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Clergy in the Front Line of Resistance

There were a few Anglican clergy who stood out for peace. One, Philip Carrington (1892-1975), later Archbishop of Quebec, was an ordinand at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He became pacifist having read such literature as George Bernard Shaw's 1914 publication *Common Sense About the War*, which argued that both sides were equally to blame for the war. Carrington knew a pacifist priest "who travelled around defending pacifists when they came into conflict with the law".¹ Generally, such clergy were individuals who found themselves in a very lonely, isolated place and vulnerable to repression if they refused to conform to the increasingly militarist norms of society.

An Army Chaplain

Edward Gordon Bulstrode (1885-1953) had served his curacy in East London, after which he tested his vocation with the Society of St John the Evangelist, Cowley (S.S.J.E.). The difficulty for him there was that, in the vow of obedience to a Superior, he could foresee possible conflict with the higher authority of God. With the door closed on conventional monasticism, the be-cassocked Brother Edward became assistant curate at Temple Balsall, near Coventry, where a community resembling *Little Gidding* existed, living in simplicity and devotion. In December 1914, at the suggestion of Father Maxwell, S.S.J.E., Brother Edward became an unofficial chaplain to the troops awaiting embarkation for France, at Roffey Camp, Horsham, Sussex. He felt ambivalent about such a role; on the one hand, he understood the war effort and appreciated the sacrifice it called for, and was keen to get involved. Yet, on the other, he himself held pacifist views: "the more I meditated on Christ's life and example and on his teaching, the less did I find it possible to reconcile it with fighting and intentional slaughter".² The local vicar told him not to express pacifist opinions in sermons to the troops, advice which was hardly likely to be heeded by a man who had left S.S.J.E. in order to say and to do as the Holy

Spirit guided. In any case, Brother Edward's position was, after all, independent and unofficial. Relations with the military command soon reached breaking point and he left after a confrontation in May 1915. As he wrote to his mother:

I am now not allowed to speak any more to the troops in Horsham. . . . The officers of the Artillery complained to the vicar that what I said to the men the Sunday before last had had a depressing effect and they did not like what I had said about being men of peace. So the vicar asked me to take a certain line with them which I could not in faithfulness do. I *cannot* tell beforehand what the Lord shall put into my mouth. I try to ask the Holy Spirit to speak through me and I cannot limit His operation. So I offered to cease my ministrations and the offer was accepted.³

Brother Edward returned to Temple Balsall.⁴

Lansbury's Converter

The clergyman whose influence had led to the conversion of Lansbury remained close to the *Herald* editor. William Corbett Roberts urged Lansbury to become more actively involved with the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and Lansbury reproduced in full Roberts's 1916 address to the Church Socialist League, in which he referred to "the demand of the Christian conscience that wars shall cease".⁵ Roberts began the war as Vicar of Crick. Writing in the *Peterborough Diocesan Magazine*, he stated that:

I cannot think of any war as coming within the Will of God for which we pray. War is the denial of that Will. The "incredible good" that our faith holds out before us is not going to be helped by War. Its presence in men's hearts is indeed displayed in many deeds of self-sacrifice shown on the battlefield, but the spirit which inspires these deeds is not a spirit that war implants in men; it has been there long before, and was learnt in a different school. Is it not true that all the heroism and self-sacrifice of the war will be wasted unless, when the war is done, the same fine spirit, so freely devoted to the cause of the fatherland, is devoted to the cause of the Kingdom of God?

People say that the war was inevitable. It is only true if sin is inevitable. There are no "necessary" evils. God always leaves the ideal way open, open that is to repentance and faith. The trouble is that we have not got faith, and do not really believe the Gospel. As long as this is so, war will remain "inevitable", like other sins of individuals and people which we frankly profess ourselves "helpless" about. . . .⁶

He left Crick for six months near the end of 1915 to lecture at St Stephen's College, Delhi, where C.F. Andrews (of whom, more later) had recently been vice-principal, and in May 1917 he was instituted as Rector of the parish of St George, Bloomsbury, which became something of a pacifist stronghold between the wars.

