UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
History Working Paper

Number V, October 2013

Religion and the War

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Introduction

For the generation that fought the First World War religious belief and practice was still almost everywhere normal rather than the exceptional. Yet the intellectuals of the era were acutely aware that the sea of faith was in retreat. In the western world religion was facing three challenges. Politically, the century since the French revolution had seen the emergence of an ideological challenge of organised anti-clerical politics, further compounded by the emergence of self-consciously atheist socialist and anarchist movements. Intellectually, the inheritors of enlightenment scepticism had received powerful reinforcement from the biblical source criticism that emerged from the German Universities and from the promulgation of Darwin's ideas of natural selection as an alternative to divine creation. In his confident post mortem report on the Deity, Nietzsche was a little ahead of conventional opinion, but he certainly recognised the implications. Finally, social change had undermined the traditional authority of the churches in the western world; mass movement to cities had broken the ties with the parishes and disrupted the role of religious *rites de passage* in defining individual identity. The two founding fathers of the sociology of religion, both prominent just before the war; the German Max Weber and the Frenchman Émile Durkheim, saw the growth of scientific rationality and the disruption of community as leading to an inevitable failure of traditional religiosity.

But the full picture was not this simple. The nineteenth century tide of rationality created its own counter currents. Some of the 'generation of 1914' rejected rationalism. In philosophy, Henri Bergson gained disciples with his 'vitalist' rejection of materialism. The science that was discovering electro-magnetism was sufficiently undefined to embrace the possibility of spiritual communication after death and spiritualism had an appeal to many scientific minds. To this fluid mix can be added the impact of exotic eastern mysticism, promoted by charlatans and honest seekers alike. Even the most traditional religion had a revival; in 1910 American Evangelicals published the five books defending biblical literalism which were labelled 'The Fundamentals,' providing the impetus for the eponymous movement.

Religion had not been superseded, it had evolved. The nineteenth century had seen it retreat in the public sphere but often gain an even greater significance within the home. This went hand in hand with the feminization of the laity of all the main Christian churches. This was most notable in Roman Catholicism where the gulf between the irreligious father and the

pious mother became stereotypical. Feminization contributed to the massive revival in the Marian cult in the nineteenth century as witnessed by the popularity of Lourdes and the Papal Dogma of the immaculate conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The appeal and prestige of the female religious orders had never been greater and nuns had become a significant force in health and educational provision. Protestantism engaged women differently but with equal power. In the English speaking world religious philanthropy was central to the identity of middle-class women, and through this mechanism domestic piety would ultimately mutate into militant political activism against sexual immorality and the demon drink.

Furthermore, despite the mass population movements of the century, rural life dominated most of Europe and even more beyond it. Religion as a local force remained strong and perhaps in some cases was even strengthened by churches actively engaged politically and educationally in bolstering the resistance to the anti-clerical challenge. The conservative, imperial and monarchical regimes that dominated most of the world still embraced the church (and the temple and the mosque) as a partner in social control.

Nor was mass urbanization in itself a royal road to secular rationalism. Life in early twentieth century cities was often nasty, brutish and sometimes short and it was above all unpredictable. Illness, accident, unemployment and bereavement were facts of life and the masses still required some form of opiate as a warm heart in a cold world. Narcosis and cheap entertainment did increasingly provide alternatives, but superstition was as common in the slums as the fields and the inner cities could provide the churches with a mission field where they were willing and able to do so.

This was the religious world at the outbreak of war; challenged and contradictory, complex and deep. Would the war weaken or strengthen religion and would faith affirm or oppose the war? The answer would be yes to all of these things.

Acceptance

George Studdert Kennedy, the British Army chaplain popularly known as ‘Woodbine Willie’ claimed that the outbreak of war saw a ‘run on the bank of God’. Like the other bank runs of July and August it was short-lived. But we need to be careful in thinking about what was actually happening when previously empty churches filled.

From the very outset established churches were active in promoting popular acceptance of the war. This was particularly marked in Berlin; the crowd on Alexanderplatz on 1 August had spontaneously begun singing the Lutheran chorale *Gott, tief im Herzen*, rather than *Deutschland Uber Alles* and on Sunday 2nd August the court chaplain Bruno Doehring conducted an open air service in Konigplatz to mark the declaration of war with France. The Kaiser's famous speech to the crowds in Berlin on 4 August was in fact written by the noted theologian Adolf von Harnack and was in the nature of a sermon, 'German faith and German piety are ultimately bound up with German Civilization'. The presentation of the war as one of pious Germans against irreligious French acted as a method of literally presenting the war as having been begun in 'good faith'. But subtleties in the German case can also be found, with variants in the reaction of other churches. The war was also presented as a *punishment* for national sin and therefore an opportunity for national repentance leading to redemption. Much of the reaction to the outbreak of the war at the highest levels of the clerical hierarchies and amongst theologians saw the war as having been caused by sin. There was a fair degree of consensus on what these sins were: materialism, indifference, scepticism and generally a turning away from God. The differences came largely in attributing blame. The culprits were in varying degrees of importance the external enemy, the internal enemy and the 'Church' itself.[1]

Straightforward language of religious war certainly did appear in 1914. For example, the Slovenian Catholic monthly *Mladost* described the Hapsburg monarchy as the 'magnificent fort of Catholicism and protector of the faith', Slovenian religious figures gave to the murdered Archduke and his wife the status of martyrs and the Prince-Bishop of Ljubjana in his war sermon of 9 August described the Hapsburg war effort as being conducted against 'the enemies of God'. But the context is important; in this rhetoric Slovenian Catholics were presenting a very specific ideological vision of 'South Slav' Roman Catholic loyalty to the dynasty distinct both from German and Magyar nationalist hegemony and simultaneously from a South Slav vision centred on Orthodox Serbia and looking towards Orthodox Russia. Justified as the war might be, it did not promise the unconditional redemption of a 'crusade', in fact the interpretation was traditionally Augustinian, the war might be just, but it was still a

[1] A.J.Hoover, *God, Germany and Britain in the Great War: A study in clerical nationalism* (Greenwood, NY, 1989).

'scourge' inflicted by God because of the impious backsliding of the people and repentance was required as well as service.[2]

In Freiburg in Germany, the Roman Catholic clerics and laity alike similarly saw the war as both justified and a challenge. Roger Chickering notes the common use of the term *Heimsuchung* with its connotation of a test of believers. One priest in a sermon stated bluntly that the war should draw Catholics back from the path of sin to belief in and fear of God. Chickering suggests that although the local Protestants were more drawn to a concept of 'holy war' they too used the term *Heimsuchung* and indeed the head of the Protestant Badenese church referred to the war as 'the rod of God's punishment'.[3]

The higher levels of the church in all countries tended to accuse the enemy of being guilty in an extreme form of faults that were also observable within the nation and Empire. As the Germans accused the French of encouraging atheism though the influence of the philosophes, the British citing Nietzsche and biblical higher criticism turned the accusation upon Germany. French Roman Catholics turned their fire on both German atheism and on the alleged tendency of Lutheranism to worship the state whilst trying to exempt Protestant allies as coming from markedly different traditions. Yet despite lip service to the *Burgfrieden* and the *Union Sacré*, it frequently proved impossible to resist a swipe at the traditional enemies within. Socialists in Germany and Freemasons and anti-clericals in France could be seen as enemies of God who had brought down wrath upon the nation by their actions. The failure of both clergy and laity to stem the tide of modern materialism also came in for criticism. Such self-criticism was perhaps most marked amongst Anglicans, who had been agonizing about this since the 1850s, but most churches felt the urge. The Scottish Free Presbyterians almost revelled in the war as the punishment they had long predicted.

