

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Mobilization Through Faith:

The religious reaction to the First World War in the United Kingdom through the national and local press.

This dissertation is submitted in part fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of BA Honours in History at the University of Canterbury. This dissertation is the result of my own work. Material from the published or unpublished work of other historians used in the dissertation is credited to the author in the footnote references. The dissertation is approximately 9270 words in length.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the reactions to the First World War by the churches of the United Kingdom through the use of published newspapers. In the past there has been a lack of focus on the role religion played throughout the war, but its importance to daily life during this period makes it a significant aspect to understanding British wartime spirit. The terms used by the clergy that were documented in the press reveal how religion sought to justify the conflict and make the Church relevant in a period where institutionalized religion was in decline. Scholars have had an increasing interest in the theological framing of the First World War, and it has been portrayed as a religious battle by historians Philip Jenkins and Albert Marrin. Especially in the period surrounding August 4, the anniversary of Britain's entrance into the war, clergy made their opinions heard, whether through direct publication or the documentation of sermons given at war intercession services around the United Kingdom. Despite denominational differences, these men espoused similar themes that sought to capitalize on the religious understanding most people had and insert the Church back into a position of public dominance.

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Introduction

The national and local newspapers of England, Wales, Ireland and Scotland were all places of religious expression and opinion on the First World War. This was seen most frequently in the days and weeks surrounding the annual anniversary of the outbreak of war in August. Clergymen from many different denominations within the British Isles made use of the national and local newspapers to spread the word of God and advertise the role that religion and the Church could, and would, play in the war. Many different religious themes were expressed in these papers, some demonstrated more clearly in certain parts of the United Kingdom than others. In the early years of the war, significant emphasis was placed on the role of Germany as the main aggressor, and clergymen criticized Germany's militarism and industrialization as a way to justify the two Protestant nations being at arms against each other. Much of the religious justification for the war, demonstrated by churchmen in the press and through their sermons, was centered on the idea that Britain was fighting a 'holy war'. Not only did this concept afford the churches a pronounced role in the war that Britain was fighting, but it helped to bolster nationalism with its close ties to notions of honour and Britain's duty as a land of Christian people. But, as the war endured throughout the years with no decisive win for the Allies, British clergymen had to revise their justifications, and turned to more domestic reasonings for why God had not yet allowed them to secure victory. The main argument put forward by the clergy was that the war was penance for Britain's previous lack of faith, and that it would not be concluded until the nation returned to greater levels and demonstrations of faith. Throughout the United Kingdom there had been declining numbers of churchgoers and a distinct turn towards personal and privatized religion, labelled by contemporary churchmen as diffusive Christianity.¹ A major call to prayer and repentance by the clergymen of the United

¹ Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, 22.

Kingdom was not only their perceived solution to ending the war, but also a way to encourage people back into the churches and allow the churches the same degree of authority over society that it had enjoyed in previous centuries. For the most part, religious unity was found in all areas of the United Kingdom, although the Irish Roman Catholics eventually came to endorse a more pacifist view of the war after calls from the Pope to cease the violence. Despite this, the clergy and their churches had a profound impact on the morale of the nation and the perception of the war that they were fighting.

The role of religion in the First World War is a diverse and growing field of research within World War One historiography. Few have analyzed the reactions of the churches to such a violent and lethal war, and many who have done so have focused on the work of the army chaplains at the front lines. Despite this, the actions of the churches at the home front demonstrated that the religious community believed they could make a great impact on the war's eventual outcome. In the early twentieth century religion was a significant aspect of society, making it of supreme importance to understanding the attitudes towards the war as a whole. Using the local and national press, this thesis seeks to evaluate the public responses of the churches in the United Kingdom to the First World War, and understand their role in the British wartime spirit.

The historiography of World War One has had a tendency to cast the religious and military experiences of war into separate spheres, with Michael Snape, author of *God and the British Soldier*, asserting that this has seen military historians "fail to recognize the underlying importance of religion in these conflicts," and left religious historians "squeamish about

studying the religious dimensions of the two World Wars".² Often the spirit of religion during wartime had been confined to aspects of wider social histories of Great Britain, such as E. R. Norman's *Church and Society in England 1770-1970*, or John Wolffe's *God and Greater Britain: Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland 1843-1945*.³ Increasing attention has since been given to the doctrinal and denominational details of religion in wartime and the ways different religions came to either justify or condemn their nation's participation. A. J. Hoover conducted a comparative study into the differences between the sermons given by British and German Protestant clergymen during the First World War, bringing to the fore questions about God's will and the belief in a Christian duty.⁴

Recently, a new trend in the historiography has been the recasting of World War One as a religious 'holy war'. Albert Marrin, Philip Jenkins, and Adrian Gregory have contributed to this school of thought. Marrin's work likened the war to a crusade, indicating that the war was adopted by Britain as part of their Christian duty, and in turn provided a religious framework for understanding the war.⁵ Jenkins follows on from Marrin's argument, and uses the widespread application of religious rhetoric and iconography to justify his argument that religion was central to understanding the First World War.⁶ Adrian Gregory's *The Last Great War*, sheds light on the position of authority that the churches occupied during the First World War. His work further indicates the dominating status the churches held over the way the war was justified,

² Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier: Religion and the British Army in the First and Second World Wars* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 4.

³ E. R. Norman, *Church and Society in England 1770-1970* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976); John Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain: Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland 1843-1945* (London: Routledge, 1994).

⁴ A. J. Hoover, *God, Germany, and Britain in the Great War: A Study in Clerical Nationalism* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1989), 6.

⁵ Albert Marrin, *The Last Crusade: The Church of England in the First World War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1974), 130.

⁶ Philip Jenkins, *The Great and Holy War* (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2014), 5.

and their influence over the manner in which the nations' and its soldiers conducted themselves.

The effect that religion had on the daily lives of people at the Home Front in the United Kingdom has received less attention within the historiography, although those who have tackled this topic have done so both thoroughly and convincingly. One such historian is Alan Wilkinson, who had published a number of studies on the Church of England and the First World War. Wilkinson has dealt with all major aspects of religion in wartime, such as the moral issues that war poses to religion, the Church's efforts on the home front, army chaplaincy, remembrance, and the general faith of England and its people during the early twentieth century.⁷ Robert Beaken is another historian who has a more direct focus on the Church and its relationship to the everyday people during wartime. In his work *The Church of England and the Home Front 1914-1918*, Beaken specifically looks at the town of Colchester, and uses statements from the local clergymen in the town's newspapers and parish magazines, to understand how their actions fitted into the wider actions of the Church of England.⁸ While Beaken's insights are a significant contribution to the historiography, no comparisons are made with the experience of any other town throughout the United Kingdom.

