



**HAL**  
open science

# ”ONWARD, CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS”: THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

John Mullen

► **To cite this version:**

John Mullen. ”ONWARD, CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS”: THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR. Séminaire CIMMA, 2011, Créteil, France. hal-02586065

**HAL Id: hal-02586065**

**<https://normandie-univ.hal.science/hal-02586065v1>**

Submitted on 15 May 2020

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L’archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d’enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

**“ONWARD, CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS”: THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND IN THE  
FIRST WORLD WAR**

**JOHN MULLEN UNIVERSITE DE PARIS EST CRETEIL**

Intervention au séminaire CIMMA (IMAGER) le 11 février 2011.

This contribution will examine the activity of the Anglican Church during the First World War, and the debates and reforms in the Church provoked by the war. The Anglican religion is of course composed of a series of ethical and theological beliefs, but it is also an *established* church - an ideological institution linked to the state, and it is a mass cultural activity. We will need to keep in mind the relatively broad nature of the Church of England, encompassing both a High Church wing, close in ceremony, liturgy and theology to the Roman Catholic Church, and a Low Church wing, with simpler ceremonies and practices closer to other protestant churches such as the Methodists.

**Support for the empire**

From the very beginning of the war, the Church of England confirmed its role as an important ideological support for the state. This was not the first time the Anglican Church had been active in supporting the Empire's wars, though the Crimean War in the 1850s was the last during which the Church had declared national days of fasting and prayer. Perhaps one of the most emblematic examples of Church support for the government in the Great War is the written reply of the Archbishop of Canterbury when asked, a few days before the outbreak, to sign a petition in favour of a policy of non-intervention. He wrote: "I could not

possibly sign it without an assurance that it was on lines which the government would find helpful and not harmful” (Wilkinson 18).

Once the war was underway, support for the empire’s cause was unhesitant. The Bishop of London, Arthur Winnington-Ingram, became known as a fiery orator for the cause:

[Let us] band in a great crusade... to kill Germans. To kill them, not for the sake of killing, but to save the world; to kill the good as well as the bad; to kill the young men as well as the old, to kill those who have shown kindness to our wounded as well as those fiends who crucified the Canadian sergeant...to kill them lest the civilization of the world should itself be killed. (Moynihan 15)

Winnington-Ingram liked to repeat that the war was a combat “between nailed hand and mailed fist”, that is, between the suffering Jesus, dying for man’s sins, and brute violence. Speaking at meetings of the Anglican Women’s Union, he asked wives to be sure that their husbands volunteered for the forces, and didn’t hesitate to repeat doubtful stories of German war crimes, such as the story of an officer who had found, in the trenches, a young woman, entirely naked, whose breasts had been cut off by German soldiers. According to another priest, Basil Bouchier, German soldiers, when occupying a town, cut the breasts off wooden statues of the Virgin Mary if they found them in the churches (Wilkinson 93-95).

For Winnington-Ingram, the soldiers were carrying out a sacred duty:

I am perfectly certain that boys who have gone out to the war... are using force as a preliminary to establishing a better world, and they are just as much ministers of God in using force as any ministers of religion. I believe that

those boys who have died, just as He who died on Good Friday, died for the salvation and good of the world.” (*The Scotsman*, 5 June 1917)

Winnington-Ingram was not an exception. John Percival, the Bishop of Hereford, for example, who had, before the outbreak of war, defended British neutrality, wrote in 1915 that the Germans were not in fact Christian : “We are the predestined instruments to save the Christian civilization of Europe from being overcome ... by a brutal and ruthless military paganism” (Wilkinson 26).

And the Reverend Basil Bouchier wrote :

The Christian man never had less cause for misgiving in being a soldier. This truly is a war of ideals. Odin is ranged against Christ, and Berlin is seeking to prove its supremacy over Bethlehem. Every shot that is fired, every bayonet thrust that gets home, every life that is sacrificed, is, in very truth, ‘for His Name’s sake’ (Wilkinson 254).

One final example – the Reverend Tanner, chaplain of an elite private school before becoming an army chaplain, and present at the Battle of Passchendaele wrote “Bravely they fought and proudly they died in the greatest and most sacred cause in which men have ever taken up arms” (Moynihan 146). This last example underlines the fact that warmongering statements were not limited to clergy safely ensconced back in Britain: Tanner had seen first-hand the horrors of war, and describes in his writings the carnage, and the severely wounded men begging him to kill them.