The young Florentine soldier Giosué Borsi experienced an intense conversion experience just before the war and began to keep a spiritual diary. On Italy's entry into the war he wrote:

War is a terrible scourge, a fearful chastisement thou inflictest on peoples. Although I know that it is often the bloody sign by which Thou recallest them to Thee. I am persuaded that war is the greatest test of the endurance of races, the occasion of their internal concord, the

[2] Unpublished material kindly provided by Dr Pavlina Bobic, to be published as P. Bobic, *War and Faith the Catholic Church in Slovenia 1914-1918* (Brill, Leiden 2012).

[3] R.Chickering, *The Great War and Urban Life in Germany: Freiburg 1914-1916* (Cambridge UP, 2007) , pp. 72-75

inspirer of obedience of discipline, of sacrifice….I am not so inhuman or blood thirsty as to wish it to be long and cruel. Therefore I believe my principal duty as a good Christian is to wish and pray that it may be brief and that peace may come soon, a long peace and a fruitful one.[4]

The official language of the churches was the language of repentance, redemption and revival. But it is unlikely that this is the message that most of the laity were hearing and it probably played only a tiny and marginal role in the rush to the churches. The many who attended a church service for the first time in years in late July and August 1914 were not attending in order to be rebuked for their guilt. What they were seeking was comfort. When the United States entered the war in 1917 the Syrian Christian Abraham Rihbany captured the real desire of the majority, 'I want every soldier who is fighting the battle of freedom and right to feel he is doing the work of a *Christian* soldier …I want every American Mother who has a son at the front to feel that the precious gift she has given the Nation has been offered not upon the altar of Moloch, but upon the altar of Christ and of the sacred duty which every free man owes to mankind'.[5]

Benjamin Ziemann's nuanced study of Bavaria carefully detaches the upsurge of popular piety from 'enthusiasm' for the war. The typical reaction of the Bavarian peasantry was one of despondency, and the war theology which developed locally was that the war was divine punishment and that pilgrimage and devotion as a form of repentance could mitigate God's wrath. Newly mobilized soldiers prayed for forgiveness and protection and women in particular sought intercession on behalf of their loved ones. The dedication of Bavaria to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in January 1915 reflected this upsurge in emotional religious activity.[6] Whether the similar upsurges in rural France were motivated by similar concerns is less clear, but certainly plausible. The Vendée, traditional home of Catholic resistance to the secular republic, unsurprisingly led the way and showed a similar commitment to the symbolism of the Sacred Heart, which had a strong local resonance as a symbol of Catholic rebellion. The demand to modify the Tricolour by the addition of this symbol emerged early in the war, indeed it had been prefigured in 1870. By the end of August 1914, Raymond Poincaré, the

[4] G.Borsi, *A Soldiers Confidences: Spiritual Colloquies of Giosué Borsi* (Trans Pasquale Malteses, P.J.Kennedy, NY 1918), pp. 203-204.

[5] Abraham Rihbany, *Militant America and Jesus Christ* (Houghton Mifflin, Boston and NY, 1917).

[6] Benjamin Ziemann, *War experiences in Rural Germany* (Berg, Oxford, 2007).

President of the Republic, complained that he was being deluged by letters from 'priests and women' (a revealing comment reflecting Republican prejudices) to take this step. Poincaré had famously called for 'Union Sacrée', but this term is somewhat misleading. In reality the national reconciliation of August leant much more to the left than to the 'right' and there was little official effort to woo 'religious malcontents'. Secular politicians remained suspicious of the intentions of the church and resistant to pressure. The 'Sacred Heart' issue re-emerged forcefully in early 1917 with the demands of the charismatic young woman Claire Ferchaud, herself from the Vendée, that the nation be dedicated to the symbol. Ferchaud, remarkably, was granted an audience with Poincaré. Whilst this might seem to be remarkable evidence of a new openness from the secular establishment, it is clear from Ferchaud's own account of the meeting that Poincaré was deeply dismissive of the idea and was simply humouring her. When some of her supporters took up her hint that Poincaré was 'persuadable' by mass petitioning, French official secularism bared its teeth. Louis Malvy, Minister of the Interior, sent out an order banning the modified tricolour and denounced the petitions in the press. When the Archbishop of Tours displayed a tricolour with the addition of the Sacred Heart inside the cathedral the government pressed charges against him. The instinctive response of the Republican establishment, much heightened in the tense summer of 1917 marked by strikes, plots and army indiscipline, along with the increasingly strong signals in favour of compromise peace from Rome, was to view the Sacred Heart campaign, with its insistence that France could only be saved by divine intervention, as defeatism and subversion.[7]

Did religious leaders generally sanctify war and did they succumb to the temptation to demonize the enemy? Examples on all sides can be found, but should be treated with caution. The most infamous example is the Lent sermon preached by the Bishop of London in 1915, Arthur Winnington-Ingram, which called for the extermination of Germans for the sake of the Lord. This sermon has taken on enormous interpretative weight as an example of wartime brutalization, but it passed almost completely un-noticed at the time. *The Times*, which regularly carried speeches and sermons by the Bishop of London, does not mention it at all. It is in fact doubtful that it would ever have been noticed beyond the small immediate audience had not the respected Anglican intellectual Canon Holland condemned it in the pages of the church newspaper. Winnington-Ingram was exceptional and noteworthy even within the

[7] R. Jonas, *The tragic tale of Claire Ferchaud* (University of California Press, 2005)

Anglican Church for his wholehearted patriotic identification of nation and religion. In an interview with the New York Times in November 1914, given whilst wearing his khaki uniform as chaplain to the London Division, he stated that, 'I am speaking to you as a Christian and an Englishman…As an Englishman I would rather die than see England a German province and as a Christian I would rather die than see the triumph of the German's new God – might is right.'[8]

A more subtle reproach to enemy 'blasphemy' was the ostentatious humility of General Allenby when he conquered Jerusalem. Allenby walked into the Old City, in deliberate contrast to Kaiser Wilhelm who had ridden a white horse in triumph into the city before the war. Allenby let it be known that he would have been ashamed to ride a horse along the route that his Saviour had ridden on an ass. It is perfectly plausible that this was a genuine sentiment. It was also brilliant propaganda.