There is also a suggestion that, whilst at Crick, W.C. Roberts may have been persecuted for his pacifist views. His wife Ursula – a feminist poet and novelist writing under the pseudonym Susan Miles – produced an epic novel, *Blind Men Crossing a Bridge* (1934). It was a substantial work of fiction centred on a woman, Mazod, one of a pair of twins conceived in an ill-fated relationship between a squire's son and a woman from a farm-labouring family. The setting was the village of Dill, quite possibly based on Crick. In the novel, not long after the outbreak of war in 1914, a group of drunkards attacked the vicarage because there were pacifists inside. A bedroom window was smashed and the family inside the vicarage were threatened with a ducking in pigwash. Soon afterwards the family needed to hire a pony and trap in order to seek help for a sick girl. The owner of the pony and trap refused, in dialect, "Not for hire, I told y', to pashfists and Fritzes".⁷ Such scenes may well have been autobiographical.⁸

Rebel in a New Cathedral

As a young man Henry Cecil (1882-1954) came across many early Labour leaders, including Lansbury, Philip Snowden, Arthur Henderson and Ramsay MacDonald, at Stepney Working Men's College. A socialist and pacifist himself, Cecil was ordained and in 1913 accepted a position at what was about to become Sheffield Cathedral. With the outbreak of war, local recruiting campaign meetings were held in the Cathedral churchyard, with the blessing of the senior clergy and the Bishop, Leonard Burrows. Cecil's response each time was to set up a rival meeting denouncing the war and the Church's collusion in it. The Cathedral congregation were horrified and on several occasions Cecil was physically assaulted by hostile crowds. On his appointment in 1917 to the parish of St Philip, Sheffield, Cecil continued his campaigning, finding some support among his steelworker parishioners. The Bishop of Sheffield was not enamoured with Cecil's message, but he refused many demands for his suspension, removal or unfrocking, accepting Cecil's right to express a pacifist view, however unpopular or (in the bishop's eyes) wrong that view might be.⁹

A similar case arose in Durham in 1918, when one unnamed vicar was reported to have declared to the patriotic Bishop Handley Moule that he was a pacifist. The bishop reluctantly advised the vicar to express his views cautiously in his parish magazine of June that year. The article exalted "Love your enemies" over the old way of "an eye for an eye", with the author proclaiming, "I cannot square the way of war with the way of Christ".¹⁰

An Embryonic Brotherhood

Also in Sheffield was Thomas Pickering, who ran a hostel for local youth in the parish of St Mary.¹¹ The parish curate, Charles Casson Stimson (1889-1964) was five years younger than Pickering. Stimson had grown up in what he described as a “cautiously liberal” household, with the writings of Tolstoy and the nineteenth-century Christian socialists on the bookshelves. After training at Ridley Hall Stimson was made deacon in 1912 and ordained priest the following year. The ordaining bishop in 1912 was Archbishop Cosmo Gordon Lang, with whom Stimson had several discussions concerning his considerable objections to the Thirty-Nine Articles, some of which he thought were “seriously in error”.¹² Far from being shocked at possible heterodoxy, Lang was impressed by Stimson’s thoughtfulness, and assured him that assent to the Articles was but a “general assent”, and did not imply complete agreement. Some in the parish were suspicious of the effect that the radical Pickering was having on the local youth, and they hoped that the new curate would draw the young people away from his influence.¹³ Instead, Stimson soon warmed to Pickering’s ideas himself, and the two became lifelong friends.