### **Following the elites**

These warmongering statements, perhaps surprising to us, a century later, who have little experience of such strands of Christianity, need to be put in context. Though a powerful player, the Church of England was far from the only institution to stoke the fires of jingoism

in 1914. The most prominent feminists cheered for the war: imprisoned suffragettes were freed, while the newspaper of the Women's Social and Political Union was changed from *The Suffragette* to *Britannia* and campaigned for conscription. Emmeline Pankhurst, leader of suffragette hunger strikes only months before, declared in Plymouth in November 1914 "If you go to this war and give your life, you could not end your life in a better way - for to give one's life for one's country, for a great cause, is a splendid thing" (Purvis 272).

Trade Union leaders such as Ben Tillett and Tom Mann, who had led bitter strikes in the 1890s and were considered as heroes by wide sections of the working class, gave outspoken and practical support to the war drive (Tillett). Lord John French, Commander-in-Chief of the British Armed Forces, would praise publicly Ben Tillett's war work, and Tillett would become head of a government propaganda unit.

Practically all of the leading intellectuals of the time behaved similarly. Rudyard Kipling had always been an enthusiastic supporter of the British Empire, and he was joined in writing pro-war pamphlets by G. K. Chesterton and Arthur Conan Doyle. Even those intellectuals who have maintained a reputation as peace-lovers, such as George Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells, clearly desired a British victory. In 1916, the only time when the anti-war movement in Britain gained substantial support, Wells denounced it in the press (*The Herald* May 27 1916).

The popular stars of the time – singers and comics of the music hall such as Harry Lauder, George Robey and Vesta Tilley, and top Shakespearean actress Lena Ashwell also threw themselves heart and soul into supporting the war, and many appeared on recruitment platforms. It seemed that the pro-war atmosphere was extremely difficult to oppose. Even a small religious group like the Quakers, who had a long tradition of pacifism, found that a third of their men of military age ended up in the forces (Wilkinson 21). The anti-war

movement, though it had its weekly paper, *The Herald*, was unable to mobilize large numbers of people, except for a few months in 1916.

The Church of England was, then, in many ways, reacting in the same way as most institutions of the time. It did however put forward specific pro-war arguments of its own. It made liberal use of the powerful biblical imagery of purification through sacrifice, but also of other scriptural references, perhaps mostly aimed at the middle-class section of its congregation. The invasion of Belgium by the German army was compared to the occupation, by Ahab, of the vineyard belonging to Naboth, since, as recounted in the First Book of Kings, God had sanctioned severe punishment for Ahab's crime. The war was presented both as a sacred duty for Englishmen, and simultaneously as a punishment from God for the sins of all nations (Wilkinson 9).

### **Anti-war clergy – an embattled minority**

Only a handful of clergymen spoke against the war. A certain Henry Cecil organized anti-war meetings in response to church-organized pro-war meetings. He was much criticized, but his bishop refused to dismiss him. The headmaster of Eton College gave a sermon in 1915 at Saint Margaret's church, only a stone's throw from the Houses of Parliament, in which he underlined the importance of loving one's enemy, and defended the principle of a just peace at the end of the war, without annexations by either side<sup>1</sup>. He then had to leave the church by a side entrance, since groups of hostile demonstrators in front of the church were singing patriotic songs to protest against his position. The Archbishop of York, whose interventions were less bold, nevertheless received by post 24 German Iron Cross bravery medals from his critics ! Anglican opinion rejected pacifism to such an extent that out of the 16 500 British conscientious objectors in the First World War, only 7% were Anglicans, though Anglicans made up over 80% of the population (Wilkinson 53-4).

## **Recruitment and morale**

The established church did keep a certain minimum independence from the state. The government demand in November 1915 that all churchmen should call from the pulpit on Sunday for men to join up was met with a refusal, (although the Bishops' pastoral letter did so call). And all the Bishops, even the Bishop of London, refused to support the demand for reprisal bombings of German towns, after the bombing of some English coastal towns in 1914 and 1915.