Atrocities and destruction of religious buildings fuelled negative stereotypes. Reims cathedral took on a totemic significance amongst the Entente powers as an exemplar of 'Hunnish' anti-Christianity in the German army. The French army had almost certainly used the Cathedral as an artillery observation post and the pictorial representations of the 'destruction' of the Cathedral were normally deeply misleading, through compounding real damage to secular buildings with the Cathedral itself in misleading perspectives. Still, the perception of an unwarranted attack on Europe's shared Christian heritage was strong.

The war also mobilized sentiment against 'infidels' in the vicinity of the front-lines and within multi-ethnic Empires. The research of John Horne and Allan Kramer has shown clearly that sectarian mythologies helped shape the behaviour of some German Protestant soldiers during the advance into Roman Catholic Belgium and northern France and even in German 'Alsace'. The fear of treacherous priests and their congregations unleashed fears of ancestral demons dating back to the Thirty Years War and more recently reinforced by the *kulturkampf*.

But prolonged contact could also undermine demonization. Patrick Houlihan has shown that over time there was an element of day to day religious rapprochement between the laity and

[8] A. Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War* (SCM, London 1978) is primarily responsible for the modern attention to this sermon.

clergy of Northern France and Belgium and their Roman Catholic co-religionists in the occupying German army.[9] (But not among the Jews, French Israelites being extremely patriotic and unwanting to meet "coreligionaires".)

An example of complexity in responses to the enemy is John Estremont Adams, the Presbyterian chaplain of the 6th Gordon Highlanders. At the Christmas truce in 1914 he held a joint service of burial for the British and German dead in 'No Man's Land', reading the 23rd Psalm for the soldiers of both sides. He was the ultimate source for the the 'Roman Catholic' Scottish chaplain in the 2005 film *Joyeux Noel*. But he was no pacifist; in 1917 he translated from French into English an account of German atrocities in Lorraine in order to combat war-weariness in the British population. Adams simultaneously wished to treat German soldiers as decent humans and hold to account the political and military leaders. Germany needed to cast out the 'scoundrels who dragged her into such decadence.' For Adams the British soldiers' sacrifices would redeem Germany from militarism and Britain from selfishness.[10]

It is worth remembering that the churches had a vested interest in the appearance of patriotism. This was particularly true when the church itself was suspect. After the February Revolution in 1917 Prince Lvov's government aggressively sought and obtained the dismissal of the reactionary and 'anti-patriotic' bishops. Under the suspicion of reactionary tendencies, the Orthodox church clung even more strongly to the concept of 'patriotic war'. As early as 12 March, Bishop Andrej of Ufa addressed a huge open air crowd outside Kazan cathedral in Petrograd calling for soldiers to 'Esteem your officers, be submissive to them and the enemy at the front will be broken'. The Synod sent out two obligatory sermons to the clergy backing the 1917 'Loan of Freedom' and the Liberal All Russian Congress of Democratic clergy and laymen opened their congress on 1 June with 'eternal remembrance of the fighters of freedom' meaning both revolutionaries and the war dead. On 4 June a *Te Deum* for victory was held in Red Square in Moscow and an equally premature victory procession was held outside St Isaacs Cathedral in Petrograd. The Church printed leaflets

[9] J. Horne and A. Kramer, *German Atrocities: A History of Denial* (Yale, 2001) particularly pp.104-107. P. J. Houlihan, 'Clergy in the trenches: Catholic Military Chaplains of Gemany and Austria Hungary during the First World War' (University of Chicago PhD 2011)

[10] The earliest account of the burial service is *The Scotsman* 31 December 1914, p.3; J. E. Adams, *Their Crimes* (London, Cassell, 1917)

quoting Matthew 10, 'I come not to bring peace but a sword', but perhaps a firm indication of the way that parts of the Church had quickly adapted to 'Western' liberal interpretation was the telegram sent to Kerensky, by the voice of the 'free church', *Golas rosbonoj cerkvi,* on the eve of the great offensive which stated, 'Call ye louder into the holy battle, into the last decisive battle so that war, that shame of the world, may be conquered by war'.[11]

1918 saw a rather different political adjustment occurring in Slovenia. Jasic, the Bishop of Ljubjana who had greeted the war in 1914 as a holy cause had evolved a markedly different position. The war had convinced him that the Monarchy was not serious about 'tricameralism' and that worse it had strengthened the position of 'irreligious' or even 'anti-religious' German and Magyar nationalism at the expense of shared Catholicism. Perhaps a South Slav state operating across ecumenical lines would be better for Slovenian Catholics than a Hapsburg state operating across national lines. Jasic would argue that his patriotic vision was consistent in favour of Catholic South Slav autonomy but that events had made him more confident of achieving that vision in union with Serbia than with Austria-Hungary. In a multi-faith and multi-ethnic continent there were many variants of both patriotism and religion and many possible configurations.

Bringing together many of the themes above is the case of the English nurse in occupied Belgium, Edith Cavell. A devout Anglican, she became involved in a network which aided Allied soldiers in escaping from German captivity, a duty that she saw as humanitarian, patriotic and religious. She was captured and sentenced to death in 1915. Her execution turned her into the pre-eminent patriotic and Christian martyr of the Allied cause. As such she contributed to the demonization of the enemy. Yet her explicit intent was very different. Speaking to the Anglican chaplain before her execution she famously stated, 'patriotism is not enough...I must have no bitterness towards anyone'. Her *Imitatio Christi* included acceptance and forgiveness. Paradoxically, the Christian fortitude that made her such a potent propaganda symbol during the war would make her equally appealing as a symbol of reconciliation and even pacifism afterwards. She serves as a bridge between acceptance of war and resistance to it.[12]

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[11] J.S.Cutiss, 'The Russian Orthodox Church and the Provisional Government' *American Slavic and East European review* 7 (1948), pp.237-250

[12] Diana Souhami, *Edith Cavell* (Quercus, London 2010)

Resistance

Religious resistance in wartime can be separated into two categories. The first is the role of religion in armed rebellion or active subversion against a combatant nation or Empire. Partially Islamic rebellions against *Entente* Empires, encouraged by Turkey and Germany, include to varying extents the Singapore mutiny in the British Indian Army in 1915, the Senussi revolt against British, French and Italian Empires in North and West Africa, various 'guerilla movements' in Mesopotamia, Persia and on the North West Frontier of India and a huge rebellion against the Russian Empire in the Central Asian 'emirates'. (so you put your jihad here, fine…)

Christian rebellion was less common, but some of the more ferocious Calvinists of the Dutch Reform Church were central to the short-lived Afrikaner uprising against British rule in 1914-15. The backcountry prophet Niklaas van Rensburg appears to have played a key role in persuading General Del Rey to join and lead the rebellion and the Calvinist piety of Afrikaner women pushed some of their menfolk into the field. Even more striking is the short-lived Chilembwe uprising in Nyasaaland. John Chilembwe was a charismatic Baptist preacher who became convinced that the outbreak of war heralded the 'end times' and that only his followers would be saved the cataclysm. Millenarian ideas spread by the 'watchtower movement' in South East Africa allowed him to gather the support of around a thousand followers leading to a brief and bloody uprising in January 1915 mostly targeted against oppressive white missionaries. The colonial police were able to kill Chilembwe and put down the rising.[13]