Initially, Leonard Burrows, Bishop of Sheffield, was so impressed by the youth club’s work that he asked the local Church of England Men’s Society (C.E.M.S.) to support it. Pickering’s team of workers called themselves the St Paul’s Brotherhood, and Stimson drew up a simple rule of life, based on the Sermon on the Mount.¹⁴ The rule was placed above the fireplace in the youth club, unnoticed until the outbreak of the war, when a visiting C.E.M.S. steward objected to the pacifist slant and the clause about loving one’s enemies and complained to the Bishop. Pickering was sent for by Burrows, and when he refused to remove the offending clauses and bring the rule into line with the war effort, the support of both the Bishop and the C.E.M.S. was withdrawn. The hostel was closed down quickly to avoid bankruptcy, with Pickering losing all his money in the process. Stimson managed to persuade Bishop Hicks of Lincoln to fund Pickering’s ordination training at Lincoln, but when Hicks died Pickering was transferred to Burgh Missionary College. The Principal there was not impressed by Pickering’s pacifism, and his ordination was held up indefinitely, with few bishops or parishes willing to tolerate a pacifist priest. Eventually Pickering consented, against Stimson’s advice, to be ordained by Bishop Vernon Herford of the Evangelical Catholic Church.¹⁵

Stimson, too, aggrieved the middle-class congregation, including employers (whose workers were involved in an industrial dispute) who did not take kindly to Stimson’s support for striking grinders; there was also a mothers’ meeting whose members disapproved of hearing readings from Tolstoy. With the outbreak of war in 1914, Stimson’s employment lasted but one sermon. The congregation who

were already antagonised by his social attitudes could not tolerate his pacifism under any circumstances. Stimson was immediately told to move on.¹⁶ In a number of parishes he met with the same response.

Stimson came, in 1915, to the parish of St Andrew, Clifton and St Luke, Bristol. Although Rashley, the vicar, was a pacifist, it was the outspoken pacifist curate who soon alienated those parishioners whose money was required for his stipend.¹⁷ Stimson decided to ask Bishop George Nickson for permission to fund his own ministry by combining factory work with being an unpaid curate. The request was refused until Archbishops Davidson and Lang appealed to younger clergy to help in munitions factories.¹⁸ Stimson would not do this, but the precedent enabled him to get the Bishop's consent for him to earn his living as a labourer in a soap factory whilst assisting the local vicar. Years before French Catholics tried experimenting with worker-priests, and before Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy's Industrial Christian Fellowship took off, Stimson was acting, in effect, as an unofficial chaplain, working anonymously alongside the unskilled labourers whilst exercising his more open priestly ministry, without pay, in different parishes.

Although, as a priest, Stimson was exempt from being called up, he worked on behalf of his conscientious objector colleagues. In Bristol, he reported on the proceedings of tribunals to local pacifist societies. When possible, he followed up the treatment undergone by those whose appeals were unsuccessful. Working in a factory alongside those facing call up into the military, he was embarrassed at the prospect of hiding behind his clerical collar. Attracted by the itinerant ministry of Francis of Assisi, he handed in his notice, and after some time of prayer in Malmesbury Abbey and Cirencester Parish Church, he took to the road in his cassock and collar, "penniless, and completely dependent on God".¹⁹ Preaching Christian socialist pacifism, he journeyed from the south-west to the north Midlands, with overnight stays either in workhouses or with sympathetic listeners to his message (often Plymouth Brethren). That his 1918 Franciscan experiment only lasted a fortnight was due to Stimson receiving an invitation to accept a curacy in County Durham.²⁰ It would not, however, be the last time that Stimson and Pickering would preach peace to those who were near and those who were far off, as they were to be founder members of a radical pacifist order, the Brotherhood of the Way, spending most of the next quarter century as tramp-preachers for peace across the country.