Each vicar was left free to decide whether to participate in recruitment and morale campaigns or not, and some clerics joined morale-boosting tours of troop camps in France. One of the best-known, Geoffrey Kennedy, seconded to the army bayonet training corps, would go from camp to camp accompanied by a boxer, two wrestlers and one "star officer" who boasted of having killed eighteen Germans with his bayonet. Kennedy would fight a few rounds against the boxer (perhaps to establish virile credentials) before giving a sermon to prepare the men for battle, and distributing gift boxes of cigarettes, and a New Testament (Wilkinson 136).

But other kinds of active support for the war were more common : many thousands of vicars campaigned for contributions to war loans, which were considered both a patriotic duty and as encouraging protestant values of thrift. Many churches were active in collecting cigarettes to send out to soldiers, and collecting money to help care for the wounded. Campaigns to respect rationing, and to cut down on consumption were seen both as a way to support the empire and as part of a Christian tradition of moderation. In addition, vicars encouraged women to work in the munitions factories.

It is likely that the Church of England was even more important for maintaining the morale of middle and upper class officers than of working class rank and file soldiers, since

its influence was stronger in elite circles. Indeed Sir John French wrote to the Bishop of London to say “Five minutes of you cheers me up. Come out for ten days” (Carpenter 283). Georgina Lee, a high society lady whose war diaries were recently published, refers frequently to the importance for her and her family of the patriotic sermons (Roynon, *passim*)

### **Pastoral work**

The Church’s pastoral work in Britain had to be adapted to wartime needs. Clergy organized regular days of prayer for the population in Britain, when prayers were said for the success of British troops in battle, but also for the sick and the wounded among German soldiers (Roynon 74). The first Sunday of 1916 was declared a national “Day of Prayer and Humiliation”. The local vicar would also generally visit the families of men in his parish who had joined the army, give his blessing to the new recruit, and warn him of the dangers of vice and drink. Officers from the elite received privileged treatment: the Archbishop of Canterbury drew up a list of names for special prayers, essentially men from wealthy and influential families who had become senior officers (Roynon 23). Let us remember that two thirds of students from Oxford and Cambridge – at that time infinitely more elitist institutions than they are today – joined the army or the navy (Roynon 90).

### **The Church in France**

Vicars in the army on the Western Front, as in Britain, identified completely with the empire’s cause. Altars were decorated with union jacks or with red white and blue carpeting, and the subjects of sermons would sometimes be chosen for the chaplains by senior officers (Wilkinson 152). The clergy gave encouraging speeches before battles (Moynihan 16), or organized silent prayers en masse before an attack. In all, 40 million religious books and



pamphlets were handed out. Typical content would be the Gospel of Saint John accompanied by the words of a few popular hymns such as the following :

Rock of Ages

Sun of My Soul

Oh God Our Help in Ages Past

Abide With Me<sup>ii</sup>

Onward Christian Soldiers<sup>iii</sup>

Eternal Father, Strong to Save<sup>iv</sup>

Sunday Church Parades, sometimes addressed by bishops in military uniform, were obligatory for all soldiers, separate ones being organized for Roman Catholics. Many vicars defended the compulsory nature of weekly church parades, one going as far as to describe them as “a weekly spiritual kit inspection” (Moynihan 146).

Since priests and vicars were excluded from conscription<sup>v</sup> once this was brought in in 1916, they were present at the front voluntarily and almost always as officially appointed salaried chaplains (“padres”). A small number of clergy preferred to share the living conditions of the ordinary soldiers, and enrolled as Privates instead. During the early years of the war, the chaplains were not allowed in the front line trenches but later generals demanded that the chaplains be in the front line with the men.

Certain ex-soldiers have been very critical of the Army chaplains. Certainly their absence at the front lines in the first part of the war was unlikely to increase their popularity, but also “the Padres, being officers, lived at ease, and whereas the men had poor food, they ate and drank in the company of officers.” (Holmes 507)

Robert Graves was particularly negative:

For Anglican regimental chaplains we had little respect. If they had shown one-tenth the courage, endurance and other human qualities that the regimental doctor showed, the British Expeditionary Force might well have started a religious revival. (Moynihan 13)

Whereas the vicar Edward Woods explained:

The hardest line ever drawn in human society is that between officers and men ... they live in two different worlds and the chaplain lives in the officers' world (Wilkinson 146).