The Easter uprising in Dublin in 1916 drew heavily on specifically Roman Catholic imagery and inspiration. Indeed two major protagonists of that rebellion, Patrick Pearse and Joseph Plunkett, were noted for their intense piety whilst a third, the revolutionary socialist James Connolly, was conspicuously re-admitted to the church whilst awaiting execution. (On the other hand one of his fellow martyrs had made a point of eating a rare steak on the Good Friday Eve of the rebellion!) The Armenian resistance to the Turks both prior to and after the onset of genocide against the community was also heavily linked, as Armenian nationalism

[13] I. Linden, 'John Chilembwe and the New Jerusalem' *Journal of African History* 12 (1971), pp.629-651.

was in general, to a very specific religious identity. In Serbia at least one major leader of the *Komitadj* partisan bands was an Orthodox priest.

It may be objected that these were not rebellions against the war *as such*, but rather an attempt to transform the war into a struggle against local ethnic and religious enemies. This is undoubtedly true, but of course exactly the same 'revolutionary defeatism', effectively working on behalf of the 'national' enemy in the short term, was the avowed position of Lenin and the rationale for the October Revolution. In this sense the most extreme socialists were *also* not opponents of war.

Peaceable mass resistance to war measures was perhaps most conspicuous amongst Roman Catholics. In Canada, the Quebecois leader Henri Bourassa wrote on 31 December 1915, 'In the midst of this bloody orgy, one head stays cool, one voice continues to teach the world, proclaiming this war is infamous and asking kings and people to bring an end to this horrible killing. This voice is that of the pope.' Bourassa believed that the war was a divine punishment for historic sins against the Roman Catholic Church; the Orthodox Schism, the Reformation and the French Revolution.[14]

It is noteworthy that the Roman Catholic Church aligned with ethnic sentiment was the most effective opponent of conscription in the British Empire. Australian Roman Catholics, overwhelmingly of Irish decent, were the key constituency which defeated conscription in two referenda, led by the charismatic Cardinal Mannix. The opposition of the Catholic Church in Ireland likewise limited attempts at conscription in that country and undermined it further when it was finally legislated.

The position of the Papacy in favour of a negotiated peace became increasingly explicit from 1914 onwards. Giambista Della Chiesa had been elected to the throne of St Peter's in September 1914. He had been supported by an unlikely alliance of French and Hapsburg Cardinals, despite his relatively recent promotion to Cardinal. The former believed him to be sympathetic to France due to his connection with his Francophile mentor Cardinal Rampallo the latter supported him in preference to Rampallo who was strongly vetoed by the German cardinals, at least one of whom, the Archbishop of Cologne, was also strongly opposed to

[14] H. Bourassa,*Le Pape; Arbitre de la Paix* (Montreal 1918) p. 40. My translation.

Della Chiesa and tried to persuade the Hapsburg cardinals to oppose him. French enthusiasm gave way to a degree of disillusionment when Della Chiesa as Benedict XV emphasized his impartiality. In November 1914 he mooted the idea of a 'Truce of God' for Christmas 1914, a breathing space which would lead to a general peace conference. This call was ignored by all the powers and it is unlikely that the actual Christmas truces of 1914 were more than marginally influenced by this call. Benedict XV vigorously opposed Italian entry into the war; according to one sympathetic critic he was equally afraid of Italian defeat and Italian victory. He also threw the weight of the Vatican behind humanitarian melioration, particularly the condition of prisoners of war in all nations.

There is no reason to doubt that he took a principled personal humanitarian stance against the horror engulfing the continent and that he genuinely believed that the Vatican had to remain 'above the fray'. At the same time he was acutely aware of the *realpolitik* interests of the Church. A prolonged war threatened the faith of believers and the community of the universal church and the specific threat of the destruction of the Hapsburg Empire, though defeat, revolution or subordination to the German Reich would result in the loss of influence across Central Europe and potentially remove a crucial counterbalance to the 'secularist' states. In one respect Benedict was lucky by comparison with Pius XII during the Second World War: his humanitarian moral concerns and Vatican interests dovetailed without contradiction. They also corresponded with his personal piety. His Genoese devotion to the BVM as 'Queen of Peace' which he made specific in November 1915 and again in May 1917 provided an eschatological enthusiasm for the triumph of the Mother of God as the means to peace. His equally strong personal support for the cult of the Sacred Heart also partly explains the manifest coolness of the Vatican to attempts to annex the symbol by France in 1917-18.
The increasingly public condemnation of the war, described by the Pope as 'futile', created suspicion on both sides. In Italy he was increasingly referred to as 'Maladetto' by nationalists, who suspected him of pro-Austrianism. The still anti-clerical Benito Mussolini suspected priests of manipulating the women who publically protested against the war from late 1916 onwards. Although Benedict broke with the Papal tradition of ignoring the Italian state by directly addressing his peace note to King Victor Emmanuelle, the suspicion lingered in anticlerical circles that he was un-reconciled to Italian statehood.[15]

[15] J.Pollard, *The Unknown Pope: Benedict XV and the Pursuit of Peace* (Continuum, London, 1999).

The manifestations of the Virgin Mary at Fatima were the most dramatic intersection between Roman Catholic qualms about the on-going war and popular sentiment. The first appearance of the Virgin to the three children, most importantly Lucia Santos in May 1917, saw the BMV stating the need for revival and hinting at messages of great importance. The messages in June and July became more explicitly involved in the politics of the situation, with the claim that prayers with the rosary to Our Lady would bring about the end of the war. In August and September the local administrator, allegedly a freemason, detained the children, but the final apparition in October 1917, where more than 30,000 people claimed to have witnessed the sun 'dance' saw an explicit call for the end of the war and a demand to bring the troops home being articulated by Lucia as a message from the Virgin. This was a direct attack on the government policy of sending 4,000 men each month to maintain the expeditionary force in France.

Clerical and monarchist groups had been excluded from the secular government of Portugal (confusingly described as the 'sacred union') but until 1917 had hoped to accommodate with it. The Cardinal Patriarch of Lisbon had regularly prayed for 'peace and victory', but it is clear by 1917 the demand for peace was beginning to operate independently of the call for victory. The Portuguese soldier's prayer book, issued by a catholic association in 1917, had prominently featured a prayer to St Isabel who in the thirteenth century had performed a miracle to halt a battle between Portugal and Aragon. The prayer called on St Isabel, 'mother of peace and the nation…give us peace'. Scandals of maladministration and violent labour unrest were undermining the war effort and there can be little doubt that anti-war and anti-government forces embraced Fatima. The church hierarchy, in a pattern familiar from analogous visions with a potential political component at Marpingen and Lourdes were cautious at the time.