Despite growth in the attribution of importance to religion during wartime, in 2015 Robert Beaken reflected that the study of religion in the life of Britain during the First World War had received "scant treatment".⁹ Furthermore, there has not been much change in the sources used by historians within the field. Parish magazines, official sermons, propaganda, and personal artefacts have been key in discovering the religious experience of wartime Britain. By

⁷ Alan Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War* (London: SCM Press, 1996).

⁸ Robert Beaken, *The Church of England and the Home Front 1914-1918* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2015).

⁹ Beaken, *The Church of England and the Home Front*, 2.

deviating from this inclination, and instead focusing on the public newspapers, I hope to reveal how both local and leading figures of the Church sought to portray their faith in relation to the First World War in the United Kingdom.

Using a range of both local and national newspapers from the British Isles has allowed me to engage with my primary material in greater depth, by discovering the similarities and differences in religious rhetoric across the region. Including a range of Christian denominations into the thesis has also contributed to a more complete evaluation of the British and Irish public feeling towards the role of the churches during World War One. National newspapers commonly portrayed the general feeling of the nation, and also acted as the most popular place for high ranking clergy to publish their personal thoughts on the war. The thesis's use of local and national newspapers allows for a deeper analysis that covers much of the educated classes. One limitation of using newspapers as my primary source is that many of the articles contain similar content. Such instances occurred especially in reference to major events and gatherings, such as war memorial services or services of intercession. This thesis applies a linguistic analysis to my primary sources. Many of my newspaper sources share a range of emotive language techniques and phrases that the author has used to provoke a close relationship between the work of the church and the war effort. From my analysis I have identified a number of key themes that run through both the national and local newspapers promoting various religious opinions on the First World War.

The significant role of the United Kingdom in World War One made it the geographic focus of this thesis. Newspaper articles from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales published between 1915 and 1918 have been used to explore the major themes of religious reaction and justification to Great Britain's involvement in World War One. To concentrate my search, only

articles published from the end of June to mid-August for each year between 1915 and 1918 have been consulted. This is in an attempt to capture August 4, the anniversary of Britain's entrance into the conflict, as this was the most intense period of communication and ardour over the war. This anniversary was used as a time to celebrate, chastise, console, and congratulate the people of the United Kingdom for their efforts throughout the war and the churches took complete control in the execution of the ceremonies used to express these sentiments.

To explore the several recurring themes espoused by the various churches across the United Kingdom, this thesis follows a thematic structure. The first section deals with the initial reactions from the religious society and how this manifested into the strong conviction that Germany was to blame for the war. The next theme examines the adopted belief that Great Britain was fighting a Holy War, helping to reconcile religion's passivity with the violence of battle. The following two sections, 'The Need for Thankfulness and Prayer' and 'The Sins of Great Britain', deal with the way the churches used their involvement in the war to manipulate a rededication to God. The final section traces the religious unity that emerged from the social and political climate of war, and demonstrates the need for the churches to work together in order to effectively spread their message.

Germany's Blame

Churchmen across the United Kingdom were largely unified in their belief that Germany, and the way it had strayed from Christian morality, was the major cause of the war. Directing the blame towards the German nation had a two-fold benefit for British clergymen, as it both deflected any culpability from the United Kingdom, and most importantly from the Christian faith itself. Prior to the outbreak of war in 1914, Britain and Germany had enjoyed amicable relations with each other, recognizing their many similarities as both were European, Protestant, and leading industrial powers within the Western Christian civilization.¹⁰ The fact that the two nations were so alike posed a major problem for the British clergy, who at the outbreak of war needed to justify how a country so similar to Great Britain could become so war-hungry. The British clergy were able to construct an argument attacking the Christian nature of Germany, by using the Germans' 'Prussian militarism' as the cause for their corrupt national character.¹¹ The German doctrinal belief in the amoral state, which was frequently blamed on Friedrich von Bernhardi, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Heinrich von Treitschke,¹² convinced the British that Germany had reverted to barbarism and unlawfulness, and was therefore a threat to Christian civilization.¹³ The German invasion of Belgium had acted as a unifying moment in British opinion against Germany and affirmed ideas of immorality and disregard for international law.¹⁴

¹⁰ Hoover, *God, Germany, and Britain in the Great War*, 19.

¹¹ Shannon Ty Bontrager, "The Imagined Crusade: The Church of England and the Mythology of Nationalism and Christianity during the Great War," *Church History* 71:4 (2002): 778.

¹² Hoover, *God, Germany, and Britain in the Great War*, 131.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁴ Catriona Pennell, *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 94.

In Scotland, there was a distinct feeling that Germany had lost its moral compass and therefore needed to be defeated in the war for the sake of Christian civilization.¹⁵ Even from the first anniversary of the war, the Scottish clergy had targeted the Germans and their God. In 1915, *The Daily Record and Mail*, a prominent Scottish national tabloid, published an article comparing the German God to that of Scotland and the United Kingdom, “the Kaiser’s God, the German God, is not the God of humanity, whose name was uttered yesterday in churches throughout the length and breadth of the Empire”.¹⁶ Germany’s adoption of the Romantic movement which denied the idea of a universal morality, was the cause of this division between the deities.¹⁷ This is ratified in the article’s statement that despite Germany having “the State he deserves; nevertheless, unhumiliated and unconfessed, he prays.”¹⁸ Defaming the name of the German God was a way for the clergy to reconcile the fact that Germany was also a Protestant nation, and who had up until the outbreak of the war, seemingly believed in and shared the same values that were taught by God in the Protestant faith. This position was influential in Scottish society, and was endorsed by Scottish-born Member of Parliament George Currie, during a speech made at a war anniversary service in 1916. Currie stated that the people of Leith, “believe that this generation of Germans, in committing themselves to the errors of a materialist faith, and pinning themselves to an apparently meaningless career of outrage, lust and crime, had now taken into their hands the cup of their own damnation.”¹⁹ The Scottish clergy positioned their righteous God above that of the German’s, and found solace in this hierarchy. In 1917, Presbyterian Moderator Professor James Cooper publically chastised Germany for her wrongdoings, stating that “every crime Germany was adding to her long

¹⁵ Brian R. Talbot, ‘Scottish Baptists and the First World War,’ in *Step Into Your Place: The First World War and Baptist Life & Thought*, ed. Larry J. Kreitzer (Oxford: Regent’s Park College, 2014), 61.

¹⁶ “The World’s Prayer.” *Daily Record and Mail*, 5 August, 1915, 4.

¹⁷ Roland H. Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1960), 206.

¹⁸ “The World’s Prayer.” *Daily Record and Mail*, 5 August, 1915, 4.