Those clergy who showed they were prepared to risk their lives personally were by far the most respected by ordinary soldiers; one or two, like the larger-than-life "Tubby" Clayton, who ran a rest club for soldiers, became real popular heroes among the soldiers (Clayton).

It seems that if soldiers universally demanded a Christian burial for the fallen, and if the Christian hymns were tremendously popular, padres had great difficulties getting ordinary soldiers to come to communion services. The diary entry of one padre "About twenty communicants – mostly officers" is quite typical (Moynihan 25). Another chaplain on a boat of 1500 troops said only eleven came to his communion service (Moynihan 94).

Distributing cigarettes was a major occupation, but duties were sometimes far more gruesome – chaplains habitually stayed with the condemned during the night preceding an execution, to pray with them for God's mercy. By the end of the war the army counted 3 745 chaplains, around half of them Anglicans, others Catholic, nonconformist and Jewish . Mortality rates were much lower than for other members of the armed forces: 4.4% of Anglican chaplains were killed, and 5.6% of other chaplains.

## The National Mission

It was commonly claimed that the war would bring national renewal and an increased sense of social justice and ethical responsibility. Lloyd George declared :

I see a new recognition amongst all classes, high and low, shedding themselves of selfishness, a new recognition that the honour of a country does not depend merely on the maintenance of its glory in the stricken field, but in protecting its homes from distress as well. It is a new patriotism; it is bringing a new outlook for all classes. A great flood of luxury and of sloth which had submerged the land is receding, and a New Britain is appearing. We can see for the first the fundamental things that matter in life and that have been obscured from our vision by the tropical growth of prosperity (*East Carmarthen News*, 24 September 1914).

Such ideas of renewal were also common in the church, and a one-month long “national mission” was launched in 1916, with the hope of making a religious renewal more concrete. Its results were evaluated in a book edited by Bishop L Gwynne and entitled *Religion and Morale, the Story of the National Mission on the Western Front*. The title, with its reference to the military concept of “morale”, and the preface written by the bishop show complete identification with the war project. Gwynne writes :

We can be very thankful for the way in which the message has been received , but above all we can lift up our hearts in thankfulness for the support and encouragement given by our military leaders....it seems as if in this war the men who have won their way to leadership are for the most part

men of strong Christian character who realize for themselves and believe that for others religion is the foundation of a good soldier. (p.7-8)

In Britain, one key part of the mission was groups of women travelling from town to town organizing prayer meetings, but in France, the mission took the form of a ten-day intensive programme of prayers and sermons. One missionary reported that he had preached three times a day for ten days, on each occasion to an audience of between 500 and 1500 men.

According to Bishop Gwynne

The aim was not at the conversion of the individual. The aim was to preach a crusade, and as very large numbers attended the various meetings it is certain that thousands of men have gone or will go up the line with a new vision of the meaning of a) a really Christian victory and b) the possibilities for our Empire after the war, if we set ourselves by the grace of God to the task unflinchingly of seeing that our beloved dead shall not have died in vain. (p 20)

### **Adapting religious practice to the war**

Major religions have often needed to be flexible sets of ideas, but adaptations in the era of total war were particularly rapid. Firstly there was the common presentation of the idea that death in battle for the empire meant a guaranteed ticket to get through the pearly gates. The Bishop of London preached that Jesus welcomed in Paradise those who had died for Britain. "Death represents a tremendous promotion" for these men, he said (Wilkinson 181). Such a doctrine is far from Anglican tradition, which had always maintained that only God

could know who was going to heaven, and that this depended on a whole life of Christian values, sincere contrition for one's sins and so on. And indeed, other members of the Church demurred, emphasizing in their sermons a more orthodox view, that soldiers who die without a spiritual transformation in their inner life cannot be sure to go to heaven, even if they died "for their homeland".

A second adaptation concerned the discourse about hell and damnation. The evocation of hell and the terrible suffering prepared for sinners after their death had been in gradual decline for over fifty years in the Church of England. Faced with the omnipresence of a sort of hell on earth in 1914-1918, this decline was much accelerated and references in sermons to fire and brimstone seem to have simply disappeared.