Lucia, who was clearly the main visionary, may also have been particularly concerned with the need for peace. It is alleged that she was extremely worried at the prospect of the conscription of her older brother. There remains doubt as to whether the original vision of the Virgin addressed the subject of the need to dedicate Russia to the Virgin; this part of the vision, so important in the later politics of Fatima was not a prominent feature in 1917.[16]

[16] F. Meneses, 'Rejecting total war: government mobilization and Conservative backlash in Portugal 1916-1917 *Ricerche Storiche* (September 1997), p.551-566

The role of the Roman Catholic church in the origins of the Reichstag Peace resolution is somewhat murky. There is no doubt that Matthias Erzberger retained strong links with the Vatican and was personally devout. At the start of 1917 he began to distance himself and by extension the Zentrum party of German Catholicism from the uncompromising support for maximum German war effort that had characterized his position for the first two years of the war. Thwarted personal ambition may have played a role in this. As it became clear that the 3rd OHL had little use for this most talented of German political leaders despite his intrigues on their behalf, Erzbeger began to look to a revived Reichstag as a check. Erzberger was in close contact with Rome though the mediation of Pacelli, the Papal Nuncio to Germany (later Pius XII.) But although the papacy clearly approved Erzberger's actions it did not instigate them. On the other hand the papal peace moves subsequent to the Reichstag peace resolution were almost certainly influenced by it; in fact the papacy seems to have actively tried to support both Pacelli and Erzberger by these moves and in turn this aroused the suspicion of both the more bigoted Prussian conservatives and the leaders of the Entente. The suspicions of Woodrow Wilson's Secretary of State, Robert Lancing, that the papal peace note was in some sense 'pro-German' was partially correct; the Pope was trying to strengthen the German moderates against the extremists who were striving for total victory at the risk of ruin.

In summary the Roman Catholic hierarchy tried with increasing vigour to act as a moderating force from 1917 onwards. This could have domestic consequences; for example the leadership of the Roman Catholic bishops played a crucial role in the second vote against conscription in Australia in 1917. But by 1917 most of the combatants were led by men who had ideological suspicions of the church, Anglo-Saxon and German Protestants or anti-clerical Freemasons. The Vatican really only had influence at the highest levels in Vienna and the consistent Austrian peace moves were doomed to futility.

Protestant war resistance was a much more individualistic or small communitarian affair. A partial exception was the Fellowship of Reconciliation in England. An initial meeting 28 December 1914 at Trinity College Cambridge brought together about 130 people to oppose the hatred created in war. It was an ecumenical group including for example the Anglican feminist Maude Royden. The secretary was Richard Roberts, a Welsh Presbyterian based in London. The chairman was Henry Hodgkin, a Quaker peace activist. Hodkin was acting in fulfilment of a vow made with the Lutheran Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze at Cologne

railway station on 3 August when they parted at end of an international ecumenical conference. Siegmund-Schultze for his part would pursue various humanitarian causes during the war and fall foul of the German Imperial authorities. Gijsbert Den Boggende argued in his doctoral thesis that although the FoR would become predominantly known for its support of conscientious objection, at the outset it had a programme that went far further than mere pacifism. It was driven by a genuine belief that the war could usher in the Kingdom of God, a millenarian view similar to some supporters of the war.[17]

English mainstream nonconformists generally supported the national cause but were notable for strongly resisting certain 'totalizing' tendencies in the prosecution of the war.
Two issues in particular stood out. All the free churches adamantly supported the right of 'conscientious objection' as a condition of agreeing to conscription, which most had opposed. Whilst free church ministers in some cases were keen to support voluntary enlistment they were deeply sensitive to the idea of tender consciences. The Society of Friends had to some extent compromised its unconditional pacifism and many Quakers joined up or undertook war work, but the Society remained united in its insistence that Quakers be allowed to express unconditional pacifism. Others such as the Presbyterians and Congregationalists were not themselves pacifist in doctrine, but vigorously defended the rights of others to be. The free churches and the vast majority of the Anglican ministry, up to and including the Episcopate, also took a firm line of opposition to the bombing of civilians in 'retaliation'. These stances were frequently unpopular, and much of the laity felt that the church was soft on 'conchies and Huns'.

In a series of other ways these churches sought to moderate the war. Nonconformists and Anglicans alike fretted over the prospect of moral degeneration and condemned both army brothels and the revival of compulsory medical inspection of suspected prostitutes.
The humane treatment of German prisoners of war and enemy civilian internees were unpopular causes embraced by Quakers and others. Liberal theologians kept contact with their German counterparts through the latter years of the war, leading in 1916 to the foundation of the World Federation of Churches. Compared to an 'ideal' stance of Christian

[17] Gijsbert Jacob den Boggende, 'The Fellowship of Reconciliation 1914-1954' (Doctoral Thesis, McMaster 1986)

pacifism, English protestants might seem temporizing; within the dynamics of 1914-18, their moderating instincts are rather impressive and they deserve fairer treatment.
The strongest form of protestant resistance to war was conscientious objection to conscription. In the United Kingdom the legislation was quite loosely worded to allow ethical objections to killing motivated by any form of personal belief, although in practice established membership of a historically pacifist religious group massively increased the likelihood of objection being granted. In the United States the objection clause of the Selective Service Act was applicable *only* to members of historically pacifist churches, which included the Christadelphian sect which had been founded after the American Civil War precisely for those for whom objection to military service was a central tenet of their faith. Church membership was defined as membership before April 1917.

In the USA even members of historically pacifist churches frequently suffered under the law. Many of the 'Dutch Anabaptist' pacifists, the Mennonites, Hutterites, Dunkers and Amish were punished for refusing to fulfil alternative civilian service, as were 'new' members of these groups. One paradoxical result was a great migration of these groups from the USA to Canada (west of Ontario), which despite having been longer committed to the war had a much more liberal policy fully exempting them from the war effort. In 1918 the persecution of Mennonites in the mid-west expanded to include the tarring and feathering of several Mennonites, including one pastor in Kansas, for initially refusing to subscribe to the 'Liberty Loan'.

There was little active opposition to the war from the pacifist sects within Germany. The numbers were small anyway: the vast majority of the radical pacifist groups of the Reformation had long since emigrated due to persecution and the newer groups were small scale imports largely from the USA. Such groups were open to suspicion as 'foreign' influences and some reacted quickly to quash potential hostility. The German Seventh Day Adventists for example officially dropped their objections to military service and involvement in worldly battles to demonstrate their patriotism. Whether this conformity was motivated primarily by fear of persecution or by a deep desire for acceptance is hard to tell. But the behaviour of the German Jewish community may provide a clue.