¹⁹ “Services in Leith.” *The Scotsman*, 5 August, 1916, p. 9.

catalogue was just another nail in her coffin, another spade of earth that would press her down into the pit that she had dug.”²⁰ His statement indicated that Germany’s eventual destruction was her own fault, caused by her deflection from true Christianity in favour of militarism and greed. Cooper went on to preach that safety could still be found in God, if he was obeyed and his values upheld: “For the Lord will not thrust away His people, neither will He forsake His inheritance for judgement shall return unto righteousness.”²¹ In Cooper’s opinion, steadfast in his belief in Great Britain’s righteous cause, the “impending punishment of Prussia,” was to be an important lesson for all to learn from and discourage against; “ambitions like hers would be dreaded, not followed.”²²

These sentiments were also shared at a local level. The Reverend W. H. Leathem, of the Holburn Parish Church in Aberdeen, had preached to his parishioners that throughout the first year of the war “the leprosy of Germany was no longer hidden,” for they had adopted “that doctrine, destructive of morality and Christianity,” which “had urged Germany on to the infamies of an infamous war”.²³ Such shock and disgust at Germany’s departure from Christianity was still felt in Aberdeen a year later in 1916, with one clergyman referring to Germany when he stated that their nation had “seen horrible powers of evil, not lurking but rampant in modern civilization,” as though Germany had no shame for actions the rest of the world deemed reprehensible.²⁴ While these statements were blatant attacks on the immorality and lawlessness of Germany, they were also warning signs to the British people to keep a strong faith in God or run the risk of a similar fate and the disintegration of the values they, and the Christian faith, were based on. In England, the Bishop of London, Arthur Winnington-

²⁰ “Scotland Firm for Victory.” *Daily Record and Mail*, 6 August, 1917, 4.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ “Revelations of the War.” *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 2 August, 1915, 4.

²⁴ “Official Service in West Church.” *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 5 August, 1916, 3.

Ingram, was also outspoken against the German nation, calling for British forces to “kill Germans – to kill them, not for the sake of killing, but to save the world.”²⁵ Continuing to draw attention to the dangers of Germany’s new social ideology, and the implications that this had on its religion, churchmen such as Leathem and the Bishop of London reasserted the explicit need for moral guidance that now only the British churches could offer.

To further highlight the differences between Germany and Great Britain, many clergymen spoke of Germany’s preparedness for war in contrast to Britain’s reluctance to engage in the fighting. Reverend G. Bainton, preaching at the West Orchard Congregational Church in Coventry, associated Germany’s readiness for war with selfishness and the destruction of peace: “Germany had resolved upon war. She had made ready for war. She was determined nothing should hold her back from war. So in pursuit of her selfish policy of world-power Germany wantonly broke the peace of the world.”²⁶ Bainton’s tone is instead, distinctively more complimentary when discussing Britain’s entrance into the war, stating that their politicians had done “everything men could do to avert the struggle... they had proposed conferences between the nations, had offered terms, had pledged themselves in every honourable way – but all to no effect”.²⁷ From Bainton’s statements it is clear to see that in public opinion, and the opinion of the churches, Britain’s reluctance to go to war was an impressive example of their Christian nature. Britain’s unpreparedness for war was still being congratulated towards the end of the war, when in 1918, Anglican Reverend R. G. Thomas of Brecon reminded his congregation that Britain “became involved in this struggle not of their

²⁵ Bishop A. F. Winnington-Ingram speaking on November 28, 1918, quoted in Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace*, 207.

²⁶ “Rev. G. Bainton on the Nation’s Task.” *The Coventry Herald*, 6 August, 1915, 3. For similar arguments by other clergymen, see “Commemorations in Glasgow.” *The Scotsman*, 6 August, 1917, 7; “A Year of War.” *The Surrey Advertiser and County Times*, 31 July, 1915, 4.

²⁷ “Rev. G. Bainton on the Nation’s Task.” *The Coventry Herald*, 6 August, 1915, 3.

own choice, but compelled by moral obligations".²⁸ Thomas went on to reflect the wider sentiment felt in Wales and the United Kingdom that their war was "in defence of the brotherhood of nations against the criminal attack of a colossal bully,"²⁹ clearly referring to Germany as the culprit.³⁰

The Roman Catholic Church in Ireland, despite their differing attitudes towards the war, agreed upon the superiority of the United Kingdom's entrance into the conflict when compared with Germany. Michael Logue, the Primate and senior Catholic priest in Ireland, preaching at the fourth anniversary war service in 1918, placed particular emphasis on Britain's unique entrance into the war:

Thank God, we can boldly say that we declared war with no such lust of conquest, and that the momentous decision was only taken after every effort had been made by our statesmen to preserve the peace, and because honour and plighted faith and a passionate desire to help the weak made it clear to us that it were better far to suffer the loss of all things than to lose the nation's soul.³¹

Logue's statement was both a direct criticism of Germany and their Prussian militarism as well as a compliment to the efforts of the British parliament in putting off the war for as long as they could until it became clear that Germany was a nation that needed to be defeated in the eyes of Christian honour. Initially, the great majority of Irish nationalists and Ulster Unionists had placed their support for the war, in spite of the political unrest that had been brewing within Ireland at this point.³² Other members of the clergy in Ireland shared in these feelings against

²⁸ "Remembrance & Prayer." *The Brecon Radnor Express Carmarthen and Swansea Valley Gazette and Brynmawr District Advertiser*, 8 August, 1918, 5.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Gethin Matthews, 'The Responses of Welsh Baptist Churches to the First World War,' in *Step Into Your Place: The First World War and Baptist Life & Thought*, ed. Larry J. Kreitzer (Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2014), 94.

³¹ "The Day in Ireland." *The Irish Times*, 5 August, 1918, 4.

³² Keith Jeffrey, 'The Irish Military Tradition and the British Empire', in *'An Irish Empire'? Aspects of Ireland the British Empire*, ed. Keith Jeffrey (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 99.

Germany's preparedness for war also, although some were less impressed with how unprepared the United Kingdom was. The Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin, Charles Thomas Ovenden, criticized both Germany and Britain when he preached: "While the Central Powers used the past years of peace and prosperity in preparing for war, by which they might win the mastery of the world, we as a nation had indulged in folly and amusement as if there were no possibility of a great war."³³ The particular angle that the Dean was taking was unique when compared with the readiness of Germany, but spoke to a larger thematic trend adopted by the British clergy later in the war over Britain's lack of faith as the underlying divine cause of war. The essence of Dean Thomas' argument is revealed when he states "we knew now that the appeal must be to Him, who is mighty, to save,"³⁴ and that by placing faith in God, a nation and its people will always be more prosperous and less susceptible to the ills of sin and modernity.