A Tractarian Radical

One prominent figure in the Fellowship of Reconciliation was as far removed as could be imagined from the Nonconformist majority of that organisation. Bernard Walke, who from 1913 was the parish priest in

the village of St Hilary, Cornwall, just inland from St Michael's Mount, followed in the tradition of his Tractarian father and grandfather, combining the ministry of an idiosyncratic, unwavering Anglo-Catholic priest with a commitment to ecumenism and a determination to promote a distinctive Christian and pacifist lifestyle. Walke was a radical pacifist with a great appreciation of nature, who spoke of his awareness of "the increased friendliness among all living things".²¹ He dedicated two chapels in church to St Francis and to St Joan (whom, even though she was a warrior, Walke upheld for placing conscience before the authority of the state). He described his feelings when war was approaching in August 1914:

When I stood in the pulpit, looking down on the people whose faces were now so familiar to me, I had the sensation of being in the centre of a cataclysm which was approaching as inevitably as a thunderstorm against the wind. It was contrary to reason, yet no ingenuity of man could prevent it. The noblest motives would be exploited and the most generous natures would offer themselves willingly to this monster that was about to destroy them.

I felt strangely alone standing there in the pulpit before all these people, with nothing to say, with no word of comfort or assurance to offer them. I was certain only that I could have no part in what was coming.²²

Recalling the answer of George Fox to an enquiry about the wearing of swords, "Wear it as long as thou canst", Walke resolved to follow Fox's advice.

"Wear it as long as thou canst." I could wear it no longer. As I stood looking down on the people on that Sunday night in August 1914, I saw no way of reconciliation between the way of the Gospel that I had been called to preach and the war that was approaching. I was not, as far as I know, carried away by my emotions; I was empty of all feeling but an awareness that this rejection of war as an altogether evil thing, was at one with whatever intelligence I possessed.²³

There was a loneliness in this stand, and some accused Walke of being a German spy ("Half your pay do come from the Pope and the other half from the Kaiser").²⁴ He constantly feared arrest for his peace activities. Support came from local Quakers, and Walke attended many of their meetings. In both sermons and liturgy, Walke addressed the evils of war.

It had been my custom to say daily, after Mass, the prayer for the ending of the war composed by the saintly Pius X, who when

asked to bless the armies of Austria replied, "I bless peace and not war." I had also instituted the service of Benediction on Sunday evenings, as an act of reparation to the Sacred Heart for the wrongs of war, and as a means of uniting ourselves with our enemies in that Sacrament that knows no frontiers.²⁵

In the spring of 1917, Walke joined the F.O.R., an ecumenical pacifist but still an Anglo-Catholic. He raised some Nonconformist eyebrows at the 1918 F.O.R. conference when he arrived in his cassock and with little luggage save a portable altar.²⁶ His peace witness, for him the living out of his priestly vocation, was by then going far beyond his parish boundary. He wrote almost daily articles and letters to the press, and spoke at meetings in London, Liverpool, Bristol and in many of the towns and villages of Cornwall.

The message that I had to deliver was the one I had been charged to preach on the day of my Ordination. I could not regard that commission as having come to an end because the world was at war. It was still a message of "Peace and good will"; an affirmation that peace did not depend on the armies in the field; that there was no other way to peace for nations or individuals but the way of Jesus who had met and overcome the forces of evil on the cross, and offered to those, who could receive it, a share in His victory. If that message of peace was ever to be effective among the nations, there must be some to witness to this power at a time when men had ceased to believe in it. To keep silence now was to seal our lips for ever. The world would rightly distrust a message of peace that could not stand the test of war.²⁷

One meeting, in the Labour Hall in Penzance, was broken up violently by a gang of one hundred and fifty men from the Naval Reserve, a "howling mob" with faces "changed by hate". Walke received a blow which laid him out. Eventually he, his wife Annie, and a Quaker woman who was also on the platform at the meeting, were escorted to safety by two soldiers home on leave from France, who were appalled by the tactics of the mob.²⁸ Together with George Hodgkin, a Quaker, Walke travelled around Cornwall on foot, talking to those they met about seeking peace within themselves and avoiding occasions of war. Walke reported that cobblers, basket-makers and other tradesmen were among the most attentive listeners.