Native born German Jews were overwhelmingly affiliated with 'Reform Judaism' which from the outset had stressed the identity of Jews as patriotic Germans. This identity had been

strongly demonstrated in previous wars but the First World War was perfectly cast for German Jews to emphasize their loyalty, which they did overwhelmingly. Patriotism was highly valued and instinctive. Religious Jews were just as strongly motivated to support the war effort as the lapsed and some went further embracing the idea of liberating their co-religionists from the persecution of the Russian 'pogrom-lander'. French citizen Jews, also well assimilated, similarly embraced the Republic and non-citizen immigrant Jews rushed to enlist in the Foreign Legion. The aftermath of the Dreyfus affair made the Jewish community grateful to Republican ideology and at the same time sensitive to any slurs of lack of patriotism.

The story in other countries was far more complicated. As a general rule the most assimilated and least religious Jewish communities were the strongest backers of the national effort, indeed there even were nominally Jewish 'Young Turks' in the Turkish CUP government. It was partly in an attempt to counter this perceived 'Jewish' influence that the British turned towards the idea of fulfilling the messianic dream of a Jewish national home thought the Balfour declaration. It was also hope that such a move would spark enthusiasm for the *Entente* cause amongst American Jews, both secular and religious.

Before US entry into the war majority American Jewish opinion was probably more drawn to the argument that German forces were liberators. This was also of course the majority opinion amongst German Jews. But as the war dragged on there was an interesting development amongst a minority of German Jewish intellectuals. The initial impulse to civilize the *Ostjuden* gave way to a growing admiration. The 'medievalism' that had been an indictment of backwardness took on a more attractive aspect. The dogged inwardness of the *Shtetl* community and the practice of mystical religion as a resistance to nationalism, the state and modernity began to look less like a failing and more like a virtue.

The influence of Hassidic tinged orthodoxy can be seen in the work of Martin Buber. He had been drawn to the world of the *Ostjuden* even before the war, but after a brief flirtation with liberationist tendencies he returned in 1916 to his effort to incorporate the lessons of Hassidism into a modern theology. The result *I and Thou* with its stress on interpersonal connectedness as the essence of spirituality would become the most important theological text of the Twentieth Century for Jews and Christians alike and is both a product of the war

and in a profound sense, an act of resistance to it, to the denial of shared humanity that makes killing possible.

Endurance

Religious faith could assist with enduring the war in two theoretically distinct ways, practical magic and existential meaning. The former might help the believer guard against earthly misfortune by personal prayer, ritual and talisman. The latter could provide consolation in the face of misfortune through acceptance of the purposes of God and hope in the afterlife. Yet in reality these two dimensions were bound to overlap.

It is perhaps tempting to see 'superstitious' practices of ritual and talisman as deeper rooted in the more 'magical' practices of Roman Catholic popular piety as opposed to the greater emphasis on personal faith in Protestantism. Yet it is clear that for Anglo-Saxon and German Protestants the vernacular bible served a remarkably similar purpose to the Roman Catholic rosary, both as physical protection from danger and as contemplative aid for prayer. It is tempting to see such things, as some more austere chaplains did, as simply superstitious practices. But it is worth remembering that in the face of danger 'Pascal's Gamble' was a two way bet. Religious talismans, like purely superstitious ones, might provide mundane protection from death and maiming. But unlike purely superstitious talismans, they could, in the worst case, act as passports to paradise. Either way they could help control and conquer fear.

However much the French state disapproved, it is impossible to ignore the enthusiasm for the Sacred Heart specifically as a protective talisman, both at the front and in the rear. The Catholic press was full of stories of how units that carried the Sacred Heart banner and individuals carrying badges had emerged unscathed from prolonged bombardments whilst their less pious colleagues had been slaughtered. Of course, a Voltairean sceptic might respond that this was only likely to be reported when it worked. Similarly the devout Protestant Londoner Private Len Smith after a near miss that killed many of his comrades wrote to his parents in May 1915 of his belief that reading the psalms had protected him.[18]

[18] L. Smith, *Drawing Fire*, (Harper Collins, London 2009), pp. 338-339. A. Becker, *La Guerre et La Foi* (Armand Colin, Paris 1994)

The interface between magic and meaning was found in the miracle. Many French Catholics took the idea of the 'miracle of the Marne' literally, pointing to the intensive vigils of intercessionary prayers in Paris as having caused the retreat of the German Army. In Britain the idea of divine intervention saving the BEF after Mons in the form of 'angels' grew in strength in 1915, with prominent clergymen, principally but not exclusively Anglican, endorsing the idea of divine intervention. But the 'Angels of Mons' are also a cautionary tale for the historian tempted to lump together all manifestations of the 'supernatural' and 'paranormal' against the rational. The main critic of the legend was the author Arthur Machen who claimed, with some reason, that his short story 'The Bowmen' was the source of the legend. Machen was a pagan occultist, a member of the 'Order of the Golden Dawn' who was disgusted by the use of the story to bolster traditional Christianity. Machen believed in magic, but not divine miracles. His position was supported by the Institute of Psychical Research, the main body of 'scientific spiritualism' who supported the idea of 'paranormal' phenomena, but not 'supernatural' ones.[19]

Indeed it is worth remembering that at the heart of the wartime boom in 'spiritualism' in the United Kingdom were men of a distinctly empirical frame of mind, such as Arthur Conan Doyle and Oliver Lodge. Undoubtedly their personal experiences of bereavement made them more open to wanting to believe in the paranormal, but they also believed that the 'other world' was supported by evidence. In Conan Doyle's case this even led him to be taken in by photographic evidence of 'fairies at the bottom of the garden' in 1917. However improbable, if another explanation was impossible (and he was unable to explain how it could have been faked), it had to be true. Such beliefs were not at all the same as the widespread 'prophecy' in the British Army that the war would come to an end when the 'leaning Virgin' of Albert toppled from its precarious position on the church spire, a folkloric superstition in the strictest sense.

More orthodox religious figures worried about the temptations of spiritualism. George Adam Smith, a Scottish minister and Vice Chancellor of Aberdeen University made a series of speeches in America in 1918 which were collected in a volume dedicated to his two sons killed in the war. After describing wartime religious revival he noted :

[19] D. Clarke, *The Angel of Mons: Phantom, Soldiers and Ghostly Guardians* (Wiley, Chicester, 2007).

Side by side with this faith, there have been produced, as you know among many of our mourners- more in England than in Scotland- those revivals of 'spiritualism', which the experience of war so often seems to favour. The temptation to seek physical communication with the beloved dead is a very ancient and most natural one …we have among ourselves proofs that the habit does weaken the judgement of those who seek the dead by such ways and does taint the characters of the media who profess to satisfy them.[20]

The question of enduring faith, conversion or loss of faith amongst men serving in the armed forces is almost impossible to answer definitively because of three crucial variables, the pre-war background, the varied nature of war experience and the observer biases in sources. Sometimes religious faith would produce reactions which to a modern sensibility are repugnant. Borsi noted in his spiritual journal:

This morning at five, not far from our camp at Dolegena, one of our soldiers, a cowardly treacherous deserter who has stained his honor on the field of battle before the enemy was shot. When I learned of it last night, my first feeling was one of horror pity and repugnance. Yet justice must be done. Let us hope the soul of this wretch, assisted by one of Thy weeping priests, is now saved, received by Thy infinite mercy…our mercy would be weakness.[21]

The author would nevertheless find his faith challenged by the sordid deaths of comrades though disease in camps behind the lines. Nevertheless he embraced the personal martyrdom of death in battle which came to him in October 1915. Highly self-consciously religious young middle class men of this kind could be found in abundance in all the armies and propagandistic works by Maurice Barres for France and after the war by Philip Witkop for Germany collected their testimonies, but historians have rightly distrusted them as unrepresentative. On the other hand contemporary surveys of religion in the armed forces present their own problems of bias.