The Holy War

The idea that Britain was involved in fighting a Holy War gained significant traction throughout the war. There were hundreds of sermons conducted by clergymen that were committed to proving that Christians could go to war and kill others if it was to protect their family, home, and country.³⁵ While depicting the war as a righteous battle was popular across many denominations, clergy often went further and regarded it as a holy crusade against a brutal foe.³⁶ The number of repeated and central, official statements and propaganda that declared that the war was being fought for God's cause or for his glory through the media and public opinion gives credit to this holy war ideology.³⁷ Even the National War Aims Committee,

³³ "The Day in Ireland." *The Irish Times*, 5 August, 1918, 4.

³⁴ "The Day in Ireland." *The Irish Times*, 5 August, 1918, 4.

³⁵ Hoover, *God, Germany, and Britain in the Great War*, 103.

³⁶ Beaken, *The Church of England and the Home Front*, 198.

³⁷ Jenkins, *The Great and Holy War*, 6.

utilized the religious meaning of war to enhance the spiritual patriotism of the nation.³⁸ Since the war took place during a time when religion permeated all levels of society, and religiosity was still relatively the norm,³⁹ using religious language and themes was an effective way to mobilize the masses and retain morality and honour throughout the fighting. The British churches were aware of this special role they could play in aiding the war effort. In 1915 Arthur Winnington-Ingram, the outspoken Bishop of London, declared that “the Church can help the nation first of all by making it realize that it is engaged in a Holy War”.⁴⁰ The idea of a holy war became central to the public religious understanding of World War One. What began as a justified war to defend national interests and cleanse the world of Germany and its militarism, was soon transformed into a holy war where they were fighting a crusade against the Devil incarnate.⁴¹ The anniversary of the war is especially notable when discussing the idea of a holy war, as many clergymen saw it as the solemnized day when God had called upon their nation to fight for peace. Churchmen from the United Kingdom also endorsed the idea of the holy war as a way to explain their pre-war pacifism.⁴² By fighting for God and the values the Christian faith embodied, such as freedom, liberty and justice, the war was religiously justified to a further extent than simply defeating the enemy.

In terms of religious language, words such as ‘just’ and ‘righteousness’ were frequently used by the clergy to refer to the nation’s role in the war and the causes they were fighting for. This idea was significant to the British clergy’s work in morally aiding the nation, as it was a continued reminder to the soldiers and those at the home front to not sink to Germany’s

³⁸ David Monger, *Patriotism and Propaganda in First World War Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 95.

³⁹ Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War*, 243.

⁴⁰ David Welch, ‘War Aims and the ‘Big Ideas’ of 1914’, in *Justifying War: Propaganda Politics and the Modern Age*, eds. David Welch and Jo Fox (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 78.

⁴¹ Marrin, *The Last Crusade*, 125.

⁴² Pennell, *A Kingdom United*, 57.

destructive level of sin. Instead it was a call to remember that they were fighting a divinely sanctioned battle to rid the world of the evil that was embodied in Germany because they were the chosen people of God. This was expressed most clearly by Edward Burroughs, an Honorary Chaplain to the King, in his letter to *The Times* in June 1915, “if we wish to share the blessing of the Christian and still regard ourselves as fighting the battle of Christ, we must not, under whatever pressure of expediency, resort to the very principle of retaliation which He Himself most roundly condemned”.⁴³ The notion that the United Kingdom was fighting an honourable battle and protecting the word of God was quickly endorsed throughout the country. In Wales, Reverend Gwyn Thomas preached that their nation was “engaging in the noblest crusade upon which any nation or group of nations had ever embarked,” and it was noted that “he believe they were confident of victory, because they believed sincerely in the righteousness of their cause”.⁴⁴ Thomas’ words both clearly emphasized the uniqueness of their cause in the eyes of God, but also highlighted the deep faith the nations had in their victory because they were fighting with God’s grace and for something more than simply victory on the battlefield. The *Daily Mail* defined what England was fighting for in an article on the second anniversary of the war in 1916, “to restore order and respect for public law, to protect the weak, to repress atrocious inhumanity,” and stated their nation’s faith in God, “under God’s Providence, we hail this third year of the war and its promise of victory”.⁴⁵

British clergymen frequently repeated to their congregations that their reasons for fighting were greater than any other nation since their cause was in the name of God. Many churchmen linked the righteousness of their cause to the worthiness of their nation. Reverend

⁴³ Burroughs, E. A. “The Mobilization of Faith.” *Times*, 19 June, 1915, 10.

⁴⁴ “A Still Nobler Future.” *The Brecon Radnor Express Carmarthen and Swansea Valley Gazette and Brynmawr District Advertiser*, 12 August, 1915, 5.

⁴⁵ “Britain Reborn.” *Daily Mail*, 4 August, 1916, 4.

T. MacClelland of Exmouth preached that “Ours was a worthy vision, that of brotherhood, equality, self-sacrifice, and of the Cross, the purpose and will of God. We should win if we were worthy to win, and worthy of being the instrument of God to fulfil His purpose.”⁴⁶ The idea of worthiness was used to further encourage support for the war, by reminding the British people that they were special, but it was also used to remind people to remain openly religious and Christian in a period when religion was in decline. In Aberdeen, Reverend W. H. Leathem stated to his parishioners that: “There were two constraining appeals in our ears and in our hearts today – the appeal of patriotism and the appeal of religion. We must not be false to the Christian faith that had made us great among the nations.”⁴⁷ In his statement, Leathem reminds his congregation that before patriotism, it was religion that made the Scottish and British nations strong, and it would be the role of faith, not patriotism that would help them overcome the challenge ahead.

Because they believed Britain to be fighting a holy war, clergy throughout the United Kingdom stressed the importance of maintaining the fight until Germany was decisively beaten. The idea of a holy sanctioned war meant that their objective was more than simply defeating the enemy on the battlefield, but rather the utter destruction of the immoral and dangerous ideals the German enemy nation embodied. Reverend E. C. Kirwan was quoted in the *Surrey Advertiser and County Times* demonstrating England’s commitment to the war, “we believed that it must be fought to the bitter end,”⁴⁸ sentiments shared by the Bishop of Exeter who stated in the *Western Times* that the nation came to God, “not in a spirit of care-worn panic, but in one of sublime, serene, and confident faith in God... a confidence which would express

⁴⁶ “Call to Greater Effort.” *The Western Times*, 3 August, 1916, 4.

⁴⁷ “Revelations of the War.” *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 2 August, 1915, 4.