Hodgkin also suggested to Walke that he try to get Home Office permission to visit the conscientious objectors (C.O.s) at Princetown. The bleak Dartmoor prison was a "work centre" for C.O.s, not that local clergy felt that the work was hard enough, passing a resolution complaining about the "ridiculously lenient treatment" afforded C.O.s

there.²⁹ William Gascoigne Cecil, Bishop of Exeter, described his own attitudes towards the interred members of his diocese in a letter to the *Times* in October 1917, headed "Anarchic Dartmoor – a Hotbed of Malcontents".³⁰ Walke was naturally far more sympathetic to the C.O.s, though he had little more awareness of the true nature of the work centre and its inmates than did the hostile bishop. He naively looked forward to being able to stay with the C.O.s for one week in February 1918, little realising the diversity of the group and the destructive individualism of so many within it. A meeting Walke held with 600 of the men was a depressing experience.

Was there ever gathered together so strange a collection of individuals? – quiet Quakers who sat unmoved while men stood up and shouted around them, wild-looking men from the Clyde and Rhondda Valley whose hopes for the regeneration of society lay in a class war, strange melancholy men whose message was the immediate coming of the Messiah and the end of the world, men of all trades and professions, mathematicians, scholars, musicians, actors, miners and farm labourers, with nothing to unite them but a refusal to bear arms in the present war.

I was distressed and dismayed by the clash and conflict of theories and personalities with which I was confronted. Some brandished Bibles, accusing me of not knowing the Word of God as revealed in the Book of Daniel, others with red flags proclaimed me as a traitor for not accepting class war and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

I had come, expecting to find, in this assembly of youth, some hope for the future, but failed to discover among these men who talked ceaselessly, waving flags and Bibles, the kind of material out of which a new world might be constructed.³¹

Yet there was still work to be done there. Rising early, Walke would wait for the prison gates to open at 6 a.m., so that he would be available to hear confession and to say Mass at a time when those men who wished to could attend. Being unable to obtain permission to use the Anglican chapel, he set up an altar in the Wesleyan meeting-house, and the daily service was attended by a few young men of "the Catholic Faith" and a number of silent Quakers. His visit was not in vain.

Walking alone on the evening of Armistice Day, "to enjoy the peace that had at last come to the world", Walke looked over lights in a valley, from cottages no longer blacked out, and rejoiced.³² In this new context, Walke turned his mind to issues of living: "As pacifists we had rejected war as altogether evil and yet we were content to

live in a society which was built largely on fear and distrust of our neighbour".³³ He was to commit the rest of his life to experimental Christian communities attempting to build sharing, openness and trust.³⁴

A Cambridge Academic

In 1914, Trinity College Cambridge boasted two gifted mathematicians on its staff who seemed, at a cursory glance, to be similar, but who were actually poles apart. Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), aristocratic, atheist lecturer, and Ernest William Barnes (1874-1953), bourgeois, Christian Fellow, were both pacifists and both members of the U.D.C. Barnes's pacifism had been newly arrived at, but was to be more consistent than Russell's. In the first few days of the war, Barnes thought that Britain was right to have taken that course of action. It did not take long for him to change his mind.

My conversion to extreme pacifism dates to the latter part of August 1914. The war had broken out, men had flocked to the colours, and a camp had been established in Cambridge, where I was then a don. I was asked to speak to some of these men on a Sunday morning. I accepted without hesitation and then began to write out my address. I wrote it once, then I went back to Christ's teaching and tore it up. I did the same a second and a third time, and then I ventured an address which seemed to me ludicrously inadequate.

"I still have that address", he admitted to the Church Assembly in February 1937, "but I have never since spoken in favour of war"³⁵.