Similar religious practices could be treated very differently as evidence by different observers. For example the types of religious observance amongst British soldiers found in both the Anglican and Roman Catholic studies of religious belief in the BEF are clearly very similar, but the Anglican report is pessimistic about the spiritual state of the Tommy and the Roman Catholic report quite positive. Both were operating within traditional modes set well before the war, the Anglican report bemoaning the failure of the church to transform the

[20] Sir George Adam Smith, *Our common conscience* (Doran, New York, 1919), p.171

[21] p.248

spirituality of the nation, the Catholic one celebrating the advance of the true religion. In most armies reports on soldiers' religion suggest that men who had a robust faith before the war tended to maintain it. This for example was the conclusion of the Slovenian enquiry, which also suggested that pre-war waverers might be losing faith. Bavarian enquiries suggested that front-line soldiers were more likely to hold to their faith due to the constant reminders of mortality and that loss of faith was more likely amongst troops in the rear areas. But there is also a real suggestion that prolonged exposure to arbitrary death could undermine faith in God's providence. The battles of 1916 may have been something of a turning point for the German armies. At the start of the battle of the Somme positive references to God and religion are still commonplace in the written accounts of German soldiers, but by the end of 1917 they seem to be becoming rare except in the accounts of chaplains. Amongst Slovenian soldiers forms of piety seem to have continued, but in line with the Vatican the desire for and prayers for peace became increasingly prominent and 'victory' became less mentioned. Throughout the war votive offerings and promises of such offerings remained popular, soldiers pledging to add statues and other icons to shrines if they were spared to return home. Indeed after the war surviving Slovenian troops made a prominent annual pilgrimage to one shrine of the Virgin.

The letters of Indian soldiers serving in the British army show that religion played a significant part in sustaining the men at the front. Both Hindu and Muslim Indians were imbued with a strong sense of 'fate' determining their lives, in this sense they were pre-adapted for the randomness of industrial war. Religion also an important category of making sense of the strangeness of the environment. One Muslim Indian soldier in Egypt was struck that Egyptian celebrations of Id were very different. An apparently proto-Gandhian Hindu soldier wrote of the French civilians:

> The morals are also good as regards civilization, but as regards spirituality I am very sorry. They are all for sensual enjoyments. It seems to me that eat drink and be merry is the motto of their life. They have a Catholic religion which is almost reduced to nothing but etiquettes. And owing to this weakness they are very weak in spiritual morality and at best I come to the conclusion that with the loss of spiritual strength, they will lose their national strength, as India did.[22]

[22] D. Omissi (ed), *Indian Voices of the Great War* (Macmillan, London,. 1999), p.65

In fact civilians were probably aided more consistently by their faith. In rural Bavaria soldiers widows 'meekly bore their fate' according to one priest. Women also comforted one another with piety: 'Dear God will continue to look after us. He is our best father who takes care of widows and orphans...No one who has sought refuge in him has ever been turned away.' The Sacred Heart cult, with its emphasis on humility and self-denial, also helped rural women deal with wartime over-work and impoverishment. This was true in many devout rural areas such as the Vendée, Bavaria and Slovenia. Local pilgrimages and annual ceremonies took on even greater importance, for example Corpus Christi processions in small Slovenian towns.

It is perhaps unsurprising that rural civilians, particularly women, drew great support from the church. This could even be the case in the most practical of matters, communication. In many parts of Europe female illiteracy was still common and the village priest might take on the role of intermediary correspondent between women and their absent husbands. Priests who were already counsellors and confessors were natural sources of support. But one might also speculate that this role was strongest in the areas where rural female piety was already strongest; particularly the 'Counter Reformation' districts of Bavaria, parts of Western France and the Hapsburg Empire.

Of course female piety was not unknown in the urban environment. But it seems to have been a more informal and perhaps fragile affair. Work on middle class London civilians does suggest various forms of Christianity playing an important role as a source of strength and endurance. Likewise some middle class Parisian women also seem to have found their faith a source of comfort. But evidence of the role of the faith in working class communities is harder to pin down. Sarah Williams suggests that working class women used churches as an important social resource for comfort in wartime London. The stability of Anglican attendance figures for Easter communion during the war in the absence of men killed or absent overseas must imply an *increase* in female attendance.[23]

The war probably had a similar effect in cities of all the major combatants, increasing the already established sense that religion was in some sense 'women's business'. Just as in the long nineteenth century this had resulted in providing opportunities for women to attain prominence (for example see Edith Cavell and Claire Ferchaud above), and at the same time

[23] S.Williams, *Popular Culture and Religious Belief: Southwark 1880-1939* (Oxford UP, 1999).

worried the male clerical hierarchy. It is worth remembering that as with all parts of civilian society the war placed the churches under extraordinary pressure. Wartime inflation increased costs, social welfare and charitable expenditures increased the financial burden even further and key male personnel, both lay and clerical, were absorbed into the war effort. Although the clergy were generally exempt from military service, tens of thousands of the youngest and fittest volunteered as chaplains and in some nations for combatant service. Maurice Barrès in *Les diverses familles spirituelles de la France* (1917) noted 25,000 priests in the army of which only 3,000 were official chaplains. In September 1915 alone 156 monks and priests were killed in action and 3754 had been killed by January 1917. One of them, Abbé Gaston Millon wrote from Verdun in 1916

I am meditating upon his phrase of Joffre, 'Our victory will be the fruit of individual sacrifice'. Sacrifice remains the one great law. Jesus Christ Himself has given us the example. The church lives through the virtue of the her Master and of his disciples , virtue is only acquired through sacrifices, sacrifice unto death.

He was killed on Easter Sunday.[24]

The result of clerical service in the military was that the increased demand for sacramental services fell very heavily on a diminished pool of older and less healthy priests. In this respect the experience of the clergy mirrored other civilian professions, but with the added burden in the cities where clerical resources were already stretched very thin before the war. Similarly the physical churches deteriorated with the lack of money for repair, heating and light. In Germany by 1917 the churches were 'persuaded' to give up their bells to the war effort. In the circumstances the hopes for widespread religious revival which had greeted the outbreak of the war were bound to be disappointed. Furthermore all churches became increasingly aware that hopes of moral revival were optimistic in wartime conditions. Civilians and soldiers alike increasingly sought solace in sex and alcohol as much or more than in prayer and attempts by the churches to 'police' and suppress such activities created irritation in working class communities that had always suspected the moral mission of the church to be a cover for middle class interference in their lives.[25]

[24] Barrès, p.35-41 in the English translation of 1918.