⁴⁸ “The War’s Anniversary,” *The Surrey Advertiser and County Times*, 7 August, 1915, 3.

itself in a calm resolve to do, to suffer, and endure right through to the end.”⁴⁹ Endurance and faith in their task was a repeated attitude that many clergymen used to keep morale high when the war gave no signs of letting up. In Scotland, Reverend James MacGibbon commented on the feeling of hopelessness at the idea of a fifth year of war, but reminded his people that when asking ‘how long?’ “the answer was that they had a task to fulfil, and the struggle would not end until that God-appointed task had been accomplished”.⁵⁰ The church and its clergy could keep themselves readily involved in the war effort by continuing to push the idea of a holy war, and by preaching a need to fulfil their task until the very end, the clergy had fair reason, as men of God, to continue being the prime ministers of support to their nations.

The Need for Thankfulness and Prayer

The belief in their holy cause was accompanied by a resurgence in church attendance,⁵¹ as many people recognized that “if we believe that we are fighting for the cause of freedom and right, the cause of God, we should by prayer release God’s good will towards us and pray that His cause may be victorious”.⁵² Aside from those who volunteered as army chaplains, the majority of the British clergy remained on the home front due to the long standing tradition in Christianity that forbade them to shed blood.⁵³ Instead, it became the clergy’s role to administer support and comfort to the families and communities affected in the war through pastoral work. Local priests would encourage their communities to stay cheerful and steadfast, administered various proclamations from the King, and shared in privations, bereavements and a common cause.⁵⁴ Because of this, in the eyes of the Church, the war effort on the home front became just as important to that of the physical fighting.

⁴⁹ “Day of Prayer.” *The Western Times*, 5 August, 1915, 2.

⁵⁰ “Scotland’s Solemn Day of Prayer.” *Daily Record and Mail*, 5 August, 1918, 3.

⁵¹ Beaken, *The Church of England and the Home Front*, 141.

⁵² Father of One Who Died for England, and M. D. Darwin. “The Fourth of August.” *Times*, 30 June 1916, 11.

⁵³ Beaken, *The Church of England and the Home Front*, 58.

⁵⁴ Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War*, 58, 66.

Prayer was regarded as the most important activity someone at the home front could engage in. The Bishop of Llandaff, Joshua Pritchard Hughes, wrote in to the *Western Mail*, a national Welsh newspaper, calling for local businesses to temporarily close so their employees could attend the numerous war anniversary services that were being held. Bishop Hughes regarded this as an opportunity to “enable as many as possible to lift their hearts for a short time in prayer”.⁵⁵ As early as the first anniversary of the war in 1915, British clergymen preached about the importance and need for prayer. The Anglican Bishop of St. David’s, John Owen, alerted his congregation that “it was necessary that there should be an atmosphere of prayer,” as in his opinion there was currently not enough prayer because contemporary materialist values constructed an “idea that for victory we needed plenty of shell, but that we did not need prayer.”⁵⁶ The Bishop compared the need for shells to that of prayer, criticizing his nation for only questioning the amount of weapons acquired, and forgetting the important role that religion was believed to play in the strength of the Allied forces.⁵⁷ The call to prayer resonated though all Christian denominations in Wales, whether they were large or small. Although a minority religious group within Wales, the Catholic Church too put out a public call for prayer on the anniversary of the outbreak of war. In 1918, the Archbishop of Cardiff, Dr. Bilsborrow, made a plea in the *Western Mail*, for people to move on to “more fervent and more earnest prayer,” and called for Sunday August 4, to “be a day of continuous prayer to Jesus”.⁵⁸ To continue to pray was to continue to have hope throughout the duration of the war, and to continue to believe that the war was just and needed. The need to pray on the anniversary of the war in Britain was especially called for, as one mother of two sons fighting wrote in to the

⁵⁵ “War Anniversary in the Churches.” *Western Mail*, 29 July, 1916, 6.

⁵⁶ “Second Year of War.” *Western Mail*, 3 August, 1915, 7.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ “Day of Intercession.” *Western Mail*, 30 July, 1918, 3.

Times in support for August 4 to become a national day of prayer, “that is the prayer our men want, that is the prayer we womenfolk want, and that, I say it in all reverence, is the prayer I believe God wants to hear, that He may grant it”.⁵⁹

Within the prayers themselves, giving thanks to God was the most important and powerful aspect. Through their national newspapers, the clergymen of Scotland effectively spread their message of thankfulness to God in the time of war. That was the general tone of most war anniversary services conducted throughout Scotland during the war, the need to give thanks to God for keeping their country, and the whole of the British Isles free from battle, and more importantly, allowing the fight for their honourable cause to continue. On the first anniversary of the outbreak of war, the focus for many Scottish ministers was giving thanks to God. Presbyterian minister, Reverend John Wallace, preaching at the Tron Kirk in Edinburgh in 1915, noted how on that anniversary, “our hearts were filled with a great pride and thankfulness”, and that after the past twelve months, “there was much for which we could lift up our Ebenezer of praise to Almighty God”.⁶⁰ At the same time, Scottish Anglican clergy were preaching similar sentiments. Bishop Walpole, at St. Mary’s Cathedral, urged his congregation to not forget the importance of the battle they were fighting, and keep in mind the rewards that would come to them once they had finished their task, “who would not be thankful as they left that building to hear the bells ringing for peace?”⁶¹ Rather than focusing on the perpetual sadness and devastation the war brought with it, Scottish ministers chose to remain focused on whatever positives they could find, as a way to continue bringing thanks to God, and keeping the spirits of their congregations high. This was a significant role that the Scottish clergy chose to play. The outbreak of war had seen a sudden increase in religious membership, and the

⁵⁹ Father of One Who Died for England, and M. D. Darwin. “The Fourth of August.” *Times*, 30 June 1916, 11.

⁶⁰ “An Edinburgh Minister on the War.” *The Scotsman*, 2 August, 1915, 4.

⁶¹ “St. Mary’s Cathedral.” *The Scotsman*, 5 August, 1915, 7.

clergy utilized this growth as an opening to preach rededication to God.⁶² It was more important for religion as a whole to seize the opportunity the crisis of war had afforded it, rather than argue over denominational differences. The belief in God and patriotism at this time was inextricably linked, and spiritual values and religious vocabulary informed people's ideas about the war.⁶³ Therefore, it was important for the churches to offer shared sentiments through their prayers, to reinforce these beliefs and keep a high level of religious involvement in the war.