His subsequent addresses in Trinity Chapel must have taken his congregation by surprise. He preached on loving enemies and on war being contrary to the mind of Christ. He argued that any concept of a Christian God of battles was a pagan illusion, and that Christians were only bearing arms because "a chain of evil circumstances . . . forced them to ignore Christ's teaching". He believed that all governments – including the British (supported by the Church) – bore responsibility for the war, and how "only at the foot of the Cross can a permanent treaty of peace be signed".³⁶ Such teaching was hardly calculated to win him friends. Not only was Trinity College far from sympathetic to pacifism, there was a concern among other dons that any residual taint of pacifism might persuade patriotic parents after the war to send their offspring to other colleges. Within the college Barnes spoke up for Russell, both in urging that Russell be appointed a Fellow and for Russell to be granted leave of absence (for which the atheist philosopher had unsuccessfully applied) in order to engage in political activity. In March 1915 Barnes chaired the first public meeting of

Cambridge U.D.C., at which Russell spoke. However, the possibility of escaping the tensions of college to become Master of the Temple was tempting for Barnes and he moved on soon afterwards. As he remarked as late as 1942, "The bitterness of college feeling in 1915 against those of us who were pacifists was such that even now I do not like to recall it".³⁷ That bitterness came to a head soon afterwards, with the College banning U.D.C. meetings in its premises, the politically active Russell failing to achieve his Fellowship despite the support from Barnes, and, a year later, being stripped of his lectureship after a conviction for prejudicing the recruitment of the armed forces. Barnes wrote Russell a letter of support. Barnes's own position suffered in all this as his own Fellowship was not renewed and he lost the chance to become a Life Fellow.³⁸

In contrast to Trinity, the Temple had a reputation for liberal opinion. Those who heard Barnes preach there may not have agreed with his pacifism, but they tolerated it. In a Good Friday sermon Barnes drew attention to the fact that "Today another crucifixion is taking place. Europe is crucifying her young men", and he asked his congregation what they were doing about it. Any nation, including Germany, that shared the system of material greed and national rivalry bore responsibility for the war. He was critical of the deadly games of diplomats, a criticism reinforced when the Bolsheviks published treaties showing how the allies planned to carve up Europe in their own interests. The Left, with the "essentially Christian" element of their aspirations, were also preferable to some of the clergy:

When the war began, some of the most virulent abuse of Germany came from those who professed to follow Him who said, "Love your enemies". . . . Those who have done most to preach peace and love among the belligerents are not the Christian Churches but workmen and their leaders. . . . If you wish to inflame the passions of war, do not imply that you do so as a follower of the Prince of Peace.³⁹

After the war Barnes reflected that, in his protests, he repeatedly found himself working alongside agnostics. He had no time for Christians who cited "an eye for an eye" – a "detestably evil maxim" – as a basis for demanding reprisals against German people. Far from purifying a nation, as some claimed, war brought out the worst in people: drunkenness, intolerance, sexual licence, and fortunes for war profiteers. It also had a detrimental effect on the civil liberties of conscientious objectors. He supported some C.O.s by letter, others by appearing at their tribunals, and all by his public pronouncements.

His own growing unpopularity as a result led to the Lord Chancellor muttering that Barnes himself ought to be in prison.⁴⁰ Yet Barnes's criticisms sprang largely from his patriotism. He worried about what the war was doing to Britain. He could see traditions dating back to the Magna Carta being swept aside. He looked forward to the ideals of the Kingdom of Heaven being reclaimed with England helping "to give such a pure ideal of righteousness to mankind that never again will the present conflict of the nations be renewed".⁴¹ He became vice-president of the (non-pacifist) League of Nations Society, arguing that disarmament and the inclusion of Germany in a League of Nations was essential for future peace. "If we impose [on the Germans] conditions of peace which they think unjust, if we exclude them from the League of Nations, they will await an opportunity to strike again. . . . Disarmament all round is a fundamental idea of the League. No nation must retain more troops than will suffice for police work".⁴² Eventually becoming Bishop of Birmingham, he spoke strongly for pacifism in the Church Assembly.

SAMPLE