Thirdly, if the Roman Catholic church had always organized prayers for the departed, and indeed more complex liturgical mechanisms (such as going to church on the first Friday of every month for nine months), by means of which one might shorten, by one's piety, the suffering of a departed soul in purgatory, this was not the case for the Church of England. Anglicans, being protestants, did not believe in purgatory, and praying for the dead was quite rare in the Church in 1914. Only the Anglo-Catholic, High Church section of the Church of England was in the habit of organizing such prayers, and the Low Church, evangelical section was positively opposed to such practices. At the front, no doubt under pressure from soldiers, the padres always said prayers for the dead, but back in England, there was much criticism of these practices. By the end of the war, however, such prayers were general and even Low Church currents raised no further objections.

Finally, the war affected a traditional theological debate within Anglicanism, concerning the "reservation of the sacrament". In Catholic tradition, the bread transformed into the body of Christ during the mass could be kept after the mass for diverse purposes: for giving communion to the sick, for Eucharistic adoration in a church (praying in front of the

host, displayed in a special gold case) or for giving communion in extraordinary circumstances when no priest was available. In the Anglican Church such “reservation of the sacrament” was not permitted for several centuries after the Reformation. In the late nineteenth century a group of High Church campaigners around Cardinal Newman had succeeded in having the reservation of the sacrament authorized, but it remained a severely criticized practice. Trench warfare gave a new urgency to the question, as a general authorization of reserved sacraments would facilitate the giving of communion on the battlefield. This question was taken very seriously in Church debates, and reservation of the sacrament soon became quite common at the front (Wilkinson 177-9).

### **Hymn singing**

Hymns were perhaps the part of religious practice the best appreciated by soldiers. Hymns resembled popular music of the time in a number of ways: they are sung in large groups and by amateurs. The melody must be simple enough for it to be easy to sing along with without rehearsal, and the words, often in a verse/chorus structure, are repetitive. Hymns and popular music shared “A common emphasis on tunefulness and sentimentality” (Baxendale 139).

For Wilkinson: “The church’s teaching had come over as externalized dogma : only hymns lasted and gave delight” (Wilkinson 162). Despite this, padres had to be careful: soldiers quickly got irritated at excessively warlike hymns, particularly when, as was generally the case, the clergyman presenting them was himself a non-combatant.

The traditional repertoire of protestant hymns provided a fund of warlike songs :

Onward Christian soldiers

Marching as to war

With the cross of Jesus

Going on before<sup>vi</sup>

But new ones were written for the war, like the one from which this extract comes

Thy kingdom come, O God

Thy rule O Christ begin

Break with Thine iron rod

The tyrannies of sin!

Or these fresh words put to a traditional hymn tune (To the tune of “The Church’s One Foundation”<sup>vii</sup>)

Stand up stand up for Jesus

Ye soldiers of the cross

Lift high his royal banner

It must not suffer loss

From victory unto victory

His army shall he lead

Till every foe is vanquished and

Christ is Lord indeed.

The Salvation Army, before and during the war, would often use popular song tunes to liven up their religious hymns, such as this one, sung to the rousing melody of “Men of Harlech”<sup>viii</sup>

Sons of God, earth's trifles leaving,  
Be not faithless, but believing;  
To your conquering Captain cleaving,  
Forward to the fight!

The archives of the British Library contain a number of examples of war hymns written for the Great War, such as the following.

Lord, Who Hast Helped Us, A War Hymn 1914

O God of Battles, Hymn for use in time of war 1914

Father, We to Thee Are Praying, War Hymn, 1914

Trust in God, A Hymn to be sung during war-time, 1915

O God Our Father, Take Our Cause, Hymn for the time of war 1915

Repentance and Hope in War-time 1916

Evening Hymn in Time of War, "The Darkness falls," 1918

Children's Hymn in Time of War 1914.

The 1914 book *Twenty Hymns for National Use in Time of War* is structured to deal with what the authors consider are the major spiritual needs of the time. As the introduction points out :

The character and order of the hymns are framed upon a broad principle of endeavouring to cover the ground of the psychology of war from the Christian point of view : the justice of the cause; the moral and spiritual equipment ;



confession of personal and national sin; prayer for divine and heavenly aid; the endurance of those on active service, and of those who suffer with them whether at home or abroad; the natural instinct to review the course of past life in presence of death; the need of patience in time of adversity; the expression of grief, and then again the duty of refraining from it ... (Draper 1914:6).