Across the British Isles, spirits were high during the first year of war. At the first anniversary of the war service in Chiddingfold, England Mr. J. H. Bolton reflected that, "they had much to be thankful for. God had saved them from disaster and preserved their shores".⁶⁴ Thanks were also awarded to God for the number of men who had enlisted to fight, and the actions of these men in battle. They had become soldiers of Christ. Clergy often commented on their heroism and sacrifice for taking part in their divinely-sanctioned battle against the German enemy, "we have cause for thankfulness too, when we think of the splendid heroism of our Expeditionary Force, how they helped to stem the German sweep for Paris".⁶⁵ But, as 1916 brought about the second anniversary of the war, and the tide of war had been changing, there became a more intense focus on the giving thanks to God for keeping Scottish, and British, lands safe from war, "we had much to bless God for, above all for the valour of our brothers and sons who had stood between our own land and destruction".⁶⁶ Bishop Walpole also commented on the role of God in helping their soldiers, "he thanked God for His providence

⁶² Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 139.

⁶³ Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *1914-1918 Understanding the Great War*, trans. Catherine Temerson (London: Profile Books, 2002), 115.

⁶⁴ "Chiddingfold." *The Surrey Advertiser and County Times*, 7 August, 1915, 6.

⁶⁵ "A Year of War." *The Surrey Advertiser and County Times*, 31 July, 1915, 4.

⁶⁶ "Celebrations in Scotland." *The Scotsman*, 5 August, 1916, 8.

and for His watchful care over them,"⁶⁷ continuing to sanction their mission as that of God through the protection God offered to the soldiers. The continued thanks to God for protection of their shores stemmed from the innate fear throughout Great Britain at the thought of invasion. Through the news media, the fate of other nations that had succumbed to invasion was well documented. Two Irish Protestant Reverends directed their fellow clergymen to offer thanks to God for "the merciful preservation of the peoples of these countries from the fate of Belgium, Poland, and Serbia".⁶⁸

As the war progressed, however, the dedication of thanks to God became more pessimistic. In 1917 at the third anniversary of the war, Presbyterian minister Dr. Wallace Williamson told his congregation "there was for all of us today a clear call to thank God and take courage".⁶⁹ This was typical of the mood of the entire nation which had begun to darken as the war endured.⁷⁰ Courage was now needed to tolerate the First World War, and there were numerous cries by clergy to not forget how bright the future would be once it was over, "the source of the thankfulness will be the memory of the awful fate from which the world has been saved."⁷¹

The Sins of Great Britain

As the war continued to persist far longer than most had initially anticipated, British clergymen in turn had to continue to justify the extent of the war and give their parishioners fair reason for why God had not yet allowed it to end. When it became apparent that both blaming Germany for the wars outbreak and fighting as God's chosen people and the defenders

⁶⁷ "Celebrations in Scotland." *The Scotsman*, 5 August, 1916, 8.

⁶⁸ "The Coming War Anniversary." *Irish Examiner*, 11 July, 1918, 2.

⁶⁹ "Impressive Service in St. Giles' Edinburgh." *The Scotsman*, 6 August, 1917, 7.

⁷⁰ Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707*, 139.

⁷¹ "Four Years of War." *The Scotsman*, 3 August, 1918, 4.

of the Christian faith was not enough, clergymen turned inwards to reflect on Britain's own sins. Not only did the appearance of British sins help to justify why God had not yet let the war finish, but it also provided an excuse for churchmen to effectively shame their people into returning to the levels of religiosity that the United Kingdom had experienced in previous times. Churches had the ability to achieve this because despite a downward trend in formal religious observance in Britain, Christianity was still a powerful influence over national and individual life.⁷² The central sin that clergy identified within Britain was their previous lack of faith, and from there went on to frame the war as the nation's penance. A large portion of the blame for Britain's lack of faith was accredited to the rise of materialism and recreation in British culture. Religious adherence was in steady decline in the years preceding the war, and the introduction of new activities such as cinemas and sports were blamed for the low levels of Sunday service attendance. The Protestant English clergy were aware of the declining levels of church membership, as it was not only the urban working class who had high levels of non-attendance, but membership of the middle classes was affected also.⁷³ Despite this, the people of England still identified as Christians, and the appeal to their lack of faith and attendance was effective as religious concepts and beliefs still informed British society.⁷⁴

Many senior British clergymen utilized the newspapers to alert the nation that the war was Britain's repentance for their lack of faith. Many of the articles of this nature were printed in *The Times*, especially in the early years of the war. The Anglican Bishop Edward Burroughs was most outspoken on this topic, in 1915 writing a long letter to *The Times* criticizing the nation for their emphasis on materialism and reminding them that the Christian Church had an important part to play in the war: "has the Christian Church anything to contribute to the

⁷² Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, 242.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 19

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 243.

nation at this present time?... I would dare to say 'Yes' to the first with the utmost emphasis; not because I believe in the Church or in the churches, but because I believe in God."⁷⁵ Again, the power of prayer was assigned importance in aiding the war effort when Burroughs wrote in again to *The Times* one month later, "to stir up the nation as a whole to pray and to strive for such fitness is a thing worth doing and needing to be done... it is a real way of helping to bring the war to a successful issue in the fullest sense."⁷⁶ Prayer and church attendance was identified as crucial in proving to God that their cause was the righteous one, and that they therefore deserved to win the war. But it went further than simply attending church, as admitting to the nations sins and striving to rectify them in the long term was seen as more valuable than any short term solution that could be imagined: "the wisdom of religion, so long ignored, tells us now that we can only cure ourselves of our faults if we hate them in themselves and not merely because of the perils with which they threaten us".⁷⁷

High-ranking churchmen such as Burroughs and Bishop Edward Talbot aimed to deepen the understanding of the Christian faith that the people already had and encourage them to more regular participation in church services.⁷⁸ Many local parish clergymen throughout the United Kingdom adopted this position as well, administering sermons that focused on the lack of faith that existed in Britain. The Irish Bishop of Killaloe, Reverend Dr. Fogarty, advised that "this war and all the consequences of it were intended in the hands of God to burn up and turn to ashes all the luxury and sensuality and extravagance that had begun to overrun the whole of Europe."⁷⁹ In the early years of the war, advice such as Reverend Fogarty's was still more seen

⁷⁵ Burroughs, E. A. "The Mobilization Of Faith." *Times*, 19 June 1915, 10.

⁷⁶ Burroughs, E. A. "Spiritual Forces." *Times*, 3 Aug. 1915, 5.

⁷⁷ "The Church and the Nation." *Times*, 26 July 1915, 7.

⁷⁸ Stuart Mews, "Religion, 1900-1939," in *A Companion to Early Twentieth-Century Britain*, ed. Chris Wrigley (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 472.