[25] A. Gregory and A. Becker, 'Religious Sites and Practices' in *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin* Vol II (CUP, 2007)

Left wing contemporaries and many modern historians both socialist and feminist perceived the role of the wartime church primarily as a mechanism of social control by elites. There is doubtless some truth in this, but it seems possible, indeed likely, that the main significance of religion was its role in bolstering the endurance of those elites themselves. It might seem odd to consider the endurance of political and military leaders given their apparent privilege, but the stresses of wartime command could be intense, involving great responsibilities and often supplemented by deep personal loss within families. As the war progressed there seems to have been a marked tendency in the West for those with explicit and conventional religious belief to cope better than those without.

In the French case the leadership of the army became progressively more devout as the war continued. Joffre had proved robust despite his indifference, but by 1918 the high command was dominated by men of piety: Foch, Castelnau and Fayolle were strong believers. Fayolle's *Cahier Secret* is full of references to his faith and in a remarkable series of entries during the great crisis of Easter 1918 he explicitly interprets the defeat and revival of the allied armies in terms of the passion and resurrection. By contrast the anti-clerical Sarrail was ultimately a failure and side-lined. Pétain is a slightly odd case: he was a conventional churchgoer, but at the same time doesn't seem to have been strongly motivated by religion and opposed the cult of the Sacred Heart in the army (which Foch allegedly favoured). Indeed Petain's preference for the practical and the material over 'faith' and the 'spiritual' marks him out from both Catholic and secular rivals.

The Presbyterian piety of Field Marshal Haig is well known and his trust in divine providence central to his capability for endurance in the face of disaster. Trusting in God's favour reinforced resilience in commanders which might lead them to persist in mistaken policies but equally insulated them from panic. Conventional piety was probably a better source of comfort than heterodoxy or deep spirituality. For example, Moltke the Younger was drawn to more occult religion and this led to the worst of all worlds, a combination of fatalism and doubt. The same appears to be true of Ludendorff, whilst the conventional Protestants Von Mackensen and Hindenburg were more robust. A similar observation might be made about monarchs; Kaiser Wilhelm, Tsar Nicholas, Archduke Karl and King George all clearly took their religion seriously but King George, who probably thought about it least, may have derived the most benefit.

David Lloyd George does seem to have benefited from his strong Protestant background, although his religion was perhaps more outwardly than inwardly directed and its principle virtue was the revivalist sermon quality of his rhetoric. Woodrow Wilson shared this quality, but the inward element was more profound; a strange mix of Calvin and Hegel. The great exception was Clemenceau. To describe him as a man without spirituality would clearly be a mistake, but it is best described as eighteenth century pantheism and was most strongly expressed in his passion for Monet. His contempt for organised religion was consistent, but at the same time he was able to build a temporary if stormy partnership with Foch, if not without some memorable profanity.

Conclusion

The war certainly had profound impacts on religion. The political upheavals of war created a crisis of church-state relations in many places. In Ireland the Roman Catholic hierarchy openly opposed the introduction of conscription. In Athens in 1916 the archbishop publically pronounced an anaethema on Prime Minister Venizelos in front of a burning effigy of the politician. Revolution induced a crisis in the theology of the German Evangelical church which moved form a Lutheran obedience to authority to a position of distrust towards the Weimar Republic. In Russia the October revolution interrupted a great moment of reform in the Orthodox Church and ushered in a terrible era of persecution. Even in the United Kingdom the established church felt impelled to embark on a process of reform and ultimately democratization.

The destruction of the Ottoman Caliphate would become a defining event for twentieth century Islam, arguably the Caliphate became much more important as a memory than it had been in existence. The war also accelerated the tragic and brutal destruction of the old Middle Eastern churches. The prophecies Fatima and the memory of Benedict XV would become increasingly central to the twentieth century papacy. Finally Buber's wartime encounter with mysticism would help reshape both Judaism and ultimately Christianity in coping with a century of political horror.

Should the First World War be seen as a great war of religion? The answer is a frustrating yes and no. We should probably avoid stretching the definition of religion to the point where the

concept of religious war becomes circular and the support for the war in itself becomes a manifestation of a religious sentiment. We need to limit the concept of 'wartime religion' and at the same time be highly sensitive to the nuances and complexities of actual religions in their practices and beliefs. But we also need to acknowledge that religious practices, language and imagery were intimately engaged in making sense of 'war experience'.

The categories of acceptance, endurance and resistance were not exclusive. The American Alvin York was a devout member of the Church of Christ, but contrary to mythology he never claimed to be a conscientious objector, although he did write on the back of his draft card, which has been preserved, 'I don't want to fight'. He wrestled with whether the war was justified, in part because he was convinced that if it was not he would be killed. He spent two days and a night praying and in the end 'received direct assurance from God' that the cause was just and he would be safe in both this life and the next, so he accepted his conscription. His pastor attempted to get him out of the army on the grounds that his church was pacifist, but York was now comfortable with service. He was a superb marksman from the backwoods Tennessee. During the battle of the Argonne, he famously killed over 20 Germans. He did so automatically in the heat of the moment, but the killing quickly sickened him and he called on the enemy to surrender, which they did. York, with little assistance, took 132 prisoners.

All of York's experience was filtered through his religious framework and he read the Bible continually at the front. The battlefield seemed to him the realm of the Anti-Christ and Armageddon. He trusted in the Lord to see him through the valley of death. He bonded with comrades in religious discussion. After the fight he mourned above all his friend Corporal Savage with whom he would 'never again talk about his faith and pray'. He also prayed for dead comrades and enemies in a broader sympathy:

I prayed for the Greeks and the Italians, the Poles and the Jews and the others. I done prayed for the Germans too. They were all brother men of mine. Maybe their religion was different, but I reckon we all believed in the same God and I wanted to pray for all of them.[26]

[26] Alvin York's diary and his draft card can be viewed online. For the strength and persistence of religious motivation amongst US Soldiers see J.Ebel, *Faith in the Fight: Religion and the American Soldier in the Great War* (Princeton, 2010)

York killed efficiently, but hated doing it and doubted whether it was right. He endured the front whilst viewing the war as an abomination. He was confident in his own survival and salvation, but hoped for the same to be granted to his enemies. His faith was never shaken and operated both alongside and at odds with his conventional patriotism. His ambiguities never entirely went away; he was always willing to condemn war, but equally quick to try to re-enlist in the infantry in 1941. He founded a humble bible school but was not averse to enjoying his new-found fame. In short he seems an odd and contradictory character, accepting, resisting and enduring the war according to the light of his faith. But York wasn't unique. In fact it is likely that there were hundreds of thousands like him. Religion helped make war possible, but it also helped limit it.