The hymns included the following, entitled “A Nation’s Hymn”

To serve the cause of God and man  
Again our armies take the field  
O God, our God, lead Thou the van  
Be Thou today our strength and shield

To Thee in faith we make appeal  
Who curbest all man's pride and lust  
To all the world O Lord reveal  
If now our cause be true and just!

And this one:

God of all nations, sovereign Lord  
In thy dread name we draw the sword  
We lift the flag of freedom high  
That fills with light our stormy sky

We see that the identification of the Deity as “God of All Nations” does not prevent an automatic assumption that God is on the side of the British. In general, the hymn book shows an attempt to integrate the new situation – support for total war – with traditional preoccupations of protestant theology and piety.

### **Other uses of hymns**

The role played by hymns in the war was not limited to their use as ideological and moral support to the imperial cause and to military combativity. Firstly, hymns could bring together enemy soldiers. Many accounts are known of British and German soldiers in close trenches taking it in turn to sing hymns. Some hymns, such as “Silent Night” (Stille Nacht) exist in the two languages, and played an important role in the famous “Christmas truces” of 1914, when in several dozen distinct incidents, soldiers of both sides left the trenches to fraternize in honour of the Christmas festival. A German lance-corporal recounted

We assembled about two thirds of the rehearsed singers into the front trench as twilight fell. We were only about 60-80 metres from the English positions. We climbed out of the trench and sang our first carol, “Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht”. When the sound had faded away, we could see in the lights of some flares some English on top of their trench breastworks listening to us. As the carols went on, more and more joined them. (Brown et Seaton 49,201).

Otherwise, hymns could be adapted by soldiers to amuse and delight in other ways, and to lighten up moments of rest, or even obligatory Sunday church parades.

Wilkinson explains :

To sing bawdy verses to hymn tunes was an example of that sceptical wartime humour which enabled men to cope, because by mocking the whole hierarchy of God, politicians, the Church, military authorities, and the romantic picture of soldiers as heroic knights, they were all cut down to size (Wilkinson 158).

The most well-known parody was set to the tune

What a friend we have in Jesus,  
All our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry  
Everything to God in prayer!

and became

When this bleedin' war is over  
No more soldiering for me  
When I get my civvie clothes on  
Oh, how happy I shall be.  
No more church parades on Sunday  
No more asking for a pass  
I shall tell the sergeant major  
To stick his passes up his arse (Arthur 97)

Instead of

Our God, our help in ages past,  
Our hope for years to come,

Our shelter from the stormy blast,  
And our eternal home.

Soldiers liked to sing

John Wesley had a little dog  
It was so very thin  
He took it to the Gates of Hell  
And threw the bastard in.  
(Holmes 508)

### **How the war changed the church**

Many in the Church of England hoped to see religious renewal come out of the war. One of the main hopes was that the industrial working class would become reconciled with the Church. Indeed, from the point of view of Church commentators, the links between urban workers and the Church were at a dangerously low point. The situation had not been facilitated by the positions taken by the majority of the clergy concerning the strike waves of 1910 to 1914, and regarding the struggle of women activists for female suffrage. The Church position was all too often that these movements were the result of the nation having abandoned God's word.

The decline of working-class religiosity, however, was relative. Certainly, compared with rural agricultural workers, urban workers were much less likely to go to church. However, one must remember that in the village, church attendance was not entirely voluntary, and also that church attendance is not the only measure of religious commitment. Since 1885, numbers of people attending church in working class parts of London had very

much declined, but Church Sunday Schools for children remained massively popular, and across the country there was still (in 1911) a clergyman for every 1 457 people in the British population (Wilkinson 276).

An interdenominational report based on questionnaires concluded that “only” twenty per cent of rank and file soldiers had an active connection with a church. This seemed very low to church analysts at the time, though perhaps our historical perspective on it might consider it high. When, during the war, the Young Men’s Christian Association and the Student Christian movement ran a campaign asking soldiers to sign a promise to serve the Lord and his Kingdom. They were able to collect 350 000 signed promises. (Wilkinson 162-4).