⁷⁹ "War Economies." *Nationalist and Leinster Times*, 24 July, 1915, 3.

as warnings at the dangers of becoming like Germany but, towards the end of the war, the belief in Britain's sins became intensified. Dean Grierson did his best to rectify the love of God with the enduring and bloody war when he spoke of man's will being in contention with the will of God. "Yes God was with them, and would be with them, and if He delayed bringing peace it was because it would be forcing their wills and would not be for their good."⁸⁰ According to Grierson, men had to come to their own realization of their sins and realign themselves with God to earn true redemption and the worthiness of victory. A similar trend was demonstrated in Scotland, as Scottish clergy were reflecting on the fact that, by 1918, the war had enabled their nation to cleanse themselves of their previous sins. The Reverend George Bartlet of Aberdeen summed these sentiments up neatly when he stated:

When they called to mind the old days before the war, they saw that the nation, secure in its wealth, drunk with pleasure, spendthrift, hating restraint, and bearing no reproof, was fast rushing blindly to its undoing. The war, under God's providence, was leading men to a plainer way of life, and to a more serious way of thinking.⁸¹

In the opinion of these churchmen, the war had allowed for the identification of sins that were concealed in times of peace, but the dire experiences of wartime brought to the fore moral issues that desperately needed to be addressed before they could go on and achieve victory for Christianity.

Religious Unity

The idea of unity, demonstrated throughout the national newspapers of England, took on a dual quality that was absent in Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. While the English clergy definitely continued the theme of British-wide unity, there was also a strong

⁸⁰ "Services in Belfast." *Belfast Newsletter*, 6 August, 1918, 4.

⁸¹ "Fourth Anniversary of the War." *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 3 August, 1918, 2.

focus on the war as having bridged the divide between class divisions. While numerous newspaper articles that recorded the details of war anniversary services included the names of the most notable guests who attended, many articles also made a point to mention the general assembly of the public as being a mixture of people from all classes and all lifestyles. The record of the first anniversary service in Exeter mentioned the attendance of “representatives of all sections and citizens – of Nonconformists as well as members of the Established Church,” and how it was an example of “the necessity of unity in the presence of a world conflict in which the existence of Christian civilization and liberty is at stake.”⁸² It was the ultimate example of a country putting aside its differences and realizing they were all one people in the face of war. Furthermore, many articles written in the national newspapers documented the coming together of many different denominations to celebrate the anniversary of the war. The *Daily Telegraph* commented on how “in numerous cases the Church of England is joining with the Free Churches in these services, and in some places, for the first time in their history, all the Denominations are linking hands.”⁸³ Coming together to pray to God for support in the war was evidently more important than any liturgical differences between denominations. For soldier’s and their families, a search for temporal comfort was crucial to their handling of the war, and the needs of these people caused churches to preach the founding Christian message that all denominations arose from, sacrifice and resurrection.⁸⁴

In Wales, the clergy praised their country for its unity. The outbreak of the war had caused the majority of Welsh people to cast aside political divisions and come together in a time of crisis.⁸⁵ This was true for religious divisions as well, although it was not until the later

⁸² “Day of Prayer.” *The Western Times*, 5 August, 1915, 2.

⁸³ Meyer, F.B. “United Intercession.” *Daily Telegraph*, 27 July 1916, 10.

⁸⁴ Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *1914-1918 Understanding the Great War*, 129.

⁸⁵ Kenneth O. Morgan, *Wales 1880-1980: Rebirth of a Nation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 159.

years of the war that Welsh clergymen explicitly recognized and commented on this religious unity. In 1917, Bishop Frosham of St. John's Church spoke of Wales being united "to an extent that would have been thought impossible three years ago,"⁸⁶ but also warned of the need to resist the external dangers that threatened it, such as the troubles in Ireland. In the same year, the Bishop of Llandaff also commended the Welsh people on their efforts at home, when he spoke of their being "an awakening to a sense of duty, and to the spirit of self-sacrifice."⁸⁷ As the war endured through to 1918, the clergy in Wales continued to document the unity of the nation in an effort to distract from the persistency of the European crisis. Statements of resolutions that resulted from war anniversary services were created to dispatch to the Prime Minister in a further effort to demonstrate Wales' lasting cooperation among themselves and with the whole of Great Britain. The service to commemorate the fourth anniversary of the war in 1918 at St. John's Church in Cardiff, sent one such resolution to Mr. Lloyd George which detailed how the Welsh "unanimously resolve to do all that in their power lies to achieve the ideas on behalf of which so great sacrifice has already been made".⁸⁸ Unity also resounded in the coming together of various denominations to honour the anniversary of the war. The public anniversary service that was held in Cathay's Park, 4 August 1918, was advertised in the *Western Mail* by the Lord Mayor of Cardiff as an event that "representatives of practically every religious denomination in Cardiff will take part in,"⁸⁹ a powerful testament to the belief in the religious unity of the nation.

The religious unity of Ireland in the First World War was a unique experience when compared to the rest of the United Kingdom as they also encountered and took on their own

⁸⁶ "Cardiff Celebration." *Western Mail*, 6 August, 1917, 8.

⁸⁷ "Lesson of Self-Sacrifice." *Western Mail*, 6 August, 1917, 3.

⁸⁸ "Day of Remembrance." *Western Mail*, 10 July, 1918, 4.

⁸⁹ "War Anniversary Service at Cardiff." *Western Mail*, 1 August, 1918, 2.

issues due to their specific religious and political circumstances. One article, published by the *Irish Independent* on the fourth anniversary of the war in 1918, concerned itself primarily with the way in which Ireland had managed to come together to fight for justice and peace. The article mentions how “the outbreak of war eclipsed political divisions in Ireland,” and saw the coming together of National and Ulster volunteers to “protect the shores of Ireland.”⁹⁰ This unity prompted the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, to refer to Ireland as “the one bright spot in a very dreadful situation”.⁹¹ The coming together of the North and the South of Ireland, who had been approaching civil war over the issue of partition, was constantly reiterated in the article. It spoke of how the nation stood together on the battlefield, “united in sentiment and in a common cause as never before in her history,” and of when the “Ulster Division and the Irish Division forgot the memory of the Boyne in generous rivalry together on the Somme”.⁹² The article acted as an overview of how Ireland had temporarily settled its political differences to fight against a shared enemy who threatened the continued existence of the nation, whether or not it was together or separate. The collective fight for Ireland is described in the national press throughout the duration of the war. At the time of the first anniversary of war in 1915, Reverend Dr. Plunket, of the Anglican Church of Ireland, commented on how “when big issues were at stake Irishmen could unite and hold in common religious convictions and national aspirations.”⁹³ In 1916, the Reverend Dr. Berry was reported in the *Irish Examiner*, preaching to his congregation that of the three options available to the Church of Ireland in regard to the war, only the third option, “to heartily cooperate with the vast majority of the representatives of their fellow-countrymen, who at this critical period now proved their loyalty to the Empire in which they belonged,” was viable.⁹⁴ Despite this perceived unity, however, it was primarily the

⁹⁰ “Four Years Ago.” *Irish Independent*, 3 August, 1918, 4.

