Yet at the outset he had addressed his book to the individual rather than to the community.

The only examples he provides as to how Christian pacifism could be applied to actual political situations are somewhat confusing. Because he believed in a step-by-step development, he commends Christ and the greatest of his followers for being patient enough to allow men to crawl before they are asked to walk. So side by side with his uncompromising absolutism about pacifism in theory and his frequent denunciations of the two standards of Catholic moral theology, he nevertheless conceded that physical force is sometimes necessary. War between Christians and cultured men is now as out-of-date as duelling, but we cannot simply withdraw troops from Palestine and the North-West Frontier, where force is the only practical restraint.