What were the changes which came to the Church due to the war? Their attitude to the state did not change radically. For example, there was very little public criticism of the Versailles treaty by Anglican clergymen. A large number of new vicars were recruited directly from the armed forces, and the government agreed to pay the costs of their training to become clergy, so much was it taken for granted that the Church belonged to the nation. The enormous wave of industrial conflict in 1919 saw the Church generally on the side of the employers. A campaign for donations to the Church from businessmen, in 1920, promised openly that the Church aimed at calming industrial conflict. (Wilkinson 273)

On internal matters, there was more change. A series of reports with titles such as *The Church in the Furnace* took a critical look at church engagement with ordinary people during the war, and proposed changes. In particular it was proposed to update the standard prayer book, since it had proved, said the report’s authors, to be “too intellectual”. There was also considerable pressure for an “Enabling Act”, which, passed in 1919, allowed the Church of England considerable powers of self-government. This led to a series of measures involving much wider layers of the faithful in the government of the Church. Committees and Councils

were set up to facilitate this, and, moving with the times, it was decided that both men and women could sit on these councils. It was hoped that this self-government might make the church more responsive to its rank and file.

In the medium term, the slow secularization of British society continued; symbolically, the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge abolished compulsory prayers during this decade. The clergy became less monolithic: radical vicars such as Dick Sheppard, founder of the pacifist organization, the Peace Pledge Union, gained influence. The Church of England was to remain a major player in political debate in following decades, but at times with a less conservative discourse. In 1936 the bishop of Jarrow supported the famous Jarrow march against unemployment (though other bishops denounced it). The Church was in 1945 a strong advocate for the welfare state, and even played an important role in the move to decriminalize homosexual relations in the late 1950s.

### Works Cited

Arthur, Max, *When This Bloody War is Over: Soldiers' Songs from the First World War*, London: Piatkus 2008.

Baxendale, John, "Popular Music and Late Modernity 1910 to 1930" in *Popular Music* 14, 2, 1995.

Brown, Malcolm et Seaton, Shirley, *Christmas Truce*, London: Pan Books, 2001.

Carpenter, S. C., *Winnington-Ingram*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1949.

Clayton, P. T., *Tales of Talbot House: Everyman's Club in Poperinghe of Ypres, 1915-1918*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1919.

Draper, William H. and Bairstow, Edward C., *Twenty hymns for national use in time of war from old and new sources*, London: Stainer and Bell, 1914.

Graves, Robert, *Goodbye to All That*, London: Penguin, 1999 (First published 1929).

Gwynne, Bishop L., *Religion and Morale, the Story of the National Mission on the Western Front*, London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1917.

Holmes, Richard, *Tommy -The British soldier on the Western Front 1914-1918*, London: Harper Perennial, 2005.

Moynihan, Michael, *God on Our Side – the British Padres in World War One*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1983.

Roynon, Gavin (Dir.) *Home fires Burning : the Great War Diaries of Georgina Lee*, Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2006.

Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, *The National Mission Hymn Book*, London: SPCK, 1916.

Tillett, Ben, *Who Was Responsible for the War - and Why?*, London: Whitwell, 1917.

Wilkinson, Alan, *The Church of England and the First World War*, London: SCM Press, 1996.

## Website

UK Museum of army chaplaincy <http://www.army.mod.uk/chaplains/museum>

---

<sup>i</sup> At the Treaty of Versailles 4 600 000 square kilometres and 13 million new subjects were added to the British Empire. These aims were clearly understood in elite circles. (Roynon 14).

<sup>ii</sup> This hymn can be heard online at <http://songsandhymns.org/hymns/detail/abide-with-me-fast-falls-the-eventide>

<sup>iii</sup> This hymn can be heard online at <http://songsandhymns.org/hymns/detail/onward-christian-soldiers>

<sup>iv</sup> This hymn can be heard here <http://songsandhymns.org/hymns/detail/eternal-father-strong-to-save>

<sup>v</sup> This contrasts with the situation in France, where 33 000 priests were conscripted, and 4 600 were killed.

<sup>vi</sup> All quotations are short extracts from the hymns in question.

<sup>vii</sup> One can listen to the classic version here <http://songsandhymns.org/hymns/detail/the-churchs-one-foundation>

<sup>viii</sup> One can listen to the classic version here : <http://www.rorkesdriftvc.com/myths/menofharlech.mp3>