⁹¹ Thomas Hennessey, *Dividing Ireland: World War I and Partition* (London: Routledge, 1998), 46.

⁹² “Four Years Ago.” *Irish Independent*, 3 August, 1918, 4.

⁹³ “The War Week.” *Irish Independent*, 7 August, 1915, 5.

⁹⁴ “Protestant Bishop’s Speech.” *Irish Examiner*, 26 July 1916, 4.

Anglican Church of Ireland, which had only disestablished from the established Church of England in 1871, which was promoting this fiercely unified image of the Irish war effort which in turn demonstrated its British patriotism. Similar to the stance taken by John Redmond's Irish Nationalist party, the Anglican Church in Ireland saw the war as a unique opportunity to demonstrate its strength and its nationhood, and the statements by its clergymen were a form of propaganda for it.⁹⁵

The only significant example of religious disunity also existed within Ireland, between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church of Ireland. At the beginning of the war, all religious denominations seemed to be united in their common cause, but subsequent calls to peace from the Roman Catholic Pope in the early years of the war threatened this sense of togetherness.⁹⁶ The Catholic Church had the largest membership of all the churches in Ireland, making Roman Catholicism the religious majority, with the Anglican-Protestant Church of Ireland a distant second. Through the national newspapers, clergy from the Catholic Church endorsed the appropriateness and feasibility of the Pope's instructions. It was in 1915 that Pope Benedict XV first offered his opinion on the First World War, in a letter addressed to the heads of the belligerent countries. The letter was published in the *Irish Independent*, days before the first anniversary of the outbreak of war, and made available to all readers the Pope's demand for an end to the violence of the war, "it must not be said that this conflict cannot be settled without armed violence," and finishing with the wish of the Pope that "we invite all friends of peace to unite with us in Our desire to terminate this war and reestablish the Empire of Right, resolving henceforth to solve differences, not by the sword, but by equity and

⁹⁵ Jérôme aan de Wiel, *The Catholic Church in Ireland 1914-1918: War and Politics* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2003), 10.

⁹⁶ R. B. McDowell, *The Church of Ireland 1869-1969* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 107.

justice”.⁹⁷ Clergy from the Catholic Church in Ireland were quick to promote the ideas of the Pope. In the *Irish Independent* two weeks later, Catholic Reverend Dr. O’Dwyer spoke in support, stating that “our Holy Father speaks words of sober truth and reason,” and arguing against the strength of the Allied forces, “people who set out to smash Germany should ask themselves whether the defeat of Russia, the weakening of France, and the state of things in the Dardanelles, have not recently somewhat altered the conditions of the problem”.⁹⁸ The Pope’s calls for peace placed many Irish Catholics in a uncomfortable position, as it forced many to choose between loyalty to the United Kingdom, promulgated by the Nationalists, or to the Catholic faith. But for some clergymen, such as O’Dwyer, the Pope’s words provided an excuse to openly oppose the Irish war effort.⁹⁹ The call to abandon the war and bring out peace, caused many people to begin criticizing the Catholic Church in Ireland, its clergy and members, for having “not performed their share in coming out in the support of the cause of the Allies”.¹⁰⁰ The yearning for peace by the Catholic Church was in direct contention with the sentiments of Protestant Irish clergy. Throughout the war, the Protestant clergy preached for commitment to enduring the war, in order to achieve its aims of defeating Germany, the country which threatened humanity. In 1918, Reverend White, Dean of Christ Church Cathedral in Dublin, categorized the war as “the war of Christ against His foes,” and then went on to criticize those who did not share in the belief of the need to defeat Germany, “those who stood aloof were not with the Lord, they were against the Lord”.¹⁰¹ The Protestant clergy shared in the English conviction that “an assured peace can only come by the defeat of German Militarism”.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ “Benedict XV, and the War.” *Irish Independent*, 31 July, 1915, 4.

⁹⁸ “The Pope and Peace.” *Irish Independent*, 12 August, 1915, 2.

⁹⁹ aan de Wiel, *The Catholic Church in Ireland 1914-1918: War and Politics*, 77.

¹⁰⁰ “Ireland and the War.” *The Irish Times*, 5 July 1915, 10.

¹⁰¹ “The Day in Ireland.” *The Irish Times*, 5 August, 1918, 4.

¹⁰² “The Coming War Anniversary.” *Irish Examiner*, 11 July, 1918, 2.

Conclusion

In the opinion of the British clergy the United Kingdom was involved in a religious battle. Each varying justification for the war that arose was linked to the will of God and the reflective actions of the British as His people. Because of the religious understanding much of the educated classes possessed, the churches succeeded in their restructuring of World War One as a holy war and actively intensified public reaction against Germany and Central Power forces. The way the clergy were so quick to denounce Germany and their manifestation of Protestantism highlighted the connection between nationalism and religion. The Church sought to defend the Christian honour of Britain by proclaiming that the war was not Britain's fault, which reaffirmed both the political and religious virtue of the nation. Furthermore, the churches needed a display of nationalism, and by their support for the war they could align themselves with politics and be positively received by the public. It was not until the war had extended beyond initial suggestions that clergy were able to revert their attention to the sins of Great Britain and begin criticizing the growth of recreation and materialism which have been attributed to the decline of church admissions in the early twentieth century. Clergy had to remain pessimistic about the length of war, but this was an opportunity that allowed them to assert their importance in society and preach sentiments about social decline in the absence of religious adherence.

Religion and religious rhetoric was used by the masses for guidance, whether for moral or comfort purposes. Those who had previously not given much thought to religion became accustomed to the use of religious language to understand the ordeal of war. This made the war anniversary and intercession services so popular and valued by the public, and it provided a place for understanding and acceptance. This was a particular area of the war that the Church

largely controlled, as the Church of England had a long tradition of organizing ceremonies for national emergencies, days of prayer, or thanksgiving.¹⁰³

The way the churches throughout Great Britain and Ireland reacted to the First World War is revealing of their desire to retain autonomy over every day social life. This was a position that the Church had held for centuries, but the foundational changes that occurred at the turn of the twentieth century; materialism, nationalism, and recreation, had relegated the Church to a less vigorous role. Quite like Germany, the outbreak of war had afforded the Church an opportunity to regain domination. And like Germany they failed to seize it. The legacy that the Great War left for religion in twentieth century Britain was paradoxical.¹⁰⁴ Despite failing to drive people back into the churches, the war had enhanced religious imagination, and it was this form of religious expression and understanding that made the role of the churches so important to the general understanding of the United Kingdom during World War One.

¹⁰³ Beaken, *The Church of England and the Home Front*, 128.

¹⁰⁴ Stefan Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 232.

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